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# **The Sermons of John Owen**

**John Owen**





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## The Sermons of John Owen

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**Author(s):** Owen, John (1616-1683)

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**Description:** As a preacher, the value of John Owen--the renowned Puritan theologian--has not been appreciated to a sufficient degree. Well respected in his day for his preaching, Owen's renown has dwindled since then. (Perhaps the importance of his other impressive works has diverted attention away from his *Sermons*.) Nevertheless, this is a shame since Owen's *Sermons* are wonderfully crafted and quite powerful. Further, the style of his sermons provides a nice complement to his many theological treatises. They clearly display the ability Owen had to capture the attention of an audience in order to teach them the great truths of the gospel. This particular volume brings together not only sermons Owen delivered during his life, but a series of posthumously published sermons as well. John Owen's *Sermons* should reestablish Owen as an impressive preacher; they will not disappoint!

Tim Perrine  
CCEL Staff Writer

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## Preface.

The two following volumes contain, it is believed, the most complete collection of Dr Owen's Sermons which has ever been published.

The first volume (vol. viii.) includes all the Discourses which were published during the lifetime of the author. Among these there will be found his "Humble Testimony to the Goodness and Severity of God;" which — though, from its length, it might rank as a separate treatise — is comprehended in this volume, as it was the substance of some discourses, and is entitled by Owen himself a Discourse. Another valuable sermon, which we have discovered in the "*Morning Exercises against Popery, at Southwark,*" though omitted in every previous collection of his Sermons, and in Russell's edition of his Works, we have not hesitated to include in the present collection, our conviction that it belongs to Owen resting on the high authority of Calamy,<sup>1</sup> who must have had the best opportunities of knowing what sermons, in a publication so important and celebrated as the "*Morning Exercises,*" were the productions of our author. We are strengthened in this conviction by the circumstance, that the Rev. T. H. Horne, also, in the recent admirable edition of the "*Morning Exercises,*" expressly ascribes this sermon to Owen. It is entitled, "The Testimony of the Church not the only nor the chief Reason of our Believing the Scripture to be the Word of God." On the contrary, we have assigned to the subsequent volume, which contains the Posthumous Discourses of our author, a sermon entitled, "Human Power Defeated," though we find it mentioned by Mr Orme in his list of the works which Owen himself committed to the press. Our reason for accounting it posthumous, is not simply that we have not met with it in its original form (for in a few other instances we have been unable to discover copies of original editions), but in the folio volume of Owen's Sermons, published in 1721, and edited so carefully by five Independent ministers, who assure us that the posthumous sermons contained in it were the genuine productions of Owen, "a great part of them having been transcribed from his own copies, and the rest taken from his mouth by a gentleman<sup>2</sup> of honour and known integrity," it is ranked among the posthumous sermons, which had then for the first time been given to the public.

The other volume (vol. ix.) embraces all the Posthumous Sermons of our author, — viz., the "Seasonable Words for English Protestants," printed separately in 1690; the posthumous sermons published in 1721; others which issued from the press in 1756, and were prepared from the manuscripts of Sir John Hartopp, which his granddaughter, Mrs

<sup>1</sup> See Calamy's *Account of Ministers Ejected*, vol. ii. p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Hartopp. See vol. ix., p. 18.



Cooke of Stoke Newington, had supplied for the purpose; and, finally, the sermons derived through the same channel, and published in 1760.

An attempt has been made in this edition, by prefatory notes and running annotations, to connect the different sermons (especially in vol. viii.) with the life of Owen, and with the circumstances in which they were originally delivered. Much of the interest and value of a discourse lies in its suitableness to the occasion which called it forth.

There are discourses attributed to Owen on *Ps. cxvi. 12*, and on *2 Sam. xviii. 20*; and said to have been published, the former in 1742, and the latter in 1746. They are not mentioned by Mr Orme. There is a reference to them in Cooke's "*Preacher's Assistant*;" but after a diligent search, we have failed to recover them.

The merits of Owen as a preacher have not been sufficiently appreciated. In this respect he seems to have stood higher in the estimation of his contemporaries than he has subsequently done. No edition of his Sermons has been published in a form and at a price which placed them within the reach of all classes in the community. Perhaps the value of his other works diverted attention from his minor productions; and his style of careful and elaborate, though often prolix and cumbrous, discussion, was deemed incompatible with the condensation of statement and the vigour of appeal which constitute the main value and charm of a good discourse. From the accounts transmitted to us, however, whether by his various friends and admirers, such as Clarkson, his colleague and successor, or by those even who were quite opposed to him in principle and sentiment, such as Anthony Wood, the ability with which Owen could secure and sustain the attention of an audience must have been great.<sup>3</sup> The effects of his preaching in some instances attest his usefulness in this department of his public labours. John Rogers, in his singular work, "*The Heavenly Nymph*," records the cases of two individuals, Dorothy Emmet and Major Mainwaring, who ascribed their conversion to the preaching of Owen when he was in Dublin. Mr Orme remarks, that the circumstance confutes a saying attributed to Owen, that he never knew an instance of a sinner converted through his instrumentality; though the saying might so far be true, that he himself might be ignorant of the extent of his own usefulness. His congregation in London after the Restoration, though, from the severe measures adopted against Dissent, necessarily small, seems to have been made up of persons altogether superior in character and attainments. Another source of evidence as to the popularity and acceptance of our author in preaching the gospel, presents itself in the frequency with which he was called to officiate in this capacity before the House of Commons. He was generally summoned to this duty in connection with some event or crisis of great importance. On examining the journals of the House, we have found that he preached before it on several occasions besides those on which he delivered sermons that were afterwards published. He usually receives the thanks,

<sup>3</sup> See some excellent observations on his character as a pulpit orator, in the "*Life of Owen*," vol. i. p. 106.

or “the hearty thanks,” of the House, for “his great pains” taken in the discourses preached before them. Nor were such “orders” of the Parliament, that he should be thanked for his services, mere form and indiscriminate courtesy. There is a curious record which we may quote, as showing that the Parliament exercised some measure of discrimination in voting thanks on these occasions:—

*“Die Veneris, 14 Martii, 1650.*

“The question being propounded, That thanks be given to the ministers that preached yesterday before the Parliament, and the question being put, ‘That that question be now put?’ it passed with the negative.”

There are no means of ascertaining what ministers actually preached on the occasion here referred to. The ministers who had been appointed to preach were Mr Owen, Mr John Simson, and Mr Leigh; but it is clear from the journals, that Owen sometimes was not in circumstances to fulfil such appointments after they had been made. Perhaps, were all the facts known, it would have been to his credit that he had incurred what wears the aspect of a vote of censure from the House; although we learn, from certain entries elsewhere in its journals, that he was so much of a favourite with Parliament, that they settled “lands of inheritance of the clear value of £100 per annum in Ireland on John Owen, Doctor of Divinity, and his heirs.”

His Discourses themselves, however, will best illustrate the position and rank to which he is entitled among the lights and ornaments of the British pulpit. In judging of them, we must remember how often his singular aptitude for the management of affairs drew him into public business, interrupting and disturbing the leisure requisite for elaborate composition. The amount of time and thought expended on more important works might interfere with the care due to the preparation of a single discourse. He himself informs us that his public discourses were frequently delivered under some sudden call to the duty, and at the spur of some great emergency, when brief space was allowed him to prepare them carefully; so that, to use his own similitude, they were often “like Jonah’s gourd, the offspring of a night.” Although they cannot, therefore, be regarded as models of finished composition and careful preparation, they nevertheless abound in many cardinal excellencies. The doctrine illustrated and urged in them is commonly founded on a sifting and masterly exposition of that portion of Scripture from which the text is selected. So much was it his habit to investigate Scripture, with the view of ascertaining the precise import of its statements, that he often sheds new and striking light on other passages besides the one which it may be the object of the sermon to explain and enforce. Singular tact is evinced in eliciting the general truths or principles raised for consideration by the text. While there are many indications of haste and negligence, it may be safely affirmed, that there is not a paragraph of worthless



or frivolous matter which any reader could have wished away, and passages often occur conceived in no common strain of eloquence; while, even amidst the tamest sentences, burning thoughts are found, thrown out freely and at random by the author, as if unconscious of the effect they would produce, or careless whether they produced any effect at all. The depths of Christian experience are admirably unfolded, and the general spirit and tenor of his statements are calculated to tell with power upon the unconverted, and to commend themselves with acceptance to the enlightened conscience. No feature, indeed, in his sermons is more prominent and remarkable, — especially in the sermons delivered towards the close of his life, and which labour under the disadvantage of never having been intended for the press, — than the skill with which he can scrutinize character and motives, till his hearers must have felt as if, in gauging, their inward being, the preacher had laid his hand, with intuitive discernment, on the deepest secrets of their bosom. Nor does this result from an affected refinement of metaphysical discussion and analysis; but from the simple adaptation of truth, so as to tell on the wide variety of human character. Among uninspired authors, it is pre-eminently true of Owen, that, by the manifestation of the truth, he commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. At the same time, the highest qualities of thought and a rare knowledge of human nature are often evinced; and on perusing the sermons on Popery, "The Chamber of Imagery," and, "On the Authority of Scripture," the reader will be struck with the powers of sagacious and philosophic analysis displayed in the former, and with the logical point and acumen of the latter, — stamping on them a freshness and value as continued and enduring as the importance of the great controversy itself to which they relate. The more, in short, these Discourses of Owen are studied, it will be found that their chief blemish — if it be a blemish — is the tendency of the author, in the fertility of his resources, to compress within the limits of one sermon what, to minds less affluent, would have furnished precious materials for several sermons; and though some may desiderate in them the minor graces of composition, it would be unwise to forget that, apart from any shapes of elegance and utility into which it may be fashioned by art, sterling gold, in the broad market of the world, will always command a value of its own.

Editor.

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Sermon I.

A vision of unchangeable, free mercy, in sending the means of grace to undeserving sinners:

wherein God's uncontrollable eternal purpose, in sending and continuing the gospel unto this nation, in the midst of oppositions and contingencies, is discovered; his distinguishing mercy in this great work exalted, asserted against opposers, repiners.

whereunto is annexed

a short defensative about church government, (with a country essay for the practice of church government there) toleration, and petitions about these things.



## Prefatory note.

The occasion on which this sermon was delivered is mentioned in the "*Life of Owen*," vol. i., p. 34. From the title-page of the original edition of the sermon, Owen appears to have been "minister of the gospel at Coggeshall, in Essex," when it was published. By some inadvertency, Mr Orme, in his valuable memoir of our author, represents him as called to preach this sermon to the House of Commons before he left the parish of Fordham; a statement which can be reconciled with the original title-page only by the supposition that his removal to Coggeshall had occurred in the interval before the publication of the sermon. Asty, however, distinctly informs us that he was settled at Coggeshall when he first preached before the House of Commons.

The sermon was preached on Wednesday the 29th of April 1646; and the time is important, as it was the close of the first civil war. During the previous month, Hopton and Astley, the last generals who kept the field in the interest of Charles I., had been compelled to surrender. "You have now done your work," said Astley to his victors, "and may go to play, — unless you will fall out among yourselves." So truly was the work done, that Oliver Cromwell had returned to his place Parliament on the 22d of April, and on the following Monday the king left Oxford in disguise, and, after some hesitation of purpose, found his way to the Scots army.

A sufficient interval had hardly elapsed to give Owen an opportunity of exhibiting in his sermon any reflection of these memorable events. It is perhaps more to his credit, that, when summoned from the obscurity of his pastoral duties at Coggeshall to preach the gospel in "the chief place of concourse," and before the rulers of the land, he seizes the opportunity to portray the spiritual destitution which existed in Wales, and large districts of England, and to make an appeal for "help," in a strain of holy fervour and commanding eloquence, that will bear comparison with the best productions of the British pulpit. The reasoning at the outset is somewhat abstract, — not unsuited, perhaps, to an assembly of the leading men in the country; but throughout the discourse there is conspicuous that happy combination of argument and declamation which constitutes genuine oratory. Bogue and Bennett have remarked, "Those who are only acquainted with the general strain of Owen's writings, would not suppose him capable of pouring forth that flood of lucid, glowing, popular eloquence, which is displayed in this sermon." — *History of Dissenters*, vol. 2, p. 228.

In the "*Defensive*," or preface to the "*Country Essay*," etc., Owen assigns reasons on account of which he had not felt himself free to petition Parliament in reference to the establishment of an ecclesiastical polity for England. In the "*Country Essay*," etc., he condemns very strongly the infliction of civil penalties for religious belief. In the first part of it, he describes a form of church government which commended itself to his judgment. Owen purposely refrained from describing it either as Presbytery or Independency, deeming himself





competent to satisfy all men respecting it; “unless such as shall be so simple or malicious as to ask whether this way be that of the Presbyterians or Independents.” By his own admission, the scheme proposed in the “*Essay*” would not exactly agree with either of the two forms of church government which were then competing for national favour and the sanction of the state. There can be no doubt, however, that he was at this time undergoing the change of view which led him in the end to profess Congregationalism. It is simple justice to add, that a comparison of the “*Country Essay*” with his “*Inquiry into Evangelical Churches*,” published towards the close of his life, effectually redeems his name from any charge of vacillation in regard to his church principles. The peculiar modifications which appear in the Congregationalism of Owen, are conspicuous elements in the first scheme of ecclesiastical polity which he ever broached. See also his “*Review of the Nature of Schism*,” chap. ii., vol. xiii. — Ed.

AMPLISSIMO  
SENATUI,  
INCLYTISSIMO POPULI ANGLICANI CONVENTUI,  
OB  
PRISCA ANGLO-BRITANNORUM JURA STRENUE ET FIDELITER ASSERTA;  
LIBERTATEM PATRIAM (NEFARUS QUORUNDAM MOLITONIBUS PÆNE  
PESSUNDATAM) RECUPERATAM;  
JUSTITIAM FORTITER, ἴσως, ἐπιεικῶς, ἀπροσωπολήπτως ADMINISTRATAM;  
Ἄρχην IN ECCLESIASTICIS ἀνιεροτυραννικὴν DISSOLUTAM,  
RITUS PONTIFICIOS, NOVITIOS, ANTICHRISTIANOS ABOLITOS; PRIVILEGIA  
PLEBIS CHRISTIANÆ POSTLIMINIO RESTITUTA;  
POTISSIMUM  
PROTECTIONEM DEI O. M. HIS OMNIBUS, ALUSQUE INNUMERIS, CONSILIO,  
BELLO, DOMI, FORAS GILATIOSE POTITAM;  
TOTO ORBE JURE MERITISSIMO CELEBERRIMO, TOTI HUIC INSULÆ ÆTERNA  
MEMORIA RECOLENDO,  
VIRIS ILLUSTRIBUS, CLARISSIMUS, SELECTISSIMIS, EX ORDINE COMMUNIIUM  
IN SUPREMA CURIA PARLIAM, CONGREGATIS,  
CONCIONEM HANC SACRAM, HUMILEM ILLAM QUIDEM, IPSORUM TAMEN  
VOTO JUSSUQUE PRIUS CORAM IPSIS HABITAM, NUNC LUCE DONATAM,  
D.D.C.  
JOANNES OWEN.



*Die Mercurij 29 Aprilis, 1646.*

Ordered, by the Commons assembled in Parliament, That Mr Jenner and Sir Peter Wentworth do from this House give thanks to Mr Nalton and Mr Owen for the great pains they took in the sermons they preached this day, at the entreaty of this House (it being a day of public humiliation), at Margaret's, Westminster; and to desire them to print their sermons. And it is ordered that none shall presume to print their sermons without license under their handwriting.

H. Elsyng, *Cler. Parl. D. Com.*



## Sermon I. A vision of unchangeable, free mercy, in sending the means of grace to undeserving sinners.

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” — [Acts xvi. 9](#).

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is frequently in the Scripture compared to *growing* things,<sup>4</sup> — small in the beginning and first appearance, but increasing by degrees unto glory and perfection. The shapeless *stone*<sup>5</sup> cut out without hands, having neither form nor desirable beauty given unto it, becomes a great mountain, filling the whole earth, [Dan. ii. 35](#). The small *vine* brought out of Egypt quickly covers the hills with her shadow, — her boughs reach unto the sea, and her branches unto the river, [Ps. lxxx. 8](#). The tender *plant*<sup>6</sup> becomes as the cedars of God; and the grain of mustard-seed to be a tree for the fowls of the air to make their nests in the branches thereof. Mountains are made plains before it, every valley is filled, and the crooked paths made straight, that it may have a passage to its appointed period; — and all this, not only not supported by outward advantages, but in direct opposition to the combined power<sup>7</sup> of this whole creation, as fallen and in subjection to the “god of this world,” the head thereof. As Christ was “a tender plant,”<sup>8</sup> seemingly easy to be broken; and “a root out of a dry ground,” not easily flourishing, yet liveth for ever;<sup>9</sup> so his people and kingdom, — though as a “lily among thorns,”<sup>10</sup> as “sheep among wolves,”<sup>11</sup> as a “turtledove” among a multitude of devourers,<sup>12</sup> — yet stands unshaken, at least unshivered.

The main ground and foundation of all this is laid out, [verses 6–9 of this chapter](#), — containing a rich discovery how all things here below, especially such as concern the gospel and Church of Christ, are carried along through innumerable varieties and a world of contingencies, according to the regular motions and goings forth of a free, eternal, unchangeable

4 “Ecclesia sicut luna defectus habet, et ortus frequentes; sed defectibus suis crevit, etc. Hæc est vera Luna, quæ de fratris sui luce perpetua, lumen sibi immortalitatis et gratiæ mutuatur.” — *Amb. Hex., lib. iv. cap. 2. Ps. lxviii. 13*.

5 [Isa. liv. 11](#); [Zech. iv. 7](#).

6 [Isa. liii. 2–5](#).

7 [1 John iii. 13](#); [Rev. ii. 10](#); [2 Cor. iv. 4](#).

8 [Isa. liii. 2](#).

9 [Heb. vii. 25](#).

10 [Cant. ii. 2](#).

11 [Matt. x. 16](#).

12 [Ps. lxxiv. 19](#).

decree: as all inferior orbs, notwithstanding the eccentrics and irregularities of their own inhabitants, are orderly carried about by the first Mover.

In [verse 6](#), the planters of the gospel are “forbidden to preach the word in Asia”<sup>13</sup> (that part of it peculiarly so called); and, [verse 7](#), assaying to go with the same message into Bithynia, they are crossed by the Spirit in their attempts; but in my text are called to a place on which their thoughts were not at all fixed:— which calling and which forbidding were both subservient to His free determination “who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will,” [Eph. i. 11](#).

And no doubt but, in the dispensation of the gospel throughout the world, unto this day, there is the like conformity to be found to the pattern of God’s eternal decrees; though to the messengers not made known aforehand by *revelation*, but discovered in the *effects*, by the mighty working of Providence.

Amongst other nations, this is the day of England’s visitation, “the Dayspring from on high” having visited this people, and “the Sun of righteousness” arising upon us “with healing in his wings;”<sup>14</sup> — a man of England hath prevailed for assistance, and the free grace of God hath wrought us help by the gospel.

Now, in this day three things are to be done, to keep up our spirits unto this duty, of brining down our souls by humiliation.

First, To take us off the *pride* of our own performances, endeavours, or any adherent worth of our own: “Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel,” — O house of England! [Ezek. xxxvi. 32](#).

Secondly, To root out that *atheistical* corruption which *depresses* the thoughts of men, not permitting them, in the highest products of Providence, to look above contingencies and secondary causes; — though God “hath wrought all our works for us,” [Isa. xxvi. 12](#); and “known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world,” [Acts xv. 18](#).

Thirdly, To show that the bulk of this people are as yet in the *wilderness*, far from their resting-place, like sheep upon the mountains, as once Israel, [Jer. l. 6](#), — as yet wanting help by the gospel.

The *two first* of these will be cleared by discovering how that all revolutions here below — especially every thing that concerns the dispensation of the gospel and kingdom of the Lord Jesus — are carried along according to the eternally fixed purpose of God, free in itself, taking neither rise, growth, cause, nor occasion, from any thing amongst the sons of men.

13 “Eo ipso tempore, quo ad omnes gentes prædicatio Evangelii mittebatur, quædam loca apostolis adire prohibebatur ab eo qui ‘vult omnes homines salvos fieri.’” — *Prosp. Ep. ad Rufin. [cap. xv].* Διὸς ἐτελείετο βουλή. — *Hom. i. 5*.

14 [Mal. iv. 2](#).

The *third*, by laying open the helpless condition of gospel-wanting souls, with some particular application; to all which my text directly leads me.

The words in general are the relation of a message from heaven unto Paul, to direct him in the publishing of the gospel, — as to the place and persons wherein and to whom he was to preach. And in them you have these four things:—

1. The *manner* of it; it was by vision — “A vision appeared.”
2. The *time* of it, — “In the night.”
3. The *bringer* of it, — “A man of Macedonia.”
4. The *matter* of it, — help for the Macedonians, interpreted, [verse 18](#), to be by preaching of the gospel.

A little clearing of the words will make way for observations.

1. For the manner of the delivery of this message, — it was by *vision*. Of all the ways that God used of old to reveal himself unto any in an extraordinary manner, — which were sundry and various, [Heb. i. 1](#), — there was no one so frequent as this of vision. Wherein this did properly consist, and whereby it was distinguished from other ways of the discovery of the secrets of the Lord, I shall not now discuss. In general, visions are revelations of the mind of the Lord concerning some hidden things, present or future, and not otherwise to be known. And they were of two sorts.

(1.) Revelations merely by *word*<sup>15</sup> or some other more internal species,<sup>16</sup> without any outward sensible appearance; which, for the most part, was the Lord’s way of proceeding with the prophets; — which transient light, or discovery of things before unknown, they called a vision.<sup>17</sup>

(2.) Revelations accompanied with some sensible *apparitions*, and that either, —

[1.] Of *things*; as usually, among the prophets, rods and pots,<sup>18</sup> wheels and trees,<sup>19</sup> lamps, axes, vessels, rams, goats, and the like, were presented unto them.

[2.] Of *persons*; and those, according to the variety of them, of three sorts.

1st, Of the second person of the Trinity; and this either, —

First, In respect of some glorious *beams* of his *Deity*; as to [Isa. vi. 1](#), with [John xii. 41](#); — to [Dan. x. 5, 6](#), — as afterward to John, [Rev. i. 13–15](#); to which you may add the apparitions of the glory of God not immediately designing the second person, as [Ezek. i. 1](#).

Secondly, With reference to his *humanity* to be assumed; as to Abraham, [Gen. xviii. 1, 2](#); — to [Josh. v. 13–15](#), etc.

15 [Isa. i. 1](#).

16 [Amos i. 1](#).

17 [Nahum i. 1](#); [Obad. 1](#).

18 [Jer. i. 11, 13](#).

19 [Ezek. i. 5–7](#); [Zech. i. 8, iii. 9, 10](#), etc.; [Dan. vii. 8, 9](#).



2dly, Of angels; as unto Peter, [Acts xii. 7](#); — to the women, [Matt. xxviii. 5](#); — to John, [Rev. xxii. 8](#), etc.

3dly, Of men;<sup>20</sup> as in my text.

Now, the several advancements of all these ways in dignity and pre-eminence, according as they clearly make out intellectual verity, or according to the honour and exaltation of that whereof apparition is made, are too fruitless a speculation<sup>21</sup> for this day's exercise.

Our vision is of the latter sort, accompanied with a sensible appearance, and is called ὄραμα. There be two words in the New Testament signifying vision, ὄραμα and ὀπτασία, coming from different verbs, but both signifying *to see*. Some distinguish them, and say that ὀπτασία is a vision, — καθ' ὕπαρ, an appearance to a man awake; ὄραμα, — καθ' ὄναρ, an appearance to a man asleep, called sometimes a dream, [Job xxxiii. 15](#), — like that which was made to Joseph, [Matt. ii. 19](#). But this distinction will not hold, our Saviour calling that vision which his disciples had at his transfiguration, when doubtless they were waking, ὄραμα, [Matt. xvii. 9](#). So that I conceive Paul had his vision waking; — and the night is *specified* as the time thereof, not to intimate his being asleep, but rather his watchfulness, seeking counsel of God in the night which way he should apply himself in the preaching of the gospel. And such I suppose was that of latter days, whereby God revealed to Zuinglius a strong confirmation of the doctrine of the Lord's supper, from [Exod. xii. 11](#), against the factors for that monstrous figment of transubstantiation.

2. For the second, or time of this vision, I need say no more than what before I intimated.

3. The bringer of the message, — ἀνὴρ τις ἦν Μακεδῶν ἐστῶς, he was a man of Macedonia in a vision. The Lord made an appearance unto him as of a man of Macedonia, discovering even to his bodily eyes a man; and to his mind, that he was to be conceived as a man of Macedonia. This was, say some,<sup>22</sup> an angel; — the tutelar angel of the place, say the popish expositors,<sup>23</sup> or the genius of the place, according to the phrase of the heathens, of whom they learned their demonology; — perhaps him, or his antagonist, that not long before appeared to Brutus<sup>24</sup> at Philippi. But these are pleasing dreams; — us it may suffice that it was the appearance of a man, the mind of Paul being enlightened to apprehend him as a man<sup>25</sup> of Macedonia; and that with infallible assurance, such as usually accompanieth divine

20 [Zech. ii. 1](#).

21 Vid. [Aquin. 2, 2, q. 174, art. 3, 4](#). *Scot. in dist. tert.*

22 *Mede, Apost. of Later Times.*

23 *À Lapide, Sanctius in locum, etc.*

24 *Plutarch. in Vit. Bruti.*

25 *Calvin. in locum.* “Dicebat se discernere (nescio quo sapore, quem verbis explicare non poterat) quid interesset inter Deum revelantem,” etc. — *Aug. Confes.*

revelations in them to whom they are made, as [Jer. xxiii. 28](#), — for upon it Luke affirmeth, [verse 10](#), they assuredly concluded that the Lord called them into Macedonia.

4. The message itself is a discovery of the *want* of the Macedonians, and the *assistance* they required, which the Lord was willing should be imparted unto them. Their want is not expressed, but included in the assistance desired, and the person unto whom for it they were directed. Had it been to help them in their estates, they should scarcely have been sent to Paul, who, I believe, might for the most part say, with Peter, “Silver and gold have I none;”<sup>26</sup> — or had it been with a complaint that they — who from a province of Greece, in a corner of Europe, had on a sudden been exalted into the empire of the eastern world — were now enslaved to the Roman power and oppression, they might better have gone to the Parthians, then the only state in the world formidable to the Romans. Paul, though a military man, yet fought not with Nero’s legions, the then visible devil of the upper world; but with legions of hell, of whom the earth was now to be cleared.<sup>27</sup> It must be a soul-want, if he be entrusted with the supplying of it. And such this was, — help from death, hell, Satan, from the jaws of that devouring lion. Of this the Lord makes them here to speak, what every one in that condition ought to speak, — Help, for the Lord’s sake. It was a call to preach the gospel.

The words being opened, we must remember what was said before of their connection with the verses foregoing, — wherein the preachers of the gospel are expressly hindered from above from going to other places, and called hither. Whereof no reason is assigned, but only the will of Him that did employ them; and that no other can be rendered I am farther convinced, by considering the empty conjectures of attempters.

God foresaw that they would *oppose* the gospel, says our Beda. So, say I, might he of all nations in the world, had not he determined to send his effectual grace<sup>28</sup> for the removal of that opposition; besides, he grants the means of grace to despisers, [Matt. xi. 21](#). — They were not *prepared* for the gospel, says Cæcumenius. As well, say I, as the Corinthians, whose preparations you may see, [1 Cor. vi. 9–11](#); or any other nation, as we shall afterward declare: yet to this foolish conjecture adhere the Papists and Arminians<sup>29</sup> — God would have those places left for to be *converted by John*, says Sedulius; yet the church at Ephesus, the chief city of those parts, was planted by Paul, says Ignatius and Irenæus.<sup>30</sup> — He foresaw *a famine* to come upon those places, says Origen, from which he would deliver his own; and therefore,

26 [Acts iii. 6](#).

27 Plutarch *de Defect. Oracu.* Ἐβραῖος κέλεται με πάς μακάρεσσιν ἀνάσσων, Τὸν δὲ δόμον προλιπεῖν καὶ ὁδὸν πάλιν αὐθις ἰκέσθαι. *Respons. Apoll. apud Euseb. Niceph.*

28 “A nullo duro corde resistitur, quia cor ipsum emollit.” — Aug., [Ezek. xxxvi. 26](#); [Deut. xxx. 6](#).

29 Lapide. *Sanctius in loc. Rom. Script. Synd. ar. 1.*

30 Ὑμεῖς μὲν οὖν ἔστε τοιοῦτοι, ὑπὸ τοιῶνδε παιδευτῶν στοιχειωθέντες, Παύλου τοῦ Χριστοφόρου. — *Ignat. Epist. ad Eph.; Iren., lib. iii. cap. 3.*





it seems, left them to the power of the devil. More such fancies<sup>31</sup> might we recount, of men unwilling to submit to the will of God; but upon that, as the sole discriminating cause of these things, we rest, and draw these three observations:—

I. The *rule* whereby all things are dispensed here below, — especially in the making out of the means of grace, — *is the determinate will and counsel of God*. Stay not in Asia, go not into Bithynia, but come to Macedonia. “Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.”

II. The *sending* of the gospel to any nation, place, or persons, rather than others, as the means of life and salvation, *is of the mere free grace and good pleasure of God*. “Stay not in Asia;” etc.

III. *No men in the world want help, like them that want the gospel*. “Come and help us.”

I. Begin we with the first of these: The rule whereby, etc. All events and effects, especially concerning the propagation of the gospel and the Church of Christ, are, in their greatest variety, regulated by the eternal purpose and counsel of God.<sup>32</sup>

All things below in their events are but the *wax*,<sup>33</sup> whereon the eternal *seal* of God’s purpose hath left its own impression; and they every way answer unto it. It is not my mind to extend this to the generality of things in the world, nor to show how the creature can by no means deviate from that eternal rule of providence whereby it is guided; — no more than an arrow can avoid the mark, after it hath received the impression of an unerring hand, — or well-ordered wheels not turn according to the motion given them by the master-spring, — or the wheels in Ezekiel’s vision<sup>34</sup> move irregularly to the spirit of life that was in them. Nor yet, secondly, how that, on the other side, doth no way prejudice the liberty of second causes,<sup>35</sup> in their actions, agreeable to the natures they are endued withal. He who made and preserves the fire, and yet hinders not but that it should burn, or act necessarily agreeable to its nature; by his making, preserving, and guiding of men, hindereth not, yea, effectually causeth, that they work freely, agreeable to their nature. Nor yet, thirdly, to clear up what a straight line runs through all the darkness, confusion, and disorder in the world,<sup>36</sup> — how absolutely, in respect of the first fountain and last tendency of things, there is neither deformity, fault, nor deviation, every thing that is amiss consisting in the transgression of a

31 “Qui causam quæ sit voluntatis divinæ, aliquid majus eo quærit.” — Aug. “Voluntas Dei nullo modo causam habet.” — *Aquin*, p. q. 12, a. 5.

32 Θεία πάντων ἀρχή, δι’ ἧς ἅ πάντα καὶ ἔστι, καὶ διαμένει. *Theophrast. apud Picum de Provid.*

33 “Providentia est ratio ordinis rerum ad finem.” — *Th. p. q. 22, a. 1, 6.*

34 *Ezek. i. 1.*

35 Non tantum res, sed rerum modos.

36 “Videtur ergo quod non sit aliqua deordinatio, deformitas, aut peccatum simpliciter in toto universo, sed tantummodo respectu interiorum causarum, ordinationem superioris causæ volentium, licet non valentium, perturbare.” — *Brad. de Caus. Dei, lib. i. cap. 34.*

moral rule, which is the sin of the creature,<sup>37</sup> the first cause being free:— as he that causeth a lame man to go, is the cause of his going, but not of his going lame; — or the sun exhaling a smell from the kennel, is the cause of the smell, but not of its noisomeness; for from a garden his beams raise a sweet savour. Nothing is amiss but what goeth off from its own rule; which he cannot do who will do all his pleasure,<sup>38</sup> and knows no other rule.

But omitting these things, I shall tie my discourse to that which I chiefly aimed at in my proposition; viz., to discover how the great variety which we see in the dispensation of the means of grace, proceedeth from, and is regulated by, some eternal purpose of God, unfolded in his word. To make out this, we must lay down three things.

1. The wonderful variety in dispensing of the outward *means* of salvation, in respect of them unto whom they were granted, used by the Lord since the fall; — I say, since the fall, for the grace of *preserving* from sin, and *continuing* with God, had been *general*, universally extended to every creature; but [as] for the grace of *rising* from sin, and *coming* again unto God, *that* is made exceeding *various*, by some distinguishing purpose.

2. That this outward dispensation being presupposed, yet in *effectual working upon, particular persons*, there is no less *variety*; for “he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy.”

3. Discover the *rules* of this whole administration.

1. For the first, The promise was at first made unto Adam, and by him doubtless conveyed to his issue, and preached to the several generations which his eyes beheld proceeding from his own loins;<sup>39</sup> but yet by the wickedness of the old world, all flesh corrupting their ways, we may easily collect that the knowledge of it quickly departed from the most; — sin banishing the love of God from their hearts, hindered the knowledge of God from continuing in their minds.<sup>40</sup> After many revivings, by visions, revelations, and covenants, it was at length called in from the wide world, and wholly restrained to the house, family, and seed of Abraham,<sup>41</sup> with whom alone all the means of grace continued for thrice fourteen generations. They alone were in Goshen, and all the world besides in thick darkness; — the dew of heaven was on them as the fleece, when else all the earth was dry. God “showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation,” [Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20](#). The prerogative of the Jews was chiefly in this, that to them were committed the oracles of God, [Rom. iii. 1](#). To them pertained “the adoption, and the glory, the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises,” [Rom. ix. 4](#). But when

37 Ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία.

38 “Adeo summa justitiæ regula est Dei voluntas, ut quicquid vult, eo ipso quod vult, justum habendum sit.” — Aug., [Isa. xlvi. 10](#).

39 [Gen. iii. 15, v. 26](#).

40 [Gen. vi. 5](#).

41 [Gen. v. 24, vi. 18, xii. 1, xviii. 1, 2; Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2; John iv. 22](#).

the fulness<sup>42</sup> of time came, the Son of God being sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, drew all men unto him; and God, who had before winked at the time of their ignorance, then called them every where to repent, commanding the gospel to be preached to the universality of reasonable creatures, and the way of salvation to be proclaimed unto all; — upon which, in few years, the sound of the gospel went out into all nations,<sup>43</sup> and the Sun of righteousness displayed his beams upon the habitable parts of the earth. But yet once more this light, by Satan and his agents, persecutors and seducers, is almost extinguished, as was foretold, [2 Thess. ii.](#), — remaining but in few places, and burning dim where it was, — the kingdom of the beast being full of darkness, [Rev. xvi. 10](#). Yet God again raiseth up reformers, and by them kindles a light, we hope, never to be put out. But, alas! what a spot of ground doth this shine on, in comparison of the former vast extents and bounds of the Christian world! Now, is all this variety, think you, to be ascribed unto chance, as the philosopher thought the world was made by a casual concurrence of atoms? or hath the idol free-will, with the new goddess contingency, ruled in these dispensations? Truly neither the one nor the other, no more than the fly raised the dust by sitting on the chariot wheel; — but all these things have come to pass according to a certain unerring rule, given them by God’s determinate purpose and counsel.

2. Presupposing this variety in the outward means, how is it that thereupon one is taken, another left? The promise is made known to Cain and Abel; — one the first murderer, the other the first martyr. Jacob and Esau had the same outward advantages; but the one becomes Israel, the other Edom, — the one inherits the promises, the other sells his right for a mess of pottage. At the preaching of our Saviour, some believed, some blasphemed; — some said he was a good man; others said, nay, but he deceived the people. Have we not the word in its power this day, and do we not see the like various effects, — some continuing in impenitency, others in sincerity closing with Jesus Christ? Now, what shall we say to these things? What guides these wheels? who thus steers his word for the good of souls? Why, this also, as I said before, is from some peculiarly distinguishing purpose of the will of God.

3. To open the third thing proposed, I shall show, — (1.) That all this *variety* is according to God’s determinate purpose, and answereth thereunto; (2.) The particular purposes from whence this variety *proceedeth*.

(1.) [Eph. i. 11](#), “He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.” As a man may be said to erect a fabric<sup>44</sup> according to the counsel of his will, when he frameth it

42 [Gal. iv. 4](#); [John xii. 32](#); [Acts xvii. 30](#); [Mark xvi. 15](#); [Mal. iii. 4](#); [Prov. viii. 31](#).

43 See Tertullian, *Lib. ad Jud.*, reckoning almost all the known nations of the world, and affirming that they all, — that is, some in them, — in his days, submitted to the sceptre of Christ. He lived in the end of the second century.

44 *Piscat. in loc.*

before in his mind, and maketh all things in event answer his preconceived platform, — all things (especially τὰ πάντα, all those things of which the apostle there treateth, gospel things) have their futuration and manner of being from his eternal purpose:<sup>45</sup> — whence also is the idea in the mind of God of all things, with their circumstances,<sup>46</sup> that shall be; that is, the first mover, continuing itself immovable, giving to every thing a regular motion, according to the impression which from that it doth receive: “For known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world,” Acts xv. 18.

If any *attendants* of actions might free and exempt them from the regular dependence we insist upon, they must be either contingency or sin; but yet for both these we have, besides general rules, clear, particular<sup>47</sup> instances. What seems more contingent and casual than the unadvised slaying of a man with the fall of the head of an axe from the helve, as a man was cutting wood by the way side? Deut. xix. 5; yet God assumes this as his own work, Exod. xxi. 13. The same may be said of free agents and their actions. And for the other, see Acts iv. 27, 28, — in the crucifying of the Son of God’s love, — all things came to pass according as his counsel had before deter — mined that it should be done. Now, how in the one of these liberty is not abridged, the nature of things not changed in the other, sin is not countenanced,<sup>48</sup> belongs not to this discourse. “The counsel of the Lord,” then, “standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart unto all generations,” Ps. xxxiii. 11. “His counsel standeth, and he will do all his pleasure,” Isa. xlv. 10. For he is the Lord, and he changeth not, Mal. iii. 6. With him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning, James i. 17. All things that are, come to pass in that unchangeable method in which he hath laid them down from all eternity.

(2.) Let us look peculiarly upon the purposes according to which the dispensations of the gospel, both in *sending* and *withholding* it, do proceed.

[1.] For the *not sending* of the means of grace unto any people, whereby they hear not the joyful sound of the gospel, but have in all ages followed dumb idols, as many do unto this day. In this chapter of which we treat, the gospel is forbidden to be preached in Asia and Bithynia; — which restraint, the Lord by his providence as yet continues to many parts of the world. Now, the purpose from whence this proceedeth, and whereby it is regulated,

45 Πάντα δὲ λέγω τὰ οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, τὰ γὰρ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, οὐ ἡμῖν προνοίας, ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἡμετέρου αὐτεξουσίου. — *Damascen. Satis impie.*

46 Matt. x. 29; Job xiv. 5; Prov. xvi. 33, xxi. 1, 30, xix. 21. “Nihil fit nisi omnipotens fieri velit, vel ipse faciendo, vel sinendo ut fiat.” — Aug.

47 Gen. iv. 5–7, 1 Kings xxii. 19–21; 2 Kings v. 18, 19; Ps. lxxvi. 10; Eccles. vii. 26; Isa. vi. 9–11, etc.

48 “Deus non operatur in malis, quod ei displicet; sed operatur per eos quod ei placet, recipientur veto non pro eo, quod Deus bene usus est ipsorum operibus malis, sed pro eo, quod ipsi male abusi sunt Dei operibus bonis.” — *Fulgent. ad Monim.*

you have, [Rom. ix. 22](#), “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” compared with [Matt. xi. 25, 26](#), “Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight;” and with [Acts xiv. 16](#), — he “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.”<sup>49</sup> Now, God’s not sending the truth, hath the same design and aim with his sending the efficacy of error; viz., “that they all may be damned” who have it not; “there being no other name under heaven, whereby they may be saved,” but only that which is not revealed unto them; — God, in the meantime, being no more the cause<sup>50</sup> of their sins, for which they incur damnation, than the sun is the cause of cold and darkness, which follow the absence thereof: or he is the cause of a man’s imprisonment for debt, who will not pay his debt for him, though he be no way obliged so to do. So, then, the not sending of the gospel to any people, is an act regulated by that eternal purpose of God whereby he determineth to advance the glory of his justice, by permitting some men to sin, to continue in their sin, and for sin to send them to their own place; — as a king’s not sending a pardon to condemned malefactors is an issue of his purpose that they shall die for their faults. When you see the gospel strangely, and through wonderful varieties and unexpected providences, carried away from a people, know that the spirit which moves in those wheels is that purpose of God which we have recounted.

[2.] To some people, to some nations, the gospel is sent. God calls them to repentance and acknowledgment of the truth, — as in my text, Macedonia: and England, the day wherein we breathe. Now, there is in this a twofold aim. 1. *Peculiar*, towards some in their conversion. 2. *General*, towards all, for conviction. And therefore it is acted according to a twofold purpose, which carries it along, and is fulfilled thereby.

First, His purpose of saving<sup>51</sup> some in and by Jesus Christ, effectually to bring them unto himself, for the praise of his glorious grace. Upon whomsoever the seal of the Lord is stamped, that God knows them, and owns them as his, to them he will cause his gospel to be revealed. [Acts xviii. 10](#), Paul is commanded to abide at Corinth, and to preach there, because God had much people in that city. Though the devil had them in present possession,<sup>52</sup> yet they were God’s in his eternal counsel. And such as these they were for whose sake the man of Macedonia is sent on his message. Have you never seen the gospel hover about a nation, now and then about to settle, and anon scared and upon wing again; yet working

49 [2 Thess. ii.](#); [Acts iv.](#)

50 “Liberatur pars hominum, parte pereunte. Sed cur horum sit misertus Deus — illorum non misertus, quæ scientia comprehendere, quæ potest investigare sapientia? Latet discretionis istius ratio, sed non latet ipsa discretio.” — *Prosp. de Vocat. Gen., [lib. i. cap. 15.]*

51 [Rom. viii. 28, 29](#), [Eph. i. 4](#), [2 Tim. ii. 19](#).

52 [Eph. ii. 1, 11](#).

through difficulties, making plains of mountains and filling valleys, overthrowing armies, putting aliens to flight, and at length taking firm root like the cedars of God? Truly if you have not, you are strangers to the place wherein you live. Now, what is all this but the working of *the purpose* of God to attain its proposed end, of gathering his saints to himself? In the effectual working of grace also for conversion and salvation, whence do you think it takes its rule and determination, in respect of particular objects, that it should be directed to John, not Judas, — Simon Peter, not Simon Magus? Why, only from this discriminating<sup>53</sup> counsel of God from eternity, to bring the one and not the other to himself by Christ. “The Lord added to the church such as should be saved,” [Acts ii. 47](#). The purpose of saving is the rule of adding to the church of believers. And [Acts xiii. 48](#), “As many believed as were ordained to eternal life.” Their fore-ordaining to life eternal gives them right to faith and belief. The purpose of God’s election is the rule of dispensing saving grace.

Secondly, His purpose of leaving some inexcusable<sup>54</sup> in their sins, for the farther manifestation of his glorious justice, is the rule of dispensing the word unto them. Did you never see the gospel sent or continued to an unthankful people,<sup>55</sup> bringing forth no fruits meet for it? Wherefore it is so sent, see [Isa. vi. 9, 10](#); — which prophecy you have fulfilled, [John xii. 37–41](#); in men described, [Jude 4](#), and [1 Pet. ii. 8](#). But here we must strike sail, the waves swell, and it is no easy task to sail in this gulf. The righteousness of God is a great mountain, easy to be seen; but his judgments are like the great deep: who can search into the bottom thereof? [Ps. xxxvi. 6](#). And so I have, I hope, discovered how all things here below, concerning the promulgation of the gospel, are, in their greatest variety, straightly regulated by the eternal purposes and counsel of God.

The uses of it follow.

*Use 1.* To discover whence it is that the work of reforming the worship of God, and settling the almost departing gospel, hath so powerfully been carried along in this nation; — that a beautiful fabric is seen to arise in the midst of all oppositions, with the confusion of axes and hammers sounding about it, though the builders have been forced oftentimes, not only with one hand, but with both, to hold the weapons<sup>56</sup> of war; — that although the wheels of our chariots have been knocked off, and they driven heavily, yet the regular motions

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53 “Non ob aliud dicit, non vos me elegistis, sed ego vos elegi, nisi quia non elegerunt eum, ut eligeret eos; sed ut eligerent eum, elegit eos. Non quia præscivit eos credituros, sed quia facturus ipse fuerit credentes. Electi sunt itaque ante mundi constitutionem, eâ prædestinatione, quâ Deus ipse sua futura facta prævidit: electi sunt autem de mundo, eâ vocatione, quâ Deus id, quod prædestinavit, implevit.” — *August. de Prædest. Sanctorum. cap. xvi., xvii.*

54 [Matt. xi. 21](#); [Acts xiii. 46](#).

55 [Luke ii. 34](#); [1 Pet. ii. 7](#); [Ezek. ii. 5](#); [Matt. xxiv. 14](#); [Rom. ix. 22, 23](#).

56 [Neh. iv. 17](#).

of the superior wheels of providence have carried on the design towards the resting-place aimed at; — that the ship hath been directed to the port, though the storm had quite puzzled the pilots and mariners:— even from hence, that all this great variety was but to work out one Certain fore-appointed end, proceeding in the tracts and paths which were traced out for it from eternity; which, though they have seemed to us a maze or labyrinth, such a world of contingencies and various chances hath the work passed through, yet, indeed, all the passages thereof have been regular and straight, answering the platform laid down for the whole in the counsel of God. [Dan. ix. 1](#), makes his supplication for the restoration of Jerusalem; [verse 23](#), an angel is sent to tell him, that “at the beginning of his supplication the commandment came forth,” — viz., that it should be accomplished. It was before determined, and is now set on work; but yet what mountains<sup>57</sup> of opposition, what hinderances lay in the way! Cyrus must come to the crown by the death or slaughter of Darius,<sup>58</sup> — his heart be moved to send some to the work: in a short time Cyrus is cut off. Now, difficulties arise from the following kings:— what their flattering counsellors, what the malignant nations about them conspired, the books of Nehemiah and Ezra sufficiently declare. Whence, [verse 25](#), the angel tells Daniel, that from “the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, in troublesome times;” that is, it shall be seven weeks to the finishing of Jerusalem, and thence to Messiah the Prince sixty-two weeks; — seven weeks, that is, forty-nine years; for so much it was from the decree of Cyrus<sup>59</sup> to the finishing of the wall by Nehemiah: of which time the temple, as the Jews affirmed, was all but three years in building, [John ii. 20](#). During which space, how often did the hearts of the people of God faint in their troubles, as though they should never have seen an end! And therefore, ever and anon they were ready to give over, as [Hag. i. 2](#). But yet we see the decree was fixed, and all those varieties did but orderly work in an exact method for the glorious accomplishment of it.




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57 [Zech. iv. 7](#).

58 *Scal. de Emend. Temp.*

59 I follow in this the vulgar or common account, otherwise there is no part of Scripture chronology so contended about as these weeks of Daniel; most concluding that they are terminated in the death of Christ, happening about the midst of the last week. But about their original, or rise, there is no small debate. Of the four decrees made by the Persian kings about the building of Jerusalem, — viz., 1st, by Cyrus, [2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23](#); 2dly, by Darius, [Ezra vi. 8](#), 3dly, by Artaxerxes, [Ezra vii.](#); of the same to Nehemiah [chap. ii.](#), — following the account of their reign set down in profane stories, the last only holds exactly. Tertullian *ad Jud.* begins it from Darius, when this vision appeared to Daniel, whom, it seems, he conceived to be Darius Hystaspes, that followed the Magi, and not Medus, that was before Cyrus; and so with a singular kind of chronology makes up his account. — Vid. *Euseb. Demon. Evan., lib. viii. cap. Func. Com. in Chron. Beroald. Chron., lib. iii. cap. 7, 8. Montacut. Appar.*

England's troubles have not yet endured above half the odd years of those reformers' task; yet, good God! how short-breathed are men! What fainting is there! what repining, what grudging against the ways of the Lord! But let me tell you, that as the water in the stream will not go higher than the head of the fountain, no more will the work in hand be carried one step higher or beyond the aim of its fountain, the counsel of God, from whence it hath its rise. And yet, as a river will break through all oppositions, and swell to the height of mountains, to go to the sea from whence it came; so will the stream of the gospel, when it comes out from God, break down all mountains of opposition, and not be hindered from resting in its appointed place. It were an easy thing to recall your minds to some trembling periods of time, when there was trembling in our armies, and trembling in our councils, — trembling to be ashamed, to be repented of, — trembling in the city and in the country; and men were almost at their wits' end for the sorrows and fears of those days: and yet we see how the unchangeable purpose of God hath wrought strongly through all these straits, from one end to another, that nothing might fall to the ground of what he had determined. If a man, in those days, had gone about to persuade us that all our pressures were good omens, that they all wrought together for our good, we could have been ready to cry, with the woman who, when she had recounted her griefs to the physician, and he still replied they were good signs, οἱ μοι ἀγαθῶν ἀπόλλυμαι, "Good signs have undone me," — These good signs will be our ruin: yet, behold, we hope the contrary. Our day hath been like that mentioned, [Zech. xiv. 6, 7](#), — a day whose light is neither clear nor dark, — a day known only to the Lord, seeming to us to be neither day nor night. But God knew all this while that it was a day, — he saw how it all wrought for the appointed end; and in the evening, in the close, it will be light, so light as to be to us discernible. In the meantime we are like unskilful men, [who] going to the house of some curious artist, so long as he is about his work, despise it as confused; but when it is finished, admire it as excellent: — whilst the passages of providence are on us, all is confusion; but when the fabric is reared, glorious.

*Use 2.* Learn to look upon the wisdom of God in carrying all things through this wonderful variety, exactly to answer his own eternal purpose; — suffering so many mountains to lie in the way of reforming his churches and settling the gospel, that his Spirit may have the glory, and his people the comfort in their removal. It is a high and noble contemplation, to consider the purposes of God, so far as by the event revealed, and to see what impressions his wisdom and power do leave upon things accomplished here below, — to read in them a temporary history of his eternal counsels. Some men may deem it strange, that his determinate will, which gives rule to these things, and could in a word have reached its own appointment, should carry his people so many journeys in the wilderness, and keep us thus long in so low estate. I say, — not to speak of his own glory, which hath sparkled forth of this flinty opposition, — there be divers things, things of light, for our good, which he hath brought forth out of all that darkness wherewith we have been overclouded. Take a few instances.



(1.) If there had been no difficulties, there had been no deliverances. And did we never find our hearts so enlarged towards God upon such advantages, as to say, Well, this day's temper of spirit was cheaply purchased by yesterday's anguish and fear; — *that* was but a being sick at sea?

(2.) Had there been no tempests and storms, we had not made out for shelter. Did you never run to a tree for shelter in a storm, and find fruit which you expected not? Did you never go to God for safeguard in these times,<sup>60</sup> driven by outward storms, and there find unexpected fruit, the "peaceable fruit of righteousness,"<sup>61</sup> that made you say, Happy tempest, which cast me into such a harbour? It was a storm<sup>62</sup> that occasioned the discovery of the golden mines of India; — hath not a storm driven some to the discovery of the richer mines of the love of God in Christ?

(3.) Had not Esau come against him with four hundred men, Jacob had not been called Israel; — he had not been put to it to try his strength with God, and so to prevail. Who would not purchase with the greatest distress that heavenly comfort which is in the return of prayers? The strength of God's Jacobs in this kingdom had not been known, if the Esaus had not come against them. Some say, this war hath made a discovery of England's strength, what it is able to do. I think so also, — not what armies it can raise against men, but with what armies of prayers and tears it is able to deal with God. Had not the brethren strove in the womb, Rebekah had not asked, "Why am I thus?" — nor received that answer, "The elder shall serve the younger." Had not two sorts of people struggled in the womb of this kingdom, we had not sought, nor received, such gracious answers. Thus do all the various motions of the lower wheels serve for our good, and exactly answer the impression they receive from the master-spring, the eternal purpose of God. Of this hitherto.

II. The sending of the gospel to any one nation rather than another, as the means of life and salvation, is of the *mere free grace and good pleasure of God*.

Now; before I come to make out the absolute independency and freedom of this distinguishing mercy, I shall premise three things.

1. That the not sending of the gospel to any person or people is of God's mere good pleasure,<sup>63</sup> and not of any peculiar distinguishing demerit in that person or people. No man or nation doth "*majorem ponere obicem*," lay more or greater obstacles against the gospel than another. There is nothing imaginable to lay a block in the passage thereof but only sin.

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60 [Prov. xviii. 10.](#)

61 [Heb. xii. 11.](#)

62 *Pet. Mart. de Relig. Jud. decad, i. lib. 1.*

63 "Qui liberatur, gratiam diligit, qui non liberatur, debitum agnoscat." — *Aug. de Bon. Persev., cap. viii.* "Ex nequissimis in ipso vitæ exitu gratia invenit quos adoptet, cum tamen multi, etiam qui minus nocentes videantur, doni hujus alieni sunt." — *Pros. de Voc. Gen., lib. i. cap. 17.*

Now, these sins are, or may be, of two sorts; — either, first, Against the gospel itself, which may possibly hinder the receiving of the gospel, but not the sending of it, which it presupposeth: secondly, Against the covenant they are under, and the light they are guided by, before the beams of the gospel shine upon them. Now, in these generally all are equal,<sup>64</sup> all having sinned and come short of the glory of God; and in particular sins against the law and light of nature, no nations have gone farther than they which were soonest enlightened with the word, as afterward will appear: so that the sole cause of this is the good pleasure of God, as our Saviour affirmeth, [Matt. xi. 25, 26](#).

2. That sins against the covenant of works, which men are under before the gospel<sup>65</sup> comes unto them, cannot have any general demerit, that the means of life and salvation by free grace should not be imparted to them. It is true, all nations have deserved to be turned into hell, and a people that have had the truth, and detained it in ungodliness, deserve to be deprived of it; — the first, by virtue of the sanction of the first broken covenant; the other, by sinning against that which they had of the second. But that men in a fallen condition, and not able to rise, should hereby deserve not to be helped up, needeth some distinction to clear it.

There is, then, a twofold demerit and indignity; — one merely negative, or a not deserving to have good done unto us; the other positive, deserving that good should not be done unto us. The first of these is found in all the world, in respect of the dispensation of the gospel. If the Lord should bestow it only on those who do deserve it, he must for ever keep it closed up in the eternal treasure of his own bosom. The second is found directly in none, in respect of that peculiar way which is discovered in the gospel, because they had not sinned against it; which, rightly considered, gives no small lustre to the freedom of grace.

3. That there is a right in the gospel, and a fitness in that gracious dispensation to be made known to all people in the world; that no singular portion of the earth should be any longer a holy land, or any mountain of the world lift up its head above its fellows. And this right hath a double foundation.

(1.) The infinite value and worth of the blood of Christ, giving fulness<sup>66</sup> and fitness to the promises founded thereon to be propounded to all mankind; for through his blood remission of sins is preached to whosoever believes on him, [Acts x. 43](#), — “to every creature,” [Mark xvi. 15](#). God would have a price of that infinite value for sin laid down, as might justly give advantage to proclaim a pardon infinitely to all that will come in and accept of it, — there being in it no defect at all (though intentionally only a ransom for some), but that by

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64 [1 Cor. i. 25, 26](#).

65 [Acts xiv. 16, 17, xvii. 30, 31](#).

66 [Rom. viii. 32; Joel ii. 28; John xvii. 22; Rom. i. 5, xvi. 26](#).

it the world might know that he had done whatsoever the Father commanded him, [John xiv. 31](#).

(2.) In that economy and dispensation of the grace of the new covenant, breaking forth in these latter days, whereby all external distinction of places and persons,<sup>67</sup> people and nations, being removed, Jesus Christ taketh all<sup>68</sup> nations to be his inheritance, dispensing to all men the grace of the gospel, bringing salvation, as seemeth best to him, [Tit. ii. 11, 12](#). For being lifted up, he drew all unto him, having redeemed us with his blood, “out of every kindred and tongue, people and nation,” [Apoc. v. 9](#). And on these two grounds it is that the gospel hath in itself a right and fitness to be preached to all, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

These things being premised, I come to the proof of the assertion.

[Deut. vii. 7, 8](#). Moses is very careful in sundry places to get this to take an impression upon their spirits, that it was mere free grace that exalted them into that condition and dignity wherein they stood, by their approach unto God, in the enjoyment of his ordinances; — in this most clearly rendering the cause of God’s love in choosing them, mentioned, [verse 7](#), to be only his love. [Verse 8](#), his love towards them is the cause of his love, — his free love eternally determining, his free love actually conferring, those distinguishing mercies upon them. It was not for their righteousness, for they were a stiff-necked people, [Deut. ix. 6](#).

[Matt. xi. 25, 26](#): Our Saviour laying both these things together, the hiding of the mysteries of salvation from some, and revealing them to others, renders the same reason and supreme cause of both, of which no account can be rendered, only the good pleasure of God: “I thank thee, O Father.” And if any will proceed higher, and say, Where is the justice of this, that men equally obnoxious should be thus unequally accepted? we say, with Paul, “That he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. And who art thou, O man, that disputest against God?” “Si tu es homo, et ego homo, audiamus dicentem, O homo, Tu quis?”<sup>69</sup> To send a pardon to some that are condemned, suffering the rest to suffer, hath no injustice. If this will not satisfy, let us say, with the same apostle, ὦ βάθος, [Rom. xi. 33](#), “O the depth,” etc.

Yea, so far is it from truth, that God should dispense and grant his word and means of grace by any other rule, or upon any other motive, than his own will and good pleasure,<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> [Rom. ix. 13](#).

<sup>68</sup> [Eph. iii. 14, 15](#); [Matt. xxvii. 19](#).

<sup>69</sup> August.

<sup>70</sup> “Si hoc voluntatum meritis voluerimus ascribere, ut malos neglexisse gratia, bonos autem elegisse videatur, resistet nobis innumerabilium causa populorum, quibus per tot secula, nulla cœlestis doctrinæ annunciatio corruscavit. Nec meliores fuisse eorum posteros possumus dicere, de quibus scriptum est, ‘Gentium populus qui sedebat in tenebris, lucem vidit magnam.’” — *Prosp. de Voc. Gen., lib. i. cap. 15*.

that we find in Scripture the direct contrary to what we would suppose, even mercy showed to the more unworthy, and the more worthy passed by; reckoning worthiness and unworthiness by less or greater sin, with less or more endeavours. Christ preaches to Chorazin and Bethsaida, which would not repent; and at the same time denies the word to Tyre and Sidon, which would have gotten on sackcloth and ashes, when the other continued delicate despisers, [Matt. xi. 21](#). Ezekiel is sent to them that would not hear him, passing by them that would have hearkened, [chap. iii. 5](#); which is most clear, [Rom. ix. 30, 31](#), “The Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” If, in the dispensation of the gospel, the Lord had had any respect to the desert of people, Corinth, that famous place of sinning, had not so soon enjoyed it, — the people whereof, for *worship*, were led away with dumb idols, [1 Cor. xii. 2](#); and for their *lives*, you have them drawn to the life, [1 Cor. vi. 9–11](#), “Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers; effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners,” καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε, which is to be repeated, ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ, — “Some of you were fornicators, some idolaters; but ye are sanctified.” Seem not these to the eye of flesh goodly qualifications for the gospel of Jesus Christ? Had these men been dealt withal according as they had disposed themselves, not fitter fuel for hell could the justice of God require; but yet ye see to these the gospel comes with the first, “a light shines to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

If God send or grant the gospel, which is the means of grace, upon any other ground but his mere good pleasure, then it must be an act of remunerative justice.<sup>71</sup> Now, there is no such justice in God towards the creature, but what is founded upon some preceding covenant, or promise of God to the creature, — which is the only foundation of all relation between God and man, — but only those that attend creation and sovereignty. Now, what promise do you find made to, or covenant with, a people as yet without the gospel; — I mean conditional promises, inferring any good to be bestowed on any required performance on their part? Free, absolute promises there are innumerable, that light should shine to them that were in darkness, and those be called God’s people which were not his people; but such as depend on any condition on their part to be fulfilled, we find none. God bargains<sup>72</sup> not

71 “Si de debito quærat respectu creaturæ, in Deum cadere non potest, nisi ex aliqua suppositione ipsi Deo voluntaria, quæ non potest esse nisi promisso aut pacto aliquo, ex quibus fidelitatis aut justitiæ debitum oriri solet.” — *Suarez. de Libert. Div. Vol., disp. 1, sect. 2, num. 5.*

72 “Deus nulla obligatione tenetur, autequam ipse fidem suam astringat, ergo ante promissionem nulla justitia distributiva in Deo reperitur.” — *Vasq. in q. 21, a. 1, disp. 86.*

with the creature about the gospel, knowing how unable he is to be merchant for such pearls. If a man had all that goodness which may be found in man without Jesus Christ, they would not in the least measure procure a discovery of him.

I deny not but God may, and perhaps sometimes doth, reveal himself to some in a peculiar and extraordinary manner. Whereunto tends that story in Aquinas,<sup>73</sup> of a corpse taken up in the days of Constantine and Irene, with a plate of gold, and this inscription on it, “Christus nascetur ex virgine, ego credo in illum. O sol sub Irenæ et Constantini temporibus iterum me videbis.” But that this should be regular unto men living, μετὰ λόγου, in Justin Martyr’s phrase,<sup>74</sup> or using their naturals aright (which is impossible they should, the right use of naturals depending on supernaturals), is wide from the word.

If there be any outward motive of granting the gospel unto any, it is some acceptable performances of theirs, holding up to the rule and will of God. Now, this will and rule having no saving revelation but by the gospel, which should thus be procured by acts agreeable unto it, makes up a flat contradiction, — supposing the revelation of the gospel before it be revealed. Doubtless, according to all rules of justice to us made known, it is an easier thing to deserve heaven by obedience now under the covenant of works, than being under that covenant, to do any thing that might cause a new way of salvation, such as the gospel is, to be revealed.

With some observations I descend to application.

[1.] There is the same reason of continuing the gospel unto a people as of sending it; especially if oppositions rise high, apt and able in themselves for its removal. Never nation as yet enjoyed the word that deserved the continuance of the word. God hath always<sup>75</sup> something against a people, to make the continuing of his grace to be of grace, the not removing of his love to be merely of love, and the preaching of the gospel to be a mercy of the gospel, free and undeserved. Though there be work, and labour, and patience for Christ’s sake at Ephesus; yet there is somewhat against Ephesus, [Rev. ii. 4, 5](#), for which he might justly remove his candlestick; and if he doth it not, it is of the same mercy that first set it there. As God lays out goodness and grace in the entrance; so *patience*, long-suffering, and forbearance in the continuance. He bears with our manners, whilst we grieve his Spirit. Look upon the face of this kingdom, and view the body of the people; think of the profaneness, villany, trampling upon the blood of Jesus, ignorance, contempt of God and his ways, despising his ordinances, reviling his servants, branding and defaming the power of godliness,

73 *Aquin. 2, 2, q. 2, art. 7.*

74 Καὶ οἱ μετὰ λόγου βιώσαντες Χριστιανοί εἰσι. — *Justin., Apol. ii.*

75 [Hos. xi. 8, 9.](#)

persecuting and tearing one another, — and yet hear the joyful sound of the word in every corner; and you will quickly conclude, that you see a great fight of God's love against our sins, and not of our goodness for his love.

[2.] There is the same reason of the reformation and the doctrine of the gospel corrupted with error, and of the worship of God collapsed with superstition, as of the first implantation of the gospel. God, in his just judgment of late ages, had sent upon the western world the efficacy of error, that they should believe lies, because they received not the love of the truth; as he foretold, [2 Thess. ii. 1](#). Now, whence is it that we see some of the nations thereof as yet suffered to walk in their own ways, others called to repentance, — some wildernesses turned into green pastures for the flock of God, and some places made barren wildernesses for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? How comes it that this island glories in a reformation, and Spain sits still in darkness? Is it because we were better than they, or less engaged in antichristian delusions? Doubtless no. No nation in the world drank deeper of that cup of abomination. It was a proverbial speech amongst all, "England was our good ass" (a beast of burden) for (Antichrist whom they called) the Pope. Nothing but the good pleasure of God and Christ, freely coming to refine us, [Mal. iii. 1–4](#), caused this distinction.

[3.] Though men can do nothing towards the procuring of the gospel, yet men may do much for the expulsion of the gospel. If the husbandmen prove idle or self-seekers, the vineyard will be let to others; and if the people love darkness more than light, the candlestick will be removed. Let England beware! Now this men may do, either upon the first entrance of the gospel, or after some continuance of it. The gospel spreading itself over the earth, finds entertainment, like that of men's seeking plantations amongst barbarous nations; sometimes kept out with hideous outcries at the shore, — sometimes suffered to enter with admiration, and a little after violently assaulted.

1st, In the first way, how do we find the Jews putting far from them the word of life, and rejecting the counsel of God *at its first entrance*, — calling for night at the rising of the sun! Hence, [Acts xiii. 41](#), Paul concludes his sermon to thorn with, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;" — and [verse 46](#), it was necessary the word should be preached to them; but seeing they judged themselves unworthy, they were forsaken; — and [verse 51](#), they shake off the dust of their feet against them, — a common symbol in those days of the highest indignation and deepest curse. The like stubbornness we find in them, [Acts xxviii.](#); whereupon the apostle wholly turned himself to the Gentiles, [verse 28](#). How many nations of Europe, at the beginning of the Reformation, rejected the gospel of God, and procured Christ, with the Gadarenes, to depart as soon as he was entered, will be found at the last day written with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus that suffered amongst them!

2dly, *After some continuance*. So the Church of Laodicea, having for a while enjoyed the word, fell into such a tepid condition, — so little moved with that fire that Christ came to send upon the earth, [Rev. iii. 15, 16](#), — that the Lord was even sick and weary with bearing



them. The Church of Rome, famous at the first, yet quickly, by the advantage of outward supportments and glorious fancies, *became* head of that fatal rebellion against Jesus Christ,<sup>76</sup> which spread itself over most of the churches in the world; — God hereupon sending upon them the “efficacy of error to believe a lie, that they all might be damned that believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness,” [2 Thess. ii. 1](#), — suffering them to retain the empty names of Church and Gospel; which, because they usurp only for their advantage here, to appear glorious, the Lord will use for the advancing of his justice hereafter, to show them inexcusable. O Lord, how was England of late, by thy mercy, delivered from this snare! A captain being chosen for the return of this people into Egypt, O how hath thy grace fought against our backsliding! And let none seek to extenuate this mercy, by catalogues of errors still amongst us: there is more danger of apostasy against Christ, and rebellion against the truth, in one Babylonish error, owned by men pretending to power and jurisdiction over others, than in five hundred scattered amongst inconsiderable, disunited individuals. I would to God we could all speak and think the same things, — that we were all of one mind, even in the most minute differences that are now amongst us. But yet the truth is, the kingdom of Jesus Christ never shakes amongst a people until men, pretending to act with a combined mixed power of heaven and earth, unto which all sheaves must bow or be thrashed, do, by virtue of this trust, set up and impose things or opinions deviating from the rule. As it was in the Papacy, errors owned by mixed associations, civil and ecclesiastical, are for the most part incurable, be they never so absurd and foolish; of which the Lutheran ubiquities and consubstantiation are a tremendous example. These things being presupposed, —

*Use 1. Let no flesh glory in themselves, but let every mouth be stopped; for we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Who hath made the possessors of the gospel to differ from others? or what have they that they have not received? 1 Cor. iv. 7. Why are these things hidden from the great and wise of the world, and revealed to babes and children, but because, O Father, so it pleased thee? Matt. xi. 26. “He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth,” Rom. ix. 18. Ah, Lord, if the glory and pomp of the world might prevail with thee to send thy gospel, it would supply the room of the cursed Alkoran, and spread itself in the palaces of that strong lion of the east who sets his throne upon the necks of kings; but, alas! Jesus Christ is not there. If wisdom, learning, pretended gravity, counterfeit holiness, real policy, were of any value in thine eyes to procure the word of life, it would be as free and glorious at Rome as ever; but, alas! Antichrist hath his throne there. Jesus Christ is not there. If will-worship and humilities, neglect of the body, macerations, superstitions, beads, and vainly-repeated prayers, had any efficacy before the Lord, the gospel, perhaps, might be in the cells of some recluses and monks; but, alas! Jesus Christ is not there. If moral virtues to an amazement, exact civil honesty and justice, that soul of human society,*



76 Νῦν δὲ ἐστὶν ἀποστασία, ἀπέστησαν γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως. *Cyrillus Hieros. Κατήχησις.*

could have prevailed aught, the heathen worthies in the days of old had had the promises; but, alas! Jesus Christ was far away. Now, if all these be passed by, to whom is the report of the Lord made known? to “whom is his arm revealed?” Why, to a handful of poor sinners amongst the nations formerly counted fierce and barbarous.<sup>77</sup> And what shall we say to these things? — ὦ βάθος, “O the depth,” etc.

Use 2. Let England consider with fear and trembling *the dispensation that it is now under*; — I say, with fear and trembling, for this day is the Lord’s day, wherein he will purge us or burn us, according as we shall be found silver or dross:— it is our day, wherein we must mend or end. Let us look to the rock from whence we were hewed, and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged. Was not our father an Amorite, and our mother an Hittite? Are we not the posterity of idolatrous progenitors?<sup>78</sup> — of those who worshipped them who by nature were no gods? How often, also, hath this land forfeited the gospel! God having taken it twice away, who is not forward to seize upon the forfeiture. In the very morning of the gospel, the Sun of righteousness shone upon this land; and they say the first potentate on the earth that owned it was in Britain.<sup>79</sup> But as it was here soon professed, so it was here soon abused; that part of this island which is called England being the first place I read of which was totally bereaved of the gospel, — the sword of the then pagan Saxons fattening the land with the blood of the Christian inhabitants,<sup>80</sup> and in the close wholly subverting the worship of God. Long it was not ere this cloud was blown over; and those men who had been instruments to root out others submitted their own necks to the yoke of the Lord; and, under exceeding variety in civil affairs, enjoyed the word of Mace, until, by insensible degrees, like summer unto winter, or light unto darkness, it gives place to antichristian superstition, and left the land in little less than a paganish darkness, drinking deep of the cup of abominations mingled for it by the Roman harlot. And is there mercy yet in God to recover a twice over lost backsliding people? Might not the Lord have said unto us, What shall I do unto thee, O island? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? But his heart is turned within him, his repentings are kindled together: the dry bones shall live, and the fleece shall be wet, though all the earth be dry. God will again water his garden, once more purge his vineyard, — once more of his own accord he will take England upon liking, though he had twice deservedly turned it out of his service. So that, “*coming as a refiner’s fire, and as fuller’s soap, to purify the sons of Levi, to purge them as gold and silver, to offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness,*” to reform his churches, England, as soon as any, hath the benefit and comfort thereof. Nay, the reformation of England shall be more glorious



77 “Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita.” — Tertul.

78 “Britanniam in Christianam consentire religionem.” — Origen. *Hom. iv. in Ezek.*

79 *Niceph., lib. ii. cap. 40. Epist. Eleuth. ad Lucium, an. 169, apud Bar.*

80 Anno 469 the Saxons entered.



than of any nation in the world, being carried on neither by might nor power, but only by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. But is this the utmost period of England's sinning, and God's showing mercy, in continuing and restoring of the gospel? No, truly: we again in our days have made forfeiture of the purity of his worship, by an almost universal treacherous apostasy; from which the free grace and good pleasure of God hath made a great progress again towards a recovery.

There are two sorts of men that I find exceedingly ready to extenuate and lessen the superstition and popish tyranny of the former days, into which we were falling.

(1.) Such as were industriously instrumental in it, whose suffrages had been loud for the choice of a captain to return into Egypt, — men tainted with the errors and loaded with the preferments of the times; with all those who blindly adhere to that faction of men who as yet covertly drive on that design:— to such as these all was nothing, and to them it is no mercy to be delivered. And the truth is, it is a favour to the lamb, and not the wolf, to have him taken out of his mouth; but these men have interest by those things which have no ears, against which there is no contending.

(2.) Such as are disturbed in their optics, or have gotten false glasses,<sup>81</sup> representing all things unto them in dubious colours. Which way soever they look, they can see nothing but errors, — errors of all sizes, sorts, sects, and sexes, — errors and heresies from the beginning to the end; which have deceived some men, not of the worst, and made them think that all before was nothing, in comparison of the present confusion. A great sign they felt it not, or were not troubled at it; as if men should come into a field, and seeing some red weeds and cockle among the corn, should instantly affirm there is no corn there, but all weeds, and that it were much better the hedges were down, and the whole field laid open to the boars of the forest: but the harvest will one day show the truth of these things. But that these apprehensions may not too much prevail, to the vilifying and extenuating of God's mercy, in restoring to us the purity and liberty of the gospel, give me leave, in a few words, to set out the danger of that apostasy from which the good pleasure of God hath given us a deliverance. I shall instance only in a few things. Observe then, that, —

[1.] The darling errors of late years were all of them stones of the old Babel, closing and coupling with that tremendous fabric which the man of sin had *erected* to dethrone Jesus Christ, — came out of the belly of that Trojan horse, that fatal engine, which was framed to betray the city of God. They were popish errors, such as whereof that apostasy did consist which only is to be looked upon as the great adverse state of the kingdom of the Lord Christ. For a man to be disorderly in a civil state, yea, oftentimes through turbulency to break the peace, is nothing to an underhand combination with some formidable enemy for the utter

81 “Nunc igitur si nominis odium est, quis nominum reatus? quæ accusatio vocabulorum? nisi aut, barbarum sonat aliqua vox nominis, aut maledicum aut impudicum.” — *Tertul. Apol. ad Gen., cap. iii.*

subversion of it. Heedless and headless errors may breed disturbance enough, in scattered individuals, unto the people of God; but such as tend to a peace and association “cum ecclesia malignantium,” tending to a total subversion of the sacred state, are far more dangerous. Now, such were the innovations of the late hierarchists. In worship, their paintings,<sup>82</sup> crossings, crucifixes, bowing, cringings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany, rails, images, copes, vestments, — what were they but Roman varnish, an Italian dress for our devotion, to draw on conformity with that enemy of the Lord Jesus? In doctrine, the divinity of Episcopacy, auricular confession, free-will, predestination on faith, yea, works foreseen, “limbus patrum,” justification by works, falling from grace, authority of a church, which none knew what it was, canonical obedience, holiness of churches, and the like innumerable, — what were they but helps to Sancta Clara, to make all our articles of religion speak good Roman Catholic? How did their old father of Rome refresh his spirit, to see such chariots as those provided to bring England again unto him! This closing with Popery was the sting in the errors of those days, which cause pining, if not death, in the episcopal pot.

[2.] They were such as raked up the ashes of the ancient worthies, whose spirits God stirred up to reform his church, and rendered them contemptible before all, especially those of England, the most whereof died in giving their witness against the blind figment of the real presence,<sup>83</sup> and that abominable blasphemy of the cursed mass. In especial, how did England, heretofore termed ass, turn ape to the pope, having set up a stage, and furnished it with all things necessary for an unbloody sacrifice,<sup>84</sup> ready to set up the abomination of a desolation, and close with the god Maozim [מַעֲזִים] *Mauzzim*, god of forces, [Dan. xi. 38](#)], who hath all their peculiar devotion at Rome?

[3.] They were in the management of men which had divers dangerous and pernicious qualifications: as, —

1st, A false repute of learning; I say, a false repute for the greater part, especially of the greatest. And yet, taking advantage of vulgar esteem, they bare out as though they had engrossed a monopoly of it, — though I presume the world was never deceived by more empty pretenders, especially in respect of any solid knowledge in divinity or antiquity; but yet their great preferments had got them a great repute of great deservings, — enough to blind the eyes of poor mortals adoring them at a distance, and to persuade them, that all was not only law, but gospel too, which they broached: and this rendered the infection dangerous.

82 See *Canterburian self-conviction*. See *Ld. Dee. Coll.*, etc.

83 *Coal from the Altar*.

84 *Altare Christianum. Antidotum Lincoln. Case of Greg.*

2dly, A great hatred of godliness in the power thereof, or any thing beyond a form, in whomsoever it was found; yea, how many<sup>85</sup> odious appellations were invented for bare profession, to render it contemptible! — especially in the exercise of their jurisdiction, thundering their censures against all appearance of zeal, and closing with all profane impieties; for were a man a drunkard, a swearer, a Sabbath-breaker, an unclean person, so he were no Puritan, and had money, — “patet atri janua ditis,” the Episcopal heaven was open for them all. Now, this was a dangerous and destructive qualification, which, I believe, is not professedly found in any party amongst us.

3dly, Which was worst of all, they had centred in their bosoms an unfathomable depth of power, civil and ecclesiastical, to stamp their apostatical errors with authority, — giving them not only the countenance of greatness, but the strength of power, violently urging obedience; and to me the sword of error never cuts dangerously but when it is managed with such a hand. This I am sure, that errors in such are not recoverable, without the utmost danger of the civil state.

Let now, I beseech you, these and the like things be considered, especially the strong combination that was throughout the<sup>86</sup> papal world for the seducing of this poor nation (that I say nothing how this vial was poured out upon the very throne<sup>87</sup>), and then let us all be ashamed and confounded in ourselves, that we should so undervalue and slight the free mercy of God in breaking such a snare, and setting the gospel at liberty in England. My intent was, having before asserted this restoration of Jerusalem to the good pleasure of God, to have stirred you up to thankfulness unto him, and self-humiliation in consideration of our great undeserving of such mercy; but, alas! as far as I can see, it will scarce pass for a mercy; and unless every man’s persuasion may be a Joseph’s sheaf, the goodness of God shall scarce be acknowledged. But yet let all the world know, and let the house of England know this day, that we lie unthankfully under as full a dispensation of mercy and grace as ever nation in the world enjoyed, and that without a lively acknowledgment thereof, with our own unworthiness of it, we shall one day know what it is (being taught with briers and thorns) to undervalue the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus. Good Lord! what would helpless Macedonians give for one enjoyment? O that Wales! O that Ireland! O that France! — where shall I stop? I would offend none, but give me leave to say, O that every, I had almost said, O that any, part of the world had such helps and means of grace as these parts of England have, which will scarce acknowledge any mercy in it! The Lord break the pride of our spirits before it break the staff of our bread and the help of our salvation. O that the bread of heaven and



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85 Sapienior sis Socrate; doctior Augustino, etc.; Calvinianus si modo dicare clam vel propalam, mox Tartaris, Moscis, Afris, Turcisque sævientibus, et jacebis execrator, etc.

86 Rome’s Master-piece.

87 Royal favourite.

the blood of Christ might be accounted good nourishment, though every one hath not the sauce he desireth! I am persuaded that if every Absalom in the land, that would be a judge for the ending of our differences, were enthroned (he spoke the people's good, though he intended his own power), the case would not be much better than it is. Well, the Lord make England, make this honourable audience, make us all, to know these three things:—

First, That we have received such a blessing, in setting at liberty the truths of the gospel, as is the crown of all other mercies, yea, without which they were not valuable, yea, were to be despised; for success without the gospel, is nothing but a prosperous conspiracy against Jesus Christ.

Secondly, That this mercy is of mercy; this love, of free love; and the grace that appeareth, of the eternal, hidden, free grace of God. He hath showed his love unto us because he loved us, and for no other reason in the world; this people being guilty of blood and murder of soul and body, adultery, and idolatry, and oppression, with a long catalogue of sins and iniquities.

Thirdly, That the height of rebellion against God is the despising of spiritual gospel mercies. Should Mordecai have trodden the robes under his feet that were brought him from the king, would it not have been severely revenged? Doth the King of heaven lay open the treasures of his wisdom, knowledge, and goodness for us, and we despise them? What shall I say? I had almost said, hell punishes no greater sin: the Lord lay it not to our charge! O that we might be solemnly humbled for it this day, before it be too late!

*Use 3. To discover unto us the freedom of that effectual grace* which is dispensed towards the elect, under and with the preaching of the word; for if the sending of the outward means be of free,<sup>88</sup> undeserved love, surely the working of the Spirit under that dispensation for the saving of souls is no less free; for “who hath made us differ from others? and what have we that we have not received?” O that God should say unto us in our blood, Live; — that he should breathe upon us when we were as dry bones, dead in trespasses and sins! Let us remember, I beseech you, the frame of our hearts and the temper of our spirits, in the days wherein we knew not God and his goodness, but went on in a swift<sup>89</sup> course of rebellion. Can none of you look back upon any particular days or nights, and say, Ah, Lord, that thou shouldst be so patient and so full of forbearance, as not to send me to hell at such an instant! But, O Lord, that thou shouldst go farther, and blot out mine iniquities, for thine own sake, “when I made thee serve with my sins! — Lord, what shall I say it is? It is the free grace of my God! What expression transcendeth that, I know not.

*Use 4. Of caution.* England received the gospel of mere mercy; let it take heed lest it lose it by justice; — the placer of the candlestick can remove it. The truth is, it will not be removed

88 “Non libertate gratiam, sed gratia libertatem consequimur.” — Aug.

89 Ezek. xxxvi. 26; Acts xvi. 14; Phil. i. 29, ii. 13.

unless it be abused; and woe to them from whom mercies are taken for being abused, — from whom the gospel is removed for being despised! It had been better for the husbandmen never to have had the vineyard, than to be slain for their ill using of it: there is nothing left to do them good who are forsaken for forsaking the gospel.

The glory of God was of late by many degrees departing from the temple in our land. That was gone to the threshold, yea, to the mount. If now at the return thereof, it find again cause to depart, it will not go by steps, but all at once. This island, or at least the greatest part thereof, as I formerly intimated, hath twice lost the gospel; — once, when the Saxons wrested it from the Britons, — when, if we may believe their own doleful, moaning<sup>90</sup> historian, they were given over to all wickedness, oppression, and villainy of life; which doubtless was accompanied with contempt of the word; though for faith and persuasion we do not find that they were corrupted, and do find that they were tenacious enough of antique discipline, as appeared in their following oppositions to the Roman tyranny, as in Beda. Secondly, It was lost in regard of the purity and power thereof, by blind superstition and antichristian impiety, accompanied also with abominable lewdness, oppression, and all manner of sin, in the face of the sun; so that first profaneness working a despising of the gospel, then superstition ushering in profaneness, have in this land showed their power for the extirpation of the gospel. Oh, that we could remember the days of old, that we could “consider the goodness and severity of God; — on them which fell severity, but towards us goodness, if we continue in that goodness; for otherwise even we also shall be cut off!” Yet here we may observe, that though both these times there was a forsaking in the midst of the land, yet there was in it a tenth for to return “as a teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves;” so was the holy seed the substance thereof, [Isa. vi. 13](#). As in the dereliction of the Jews, so of this nation, there was a remnant that quickly took root, and brought forth fruit, both in the one devastation and the other. Though the watcher and the holy one from heaven had called to cut down the tree of this nation, and to scatter its branches from flourishing before him; yet the stump and root was to be left in the earth with a band of iron, that it might spring again. Thus twice did the Lord come seeking fruit of this vine, doing little more than pruning and dressing it, although it brought forth wild grapes; but if he come the third time and find no fruit, the sentence will be, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” Now, to prevent this, I shall not follow all those gospel-supplanting sins we find in holy writ, only I desire to cautionate you and us all in three things.

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90 *Gildas de Excid. Britanniae*. “Omnia quæ Deo placebant, et displicebant, æquali lance pendebantur, non igitur admirandum est degeneres tales patriam illam amittere, quam prædicto modo maculabant.” — *Hist. M.S., apud Foxum*.

(1.) Take heed of pretending or holding out the gospel for a covert or shadow for other things. God will not have his gospel made a stalking-horse for carnal designs. Put not in that glorious name, where the thing itself is not clearly intended. If in any thing it be, let it have no compeer; if not, let it not be named. If that you aim at be just, it needs no varnish; if it be not, it is the worse for it. Gilded pills lose not their bitterness, and painted faces are thought to have no native beauty. All things in the world should serve the gospel; and if that be made to serve other things, God will quickly vindicate it into liberty.

From the beginning of these troubles, right honourable, you have held forth religion and the gospel, as whose preservation and restoration was principally in your aims; and I presume malice itself is not able to discover any insincerity in this. The fruits we behold proclaim to all the conformity of your words and hearts. Now, the God of heaven grant that the same mind be in you still, in every particular member of this honourable assembly, in the whole nation, especially in the magistracy and ministry of it; — that we be not like the boatmen, — look one way, and row another; — cry “Gospel,” and mean the other thing, — “Lord, Lord,” and advance our own ends; — that the Lord may not stir up the staff of his anger and the rod of his indignation against us, as a hypocritical people.

(2.) Take heed of resting upon and trusting to the privilege, however excellent and glorious, of the outward enjoyment of the gospel. When the Jews cried, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,” the time was at hand that they should be destroyed. Look only upon the grace that did bestow, and the mercy that doth continue it. God will have none of his blessings rob him of his glory; and if we rest at the cistern, he will stop at the fountain.

(3.) Let us all take heed of barrenness under it: “For the earth that drinks in the rain that cometh upon it, and beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned,” [Heb. vi. 7, 8](#). Now, what fruits doth it require? Even those reckoned, [Gal. v. 22, 23](#), “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” O that we had not cause to grieve for a scarcity of these fruits, and the abundant plenty of those works of the flesh recounted, [verses 19–21](#)! O that that wisdom which is an eminent fruit of the gospel might flourish amongst us! — it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated;” — that we might have less writing, and more praying! — less envy, and more charity! that all evil surmisings, which are works of the flesh, might have no toleration in our hearts, but be banished for nonconformity to the golden rule of love and peace! [James iii. 17](#). But ἀπέχω. Come we now to the last proposition.

III. No men in the world want help like them that want the gospel; or, of all distresses, want of the gospel cries the loudest for relief.

Rachel wanted children, and she cries, “Give me children,<sup>91</sup> or I die;” — but that was her impatience; she might have lived, and have had no children; yea, see the justice of God,

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91 [Gen. xxx. 1, xxxv. 18](#).

— she dies so soon as ever she hath children. Hagar<sup>92</sup> wants water for Ishmael, and she will go far from him, that she may not see him die; — a heavy distress; and yet if he had died, it had been but an early paying of that debt which in a few years was to be satisfied. But they that want the gospel may truly cry, Give us the gospel, or we die; and that not temporally with Ishmael, for want of water, but eternally in flames of fire.

A man may want liberty, and yet be happy, as Joseph was; a man may want peace, and yet be happy, as David was; a man may want children, and yet be blessed, as Job was; a man may want plenty, and yet be full of comfort, as Micaiah was; — but he that wants the gospel, wants every thing that should do him good. A throne without the gospel is but the devil's dungeon. Wealth without the gospel is fuel for hell. Advancement without the gospel is but a going high to have the greater fall.

Abraham<sup>93</sup> wanting a child, complains, "What will the Lord do for me, seeing I go childless, and this Eliezer of Damascus must be my heir?" Much more may a man without the means of grace complain, What shall be done unto me, seeing I go gospel-less; and all that I have is but a short inheritance for this lump of clay, my body?

When Elisha<sup>94</sup> was minded to do something for the Shunammite who had so kindly entertained him, he asks her whether he should speak for her to the king or the captain of the host. She replies, she dwelt in the midst of her own people, she needeth not those things; but when he finds her to want a child, and tells her of that, she is almost transported. Ah! how many poor souls are there who need not our word to the king or the captain of the host; but yet being gospel-less, if you could tell them of that, would be even ravished with joy!

Think of Adam<sup>95</sup> after his fall, before the promise, hiding himself from God, and you have a perfect portraiture of a poor creature without the gospel. Now this appeareth, —

1. *From the description we have of the people that are in this state<sup>96</sup> and condition* — without the gospel. They are a people that sit in darkness, yea, in the region and shadow of death, [Matt. iv. 16, 17](#); they are even darkness itself, [John i. 5](#), — within the dominion and dreadful darkness of death. Darkness was one of Egypt's plagues; but yet that was a darkness of the body, a darkness wherein men lived; — but this is a darkness of the soul, a darkness of death; for these men, though they live, yet are they dead. They are fully described, [Eph. ii. 12](#), "Without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Christless men, and Godless

92 [Gen. xxi. 16.](#)

93 [Gen. xv. 2.](#)

94 [2 Kings iv. 13, 14.](#)

95 [Gen. iii. 8.](#)

96 [Matt. vi. 23](#); [Luke i. 79](#); [Acts xxvi. 18](#); [Rom. ii. 19](#); [Eph. v. 8](#); [Col. i. 13](#); [1 Pet. ii. 9.](#)

men, and hopeless men, — and what greater distress in the world? Yea, they are called dogs, and unclean beasts. The wrath of God is upon them; they are the people of his curse and indignation. In the extreme north, one day and one night divide the year; but with a people without the gospel it is all night, — the Sun of righteousness shines not upon them; it is night whilst they are here, and they go to eternal night hereafter. What the men of China say concerning themselves and others, that they have two eyes, the men of Europe one, and all the world besides is blind, may be inverted too. The Jews had one eye, sufficient to guide them; they who enjoy the gospel have two eyes; but the men of China, with the rest of the nations that want it, are stark blind, and reserved for the chains of everlasting darkness.

2. *By laying forth what the men that want the gospel do want with it.*

(1.) They want Jesus Christ, for he is revealed only by the gospel. Austin refused to delight in Cicero's "Hortensius," because there was not in it the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup> Jesus Christ is all, and in all; and where he is wanting there can be no good. Hunger cannot truly be satisfied without manna, the bread of life, which is Jesus Christ;<sup>98</sup> — and what shall a hungry man do that hath no bread? Thirst cannot be quenched without that water or living spring, which is Jesus Christ; — and what shall a thirsty soul do without water? A captive, as we are all, cannot be delivered without redemption,<sup>99</sup> which is Jesus Christ; — and what shall the prisoner do without his ransom? Fools, as we are all, cannot be instructed without wisdom, which is Jesus Christ; — without him we perish in our folly. All building without him is on the sand, which will surely fall. All working without him is in the fire, where it will be consumed. All riches without him have wings, and will away. "Mallem ruere cum Christo, quam regnare cum Cæsare," said Luther. A dungeon with Christ, is a throne; and a throne without Christ, a hell. Nothing so ill, but Christ<sup>100</sup> will compensate. The greatest evil in the world is sin, and the greatest sin was the first; and yet Gregory feared not to cry, "O felix culpa, quæ talem meruit redemptorem!" — "O happy fault, which found such a Redeemer!" All mercies without Christ are bitter; and every cup is sweet that is seasoned but with a drop of his blood; — he truly is "amor et deliciæ humani generis," — the love and delight of the sons of men, — without whom they must perish eternally; "for there is no other name given unto them, whereby they may be saved, Acts iv. 12. He is the Way;<sup>101</sup> men without him are Cains, wanderers, vagabonds:— he is the Truth; men without him are liars, like the devil, who was so of old:— he is the Life;<sup>102</sup> without him men are dead, dead in trespasses and

97 Nomen Jesu non erat ibi.

98 John vi. 50; Rev. ii. 17; John iv. 14; Cant. iv. 12.

99 John vii. 37, 38; 1 Cor. i. 30.

100 "Pauca igitur de Christo." — Tertul.

101 John xiv. 6.

102 John i. 3–5; Eph. iv. 18; John xv. 5; Matt. vii. 26, 27; Matt. xvi. 18.



sins:— he is the Light; without him men are in darkness, and go they know not whither:— he is the Vine; those that are not grafted in him are withered branches, prepared for the fire:— he is the Rock; men not built on him are carried away with a flood:— he is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the author and the ender, the founder and the finisher of our salvation. He that hath not him, hath neither beginning of good, nor shall have end of misery. O blessed Jesus! how much better were it not to be, than to be without thee! — never to be born, than not to die in thee! A thousand bells come short of this, eternally to want Jesus Christ, as men do that want the gospel.

(2.) They want all holy communion with God, wherein the only happiness of the soul doth consist. He is the life, light, joy, and blessedness of the soul; — without him the soul in the body is but a dead soul in a living sepulchre. It is true, there be many that say, “Who will show us any good?”<sup>103</sup> but unless the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, we perish for evermore. “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord; and our heart is unquiet until it come to thee.” You who have tasted how gracious the Lord is, who have had any converse and communion with him in the issues and goings forth of his grace, those delights of his soul with the children of men, would you live — would not life itself, with a confluence of all earthly endearments, be a very hell — without him? Is it not the daily language of your hearts, “Whom have we in heaven but thee? and on earth there is nothing in comparison of thee?” The soul of man is of a vast, boundless comprehension; so that if all created good were centred into one enjoyment, and that bestowed upon one soul, because it must needs be finite and limited, as created, it would give no solid contentment to his affections, nor satisfaction to his desires. In the presence and fruition of God alone there is joy for evermore; at his right hand are rivers of pleasure, the well-springs of life and blessedness. Now, if to be without communion with God in this life, wherein the soul hath so many avocations from the contemplation of its own misery (for earthly things are nothing else), is so unsupported a calamity; ah! what shall that poor soul do that must want him for eternity? — as all they must do who want the gospel.

(3.) They want all the ordinances of God, — the joy of our hearts<sup>104</sup> and comfort of our souls. Oh! the sweetness of a Sabbath! the heavenly raptures of prayer! — oh! the glorious communion of saints, which such men are deprived of! If they knew the value of the hidden pearl, and these things were to be purchased, what would such poor souls not part with for them?

(4.) They will at last want heaven and salvation. They shall never come to the presence of God in glory, never inhabit a glorious mansion; — they shall never behold Jesus Christ, but when they shall call for<sup>105</sup> rocks and mountains to fall upon them, to hide them from

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103 [Ps. iv. 6.](#)

104 [Ps. xlii. 1, 2, xxxiv. 1–4, etc.](#)

105 [Rev. vi. 16.](#)

his presence; — they shall want<sup>106</sup> light in utter darkness, want life under the second death, want refreshment in the midst of flames, want healing under gnawing of conscience, want grace continuing to blaspheme, want glory in full misery; — and, which is the sum of all this, they shall want an end of all this; for “their worm dieth not, neither is their fire quenched.”

3. Because being in all this want, they know not that they want any thing, and so never make out for any supply. Laodicea knew much; but yet because she knew not her wants,<sup>107</sup> she had almost as good have known nothing. Gospel-less men know not that they are blind, and seek not for eye-salve; they know not that they are dead, and seek not for life. Whatever they call for, not knowing their wants, is but like a man’s crying for more weight to press him to death; and therefore, when the Lord comes to any with the gospel, he is “found of them that sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him,” [Rom. x. 20](#). This is a seal upon their misery, without God’s free mercy, like the stone laid upon the mouth of the cave by Joshua, to keep in the five kings, until they might be brought out to be hanged.”<sup>108</sup> All that men do in the world is but seeking to supply their wants; — either their *natural* wants, that nature may be supplied; or their *sinful* wants, that their lusts may be satisfied; or their *spiritual* wants, that their souls may be saved. For the two first, men without the gospel lay out all their strength; but of the last there is amongst them a deep<sup>109</sup> silence. Now this is all one as for men to cry out that their finger bleeds, whilst a sword is run through their hearts, and they perceive it not; — to desire a wart to be cured, whilst they have a plague-sore upon them. And hence perhaps it is that they are said to go to<sup>110</sup> hell “like sheep,” [Ps. xlix. 14](#), — very quietly, without dread, as a bird hasting to the snare, and not knowing that it is for his life, [Prov. vii. 23](#), — and there lie down in utter disappointment and sorrow for evermore.

4. Because all mercies are bitter judgments to men that want the gospel; — all fuel for hell, — aggravations of condemnation; — all cold drink to a man in a fever, pleasant at the entrance, but increasing its torments in the close; — like the book in the Revelation, sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly. When God shall come to require his bread and wine, his flax and oil, peace and prosperity, liberty and victories of gospel-less men, they will curse the day that ever they enjoyed them. So unspiritual are many men’s minds, and so unsavoury their judgments, that they reckon men’s happiness by their possessions, and suppose the



106 [Matt. xxii. 13](#); [Luke xvi. 24](#); [Mark ix. 43, 44](#); [Isa. lxvi. 24](#).

107 [Rev. iii. 17](#).

108 [Josh. x. 18](#).

109 “Ego propero ad inferos, nec est ut aliquid pro me agas.” — *Advocatus quidam moriens, apud Bel. de arte mor., lib. ii. cap. 10.*

110 לְשֵׂאוֹל.

catalogue of their titles to be a roll of their felicities, calling the proud happy, and advancing in our conceits “them that work wickedness,” [Mal. iii. 15](#); but God will one day come in with another reckoning, and make them know that all things without Christ are but as ciphers without a figure, — of no value. In all their banquets, where Christ is not a guest, “their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the field of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter,” [Deut. xxxii. 32, 33](#); — their palaces, where Christ is not, are but habitations of ziim and ochim, dragons and unclean beasts; — their prosperity is putting them into full pasture, that they may be fatted for the day of slaughter, the day of consumption decreed for all the bulls of Bashan. The gospel bringing Christ, is the salt that makes all other things savoury.

*Use 1.* To show us the great privilege and pre-eminence which, by the free grace of God, many parts of this island do enjoy. To us that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death a great light is risen, to guide us into the ways of peace. Let others recount the glories, benefits, profits, outward blessings of this nation; let us look only upon that which alone is valuable in itself, and makes other things so to be, — the gospel of Christ. It is reported of the heralds of our neighbour monarchs, that when one of them had repeated the numerous titles of his master of Spain, the other often repeated, France, France, France! intimating that the dominion which came under that one denomination would counterpoise the long catalogue of kingdoms and dukedoms wherewith the other flourished. Were we to contend with the grand seignior of the east about our enjoyments, we might easily bear down his windy, pompous train of titles with this one, — which “*millies repetitum placebit*,” — The gospel, the gospel! Upon all the other things you may put the inscription in Daniel, “Mene, mene, tekel,” they are “weighed in the balances, and found wanting;” but proclaim before those that enjoy the gospel, as Haman before Mordecai, “Lo, thus shall it be done to them whom the Lord will honour!” The fox in the fable had a thousand wiles to save himself from the hunters; but the cat knew “*unum magnum*,” “one great thing” that would surely do it. Earthly supports and contentments are but a thousand failing wiles, which will all vanish in the time of need; the gospel, and Christ in the gospel, is that “*unum magnum*,” that “*unum necessarium*,” which alone will stand us in any stead. In this, this island is as the mountain of the Lord, — exalted above the mountains of the earth. It is true, many other nations partake with us in the same blessing. Not to advance our own enjoyments in some particulars, — wherein perhaps we might justly do it, — but take all these nations with us, and what a molehill are we to the whole earth, overspread with Paganism, Mohammedanism, Antichristianism, with innumerable foolish heresies! And what is England, that it should be amongst the choice branches of the vineyard, the top-boughs of the cedars of God?

*Use 2.* Shows that such great mercies, if not esteemed, if not improved, if abused, will end in great judgments. Woe be to that nation, that city, that person, that shall be called to an account for despising the gospel! [Amos iii. 2](#), “You only have I known of all the families

of the earth.” What then? surely some great blessing is coming to that people whom God thus knows, so owns, as to make himself known unto them. No; but, “therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities.” However others may have some ease or mitigation in their punishments, do you expect the utmost of my wrath. Luther said, he thought hell was paved with the bald skulls of friars. I know nothing of that; yet of this sure I am, that none shall have their portion so low in the nethermost hell, none shall drink so deep of the cup of God’s indignation, as they who have refused Christ in the gospel. Men will curse the day to all eternity wherein the blessed name of Jesus Christ was made known unto them, if they continue to despise it. He that abuseth the choicest of mercies, shall have judgment without mercy. What can help them who reject the counsel of God for their good? If now England has received more culture from God than other nations, there is more fruit expected from England than other nations. A barren tree in the Lord’s vineyard must be cut down for cumbering the ground; the sheep of God must “every one bear twins, and none be barren amongst them,” [Cant. iv. 2](#). If, after all God’s care and husbandry, his vineyard brings forth wild grapes, he will take away the hedge, break down the wall, and lay it waste. For the present, the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of England; and if it be as earth which, when the rain falls upon it, brings forth nothing but thorns and briers, it is nigh unto cursing, and the end thereof is to be burned, [Heb. vi. 8](#). Men utterly and for ever neglect that ground which they have tried their skill about, and laid out much cost upon, if it bring not forth answerable fruits. Now here give me leave to say, and the Lord avert the evil deserved by it! that England (I mean these cities and those other places which since the beginning of our troubles have enjoyed the gospel in a more free and plentiful manner than heretofore) hath showed itself not much to value it.

(1.) In the time of straits, though the sound of the gospel passed through all our streets, our villages enjoying them who preached peace and brought glad tidings of good things, so that neither we, nor our fathers, nor our fathers’ fathers, ever saw the like before us, — though manna fell round about our tents every day; yet, as though all were lost, and we had nothing, manna was loathed as light bread, — the presence of Christ made not recompense for the loss of our swine, — men had rather be again in Egypt, than hazard a pilgrimage in the wilderness. If there be any here that ever entertained thoughts to give up the worship of God to superstition, his churches to tyranny, and the doctrine of the gospel to episcopal corruptions, in the pressing of any troubles, let them now give God the glory, and be ashamed of their own hearts, lest it be bitterness in the end.

(2.) In the time of prosperity, by our fierce contentions about mint and cummin, whilst the weightier things of the gospel have been undervalued, languishing about unprofitable questions, etc.; but I shall not touch this wound, lest it bleed.

*Use 3.* For exhortation, that every one of us, in whose hand there is any thing, would set in for the help of those parts of this island that as yet sit in darkness, yea, in the shadow



of death, and have none to hold out the bread of life to their fainting souls. Doth not Wales cry, and the north cry, yea, and the west cry, Come and help us? — we are yet in a worse bondage than any by your means we have been delivered from; — if you leave us thus, all your protection will but yield us a more free and jovial passage to the chambers of death. Ah! little do the inhabitants of Goshen know, whilst they are contending about the bounds of their pasture, what darkness there is in other places of the land; how their poor starved souls would be glad of the crumbs that fall from our tables! O that God would stir up the hearts, —

(1.) Of ministers, to cast off all by-respects, and to flee to those places where, in all probability, the harvest would be great, and the labourers are few or none at all! I have read of a heretic that swam over a great river in a frost to scatter his errors; the old Jewish, and now popish Pharisees, compass sea and land to make proselytes; the merchants trade not into more countries than the factors of Rome do to gain souls to his holiness. East and west, far and wide, do these locusts spread themselves, not without hazard of their lives as well as the loss of their souls, to scatter their superstitions; — only the preachers of the everlasting gospel seem to have lost their zeal. O that there were the same mind in us that was in Jesus Christ, who counted it his meat and drink to do his Father's will, in gaining souls!

(2.) Of the magistrates, — I mean, of this honourable assembly, — to turn themselves every lawful way for the help of poor Macedonians. The truth is, in this I could speak more than I intend; for perhaps my zeal and some men's judgments would scarce make good harmony. This only I shall say, that if Jesus Christ might be preached, though with some defects in some circumstances, I should rejoice therein. O that you would labour to let all the parts of the kingdom taste of the sweetness of your successes, in carrying to them the gospel of the Lord Jesus; that the doctrine of the gospel might make way for the discipline of the gospel, without which it will be a very skeleton! When manna fell in the wilderness from the hand of the Lord, every one had an equal share. I would there were not now too great an inequality in the scattering of manna, when secondarily in the hand of men; whereby some have all, and others none; — some sheep daily picking the choice flowers of every pasture, others wandering upon the barren mountains, without guide or food. I make no doubt but the best ways for the furtherance of this are known full well unto you; and you therefore have as little need to be petitioned in this as other things. What, then, remains, but that for this, and all other necessary blessings, we all set our hearts and hands to petition the throne of grace?

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## **A short defensative about church government, toleration, and petitions about these things.**



Reader,

This, be it what it will, thou hast no cause to thank or blame<sup>111</sup> me for. Had I been mine own, it had not been thine; my submission unto others' judgments being the only cause of submitting this unto thy censure. The substance of it is concerning things now doing, in some whereof I heretofore thought it my wisdom modestly *hæsitare* (or at least not with the most, peremptorily to dictate to others my apprehensions), as wiser<sup>112</sup> men have done in weightier things; and yet this not so much for want of persuasion in my own mind, as out of opinion that we have already had too many needless and fruitless discourses about these matters. Would we count agree to spare perishing paper!<sup>113</sup> and for my own part, had not the opportunity of a few lines in the close of this sermon, and the importunity of not a few friends, urged, I could have slighted all occasions and accusations provoking to publish those thoughts which I shall now impart. The truth is, in things concerning the church (I mean things purely external, of form, order, and the like), so many ways have I been spoken, that I often resolved to speak myself, desiring rather to appear (though conscious to myself of innumerable failings) what indeed I am, than what others incuriously suppose. But yet the many I ever thought unworthy of an apology, and some of satisfaction, — especially those who would make their own judgments a rule for themselves and others, impatient that any should know what they do not, or conceive otherwise than they of what they do, in the meantime, placing almost all religion in that which may be perhaps a hindrance of it, — and being so valued, or rather overvalued, — is certainly the greatest, Nay, would they would make their judgments only so far as they are convinced, and are able to make out their conceptions to others, and not also their impotent desires, to be the rule; that so they might condemn only that which complies not with their minds, and not all that also which they find to thwart their aims and designs! But so it must be. Once more conformity is grown the touchstone (and that not in practice, but opinion) amongst the greatest part of men, however otherwise of different persuasions. Dissent is the only crime;<sup>114</sup> and where that is all that is culpable, it shall be made all that is so. From such as these, who almost hath not

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111 “Laudatur ab his, culpatur ab illis.” [Hor. Sat., lib. i. 2, 11.]

112 See *August.*, Ep. 7, 28, 157, *De Orig. Anim.*

113 “Deferar in vicum vendentem thus et odores, Et piper, et quicquid chartis amicitur ineptis.” [Hor. Epist., lib. ii. 1.] “Occidit miseros crambe repetita magistros.” [Juv.] “Semper ego auditor tantum?” [Juv. Sat. i.]

114 “Immortale odium et nunquam sanabile vulnus, Ardet adhuc, Ombos et Tentyra. Summus utrinque Inde furor vulgo, quad numina vicinorum Odit uterque locus.” Juven., [xv. 35.] “Græcè scire, aut politè loqui, apud illos hæresis est.” — *Eras. de Scholiast.*

suffered? but towards such the best defence is silence. Besides, my judgment commands me to make no known quarrel my own; but rather if it be possible, and as much as in me lieth, live peaceably with all men. Ἱερὸν πόλεμον, I proclaim to none but men whose bowels are full of gall. In this spring of humours, lenitives for our own spirits may perhaps be as necessary as purges for others' brains. Farther, I desire to provoke<sup>115</sup> none; more stings than combs are got at a nest of wasps; even cold stones, smitten together, sparkle out fire: "The wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood." Neither do I conceive it wisdom, in these quarrelsome days, to intrust more of a man's self with others than is very necessary. The heart of man is deceitful; some that have smooth tongues have sharp teeth: such can give titles on the one side and wounds on the other. Any of these considerations would easily have prevailed with me "stultitiâ hac caruisse," had not mine ears been filled, presently after the preaching of the precedent sermon, with sad complaints of some, and false reports of others, neither of the lowest rank of men, as though I had helped to open a gate for that which is now called a Trojan horse; though heretofore counted an engine likelier to batter the walls of Babylon than to betray the towers of Zion. This urged some to be urgent with me for a word or two about church government, according to the former suggestions, undermined, and a toleration of different persuasions, as they said, asserted. Now, truly, to put the accusers to prove the crimination — for so it was, and held forth a grievous crime in their apprehensions (what is really so God will judge) — had been sufficient.<sup>116</sup> But I could not so evade; and therefore, after my sermon was printed to the last sheet, I was forced to set apart a few hours,<sup>117</sup> to give an account of what hath passed from me in both these things, which have been so variously reported; hoping that the reading may not be unuseful to some, as the writing was very necessary to me. And here, at the entrance, I shall desire at the hands of men that shall cast an eye on this heap of good meaning, these few, as I suppose, equitable demands:—

First, Not to prosecute men into odious appellations, and then themselves, who feigned the crime, pronounce the sentence, — like him who said of one brought before him, If he be not guilty, it is fit he should be; — involving themselves in a double guilt, of falsehood and malice; and the aspersed parties in a double misery, of being belied in what they are, and hated for what they are not. If a man be not what such men would have him, it is odds but they will make him what he is not; — if what he really is do not please, and that be not enough to render him odious, he shall sure enough be more. Ithacius will make all Priscil-

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115 "Noli irritare crabrones. Si lapides teras nonne ignis erumpit?" — Ambros., lib. i. cap. 21; [Prov. xxx. 33](#); [Job xiii. 13](#); [Prov. xxv. 18](#). Vid. Remed. contra Gravam. Nationis Germanicæ. Luth. præfat, ad Lib. de Concil. Protest. 34 ministrorum. 4. Conclus. And generally all writers at the beginning of the Reformation.

116 Si accusasse sufficet, quis erit innocens?

117 "Nec nos obniti contrâ, nec tendere tantùm Sufficimus." [Virg. *Æ.* v. 21.]

lianists who are any thing more devout than himself.<sup>118</sup> If men do but desire to see with their own eyes, presently they are enrolled of this or that sect; every mispersuasion being beforehand, in petitions, sermons, etc., rendered odious and intolerable; — in such a course, innocency itself cannot go long free. Christians deal with one another in earnest, as children in their plays clap another's coat upon their fellow's shoulders, and pretending to beat that, cudgel him they have clothed with it. "What shall be given unto thee, thou false tongue?" If we cannot be more charitable, let us be more ingenuous. Many a man hath been brought to a more favourable opinion of such as are called by dreadful names than formerly, by the experience of false impositions on himself.

Secondly, Not to clothe our differences with expressions fitting them no better than Saul's armour did David; nor make them like a little man in a bombast coat upon stilts, walking about like a giant. Our little differences may be met at every stall, and in too many pulpits, swelled by unbefitting expressions into such a formidable bulk as poor creatures are even startled at their horrid looks and appearance; whilst our own persuasions are set out ῥήμασι βυσσίνοις,<sup>119</sup> with silken words and gorgeous apparel, as if we sent them into the world a-wooing. Hence, whatever it is, it must be temple building, — God's government, — Christ's scepter, throne, kingdom, — the only way, that for want of which, errors, heresies, sins, spring among us, plagues, judgments, punishments come upon us. To such things as these all pretend, who are very confident they have found out the only way. Such big words as these have made us believe that we are mortal adversaries (I speak of the parties at variance about government), — that one kingdom, communion, heaven cannot hold us. Now, truly, if this course be followed, — so to heighten our differences, by adorning the truth we own with such titles as it doth not merit, and branding the errors we oppose with such marks as in cold blood we cannot think they themselves, but only in their (by us supposed) tendence, do deserve, — I doubt not but that it will be bitterness unto us all in the end. And, query, whether by this means many have not been brought to conceive the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which himself affirms to be within us, to consist in forms, outward order, positive rules, and external government. I design none, but earnestly desire that the two great parties at this day litigant in this kingdom, would seriously consider what is like to be the issue of such proceedings; and whether the mystery of godliness, in the power thereof, be like to be propagated by it. Let not truth be weighed in the balance of our interest. Will not a dram of that turn the scale with some against many arguments? Power is powerful to persuade.

Thirdly, Not to measure men's judgments by their subscribing or refusing to subscribe petitions in these days about church government. For subscribers, would that every one could not see, with what a zealous nescience and implicit judgment many are led! And for

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118 *Sulp. Sever. Epist. Hist. Eccles.*

119 *Plut. Apophth.*



refusers, though perhaps they could close with the general words wherewith usually they are expressed, yet there are so many known circumstances restraining those words to particular significations, directing them to by and secondary tendencies, as must needs make some abstain. For mine own part, from subscribing late petitions about church government, I have been withheld by such reasons as these:—

1. I dare not absolutely assert, maintain, and abide by it (as rational men ought to do every clause in any thing owned by their subscription), that the cause of all the evils usually enumerated in such petitions is the want of church government, taking it for any government that ever yet was established amongst men, or in notion otherwise made known unto me; yea, I am confident that more probable causes in this juncture of time might be assigned of them. Neither can any be ignorant how plentifully such evils abounded when church discipline was most severely executed.<sup>120</sup> And, lastly, I am confident that whoever lives to see them suppressed by any outward means (when spiritual weapons shall be judged insufficient), will find it to be, not any thing either included in, or necessarily annexed unto, church discipline that must do it; but some other thing, not unlike that which, in days of yore, when all the world wondered after the beast, suppressed all truth and error, but only what the arch enemy of Jesus Christ was pleased to hold out to be believed. But of this afterward.

2. I dare not affirm that the Parliament hath not established a government already, for the essentials of it; themselves affirming that they have,<sup>121</sup> and their ordinances about rulers, rules, and persons to be ruled (the “requisita” and materials of government), being long since extant. Now, to require a thing to be done by them who affirm that they have already done it, argues either much weakness or supine negligence in ourselves, not to understand what is effected; or a strong imputation on those that have done it, either fraudulently to pretend that which is false, or foolishly to aver what they do not understand. Yet, though I have learned to obey, as far as lawfully I may, my judgment is exceedingly far from being enslaved; and according to that, by God’s assistance, shall be my practice; which, if it run cross to the prescriptions of authority, it shall cheerfully submit to the censure thereof. In the meantime, all petitioning of any party about this business seems to thwart some declarations of the House of Commons, whereunto I doubt not but they intend for the main inviolably and unalterably to adhere. Add hereunto, that petitioning in this kind was not long since voted breach of privilege, in them who might justly expect as much favour and liberty in petitioning as any of their brethren in the kingdom; and I have more than one reason to suppose that the purpose and design of theirs and others was one and the same.

3. There are no small grounds of supposal that some petitions have not their rise from amongst them by whom they are subscribed, but that the spring and master-wheels giving

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120 Vid. catal. hæret, apud *Tertul. de præscript. Epiphan.* Aug. Vincent.

121 “Ego ancillæ tuæ fidem habui: nonne tu impudens, qui nec mihi ipsi credis?” — *Philos. apud Plut. Apophth.*

the first motion to them are distant and unseen; myself having been lately urged to subscription upon this ground, that directions were had for it from above (as we used to speak in the country); — yea, in this I could say more than I intend, aiming at nothing but the quieting of men's spirits, needlessly exasperated; only I cannot but say, that honest men ought to be very cautious how they put themselves upon any engagement that might make any party or faction in the kingdom suppose that their interest, in the least measure, doth run cross to that of the great Council thereof; thereby to strengthen the hands or designs of any, by occasioning an opinion that, upon fresh or new divisions, (which God of his mercy prevent!) we would not adhere constantly to our old principles, walking according to which we have hitherto found protection and safety. And I cannot but be jealous for the honour of our noble Parliament, whose authority is every day undermined, and their regard in the affections of the people shaken, by such dangerous insinuations; as though they could in an hour put an end to all our disturbances, but refuse it. This season, also, for such petitions seems to be very unseasonable, the greatest appearing danger impendent to this kingdom being from the contest about church government; which, by such means as this, is exceedingly heightened, and animosity added to the parties at variance.

4. A particular form of church discipline is usually, in such petitions, either directly expressed or evidently pointed at and directed unto, as that alone which our covenant engageth us to embrace; yea, as though it had long since designed that particular way, and distinguished it from all others, the embracing of it is pressed, under the pain of breach of covenant, — a crime abhorred of God and man. Now, truly, to suppose that our covenant did tie us up absolutely to any one formerly known way of church discipline, — the words formally engaging us into a disquisition out of the word of that which is agreeable to the mind and will of God, — is to me such a childish, ridiculous, selfish conceit, as I believe no knowing men will once entertain, unless prejudice, begotten by their peculiar interest, hath disturbed their intellectuals. For my part, I know no church government in the world already established amongst any sort of men, of the truth and necessity whereof I am convinced in all particulars; especially if I may take their practice to be the best intepreter of their maxims.

Fourthly, Another “postulatum” is, that men would not use an overzealous speed, upon every small difference, to characterize men (otherwise godly and peaceable) as sectaries; knowing the odiousness of the name,<sup>122</sup> among the vulgar, deservedly or otherwise imposed, and the evil of the thing itself, rightly apprehended, whereunto lighter differences do not amount. Such names as this I know are arbitrary, and generally serve the wills of the greater number. They are commonly sectaries who, “jure aut injuriâ,” are oppressed. Nothing was

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122 “Nunc vero si nominis odium est, quis nominum reatus? quæ accusatio vocabulorum? nisi aut Barbarum sonat aliqua vox nominis, aut maledicum, aut impudicum?” — *Tertul. Apol.*

ever persecuted under an esteemed name. Names are in the power of many; things and their causes are known to few. There is none in the world can give an ill title to others, which from some he doth not receive. The same right which in this kind I have towards another, he hath towards me; unless I affirm myself to be infallible, not so him. Those names which men are known by when they are oppressed, they commonly use against others whom they seek to oppress. I would, therefore, that all horrid appellations, as increasers of strife, kindlers of wrath, enemies of charity, food for animosity, were for ever banished from amongst us. Let a spade be called a spade, so we take heed Christ be not called Beelzebub. I know my profession to the greatest part of the world is sectarism, as Christianity; amongst those who profess the name of Christ, to the greatest number I am a sectary, because a Protestant;<sup>123</sup> amongst Protestants, at least the one half account all men of my persuasion Calvinistical, sacramentarian sectaries; amongst these, again, to some I have been a puritanical sectary, an Arian heretic, because anti-prelatical; yea, and amongst these last, not a few account me a sectary because I plead for presbyterial government in churches: and to all these am I thus esteemed, as I am fully convinced, causelessly and erroneously. What they call sectarism, I am persuaded is “*ipsissima veritas*,” the “very truth itself,” to which they also ought to submit; that others also, though upon false grounds, are convinced of the truth of their own persuasion, I cannot but believe: and therefore, as I find by experience that the horrid names of heretic, schismatic, sectary, and the like, have never had any influence or force upon my judgment, nor otherwise moved me, unless it were unto retaliation, so I am persuaded it is also with others; for “*homines sumus*,” forcing them abroad in such liveries doth not at all convince them that they are servants to the master of sects indeed, but only makes them wait an opportunity to cast the like mantle on their traducers. And this usually is the beginning of arming the more against the few with violence, impatient of bearing the burdens which they impose on others’ shoulders; by means whereof Christendom hath been made a theatre of blood, and one amongst all, after that by cruelty and villany he had prevailed above the rest, took upon him to be the only dictator in Christian religion. But of this afterward.

Now, by the concession of these, as I hope, not unequitable demands, thus much at least I conceive will be attained, viz., that a peaceable dissent in some smaller things, disputable questions, not absolutely necessary assertions, deserves not any rigid censure, distance of affections, or breach of Christian communion and amity. In such things as these, “*veniam petimusque damusque vicissim*,” if otherwise, I profess I can hardly bring my mind to comply and close in with them amongst whom almost any thing is lawful but to dissent.

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123 [Acts xxiv. 14, xxviii. 22.](#) — “*Hæresis Christianorum.*” Tertul., — “*Secta Christ.*” Id., — “*Hæresis catholica, et hæresis sanctissima,*” Constant. Epist. Chr. Syriac. Tileni Syntagma, — quo probate conatur Calvinianos esse hæreticos, Hun. Calv. Tur. Andrews. Epist. ad Molin.

These things being premised, I shall now set down and make public that proposal which heretofore I have tendered, as a means to give some light into a way for the profitable and comfortable practice of church government; drawing out of general notions what is practically applicable, so circumstantiated as of necessity it must be. And herein I shall not alter any thing, or in the least expression go off from that which long since I drew up at the request of a worthy friend, after a discourse about it; and this, not only because it hath already been in the hands of many, but also because my intent is not, either to assert, dispute, or make out any thing farther of my judgment in these things than I have already done (hoping for more leisure so to do than the few hours assigned to the product of this short appendix will permit), but only, by way of a defensative, to evince that the rumours which have been spread by some, and entertained by others too greedily, about this matter, have been exceeding causeless and groundless; so that though my second thoughts have, if I mistake not, much improved some particulars in this essay, yet I cannot be induced, because of the reason before recounted (the only cause of the publication thereof), to make any alteration in it; only I shall present the reader with some few things which gave occasion and rise to this proposal. As, —

(1.) A fervent desire to prevent all farther division and separation, — disunion of minds amongst godly men, — suspicions and jealousies in the people towards their ministers, as aiming at power and unjust domination over them, — fruitless disputes, languishings about unprofitable questions, breaches of charity for trifles, exasperating the minds of men one against another; — all which growing evils, tending to the subversion of Christian love and the power of godliness, with the disturbance of the state, are too much fomented by that sad breach and division which is here attempted to be made up.

(2.) A desire to work and draw the minds of all my brethren (the most, I hope, need it not) to set in for a thorough reformation, and for the obtaining of holy communion, — to keep off indifferently the unworthy from church privileges and profaning of holy things. Whereunto I presumed the discovery of a way whereby this might be effected, without their disturbance in their former station, would be a considerable motive.

(3.) A consideration of the paucity of positive rules in the Scripture for church government, with the great difficulty of reducing them to practice in these present times (both sufficiently evidenced by the endless disputes and irreconcilable differences of godly, precious, and learned men about them), made me conceive that the practice of the apostolical churches, doubtless for a time observed in those immediately succeeding, would be the best external help for the right interpretation of those rules we have, and pattern to draw out a church way by. Now, truly, after my best search and inquiry into the first churches and their constitution, framing an idea and exemplar of them, this poor heap following seems to me as like one of them as any thing that yet I have seen; nothing at all doubting but that if a more

skilful hand had the limning of it,<sup>124</sup> the proportions, features, and lines would be very exact, equal and parallel; yea, did not extreme haste now call it from me, so that I have no leisure so much as to transcribe the first draught, I doubt not but by God's assistance it might be so set forth as not to be thought altogether undesirable, if men would but a little lay aside beloved pre-conceptions. But the printer stays for every line; only I must entreat every one that shall cast a candid eye on this unwillingly-exposed embryo and rude abortion, that he would assume in his mind any particular church mentioned in the Scripture, as of Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, or the like; consider the way and state they were then and some ages after, in respect of outward immunities and enjoyments, and tell me whether any rational man can suppose that either there were in those places sundry particular churches, with their distinct, peculiar officers, acting in most pastoral duties severally in them, as distinguished and divided into entire societies, but ruling them in respect of some particulars loyally in combination, considered as distinct bodies; or else that they were such single congregations as that all that power and authority which was in them may seem fitly and conveniently to be intrusted with a small handful of men, combined under one single pastor, with one, two, or perhaps no associated elders. More than this I shall only ask, whether all ordinary power may not, without danger, be asserted to reside in such a church as is here described, reserving all due right and authority to councils and magistrates? Now, for the fountain, seat, and rise of this power, for the just distribution of it between pastors and people, this is no place to dispute; these following lines were intended merely to sedate and bury such contests, and to be what they are entitled, —

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124 Ἀμέραι δ' ἐπίλοιποι μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι. — *Pind., Od. i. Olym., 54, 55.*

## **A country essay for the practice of church government there.**

Our long expectation of some accommodation<sup>125</sup> between the dissenting parties about church government being now almost totally frustrate, — being also persuaded, partly through the apparent fruitlessness of all such undertakings, partly by other reasons not at this time seasonable to be expressed, that all national disputes tending that way will prove birthless tympanies, — we deem it no ungrateful endeavour, waiving all speculative ideas, to give an essay, in such expressions as all our country friends concerned in it may easily apprehend, of what we conceive amongst us may really be reduced to comfortable and useful practice: concealing for a while all arguments for motives and inducements unto this way, with all those rocks and shelves, appearing very hideous in former proposals, which we strive to avoid; until we perceive whether any of our giants in this controversy will not come and look, and so overcome it, that at first dash the whole frame be irrecoverably ruined.

Neither would we have any expect our full sense to each particular imaginable in this business, — it being only a heap of materials, mostwhat unhewed, that we intend, and not a well-compacted fabric; and if the main be not condemned, we are confident no difference will ensue about particulars, which must have their latitude. However, if it be received as candidly as it is offered, no inconvenience will ensue. Now, that the whole may be better apprehended, and the reasons, if not the necessity, of this undertaking intimated, we shall premise some things concerning the place and persons for whose use is this proposal.

First, For ministers. The place having all this while, through the goodness of God, been preserved in peace and quietness; and by the rich supply of able men sent hither by Parliament, there are in many parishes godly, orthodox, peace-loving pastors.

Secondly, For the people.

1. Very many, as in most other places, extremely ignorant, worldly, profane, scandalously vicious.

2. Scarcely any parish where there are not some visibly appearing, of all ages, sexes, and conditions, fearing God, and walking unblamably with a right foot, as beseemeth the gospel; though in some places they are but like the berries after the shaking of an olive-tree.

3. Amongst these, very few gifted, fitted or qualified for government.

4. Many knowing professors, and such of a long standing, inclined to separation, unless some expedient may be found for comfortable communions; and in this resolution seem to be settled, to a contempt of allurements and threatenings.

5. Seducers everywhere lying in wait to catch and deceive well-meaning souls, any thing discontented with the present administration of church affairs.

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125 The form being given to this essay at the first, I thought not good to alter any thing about it.

6. Upon all which it appears, that comfortable communion is not to be attained within the bounds of respective parishes.

Farther to carry on our intentions, we would desire of authority, —

1. That our divisions may not be allotted out by our committees, — who, without other consideration, have bounded us with the precincts of high constables, — but be left to the prudence of ministers, and other Christians, willingly associating themselves in the work.

2. That men placed in civil authority may not, by virtue of their authority, claim any privilege in things purely ecclesiastical.

In the several parishes let things be thus ordered:—

1. Let every minister continue in his station, taking especial care of all them that live within the precincts of his parish; preaching, exhorting, rebuking, publicly, and from house to house; warning all, — using all appointed means to draw them to Jesus Christ and the faith of the gospel; waiting with all patience on them that oppose themselves, until God give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and in so doing, rest upon the calling he hath already received.

2. Let the respective elders of the several parishes, to be chosen according to the ordinance of Parliament (annually, or otherwise), join with the ministers in all acts of rule and admonition, with those other parts of their charge which the parochial administration doth require.

3. Let all criminal things, tending to the disturbance of that church administration which is amongst them be by the officers orderly delated to such as the civil magistrate shall appoint to take cognizance and determine of such things.

And thus far have we proposed nothing new, nothing not common; neither in that which follows is there any thing so indeed, may it be but rightly apprehended.

*For the several combinations of ministers and people:—*

1. Let the extremes of the division not be above eight or ten miles distant and so the middle or centre not more than four or five miles from any part of it, — which is no more than some usually go to the preaching of the word, and in which space Christians are generally as well known to one another in the country as almost at the next door in cities; but yet this may be regulated according to the number of professors fit for the society intended, — which would not be above five hundred, nor under one hundred.

2. In this division let there be, in the name of Christ and the fear of God, a gathering of professors (visible saints, men and women of good knowledge and upright conversation, — so holding forth their communion with Christ), by their own desire and voluntary consent, into one body, — uniting themselves, by virtue of some promissory engagement or otherwise, to perform all mutual duties, to walk in love and peace, spiritual and church communion, as beseemeth the gospel.

3. Let every one so assembling have liberty, at some of the first meetings, to except against another, whether minister or others, so it be done with a spirit of meekness, and

submission of judgment; or to demand such questions for satisfaction as shall be thought fit to be propounded.

4. When some convenient number are thus assembled, let the ministers, if men of approved integrity and abilities, be acknowledged as elders respectively called to teach and rule in the church by virtue of their former mission, and be assumed to be so to this society by virtue of their voluntary consent and election.

5. Let the ministers engage themselves in a special manner to watch over this flock, every one according to his abilities, both in teaching, exhorting, and ruling, so often as occasion shall be administered, for things that contain ecclesiastical rule and church order; acting jointly and as in a classical combination, and putting forth all authority that such classes are entrusted with.

6. If it be judged necessary that any officers be added to them for the purpose before named, let them be chosen by the consent of the multitude.

7. If not, let the ministers have the whole distributed among themselves respectively, according to the difference of their gifts, — reserving to the people their due and just privileges.

8. Let this congregation assemble at the least once in a month, for the celebration of the communion, and other things them concerning; the meeting of the ministers may be appointed by authority, for those of a classis.

9. If any one after his admission be found to walk unworthily, let him, after solemn, repeated admonition, be by joint consent left to his former station.

10. Let any person, in any of the parishes combined as before, that is desirous to be admitted into this society, as is thought fit, be received at any time.

11. If the number in process of time appear to be too great, let it be divided and subdivided, according to conveniency.

12. Any one of the ministers may administer the sacrament, either to some or all of these, in their several parishes or at the common meeting, as opportunity shall serve.

13. Let the rules of admission into this society and fellowship be scriptural, and the things required in the members only such as all godly men affirm to be necessary for every one that will partake of the ordinances with profit and comfort, — special care being taken that none be excluded who have the least breathings of soul in sincerity after Jesus Christ.

Now, beyond these generals for the present we judge it needless to express ourselves, or otherwise to confirm what we have proposed, each assertion almost directly pointing out unto what, in that particular, we do adhere; which being sufficiently confirmed by others, were but a superfluous labour to undertake. Neither shall we trouble you with a catalogue of conveniences, — whereof men are put upon an express annumeration, when otherwise they do not appear, — but commit the consideration of the tendence of the whole to every one's judgment, and conclude with the removal of a few obvious objections; being resolved





hereafter, by God's assistance, to endeavour satisfaction about this way unto all, — unless to such as shall be so simple or malicious as to ask whether this way be that of the Presbyterians or Independents.

*Obj.* 1. By this means parishes will be unchurched.

*Ans.* 1. If by churches you understand such entire societies of Christians as have all church power, both according to right and exercise, in and amongst themselves, as Independents speak of congregations; then they were never churched by any.

2. If only civil divisions of men that may conveniently be taught by one pastor, and ruled by elders, whereof some may be fit to partake of all the ordinances, some not, as Presbyterians esteem them; then by this way they receive no injury, nor are abridged of any of their privileges.

*Obj.* 2. This is to erect churches amongst churches, and against churches.

*Ans.* No such thing; but a mere forming of one church with one presbytery.

*Obj.* 3. It is against the Parliament's ordinance to assume a power of admitting and excluding of church members not exactly according to their rule, nor subordinate to the supervising of such as are appointed by them.

*Ans.* 1. For the rules set out by ordinance, we conceive that the church officers are to be interpreters of them, until appeal be made from them, unto which we shall submit; and if it be so determined against us, that any be put on our communion "ipsi viderint," we shall labour to deliver our own souls.

2. Though the Parliament forbid any but such authoritatively to be excluded, yet it doth not command that any be admitted but such as desire it; and we shall pray for such a blessing upon the work of our ministry as will either prepare a man for it or persuade them "pro tempore" from it; unless they be stubbornly obstinate, or openly wicked, — against whom we hope for assistance. To objections arising from trouble and inconvenience, we answer, It cost more to redeem their souls.

The God of peace and unity give the increase!

“— Si quid novisti rectius istis,  
Candidus imperti, si non, his utere.”

[*Hor. Ep., i. 6, 67, 68.*]

And this is all which, for the present, I shall assert in this business; and this also is my own vindication. Time and leisure may give me advantage hereafter (if God permit) to deal seriously in this cause. In the meantime, it is not unknown to many, that so much as this was necessary for me to do; and I will not add now any thing that is not necessary.

Now for the other head of the accusation, about toleration of errors, "philosophare volo, sed paucis." Something I shall add of my own present judgment in this matter; but with willing, express submission unto those whom the use and experience of things, with know-

ledge of foreign parts, skill in the rules of commonwealths, acquaintedness with the affections and spirits of men, have enabled to look punctually into the issues and tendencies of such a toleration. The main prejudice against it arises from the disturbances which it naturally (they say) produceth in civil states. I conceive no sort of men more unfit to judge of this than those whose abilities of learning do properly put them upon the discussing of this, and other controversies, as far as they are purely ecclesiastical, — no men more frequently betraying narrowness of apprehension and weakness in secular affairs. For other consequences, I shall not be much moved with them, until it be clearly determined whether be worse, heretics or hypocrites, into maintain an error or counterfeit the truth; and whether profession upon compulsion be acceptable to God or man.<sup>126</sup> Laying those aside, let the thing itself be a little considered.

Peace ecclesiastical, quiet among the churches (which without doubt would be shaken by a universal toleration), is that which most men aim at and desire. And truly he that doth not, scarcely deserves the name and privilege of a Christian. Unity in the Scripture is so pressed, so commanded, and commended, that not to breathe after it argues a heart acted by another spirit than that which moved the holy penmen thereof. But yet every agreement and consent amongst men professing the name of Christ, is not the unity and peace commended in the Scripture. That which some think to be Christ's order, may perhaps be anti-Christian confusion; the specious name of unity may be a cloak for tyranny. Learned men have reckoned up a sevenfold unity<sup>127</sup> in the Papacy; all which, notwithstanding, are far enough from that true evangelical unity which we are bound to labour for. Again, that which is good must be sought in a right manner, Or it will not be so to us. Peace and quiet is desirable; but there must be good causes and very urgent, to make us build our habitations out of others' ruins, and roll our pillows in their blood. I speak of things ecclesiastical. The historian<sup>128</sup> makes it a part of the oration spoken by Galgacus, the chieftain of the British forces, to stir them up against the Roman insolency, that when they had finished their depopulations, then they said they had peace. The same men have set up bishoprics in the Indies, as their forefathers did colonies here and elsewhere, with fire and sword. I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, this proceeding with violence in matters of religion hath pleased and displeased all sorts of men, however distinguished by a true or false persuasion, who have enjoyed a vicissitude of the supreme power in any place, in supporting or suppressing of them. "Ure, seca, occide," is the language of men backed with authority: "Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris," say the same men under oppression. To give particular in-

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126 "Hostiæ ab animo libenti accipiuntur." — Tertul.

127 "1. Satanica; 2. Ethnica; 3. Belluina; 4. Iscariotica; 5. Tyrannica; 6. Herodiana; 7. Ventris causa." — *Illyricus, de Variis Sectis ap. Papistas.*

128 "Solitudinem ubi faciunt, pacem appellant." — *Tacitus Vita Agr. cap. x.*

stances, were to lay open that nakedness which I suppose it my duty rather to coven What, then, you will say; shall every one be suffered to do what he pleaseth?<sup>129</sup> You mean, think or believe what he pleaseth, or that which he is convinced to be a truth. Must all sorts of men and their opinions be tolerated? — These questions are not in one word to be resolved: many proposals are to be confirmed, many notions distinguished and retained, before a positive answer can be given. Take them in their whole latitude, and they may serve all men's turns. A negative universal resolution may tantamount unto, — “The many intrusted with authority, or having that to back them, ought not to tolerate any of different persuasions from them, if they suppose them erroneous.” Now truly, for my part, were I in Spain or Italy, a native of those places, and God should be pleased there to reveal that truth of his gospel unto me which he hath done in England, I believe those states ought to tolerate me, though they were persuaded that I were the most odious heretic under heaven; and what punishment soever they should impose on me for my profession would be required at their hands; — unless they can convince me that God allows men to slay his servants for professing the gospel, if they believe them to be heretics: and so also excuse the Jews in crucifying his dear Son, because they esteemed him as an impostor. Christ was once crucified amongst thieves: he may be again, in them that are so supposed. I shall therefore summarily set down what I conceive in answer to these questions, premising a few things, if I mistake not, universally granted.

And yet a word or two concerning toleration itself, that some guess may be given at what we aim and intend, must interpose. Much discourse about toleration hath been of late days amongst men; some pleading for it, more against it, was it always must be. Toleration is the alms of authority; yet men that beg for it, think so much at least their due. Some say it is a sin to grant it; others, that it is no less to deny it. Generally, the pleaders of each side have their interest in the cause. I never knew one contend earnestly for a toleration of dissenters, but was so himself; nor any for their suppression, but were themselves of the persuasion which prevaleth: for if otherwise, this latter would argue a Circumcellion<sup>130</sup> fury, willfully to seek their own ruin; the former so much charity, and commiseration of the condition of mortality as in these days would procure of the most no other livery but a fool's coat. Who almost would not admire at such new-discovered antipodes as should offer to assert an equal regiment of Trojans and Tyrians,<sup>131</sup> — a like regard and allowance from

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129 “*Humani juris, et naturalis potestatis est, unicuique quod putaverit colere.*” — Tertul. “*Quis imponet mihi necessitatem aut credendi quod nolim, aut quod velim non credendi!*” — Lactan.

130 The Circumcelliones, from which this epithet is derived, were fanatics in North Africa, who, in the course of the fourth century, prowled around the huts (*circum cellas*) of the peasantry, despising labour, and subsisting on alms. They were much under the influence of the Donatists, and often, by their rash demolition of pagan idols, exposed themselves to martyrdom. —Ed.

131 “*Tros, Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur.*” — [*Virg. Æ., i. 578.*]

authority for other sects as for that whereof themselves are a share? Now, amongst these contesters, few (nay, not any) have I found, either on the one side or the other, clearly and distinctly to define what they mean by toleration, or what is the direct purpose, signification, and tendency of non-toleration (a word in its whole extent written only in the forehead of the man of sin), — what bounds, what terriers are to be assigned to the one or to the other, — unto what degrees of longitude<sup>132</sup> or latitude their pole is to be elevated. Some, perhaps, by a toleration understand a universal, uncontrolled license, “vivendi ut velis,” in things concerning religion; that every one may be let alone, and not so much as discountenanced in doing, speaking, acting, how, what, where, or when he pleaseth, “in agendis et credendis fidei,” in all such things as concern the worship of God, articles of belief, or generally any thing commanded in religion; and in the meantime the parties at variance, and litigant about differences, freely to revile, reject, and despise one another, according as their provoked genius shall dispose their minds thereunto. Now truly, though every one of this mind pretends to cry for mercy to be extended unto poor afflicted truth, yet I cannot but be persuaded that such a toleration would prove exceeding pernicious to all sorts of men, and at last end in a dispute, like that recounted by Juvenal between two cities in Egypt, about their differences between their garden and river deities;<sup>133</sup> or like the contest related by Vertomannus in his travels amongst the Mohammedans, about Haly and Homar, the pretended successors to their grand impostor, where every one plied his adversary, “Hastisque clypeisque et saxis grandibus,” cleaving their skulls, and making entrance for their arguments by dint of sword: and I wish experience did not sufficiently convince us that the profession of Christianity, where the power of godliness is away, will not prevent these evils: “Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.”

Others there are that press for a non-toleration of any thing that opposes or contradicts the truth in any part, themselves being in their own judgments fully possessed of all, — their tenets being unto them the only form of wholesome words. Moreover (for these things recounted make not the difference, for it is so with all sects of men), the magistrates, or those who are intrusted with all the power over men which, for the preservation of human society, God hath been pleased to make out from himself, are also of the same persuasion with them. These they supplicate that an effectual course may be taken (asserting not only that they are intrusted with power from above so to do, but also that it is their great sin if they do it not) whereby all sectaries and erroneous persons may not only not be countenanced or kept within bounds, and not be forborne in any disturbing, insolent miscarriage; but also, that all that doctrine which is not publicly owned may be sure to be supplanted by the restraint and punishment of the dissenters, whether unto imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or

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132 “Late sibi summovet omne Vulgus ut in vacuâ regnet Basiliscus arenâ” [Lucan, i. 9, 725.]

133 “O Sanctas genres quibus hæc nascantur in hortis Numina!” [Sat. xv. 10]

death itself; for they must not cease, nay (if the thing is to be effected), they cannot rationally assign where to stay in punishing, before they come to the period of all, death itself, which is the point and centre wherein all the lines of this sentence meet;<sup>134</sup> wherein, to me, truly there is nothing but “*luctus ubique, pavor, et plurima mortis imago.*” I know it is coloured with fair pretences;<sup>135</sup> but “*quid ego verba audiam, facta cum video?*” It is written with red letters, and the pens of its abettors are dipped in the blood of Christians. Doubtless between these extremes lies the way.

Again, some by a toleration understand a mutual forbearance in communion, though there be great differences in opinion; and this the generality of the clergy (as heretofore they were called) did usually incline unto, — viz., that any men almost might be tolerated, whilst they did not separate. And these lay down this for a ground, that there is a latitude in judgment to be allowed; so that the communion may be held by men of several persuasions, in all things, with an allowance of withdrawing in those particulars wherein there is dissent amongst them: and this the Belgic Remonstrants pressed hard for, before they were cast out by the Synod of Dort.

Others plead for a toleration out of communion; that is, that men renouncing the communion of those whose religion is owned and established by authority, may yet peaceably be suffered to enjoy the ordinances in separation.

Moreover, by communion some understand one thing, some another. Some think that is preserved sufficiently, if the dissenters do acknowledge those from whom they do dissent to be true churches, to enjoy the ordinances of Christ, to have the means of life and salvation in them, closing with them in all substantials of doctrine; but yet, because of some disorders in and amongst them, they dare not be as of them, — but yet only separate from those disorders.

Others, again, think that communion is utterly dissolved if any distinctions of persons be made, more than all acknowledge ought to be, — any differences in the administration of the ordinances, — any divisions in government at all.

Now, all these things, and many more that might be added, must clearly be distinguished and determined by him that would handle his matter at large and exactly, that we may know what he means by those ambiguous words, and in what acceptation he owns them. Until this be done, a man may profess to oppose both toleration and non-toleration without any contradiction at all, because in their several senses they do not always intend the same.

For my part, as on the one side; — if by toleration you mean “*potestatem vivendi ut velis*” (as the Stoics defined liberty), a universal concession of an unbounded liberty,<sup>136</sup> or

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134 “*Inventus, Chrysippe, mi finitor acervi.*” [Persi, vi. 80.]

135 Ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς αἴδαο πύλησιν, Ὅς χ’ ἕτερον μὲν κεύθει ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ βάζει. [Hom. Il., ix. 312, 313.]

136 Ἐξουσία αὐτοπραγίας; — [Diog. Laert. in Stoic. Dogm., rendered as above by Cicer. Paradox. Sto. v. 1.]

rather, bold, unbridled licentiousness, for every one to vent what he pleaseth, and to take what course seems good in his own eyes, in things concerning religion and the worship of God, I cannot give my vote for it; — so, if by non-toleration you mean that which the gloss upon that place, “*Hæreticum hominem de vita,*” intended by adding “*supple tolle,*”<sup>137</sup> to make up the sense, — as if they were not to be endured in any place who dissent only in not-fundamentals from that which is established, but to be hated “*ad furcas et leones,*” as the Christians of old, or to have their new derided lights extinguished in that light, “*qua stantes ardent, qui fixo guttore fumant,*” in a Nero’s bonfire, — into the secrets of them that are thus minded let not my soul descend. “In their anger they will slay a man, and in their self-will they dig down a wall.

Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel.” These things, then, being so ambiguous, doubtful, and uncertain, we dare not be too peremptorily dogmatical, nor positively assert but only what is certainly true; as are these following:—

1. That heresies and errors ought not to be tolerated; — that is, men ought not to connive at, or comply with, those ways and opinions which they are convinced to be false, erroneous, contrary to sound doctrine, and that form of wholesome words which is delivered unto us as (next unto Christ) the greatest treasure of our souls, — especially if credibly supposed to shake any fundamentals of the common faith; but with all their strength and abilities, in all lawful ways, upon every just call, to oppose, suppress, and overthrow them, — rote root them up and east them out, that they may not, as noxious weeds and tares, overgrow and choke the good corn, amongst which they are covertly scattered. All predictions of “false Christs, false prophets, false teachers to come,” and “to be avoided,” all cautions to “try spirits, avoid heretics, beware of seducers, keep close to the truth received, — to hate the doctrine of Nicolaitanes, to avoid endless disputes, strife of words, old fables, languishing about unprofitable questions,” — the epithets given to, and descriptions made of, heresies, that they are “pernicious, damnable, cankers, works of the flesh,” and the like, — are all incitations and encouragements for the applying of all expedient means for the taking out of the way these stumbling-blocks. Let, then, the Scriptures be searched, and all ways embraced which the gospel holdeth forth, for the discovering, convincing, silencing, reproofing, confuting of errors and persons erring, by admonitions, reproofs, mighty Scripture convictions, evidencing of the truth, with fervent prayers to Almighty God, the God of truth, that he would give us one heart and one way; and if these weapons of our warfare do not prevail, we must let them know that one day their disobedience will be revenged with being cut off, and “cast out as unprofitable branches, fit to be cast into the fire.”

2. That any doctrine tending undeniably in its own nature (and not by strained consequences) to the disturbance of the civil state may be suppressed, by all such means as are

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137 Tolle de vita.

lawfully to be used for the conservation of the peace and safety of the state. Jesus Christ, though accused of sedition, taught none, practised none. His gospel gives not control to magistracy, righteous laws, or any sort of lawful government established amongst men; and therefore they whose faith is faction, and whose religion is rebellion, — I mean Jesuits and Jesuitical Papists, — some of the articles of whose creeds are directly repugnant to the safety, yea, being, of any commonwealths, wherein themselves and men of their own persuasion do not domineer and rule, may be proceeded against by them who bear not the sword in vain. The like may be said of men seditious, under any pretences whatsoever, — like the Anabaptists at Munster.

3. That such heresies or mispersuasions as are attended with any notorious sin in practice (I mean, not in consequences, but owned by their abettors, and practised accordingly, beyond Epicurus, whose honest life was not corrupted by his foul, dishonest opinion), — like the Nicolaitanes, teaching, as most suppose, promiscuous lust; and the Papists' express abominable idolatry, — may be in their authors more severely punished than such crimes not owned and maintained do singly deserve. To pretend conscience in such a case will not avail; "the works of the flesh are manifest," easy to be discerned, known to all. Apologies for such, argue searedness, not tenderness: such "evil communication" as "corrupteth good manners," is not to be tolerated.

4. No pretences whatsoever, nor seeming colour, should countenance men dissenting from what is established, to revile, traduce, deride, or otherwise expose to vulgar contempt, by words or actions, the way owned by authority (if not evidently fallen off from Jehovah to Baal), or fasten bitter, uncharitable appellations on those who act according to that way; that is, the public ministers and ministry, acknowledged, owned, and maintained by the supreme magistrate, where they both are. Here, by the way, I cannot but complain of want of ingenuity and candid charity in those men who, having a comfortable maintenance arising another way, do yet, "ad faciendum populum," continually, in pulpits and other public places, inveigh against that way of maintenance which is allowed by the magistrate, and set apart for those that labour in the word and doctrine; unto whom I wish no farther evil, but only forced patience when their neighbouring tradesmen shall have persuaded the people about them that preachers of the gospel ought to live by the work of their hands, and so the contribution for their maintenance be subducted.

Such men as these do show of what spirit they are, and what they would do if they were lions; seeing they bark so much, being but snarling dogs. And therefore, truly, if some severe course were used for the restraint of those who in our days strive to get themselves a name, and to build up their repute, by slighting, undervaluing, and, by all uncharitable, malicious ways, rendering odious those from whom they dissent, I should not much intercede for them: these are evil works, fruits of the flesh, evident to all. Now these, and such things as

these, are acknowledged by all even-spirited men. Some few I shall now add, I hope not unlike them. As, —

5. That it is a most difficult undertaking to judge of heresies and heretics, — no easy thing to show what heresy is in general; — whether this or that particular error be a heresy or no, — whether it be a heresy in this or that man; especially if such things as stubbornness, and pertinacy upon conviction, with the like, be required to make a man a heretic, — for such things cannot be evidenced or made out, but only (for the most part) by most obscure conjectures, and such as will scarcely satisfy a charitable judgment. Papists, indeed, who have laid it down for a principle, that a contradiction of the doctrine of the church, known to be so, and continued in after admonition, doth infallibly make a man a heretic, are very clear, uniform, and settled in that which they have made the ground, warrant, and foundation of slaying millions of men professing the name of Christ: but for all other Christians, who acknowledge an infallibility in the rule, but no infallibility in any for the discovery of the truth of that rule (though exceeding clear and perspicuous in things necessary), — for them, I say, understanding and keeping close to their own principles, it is a most difficult thing to determine of heresy, with an assurance that they are so out of danger of erring in that determination as to make it a ground of rigorous proceedings against those of whom they have so concluded. Some things, indeed, are so clearly in the Scripture laid down and determined, that to question or deny them bespeaks a spirit self-condemned in that which he doth profess. That twice two makes four, that he that runneth moveth, are not things more evident to reason than many things in the Scripture are to every captivated understanding; — a wilful deviation in such, merits no charity. But generally, errors are about things hard to be understood, not so clearly appearing, and concerning which it is very difficult to pass the sentence of heresy. No judge of heresy since the apostles' days, but hath been obnoxious to error in that judgment; and those who have been forwardest to assume a judicature and power of discerning between truth and error, so as to have others regulated thereby, have erred most foully. Of old it was generally conceived to be in councils. Now, I should acknowledge myself obliged to any man that would direct me to a council since that [Acts xv. 1](#) — which I may not be forced from the word to assert that it, in some thing or other, went astray.

Luther feared not to affirm of the first and best of general synods, that he “understood not the Holy Ghost to speak in it;” and that the canons thereof were but plain hay and stubble;<sup>138</sup> — yea, and Beza, that such was the “folly, ignorance, ambition, wickedness of many bishops in the best times, that you would suppose the devil to have been president in

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138 “Hic prorsus non intelligo Sanctum Spiritum in hoc concilio: hi omnes articuli fœnum, stramen, ligna, stipulæ fuerunt.” — Luth.



their assemblies;”<sup>139</sup> insomuch as Nazianzen complained that he never saw a<sup>140</sup> good end of any, and affirmed that he was resolved never to come at them more. And in truth, the fightings and brawls, diabolical arts of defamation and accusing one another, abominable pride, ambition, and affectation of pre-eminence, which appeared in most of them, did so far prevail, that in the issue they became (as one was entitled) dens of thieves, rather than conventions of humble and meek disciples of Jesus Christ, until at length, the holy dove being departed, an ominous owl overlooked the Lateran fathers; and though with much clamour they destroyed the appearing fowl, yet the foul spirit of darkness and error wrought as effectually in them as ever. But to close this discourse. Ignorance of men’s invincible prejudices, of their convictions, strong persuasions, desires, aims, hopes, fears, inducements, — sensibleness of our own infirmities, failings, misapprehensions, darkness, knowing but in part, should work in us a charitable opinion of poor erring creatures, that do it perhaps with as upright, sincere hearts and affections as some enjoy truth. Austin<sup>141</sup> tells the Manichees, the most paganish heretics that ever were, that they only raged and were high against them who knew not what it was to seek the truth and escape error. With what ardent prayers the knowledge of truth is obtained! And how tender is Salvian<sup>142</sup> in his judgment of the Arians! “They are,” saith he, “heretics, but know it not, — heretics to us, but not to themselves; nay, they think themselves so catholic that they judge us to be heretics: what they are to us, that are we to them. They err, but with a good mind; and for this cause God shows patience towards them.”

Now, if any should dissent from what I have before asserted concerning this particular, I would entreat him to lay down some notes whereby heresies may infallibly be discerned to be such; and he shall not find me repugning.

6. That great consideration ought to be had of that sovereign dictate of nature, the sum of all moral duties. “Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris;” — “Do not that unto others which you would not have done to you, were you in the mine condition with them.” In the business in hand, we are supposed by others to be in that estate wherein we suppose those to be of whom we speak; those others being to us what we are to them. Now truly, if none

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139 “In optimis illis temporibus, ea fuit nonnullorum episcoporum, partim ambitio, partim futilitas et ignorantia,” etc. — *Beza, præfat, ad Nov. Testa.*

140 “Ego, si vera scribere oportet, ita animo affectus sum, ut omnia episcoporum concilia fugiam, quoniam nullius concilii finem lætum faustumque vidi: nec quod depulsionem malorum potius quam accessionem et incrementum habuerit.” — *Greg. Naz. Ep. ad Procop.*

141 “Illi in vos sæviunt, qui nesciunt cum quo labore inveniantur, et quam difficile caveantur errores,” etc. — *Aug.*

142 “Apud nos sunt hæretici, apud se non sunt: quod ergo illi nobis sunt, hoc nos illis,” etc. — *Salv. de Prov.* etc.

of the former inconveniences and iniquities which we recounted (assertion 2, 3, 4, or the like), do accompany erring persons, it will be something difficult to make it appear how we may, if enjoying authority over them, impose any coercion, restraint, or punishment on them, which we would not acknowledge to be justly laid on us by others (supposing it should be laid) having authority over us, convinced that our persuasion differing from them is false and erroneous. No sort of Christians but are heretics and schismatics to some Christians in authority; and it may be their lot to live under the power and jurisdiction of men so persuaded of them, where they ought to expect that the same measure will be given unto them which, in other places, they have consented to mete out to others.

But men will say, and all men pleading the cause of non-toleration in its full extent do say, That they are heretics and erroneous persons whom we do oppose: we ourselves are orthodox; and no law of nature, no dictate of the Scriptures, requires that we should think it just to render unto them that are orthodox as unto them that are heretics, seducers, and false teachers. Because thieves are punished, shall honest men fear that they shall be so too? — But a thief is a thief in all the world, unto all men: in opinions it is not so. — He is a heretic that is to be punished. — But to whom? in whose judgment? in his own? — no more than we are in ours. — But he is so to them that judge him. — True. Put the case, a Protestant were to be judged by a Papist, as a thousand saints have been: is he not the worst of heretics to his judge? These things turn in a circle: what we are to ourselves, that he is to himself: what he is to us, that we are unto others that may be our judges. But however, you will say, we are in the truth, and therefore ought to go free. Now, truly, this is the same paralogism: who says we are in the truth? others? no, ourselves. Who says erroneous persons (as so supposed) are heretics, or the like? they themselves? no, but we: and those that are to us as we are to them, say no less of us. Let us not suppose that all the world will stoop to us, because we have the truth, as we affirm, but they do not believe. If we make the rule of our proceedings against others to be our conviction that they are erroneous; others will, or may, make theirs of us to be their rule of proceeding against us. We do thus to them, because we so judge of them; will not others, who have the same judgment of us as we of them, do the like unto us? Now here I profess that I do not desire to extend any thing in this discourse to the patronizing of any error whatsoever, — I mean, any thing commonly so esteemed in the reformed churches, — as myself owning any such; much less to the procuring of a licentious immunity for every one in his way; and least of all, to countenance men walking disorderly in any regard, especially in the particulars before recounted; — but only to show how warily, and upon what sure principles, that cannot be retorted on us, we ought to proceed, when any severity is necessarily required, in case of great danger; and how in lesser things, if the unity of faith may in some comfortable measure be kept, then to assert the proposition in its full latitude, urging and pleading for Christian forbearance, even in such manner to be granted as we would desire it from them whom we do forbear; for truly in those disputable things, we

must acknowledge ourselves in the same series with other men, unless we can produce express patents for our exemptions. But some, perhaps, will say, that even in such things as these Gamaliel's counsel is not good; better all go on with punishing that can; truth will not be suppressed, but error will. Good God! was not truth oppressed by antichristian tyranny? was not outward force the engine that for many generations kept truth in corners? But of this afterward.

Now, I am mistaken if this principle, that the civil magistrate ought to condemn, suppress, and persecute every one that he is convinced to err, though in smaller things, do not at length, in things of greater importance, make Christendom a very theatre of bloody murders, killing, slaying, imprisoning men round in a compass; until the strongest becomes dictator to the rest, and he alone be supposed to have infallible guidance, — all the rest to be heretics, because overcome and subdued. (When I speak of death and killing in this discourse, I understand not only forcible death itself, but that also which is equivalent thereunto, as banishment, or perpetual imprisonment.) I had almost said, that it is the interest of mortality to consent generally to the persecution of a man maintaining such a destructive opinion.

7. That whatsoever restraint or other punishment may be allowed in case of grosser errors, yet slaying of heretics for simple heresy, as they call it, for my part I cannot close withal; nor shall ever give my vote to the burning, hanging, or killing of a man, otherwise upright, honest, and peaceable in the state, merely because he misbelieveth any point of Christian faith. Let what pretences you please be produced, or colours flourished, I should be very unwilling to pronounce the sentence of blood in the case of heresy. I do not intend here to dispute; but if any one will, upon Protestant principles and Scripture grounds, undertake to assert it, I promise (if God grant me life) he shall not want a convert or an antagonist. I know the usual pretences: Such a thing is blasphemy. — But search the Scripture, look upon the definitions of divines, and by all men's consent you will find heresy, in what head of religion soever it be, and blasphemy properly so called, to be exceedingly distant. Let a blasphemer undergo the law of blasphemy; but yet I think we cannot be too cautious how we place men in that damnable series calling heaven and earth to witness the contrary. But again: To spread such errors will be destructive to souls. — So are many things, which yet are not punishable with forcible death. Let him that thinks so go kill Pagans and Mohammedans. As such heresy is a canker, but a spiritual one, let it be prevented by spiritual means. Cutting off men's heads is no proper remedy for it. If state physicians think otherwise, I say no more, but that I am not of the college, and what I have already said I submit to better judgments.

8. It may be seriously considered, upon a view of the state and condition of Christians, since their name was known in the world, whether this doctrine of punishing erring persons with death, imprisonment, banishment, and the like, under the name of heretics, hath not

been as useful and advantageous for error as truth; nay, whether it hath not appeared the most pernicious invention that ever was broached. In the first, second, and third ages, we hear little of it, — nothing for it, — something against it:— much afterward against it, in Austin and others.<sup>143</sup> Marlinus, the famous French bishop, rejected the communion of a company of his associate bishops, because they had consented, with Maximus the emperor, unto the death of the Priscillianists, — as vile heretics as ever breathed. At the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, when the Arians and orthodox had successively procured the supreme magistrate to join with them, men were killed and dismembered like beasts: banishments, imprisonments, plunderings, especially by the Arians, were as frequent as in new subdued kingdoms. But never was this tragedy so acted to the life, as by the worshippers of images on the one side, and their adversaries on the other:<sup>144</sup> which difference rose about the year 130, and was carried on with that barbarous outrage on both sides, especially by the Iconolatræ (as the worst were ever best at such proceedings), as is wonderful to consider. Now, excepting only those idolatrous heretics in the last, who were paid home in their own coin for a thousand years together, this doctrine was put in practice against none almost but the martyrs of Jesus. The Roman stories of the killing of heretics, are all martyrologies; thousands slain for heretics now lie under the altar, crying for vengeance, and shall one day sit upon thrones, judging their judges. So that where one man hath suffered for an error, under the name of a heretic, five hundred under the same notion have suffered for truth; a principle would seem more befitting Christians to spare five hundred for the saving of one guiltless person. Truth hath felt more of the teeth of this scorpion than error; and clearly it grew up by degrees, with the whole mystery of iniquity. In the gospel we have nothing like it: the acts of Christ purging the temple, Peter pronouncing the fate of Ananias, and Paul smiting Elymas with blindness, seem to me heterogeneous. The first laws of Constantine speak liberty and freedom.<sup>145</sup> Pecuniary mulcts afterward were added, and general edicts against all sects; and so it is put over into the hands of the Arians, who exceedingly cherished it: yet for a good while pretences must be sought out, — Eustathius of Antioch must be accused of adultery, Athanasius of sedition, magic, and I know not what, that a colour might be had for their persecution.<sup>146</sup> The Arian kings in Africa were the first that owned it, γυγνῆ κεφαλῆ, and acted according to their persuasions. Methinks I hear the cries of poor dismembered, mangled creatures, for the faith of the holy Trinity! Next to these,



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143 Τὸς μισοῦντας τὸν Θεὸν, μισεῖν χρὴ καὶ ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς αὐτοῦ ἐκτίκεσθαι· οὐ μὴν καὶ τύπτειν αὐτούς ἢ διώκειν, καθὼς τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδοτα τὸν Κύριον καὶ Θεὸν· ἀλλ' ἐχθροὺς μὲν ἠγεῖσθαι, καὶ χωρίζεσθαι ἀπ' αὐτῶν. — *Ignat. Epist. ad Philad.*

144 *Theophanes. Histor. Miscel., lib. xxii. cap. 30.*

145 *Euseb. Vit. Const., lib. ii. cap. 27.*

146 *Socrat. Evag. Rufinus. Sozom.*

through a few civil constitutions of some weak emperors, it wholly comes to reside in the hands of the pope; kings and princes are made his executioners, and he plays his game to the purpose. Single persons serve not this Bel and dragon, — whole nations<sup>147</sup> must be slaughtered, that he may be drunk with blood. He sends whole armies to crucify Christ afresh, — he gives every one of his soldiers a cross; hence followed cruel sights, bloody battles, wasting of kingdoms, raging against the names, ashes, sepulchres of the dead, with more than heathenish cruelty. Such evil fruits hath this bitter root sent forth, the streams of this fountain have all been blood; so that it cannot be denied but that a judicature of truth, and the contrary assumed, with a forcible backing of the sentence, was the bottom-stone in the foundation and highest in the corner of the tower of Babel: and I believe that upon search it will appear, that error hath not been advanced by any thing in the world so much as by usurping a power for its suppression. In divers contests that the pope had with others, the truth was on his side (as in the business of Athanasius and others in the east deposed by the Arians<sup>148</sup>). Now, who would not have thought, that his standing up with all earnestness for the truth would not have been the ruin of the devil's kingdom of darkness, and almost have spoiled the plot of the mystery of iniquity? when the truth is, the largest steps that ever the man of sin took towards his throne was by usurping of power to suppress errors and heresies. It would be a great encouragement to use that way for the extirpation of errors (if any such be, besides the preaching of the gospel, and convictions from thence), which any one could produce and give assurance that it hath not been tried, or been tried and proved ineffectual for the supplantation of truth; and if such a way be not produced, what if both should grow together until harvest?

9. Let us not be too hasty in pressing any opinion arising and divulged with odious consequences of sedition, turbulency, and the like, because tumults and troubles happen in the commonwealth where it is asserted. A coincidence of events is one of the principal causes of error and misjudgings in the world: because errors and tumults arise together, therefore one is the cause of the other, may be an argument “a baculo ad angulum.” It is a hard thing to charge them with sedition who protest against it, and none can make it appear that it is “contraria factis” by any of their actions, but only because it is fit they should bear the blame of what happeneth evilly in their days. Upon every disaster in the empire, the noise of old was, “Christianos ad leones.”<sup>149</sup> For our part, we ought to remember that we were strangers in Egypt. It is but little more than a hundred years since all mouths were opened and filled with reproaches against that glorious Reformation wherein we rejoice. Was it not the unanimous voice of all the adversaries thereof, that a new religion was brought in, tending to the

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147 Albigenses, Waldenses, Bohemians.

148 *Socrat., lib. ii. cap. 11.*

149 Arnob.

immediate ruin of all states and commonwealths, — attended with rebellion, the mother of sedition? Have we not frequent apologies of our divines for the confutation of such false, malicious, and putid criminations? It is true, indeed, the light of the gospel breaking out was accompanied with war, and not peace (according to the prediction of our Saviour); whereof the gospel was no more the cause, than John Diazius was of that horrible murder, when his brains were chopped out with an axe by his brother Alphonsus,<sup>150</sup> because he professed the gospel. Hence Luther, the vehemency of whose spirit gave no way to glosses and temporizing excuses, plainly affirms those tumults to be such necessary appendices of the preaching of the gospel, that he should not believe the word of God to be abroad in the world, if he saw it not accompanied with tumults; which he had rather partake in, than perish under the wrath of God in an eternal tumult.<sup>151</sup> The truth must go on, though thereby the world should be reduced to its primitive chaos and confusion. Were it not a perpetual course, for men of every persuasion to charge sedition, and the like, upon that which they would have suppressed, knowing that no name is more odious unto them who have power to effect their desire; and did I not find that some, who have had much ado, whilst they were sheep, to keep off that imputation from themselves, within a few years, becoming lions, have laid it home upon others as peaceable as they; I might perhaps be more rigid than now these discoveries will suffer me to be. Far be it from me to apologize for truth itself, if seditious; — only I abhor those false, malicious criminations, whereby God's people in these days wherein we live have exceedingly suffered. It hath pleased God so to order things in this kingdom, that the work of recovering his worship to its purity, and restoring the civil state to its liberty, should be both carried on at the same time by the same persons. Are there none now in this kingdom to whom this reforming is an almost everting of God's worship? And are there none that have asserted that our new religion hath caused all those tumults and bloodshed? And doth not every unprejudiced man see that these are hellish lies and malicious accusations, having indeed neither ground nor colour, but only their coincidence in respect of time? Is any wise man moved with their clamours? Are their aspersion considerable? Are we the only men that have been thus injuriously traduced? Remember the difference between Elijah and Ahab, — what was laid to the charge of Paul; see the apologies of the old Christians, and speak what you find.

Much might here be added concerning the qualifications, carriages, humility, peaceableness, of erring persons; all which ought to be considered, and our proceedings towards them to be, if not regulated, yet much swayed by such considerations. Some I have known myself, that I dare say the most curious inquirer into their ways, that sees with eyes of flesh, would

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150 *Sleid. Com.*

151 “Ego nisi tumultus istos viderem, verbum Dei in mundo non esse dicerem. Præeligimus temporali tumultu collidi, quam æterno tumultu sub ira Dei conteri.” — *Luth. de Ser. Arb. cap. xxxii.-xxxiv.*

not be able to discover any thing but mere conviction and tenderness of conscience that causeth them to own the opinions which, different from others, they do embrace. Others, again, so exceeding supercilious, scorning, proud, selfish, — so given to contemning of all others, reviling and undervaluing of their adversaries, — that the blindest pity cannot but see much carnalness and iniquity in their ways. These things, then, deserve to be weighed, all passion and particular interest being set aside. And then, if the die be cast, and we must forward, let us take along with us these two cautions:—

(1.) So to carry ourselves in all our censures, every one in his sphere (ecclesiastical discipline being preserved as pure and unmixed from secular power as possible), that it may appear to all that it is the error which men maintain which is so odious unto us, and not the consequent or their dissent from us, whether by subducting themselves from our power or withdrawing from communion. For if this latter be made the cause of our proceeding against any, there must be one law for them all, — all that will not bow, to the fiery furnace! Recusancy is the fault; and that being the same in all, must have the same punishment, — which would be such an unrighteous inequality as is fit for none but Antichrist to own.

(2.) That nothing be done to any, but that the bound and farthest end of it be seen at the beginning, and not leave way and room for new persecution upon new pretences. “*Cedo alteram et alteram,*” one stripe sometimes makes way for another, and how know I that men will stay at thirty-nine? “*Principiis obsta.*”

All these things being considered, I cannot so well close with them who make the least allowance of dissent to be the mother of abominations. Words and hated phrases may easily be heaped up to a great number, to render any thing odious which we have a mind to oppose; but the proving of an imposed evil or absurdity is sometimes a labour too difficult for every undertaker. And so I hope I have said enough to warrant my own hesitancy in this particular. Some might now expect that I should here positively set down what is my judgment concerning errors and erroneous persons dissenting from the truth received and acknowledged by authority, with respect unto their toleration: unto whom I answer, That to consider the power of the magistrate about things of religion, and over consciences; the several restraints that have been used in this case, or are pleaded for; — the difference between dangerous fundamental errors and others; — the several interests of men, and ways of disengaging; — the extent of communion, and the absolute necessity of a latitude to be allowed in some things; — with such other things as would be requisite for a full handling of the matter in hand, — ask a longer discourse, and more exactness, than the few hours allotted to this appendix can afford. Only for the present I ask, if any will take the pains to inform me, — 1. What they mean by a non-toleration? whether only a not countenancing nor holding communion with them; or if crushing and punishing them, then how? to what degree? by what means? where they will undoubtedly bound? 2. What the error is concerning which the inquiry is made? the clear opposition thereof to the word of God? the danger of it? the repug-

nancy that is in it to peace, quietness, and the power of godliness? 3. What or who are the erring persons? how they walk? in what manner of conversation? what is their behaviour towards others not of their own persuasion? what gospel means have been used for their conviction? what may be supposed to be their prejudices, motives, interests, and the like? And then, if it be worth asking, I shall not be backward to declare my opinion. And truly, without the consideration of these things, and other such circumstances, how a right judgment can be passed in this case, I see not.

And so, hoping the courteous reader will look with a candid eye upon these hasty lines, rather poured out than written; and consider that a day's pains in these times may serve for that which is but for a day's use; the whole is submitted to his judgment by him who professeth his all in this kind to be, — the love of truth and peace.





Sermon II.  
Ebenezer:  
a memorial of the deliverance  
of  
Essex county, and committee.  
In two sermons



## **Prefatory note.**

The ancient town of Colchester, which had at an early period in the civil wars declared in favour of the Parliament, was besieged and obliged to surrender to the Royal forces. Lord Fairfax, the general of the Parliamentary army, and a nobleman of high reputation, whom both Milton and Hume unite in praising, after an ineffectual attempt to regain the town by storm, changed his tactics into a rigorous blockade. The Royalists maintained the defence with signal gallantry for nearly eleven weeks, till all their provisions were spent, and they had nothing on which to subsist but horses, dogs, and other animals. At length they surrendered at discretion, when two of their officers, Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle, suffered military execution on the spot. A fine of £14,000 was imposed on the town.

Owen, at this time pastor of an Independent congregation at Coggeshall, which is not far from Colchester, and which was the head-quarters of Fairfax during the siege, seems to have officiated as chaplain to the Parliamentary general; and on the fall of the town, a day of thanksgiving was observed, when he preached before Fairfax and his victorious army, from [Hab. iii. 1–9](#). A committee of Parliament had been sitting at Colchester when the Royalists seized it, and had been under imprisonment during the siege. They also engaged in the same exercise of thanksgiving for their deliverance at Rumford, on September 28, 1648. Owen preached to them another discourse from the same text. Both discourses were published as one. They take the shape of a running comment upon a very sublime passage of Scripture. The verses are expounded in order, and the author educes from them a series of general principles or observations, which he illustrates with tact and power. Exegetic statements are made the basis of important principles, and relieved by eloquent expressions, and maxims of practical wisdom. Though necessarily brief, some of the appeals interwoven with the details of exposition are specimens of close and urgent dealing with the conscience.

Objection has been taken by Mr Orme to the warlike tone of the preacher in some parts of the discourse. There is certainly but slight reference to the evils and horrors of war. Regret might have been expressed that no course was open to the nation in the pending quarrel with its king, but the stern arbitration of the sword. Still, the objection is hardly just. The audience of Owen consisted of men who, at the call of duty, had been hazarding their lives for the best interests of the nation, and except on the principle that all war is unlawful, the preacher could not be expected to utter sentiments which might have sounded in their ears as a condemnation of their conduct. Moreover, while he could not but allude to military operations, he abstains from all fulsome eulogy of the skill and valour of the conquerors, and ascribes the praise of the victory and deliverance to God; so much so, that he has been charged with committing himself in this discourse to the erroneous principle of inferring the goodness of a cause from the success that may have attended it. Mr Orme conclusively repels the insinuation, by quoting Owen's own explicit disclaimer of the sentiment thus

imputed to him:— “A cause is good or bad before it hath success, one way or other; and that which hath not its warrant in itself, can never obtain any from its success. The rule of the goodness of any cause is the eternal law of reason, with the legal rights and interests of men.” See Owen’s *Reflections on a Slandorous Libel*,” vol. xvi. — Ed.

## To his Excellency, Thomas Lord Fairfax, etc.

Sir,

Almighty God having made you the instrument of that deliverance and peace which in the county of Essex we do enjoy, next to his own goodness, the remembrance thereof is due unto your name. “Those who honour him he will honour; and those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed,” 1 Sam. ii. 30. Part of these ensuing sermons being preached before your excellency, and now by providence called forth to public view, I am emboldened to dedicate them unto your name, as a small mite of that abundant thankfulness, wherein all peace-loving men of this county stand obliged unto you.

It was the custom of former days, in the provinces of the Roman empire: to erect statues and monuments of grateful remembrance<sup>152</sup> to those presidents and governors who, in the administration of their authority, behaved themselves with wisdom, courage, and fidelity; yea, instruments of great deliverances and blessings, through corrupted nature’s folly, became the Pagans’ deities.

There is scarce a county in this kingdom wherein, and not one from which, your excellency hath not deserved a more lasting monument than ever was erected of Corinthian brass. But if the Lord be pleased that your worth shall dwell only in the praises of his people, it will be your greater glory, that being the place which himself hath chosen to inhabit. Now, for a testification of this is this only intended. Beyond this towards men, God pleading for you, you need nothing but our silence; the issue of the last engagements, whereunto you were called and enforced, answering, yea, outgoing, your former undertakings, giving ample testimony of the continuance of God’s presence with you in your army, having stopped the mouths of many gainsayers, and called to the residue in the language of the dumb-speaking Egyptian hieroglyphic, ὧ γινόμενοι καὶ ἀπογινόμενοι, Θεὸς μισεῖ ἀναιδέϊαν,<sup>153</sup> — “Men of all sorts know that God hateth impudence.”

It was said of the Romans, in the raising of their empire, that they were “*sæpe prælio victi, bello nunquam.*” So naked hath the bow of God been made for your assistance, that you have failed neither in battle nor war.

Truly, had not our eyes beheld the rise and fall of this latter storm, we could not have been persuaded that the former achievements of the army under your conduct could have been paralleled. But He who always enabled them to outdo not only others but themselves, hath in this carried them out to outdo whatever before himself had done by them, that they might show more kindness and faithfulness in the latter end than in the beginning. The weary ox treadeth hard; — dying bites are often desperate; — half-ruined Carthage did more

152 Lubens meritoque.

153 Plut. de Iside et Osir.

perplex Rome than when it was entire; — hydra’s heads in the fable were increased by their loss, and every new stroke begat a new opposition. Such seemed the late tumultuating of the exasperated party in this nation.

In the many undertakings of the enemy, — all which themselves thought secure, and others esteemed probable, — if they had prevailed in any one, too many reasons present themselves to persuade they would have done so in all. But to none of those worthies which went out under your command to several places in the kingdom, can you say, with Augustus to Varus, upon the slaughter of his legions by Arminius in Germany, “*Quintile Vare, redde legiones.*” God having carried them all on with success and victory.

One especially, in his northern expedition, I cannot pass over with silence, who although he will not, dare not, say of his undertakings, as Cæsar of his Asian war, “*Veni, vidi, vici.*” knowing who works all his works for him; nor shall we say of the enemy’s multitude, what Captain Gam did of the French, being sent to spy out their numbers before the battle of Agincourt, that there were of them enough to kill, and enough to take, and enough to run away; yet of him and them both he and we may freely say, “It is nothing with the Lord to help, either with many, or with them that have no power.”

The war being divided, and it being impossible your excellency should be in every place of danger, according to your desire, the Lord was pleased to call you out personally unto two of the most hazardous, dangerous, and difficult undertakings;<sup>154</sup> where, besides the travel, labour, watching, heat and cold, by day and night, whereunto you were exposed, even the life of the meanest soldier in your army was not in more imminent danger than oftentimes was your own. And indeed, during your abode at the leaguer amongst us, in this only were our thoughts burdened with you, — that self-preservation was of no more weight in your counsels and undertakings. And I beseech you pardon my boldness, in laying before you this expostulation of many thousands (if we may say to him who hath saved a kingdom what was sometime said unto a king), “Know you not that you are worth ten thousands of us? why should you quench such a light in Israel?”

Sir, I account it among those blessings of Providence wherewith the days of my pilgrimage have been seasoned, that I had the happiness for a short season to attend your excellency, in the service of my master, Jesus Christ; as also, that I have this opportunity, in the name of many, to cast in my χαίρει into the kingdom’s congratulations of your late successes. What thoughts concerning your person my breast is possessed withal, as in their storehouse they yield me delightful refreshment, so they shall not be drawn out, to the disturbance of your self-denial. The goings forth of my heart, in reference to your excellency, shall be chiefly to the Most High, that, being more than conqueror in your spiritual and temporal warfare, you may be long continued for a blessing to this nation, and all the people of God.

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154 Kent, Essex.

Sir,  
Your Excellency's  
Most humble and devoted Servant,

John Owen.

Coggeshall, Essex,  
Oct. 5, 1648.

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**To the worthy and honoured Sir William Masham, Sir William Rowe, with the rest of the gentlemen of the committee lately under imprisonment by the enemy in Colchester; as also, to the honoured Sir Henry Mildmay of Wansted, Col. Sir Thomas Honeywood, with the rest of the gentlemen and officers, lately acting and engaged against the same enemy.**

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Sirs,

The righteous judgments of God having brought a disturbance and noise of war, for our security, unthankfulness, murmuring, and devouring one another, upon our country, those who were intrusted with the power thereof turned their streams into several channels. Troublous times are times of trial.

“Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand,” *Dan. xii. 10*. Some God called out to suffer, some to do, — leaving “treacherous dealers to deal treacherously.”

Of the two first sorts are you. This honour have you received from God, either with patience and constancy to undergo, involuntarily a dangerous restraint; or with resolution and courage voluntarily to undertake a hazardous engagement, to give an example that faith and truth, so shamefully despised in these evil days, have not altogether forsaken the sons of men.

It is not in my thoughts to relate unto yourselves what some of you suffered, and what some of you did, — what difficulties and perplexities you wrestled withal, within and without the walls of your enemies (the birds in the cage and the field having small cause of mutual emulation); for that which remains of these things is only a returnal of praise to Him by whom all your works are wrought.

It cannot be denied but that Providence was eminently exalted in the work of your protection and delivery; yet truly, for my part, I cannot but conceive that it vails to the efficacy of grace, in preventing you from putting forth your hands unto iniquity, in any sinful compliance with the enemies of our peace. The times wherein we live have found the latter more rare than the former. What God wrought in you hath the pre-eminence of what he wrought for you; — as much as to be given up to the sword is a lesser evil than to be given up to a treacherous spirit.

What God hath done for you all, all men know; — what I desire you should do for God, I know no reason why I should make alike public, — the general and particular civilities I have received from all and every one of you advantaging me to make it out in another way. I shall add nothing, then, to what you will meet withal in the following discourse, but only my desire, that you would seriously ponder the second observation, with the deductions from thence. For the rest, I no way fear but that that God who hath so appeared with you,

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and for you, will so indulge to y spirits the presence and guidance of his grace, in these shaking times, that if any speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ, and glorify God in the day of visitation.

For these following sermons, one of them was preached at your desire, and is now published upon your request. The first part of the labour I willingly and cheerfully underwent; — the latter, merely in obedience to your commands, being acted in it more by your judgments than mine own. You were persuaded (mean as it was) it might be for the glory of God to have it made public; whereupon my answer was, and is, That for that, not only it, but myself also, should, by his assistance, be ready for the press. The failings and infirmities attending the preaching and publishing of it (which the Lord knows to be very many) are mine; — the inconveniences of publishing such a tractate from so weak a hand, whereof the world is full, must be yours; — the fruit and benefit both of the one and other is His, for whose pardon of infirmities, and removal of inconveniences, shall be, as for you, and all the church of God, the prayer of,

Sirs,

Your most humble and obliged Servant

In the work of the Lord,

John Owen.

Coggeshall, *Oct.* 5, 1648.



## Sermon II. A memorial of the deliverance of Essex county, and committee.

“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.” — Hab. iii. 1–9.

Of [this chapter](#) there are four parts.

First, The title and preface of it, [verse 1](#).

Secondly, The prophet’s main request in it, [verse 2](#).

Thirdly, Arguments to sustain his faith in that request, from [verse 3 to 17](#).

Fourthly, A resignation of himself, and the whole issue of his desires unto God, from [verse 17 to the end](#).

We shall treat of them in order.

The prophet<sup>155</sup> having had visions from God, and pre-discoveries of many approaching judgments, in [the first and second chapters](#), in this, by faithful prayer, sets himself to obtain a sure footing and quiet abode in those nation-destroying storms.

[Verse 1](#). “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet;” that is the title of it.

And an excellent prayer it is, full of arguments to strengthen faith, — acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty, power, and righteous judgments, — with resolutions to a contented, joyful, rolling him upon him under all dispensations.

Observation I. *Prayer is the believer’s constant, sure retreat in an evil time, in a time of trouble.*

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155 The time of this prophecy is conceived to be about the end of Josiah’s reign, not long before the first Chaldean invasion.

It is the righteous man’s wings to the “name of the Lord,” which is his “strong tower,” [Prov. xviii. 10](#), — a Christian<sup>156</sup> soldier’s sure reserve in the day of battle: if all other forces be overthrown, here he will abide by it, — no power under heaven can prevail upon him to give one step backward. Hence that title of [Ps. cii. 1](#), “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed.” ’Tis the overwhelmed man’s refuge and employment: when “he swooneth with anguish” (as in the original), this fetches him to life again. So also, [Ps. lxi. 2, 3](#). In our greatest distresses let neither unbelief nor self-contrivances jostle us out of this way to the rock of our salvation.

II. Observation. *Prophets’ discoveries of fearful judgments must be attended with fervent prayers.*

That messenger hath done but half his business who delivers his errand, but returns not an answer. He that brings God’s message of *threats* unto his people, must return his people’s message of *entreaties* unto him. Some think they have fairly discharged their duty when they have revealed the will of God to man, without labouring to reveal the condition and desires of men unto God. He that is more frequent in the pulpit to his people than he is in his closet for his people, is but a sorry watchman. Moses did not so, [Exod. xxxii. 31](#); — neither did Samuel so, [1 Sam. xii. 23](#); — neither was it the guise of Jeremiah in his days, [chap. xiv. 17](#). If the beginning of the prophecy be (as it is) “The burden of Habakkuk,” — the close will be (as it is) “The prayer of Habakkuk.” Where there is a burden upon the people, there must be a prayer for the people. Woe to them who have denounced desolations, and not poured out supplications! Such men delight in the evil which the prophet puts far from him, [Jer. xvii. 16](#), “I have not desired the woeful day, [O Lord], thou knowest.”

Now this prayer is “upon Shigionoth;” that is, — 1. It is turned to a song; 2. Such a song.

1. That it is a song, penned in meter; and how done so. (1.) To take the deeper impression; (2.) To be the better retained in memory; (3.) To work more upon the affections; (4.) To receive the ingredients of poetical loftiness for adorning the majesty of God with; (5.) The use of songs in the old church; (6.) And for the present; (7.) Their times and seasons, as among the people of God, so all nations of old. Of all, or any of these, being besides my present purpose, I shall not treat.

2. That it is “upon Shigionoth,” a little may be spoken. The word is once in another place (and no more) used, in the title of a song, and that is [Ps. vii.](#), “Shigionoth of David;” and it is variously rendered. It seems to be taken from the word שִׁגְיוֹן, “erravit,” to err, or wander variously, [Prov. v. 19](#). The word is used for delight, to stray with delight: “In her love (תִּשְׁגֶּה) thou shalt err with delight,” — we have translated it, “be ravished;” noting affections out of order. The word, then, holds out a delightful wandering and variety; —



156 “Preces et lacrymæ sunt arma ecclesiæ.” — Tertul.

and this literally, because those two songs, [Ps. vii.](#) and [Hab. iii.](#), are not tied to any one certain kind of metre, but have various verses, for the more delight; which, though it be not proper to them alone, yet in them the Holy Ghost would have it especially noted.

But now surely the kernel of this shell is sweeter than so. Is not this written also for their instruction who have no skill in Hebrew songs? The true reason of their meter is lost to the most learned. Are not, then, God's variable dispensations towards his held out under these variable tunes, — not all fitted to one string? not all alike pleasant and easy? Are not the several tunes of mercy and judgment in these songs? Is not here affliction and deliverance, desertion and recovery, darkness and light in this variously? Doubtless it is so.

III. Observation. *God often calls his people unto songs upon Shigionoth.*

<sup>157</sup>He keeps them under various dispensations, that so, drawing out all their affections, their hearts may make the sweeter melody unto him. They shall not have all honey, nor all gall; — all judgment, lest they be broken; nor all mercy, lest they be proud. “Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions,” [Ps. xcix. 8.](#) Here is a song upon Shigionoth! They are heard in their prayers, and forgiven; — there is the sweetest of mercies. Vengeance is taken of their inventions, — there's tune of judgment. “By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation,” [Ps. lxxv. 5;](#) [which] is a song of the same tune. To be answered in righteousness, what sweeter mercy in the world? Nothing more refreshes the panting soul than an answer of its desires; but to have this answer by terrible things, — that string strikes a humbling, a mournful note. Israel hear of deliverance by Moses,<sup>158</sup> and at the same time have their bondage doubled by Pharaoh, — there's a song upon Shigionoth. Is it not so in our days? — precious mercies and dreadful judgments jointly poured out upon the land? We are clothed by our Father, like Joseph by his, in a party-coloured coat, [Gen. xxxvii. 3;](#) — here a piece of unexpected deliverance, and there a piece of deserved correction. At the same hour we may rejoice at the conquest of our enemies, and mourn at the close of our harvest, — victories for his own name's sake, and showers for our sins' sake; both from the same hand at the same time. The cry of every soul is like the cry of the multitude of old and young at the laying the foundation of the second temple: many shouted aloud for joy, and many wept with a loud voice; so that it was a mixed noise, and the several noises could not be distinguished, [Ezra iii. 12, 13.](#) A mixed cry is in our spirits, and we know not which is loudest in the day of our visitation. I could instance in sundry particulars, but that every one's observation will save me that easy labour. And this the Lord doth, —



157 “Graviter in eum decernitur, cui etiam ipsa conneetlo denegatur.” — *Prosp. Sent.*

158 Duplicantur lateres quando venit Moses.

1. To fill<sup>159</sup> all our sails towards himself at once, — to *exercise all our affections*. I have heard that a full wind behind the ship drives her not so fast forward as a side wind, that seems almost so much against her as with her; and the reason, they say, is, because a full wind fills but some of her sails, which keep it from the rest that they are empty; when a side wind fills all her sails, and sets her speedily forward. Which way ever we go in this world, our affections are our sails; and according as they are spread and filled, so we pass on, swifter and slower, whither we are steering. Now, if the Lord should give us a full wind, and continual gale of mercies, it would fill but some of our sails, some of our affections, — joy, delight, and the like; but when he comes with a side wind, — a dispensation that seems almost as much against us as for us, then he fills all our sails, takes up all our affections, making his works wide and broad enough to entertain them every one; — then are we carried freely and fully towards the haven where we would be.<sup>160</sup> A song upon Shigionoth leaves not one string of our affections untuned. It is a song that reacheth every line of our hearts, to be framed by the grace and Spirit of God. Therein hope, fear, reverence, with humility and repentance, have a share; as well as joy, delight, and love, with thankfulness. Interchangeable dispensations take up all our affections, with all our graces; for they are gracious affections, exercised and seasoned with grace, of which we speak. The stirring of natural affections, as merely such, is but the moving of a dunghill to draw out a stinking steam, — a thing the Lord neither aimeth at nor delighteth in. Their joys are his provocation, and he laugheth in the day of their calamity, when their fear cometh, [Prov. i. 26, 27](#).

2. To *keep them in continual*<sup>161</sup> *dependence upon himself*. He hath promised his own daily bread, — not goods laid up for many yearn Many children have been undone by their parents giving them too large a stock to trade for themselves; it has made them spendthrifts, careless, and wanton. Should the Lord intrust his people with a continued stock of mercy, perhaps they would be full, and deny him, and say, “Who is the Lord?” [Prov. xxx. 9](#). Jeshurun did so, [Deut. xxxii. 14, 15](#). Ephraim “was filled according to their pasture, and forgot the Lord,” [Hos. xiii. 6](#). Neither, on the other side, will he be always chiding. “His anger shall not burn for ever” — very sore. It is our infirmity at the least, if we my, God hath forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his tender mercies in displeasure, [Ps. lxxvii. 9](#). But laying one thing against another, he keeps the heart of his in an even balance, in a continual dependence upon himself, that they may neither be wanton through mercy, nor discouraged by too much oppression. Our tender Father is therefore neither always feeding nor always correcting.



159 “Namque bonos non blanda inflant, non aspera frangunt, Sed fidei invictæ gaudia vera juvant.” Prosp. Epig. in Sent. August.

160 [Ps. cxix. 67](#); [Hos. v. 15](#); [Heb. xii. 10, 11](#); [1 Pet. i. 6](#).

161 “In cælo non in terra mercedem promisit reddendam. Quid alibi poscis, quod alibi dabitur!” — *Ambros. Offic., lib. i. cap. 16*.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light,” saith the prophet [Zech. xiv. 6, 7](#), seeking out God’s dispensations towards his, ending in joy and light in the evening.

*Use.* Labour to have your hearts right tuned for songs on Shigionoth, sweetly to answer all God’s dispensations in their choice variety. That instrument will make no music that hath but some strings in tune. If when God strikes with mercy upon the string of joy and gladness, we answer pleasantly; but when he touches upon that of<sup>162</sup> sorrow and humiliation, we suit it not; — we are broken instruments, that make no melody unto God. We must know how to receive good and evil at his hand. “He hath made every thing beautiful in its time,” [Eccles. iii. 11](#), — every thing in that whole variety which his wisdom hath produced. A well-tuned heart must have all its strings, all its affections, ready to answer every touch of God’s finger, to improve judgments and mercies both at the same time. Sweet harmony ariseth out of some discords. When a soul is in a frame to rejoice with thankful obedience for mercy received, and to be humbled with soul-searching, amending repentance for judgments inflicted at the same time, — then it sings a song on Shigionoth, then it is fit for the days wherein we live. Indeed, both mercies and judgments aim at the same end, and should be received with the same equal temper of mind. A flint is broken between a hammer and a pillow; — an offender is humbled between a prison and a pardon; — a hard heart may be mollified and a proud spirit humbled between those two. In such a season the several rivulets of our affections flow naturally in the same stream. When hath a gracious soul the soundest joys, but when it hath the deepest sorrows? “Habent et gaudia vulnus.” When hath it the humblest melting, but when it hath the most ravishing joys? Our afflictions, which are naturally at the widest distance, may all swim in the same spiritual channel Rivulets rising from several heads are carried in one stream to the ocean. As a mixture of several colours make a beautiful complexion for the body; so a mixture of divers affections, under God’s various dispensations, gives a comely frame unto the soul. Labour, then, to answer every call, every speaking providence of God, in its right kind, according to the intention thereof; and the Lord reveal his mind unto us, that so we may do.

Having passed the title, let us look a little on those parts of the prayer itself that follow.

[Verse 2](#). The beginning of it in [verse 2](#) hath two parts.

1. The *frame* of the prophet’s *spirit* in his address to God: “O Jehovah, I have heard thy *speech*, and was afraid.”

2. His *request in this his condition*: “O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

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162 “Cum vexamur ac premimur, tum maxime gratias agimus iudulgentissimo patri, quod corruptelam nostram non patitur longius procedere: hinc intelligimus nos esse Deo curæ.” — Lactan.

1. In the first you have, —

(1.) Particularly his frame; — he was afraid, or trembled; which he wonderfully sets out, [verse 16](#), “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself.”

(2.) The cause of this fear and trembling; — he “heard the speech of God.”

If you will ask what *speech* or report this was that made the prophet himself so exceedingly quake and tremble, I answer, it is particularly that which you have, [chap. i. 5–11](#), — containing a dreadful denunciation of the judgments of God against the people of Israel, to be executed by the proud, cruel, insulting Chaldeans. This voice, this report of God, makes the prophet tremble.

IV. Observation. *An appearance of God in anger and threats against a people, should make his choicest secret ones among them to fear, to quake, and tremble.*

Trembling of man’s heart must answer the shaking of God’s hand. At the delivery of the law with all its attending threats, so terrible was the sight, that Moses himself (though a mediator then) did “exceedingly fear and quake,” [Heb. xii. 21](#). God will be acknowledged in all his goings. If men will not bow before him, he will break them. They who fear not his threatenings, shall feel his inflictions; if his word be esteemed light, his hand will be found heavy. — For,

1. In point of deserving who can say,<sup>163</sup> I have purged my heart, I am clean from sin? None ought to be fearless, unless they be senseless. God’s people are so far from being always clear of procuring national judgments, that sometimes<sup>164</sup> judgments have come upon nations for the sins of some of God’s people amongst them; — as the plague in the days of David.

2. And in point of<sup>165</sup> suffering, who knows but they may have a deep share? The prophet’s book is written within as well as without, with “lamentation, mourning, and woe,” [Ezek. ii. 10](#). If “the lion roars, who can but fear?” [Amos iii. 8](#), — fear, to the rooting out of security, not the shaking of faith, — fear, to the pulling down of carnal presidence, not Christian confidence, — fear, to draw out our souls in prayer, not to swallow them up in despair, fear, to break the arm of flesh, but not to weaken the staff of the promise, fear, that we may draw nigh to God with reverence, not to run from him with diffidence; in a word, to overthrow faithless presumption, and to increase gracious submission.

2. Here is the prophet’s request. And in this there are these two things:—

(1.) The *thing* he desireth: “The reviving God’s work, the remembering mercy.”

(2.) The season he desireth it in: “In the midst of the years.”

163 [Job xiv. 4, xv. 15, 16](#); [Prov. xvi. 2, xx. 9](#).

164 [2 Sam. xxiv. 15](#); [2 Chron. xxxii. 25](#).

165 “Omnes seculi plagæ, nobis in admonitionem, vobis in castigationem à Deo veniunt.” — *Tertul. Apol., cap. xlii.*

(1.) For the first, — that which in the beginning of the verse he calls God’s work, in the close of it he termeth mercy; and the reviving his work is interpreted to be a remembering mercy. These two expressions, then, are parallel. The reviving of God’s work towards his people is a reacting of mercy, a bringing forth the fruits thereof, and that in the midst of the execution of wrath; as a man in the midst of another, remembering a business of more importance, instantly turneth away, and applieth himself thereunto.

V. Observation. *Acts of mercy are God’s proper work towards his people, which he will certainly awake, and keep alive in the saddest times.*

Mercy, you see, is his work, his proper work, as he calleth “judgment his strange act,” [Isa. xxviii. 21](#). “He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy,” [Mic. vii. 18](#). This is his proper work. Though it seem to sleep, he will awake it; though it seem to die, he will revive it. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me,” [Isa. xlix. 15, 16](#).

(2.) For the season of this work, — he prays that it may be accomplished “in the midst of the years;” upon which you may see what weight he lays, by his repetition of it in the same verse. It is something doubtful what may be the peculiar sense of these words; — whether “the midst of the years”<sup>166</sup> do not denote the whole time of the people’s bondage under the Chaldeans (whence Junius renders the words “interea temporis,” noting this manner of expression, “the midst of the years,” for a Hebraism), during which space he intercedes for mercy for them; or whether “the midst of the years” do not denote some certain point of time, as the season of their return from captivity, about the midst of the years between their first king and the coming of the Messiah, putting a period to their church and state. Whether of these is more probable is not needful to insist upon: this is certain, that a certain time is pointed at; which will yield us, —

VI. Observation. *The church’s mercies and deliverance have their appointed season.*

In the midst of the years it shall be accomplished. As there is a decree bringing forth the wicked’s destruction, [Zeph. ii. 1, 2](#); so there is a decree goes forth in its appointed season for the church’s deliverance, which cannot be gainsaid, [Dan. ix. 23](#). Every “vision is for its appointed” season and time, [Hab. ii. 3](#); then “it will surely come, it will not tarry.” There is a determination upon the weeks and days of the church’s sufferings and expectations, [Dan. ix. 24](#), “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people.” As there are three transgressions, and four, of rebels, for which God “will not turn away their punishment,” [Amos i. 3](#); so three afflictions, and four, of the people of God, after which he will not shut out their supplications. Hence that confidence of the prophet, [Ps. cii. 13, 14](#), “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon



166 בְּקִרְבֵּי שָׁנִים, in the inward of years

Zion: for,” saith he, “the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.” There is a time, yea, a set time, for favour to be showed unto Zion: as a time to break down, so a time to build up, — an acceptable time, a day of salvation. “It came to pass, at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out of Egypt,” [Exod. xii. 41](#). As a woman with child goes not beyond her appointed months, but is pained to be delivered, — no more can the fruitful decree cease from bringing forth the church’s deliverance in the season thereof.

1. Because there is an appointed period of the church’s humiliation and bearing of her iniquities. Israel shall bear their iniquities in the wilderness; but this is exactly limited to the space of forty years. When their iniquity is pardoned, their warfare is accomplished, [Isa. xl. 2](#). They say some men will give poison that shall work insensibly, and kill at seven years’ end. The great Physician of his church knows how to give his sin-sick people potions that shall work by degrees, and at such an appointed season take away all their iniquity: then they can no longer be detained in trouble. God will not continue his course of physic unto them one day beyond health recovered. This is all the fruit of their afflictions, to take away their iniquities, [Isa. xxvii. 9](#); and when that is done, who shall keep bound what God will loose? When sin is taken away from within, trouble must depart from without.

2. Because the church’s sorrows are commensurate unto, and do contemporize with, the joys and prosperity of God’s enemies and hers. Now, wicked men’s prosperity hath assured bounds: “The wickedness of the wicked shall come to an end.” There is a time when the “iniquity of the Amorites comes to the full,” [Gen. xv. 16](#). It comes up to the brim in the appointed day of slaughter. When their wickedness hath filled the ephah, a talent of lead is laid upon the mouth thereof, and it is carried away on wings, [Zech. v. 6–8](#), swiftly, certainly, irrecoverably. If, then, the church’s troubles contemporize, rise and fall with their prosperity, and her deliverance with their destruction, — if the fall of Babylon be the rise of Zion, — if they be the buckets which must go down when the church comes up, — if they be the rod of the church’s chastisement, — their ruin being set and appointed, so also must be the church’s mercies.

*Use.* In every distress learn to wait with patience for this appointed time. “He that believeth will not make haste.” “Though it tarry, wait for it, it will surely come.” He that is infinitely good hath appointed the time; and therefore it is best. He that is infinitely wise hath determined the season; and therefore it is most suitable. He who is infinitely powerful hath set it down; and therefore it shall be accomplished. Wait for it believing, wait for it praying, — wait for it contending. Waiting is not a lazy hope, a sluggish expectation. When Daniel knew the time was come, he prayed the more earnestly, [Dan. ix. 2, 3](#). You will say, perhaps, What need he pray for it, when he knew the time was accomplished? I answer, The more need. Prayer helps the promise to bring forth. Because a woman’s time is come, therefore shall she have no midwife? nay, therefore give her one. He that appointed their return, ap-



pointed that it should be a fruit of prayer. Wait,<sup>167</sup> contending also in all ways wherein you shall be called out; and be not discouraged that you know not the direct season of deliverance. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good,” [Eccles. xi. 6.](#)

But proceed we with the prophet’s prayer.

From [verse 3 to 17](#), he layeth down several arguments, taken from the majesty, power, providence, and former works of God, for the supporting of his faith to the obtaining of those good things and works of mercy which he was now praying for. We shall look on them, as they lie in our way.

[Verse 3.](#) “God came from Teman, the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, the earth was full of his praise.”

Teman<sup>168</sup> was a city of the Edomites, whose land the people of Israel compassed in the wilderness, when they were stung with fiery serpents, and healed with looking on a brazen serpent, set up to be a type of Christ. Teman is put up for the whole land of Edom; and the prophet makes mention of it for the great deliverance and mercy granted there to the people when they were almost consumed; — that’s God’s coming from Teman. See [Num. xxi. 5–9.](#) When they were destroyed by fiery serpents, he heals them by a type of Christ, — giving them corporeal, and raising them to a faith of spiritual, salvation.

Paran,<sup>169</sup> the next place mentioned, was a mountain in the land of Ishmael, near which Noses repeated the law; and from thence God carried the people immediately to Canaan; — another eminent act of mercy.

Unto these he addeth the word Selah; as it is a song, a note of elevation in singing; as it respects the matter, not the form, a note of admiration and special observation. Selah, — consider them well, for they were great works indeed. Special mercies must have special observation.

Now, by reason of these actions the prophet affirms that the glory of God covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise; — lofty expressions of the advancement of God’s glory, and the fulness of his praise amongst his people of the earth, which attended that merciful deliverance and gracious assistance. Nothing is higher or greater than that which covers heaven, and fills earth. God’s<sup>170</sup> glory is exceedingly exalted, and his praise increased everywhere, by acts of favour and kindness to his people.

167 “Bonum agonem subituri estis, in quo agonothetes Deus vivus est: Christarchos Spiritus Sanctus, corona æternitatis brabium, epithetes Jesus Christus.” — *Tertul. ad Mar.*

168 [Gen. xxxvi. 15](#); [Jer. xlix. 7](#); [Obad. 9.](#)

169 [Deut. i. 1.](#)

170 “Gloria est frequens de aliquo fama cum laude.” — *Cic. lib. ii., De Inv.* “Consentiens laus bonorum, incorrupta vox bene judicantium de eccellente virtute.” — *Idem. Tusc., lib. iii.*

That which I shall choose, from amongst many others that present themselves, a little to insist upon, is, that —

VII. Observation — *Former mercies, with their times and places, are to be had in thankful remembrance unto them who wait for future blessings.*

Faith is to this end separated by them. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” [Isa. li. 9, 10](#). The breaking of Rahab, — that is, Egypt, so called here, and [Ps. lxxxvii. 4, lxxxix. 10](#), for her great strength, which the word signifies, — and the wounding of the dragon, that great and crooked afflicter, Pharaoh, is remembered, and urged for a motive to a new needed deliverance. So [Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14](#), “Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.” Leviathan, — the same dragon, oppressing, persecuting Pharaoh, — thou brakest his heads, his counsels, armies, power; and gavest him for meat, that the people for forty years together might be fed, sustained, and nourished with that wonderful mercy. “Out of the eater came forth meat; out of the strong came forth sweetness.”

In this reciprocation God walketh with his people. Of free grace he bestoweth mercies and blessings on them; by grace works the returns of remembrance and thankfulness *unto* himself for them; then showers that down again in new mercies. The countries which send up no vapours, receive down no showers. Remembrance with thankfulness of former mercies is the matter, as it were, which by God’s goodness is condensed into following blessings. For, —

1. Mercies have their proper end, when thankfully remembered. What more powerful motive to the obtaining of new, than to hold out that the old were not abused? We are encouraged to cast seed again into that ground whose last crop witnesseth that it was not altogether barren. That sad spot of good Hezekiah, that he rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, is set down as the opening a door of wrath against himself, Judah, and Jerusalem, [2 Chron. xxxii. 25](#). On the other side, suitable returns are a door of hope for farther mercies.

2. The remembrance of them strengthens faith, and keeps our hands from hanging down in the time of waiting for blessings. When faith is supported, the promise is engaged, and a mercy at any time more than half obtained. “*Faith* is the substance of things hoped for,” [Heb. xi. 1](#). “God,” saith the apostle, “hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver.” Now, what conclusion makes he of this experience? — “In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us,” [2 Cor. i. 10](#). It was a particular mercy with its circumstances, as you may see [verse 9](#), which he made the bottom of his dependence. In the favours of men we cannot do so; they may be weary of helping, or be drawn dry, and grow helpless. Ponds may be ex-

hausted, but the ocean never. The infinite fountains of the Deity cannot be sunk one hair's breadth by everlasting flowing blessings. Now, circumstances of actions, time, place, and the like, oftentimes make deep impressions; mercies should be remembered with them. So doth the apostle again, [2 Tim. iv. 17, 18](#), "He did deliver me from the mouth of the lion," — Nero, that lion-like tyrant. And what then? "He shall deliver me from every evil work." David esteemed it very good logic, to argue from the victory God gave him over the lion and the bear, to a confidence of victory over Goliath, [1 Sam. xvii. 37](#).

*Use.* The use of this we are led unto, [Isa. xliii. 16–18](#), "Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army, and the power; They shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow. Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old." Let former mercies be an anchor of hope in time of present distresses. Where is the God of Marston Moor, and the God of Naseby? is an acceptable expostulation in a gloomy day. O what a catalogue of mercies hath this nation to plead by in a time of trouble! God came from Naseby, and the Holy One from the west. Selah. "His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise." He went forth in the north, and in the east he did not withhold his hand. I hope the poor town wherein<sup>171</sup> I live is more enriched with a store-mercy of a few months, than with a full trade of many years. "The snares of death compassed us, and the floods of ungodly men made us afraid," [Ps. xviii. 4](#); but "the Lord thundered in the heavens, the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. He sent from above, he took us, he drew us out of many waters. He delivered us from our strong enemy, and from them which hated us: for they were too strong for us," [verses 13, 14, 16, 17](#). How may we say with the same Psalmist, in any other distress, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar!" [Ps. xlii. 6](#). "Where is the Lord God of Elijah," — who divides anew the waters of Jordan? [2 Kings ii. 14](#).

The following verses set forth the glory and power of God, in the accomplishment of that great work of bringing his people into the promised land, with those mighty things he performed in the wilderness.

[Verse 4](#), if I mistake not, sets out his glorious appearance on Mount Sinai; of which the prophet affirms two things:—

1. That "his brightness was as the light."
2. That "he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power."

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171 No place in the county so threatened; no place in the county so preserved: small undertakings there blessed; great opposition blasted. Non nobis, Domine, non nobis.

1. For the first. Is it not that brightness which appeared when the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, [Deut. iv. 11](#), — a glorious fire in the midst of clouds and thick darkness? The like description you have of God’s presence, [Ps. xviii. 11, 12](#), “He made darkness his secret place,” and brightness was before him: as the light, the sun, the fountain and cause of it, called “light,” [Job xxxi. 26](#). Now, this glorious appearance holds out the kingly power and majesty of God in governing the world, which appeareth but unto few. “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice. Clouds and darkness are round about him. A fire goeth before him; his lightnings enlightened the world,” [Ps. xcvii. 1–4](#).

2. “He had horns coming out of his hand.” So the words most properly, though by some otherwise rendered. That horns in Scripture are taken for strength and power,<sup>172</sup> needs no proving. The mighty power of God, which he made appear to his people, in that glorious representation of his majesty on Mount Sinai, is by this phrase expressed. There his chariots were seen to be twenty thousand, even many thousands of angels; and the Lord among them in that holy place, [Ps. lxxviii. 17](#). There they perceived that “he had horns in his hand;” — an almighty power to do what he pleased. Whence it is added, “And there was the hiding of his power.” Though the appearance of it was very great and glorious, yet it was but small to the everlasting hidden depths of his omnipotency. The most glorious appearance of God comes infinitely short of his own eternal majesty as he is in himself; — it is but a discovery that there is the hiding of infinite perfection; or, there his power appeared to us, which was hidden from the rest of the world.

VIII. Observation. *When God is doing great things, he gives glorious manifestations of his excellencies to his secret ones.*

The appearance on Sinai goes before his passage into Canaan: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets,” [Amos iii. 7](#). When he is to send Moses for the deliverance of his people, he appears to him in a burning, unconsumed bush, [Exod. iii. 2](#), — a sign manifesting the presence of his power to preserve his church unconsumed in the midst of burning, fiery afflictions. Unto this very end were all the visions tint are recorded in the Scripture, all of them accommodated to the things which God was presently doing. And this he doth, —

1. That they may thereby be prepared to follow him, and serve him in the great works he hath for them to do. Great works are not to be done without great encouragements. If God appears not in light, who can expect he should appear in operation? He that is called to serve Providence in high things, without some especial discovery of God, works in the dark,<sup>173</sup> and knows not whither he goes, nor what he doth. Such a one travels in the wilderness without a directing cloud. Clear shining from God must be at the bottom of deep la-

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172 [Deut. xxxiii. 17](#); [Ps. lxxv. 10](#); [Zech. i. 18](#).

173 [John xii. 35](#); [Rev. xvi. 10](#).

bouring with God. What is the reason that so many in our days set their hands to the plough, and look back again? — begin to serve Providence in great things, but cannot finish? — give over in the heat of the day? They never had any such revelation of the mind of God upon their spirits, such a discovery of his excellencies, as might serve for a bottom of such undertakings. Men must know that if God hath not appeared to them in brightness, and showed them “the horns in his hand,” hid from others, though they think highly of themselves, they’ll deny God twice and thrice before the close of the work of this age. If you have no great discoveries, you will wax vain in great undertakings. New workings on old bottoms, are like new wine in old bottles, — both are spoiled and lost. The day is the time of work, and that because of the light thereof; — those who have not light may be spared to go to bed.

2. That they may be the better enabled to give him glory, when they shall see the sweet harmony that is between his manifestations and his operations, — when they can say with the Psalmist, “As we have heard, so have we seen,” [Ps. xlviii. 8](#). As he revealeth himself, so he worketh. When his power and mercy answer his appearance in the bush, it is a foundation to a prayer: “The good-will of him that dwelt in the bush bless thee.” When a soul shall find God calling him forth to employments, perhaps great and high, yet every way suiting that light and gracious discovery which he hath given of himself, one thing answering another, it sets him in a frame of honouring God aright.

This might be of rich consideration could we attend it. For, —

*Use 1.* Hence, as I said before, is apostasy from God’s work. He appears not unto men; — how can they go upon his employment. Men that have no vision of God, are in the dark, and know not what to do. I speak not of visions beyond the Word; but answers of prayers, gracious applications of providences, with wise consideration of times and seasons. Some drop off every day, some hang by the eyelids, and know not what to do: the light of God is not sent forth to lead and guide them, [Ps. xliii. 3](#). Wonder not at the strange backslidings of our days: many acted upon by engagements, and for want of light, know not to the last what they were a-doing.

*Use 2.* Hence also is the suiting of great light and great work in our days. Let new light be derided whilst men please, he will never serve the will of God in this generation, who sees not beyond the line of foregoing ages.

*Use 3.* And this, thirdly, may put all those whom God is pleased to employ in his *service* upon a diligent inquiry into his mind. Can a servant do his master’s work without knowing his pleasure? We live for the most part from hand to mouth, and do what comes next; few are acquainted with the designs of God.

The going forth of the Lord with his people towards their rest, with reference to his harbingers, is described, [verse 5](#).

[Verse 5](#). “Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.”

“Before him,” — at his face. “The pestilence:” This is often reckoned amongst the weapons wherewith God fighteth with any people to consume them;<sup>174</sup> and as speeding an instrument of destruction it is as any the Lord ever used towards the children of men. “At his feet went forth burning coals;” — a redoubling, say some, of the same stroke, — burning coals for burning diseases. *When one blow will not do the work appointed, God redoubles the stroke of his hand, Lev. xxvi. 22–25.* Or, burning, coals, dreadful judgments, mortal weapons, as fire and flames, are often taken in other descriptions of God’s dealing with his enemies, *Ps. xi. 6, xviii. 8.* Prevailing fire is the most dreadful means of destruction, *Heb. xii. 29; Isa. xxxiii. 14.* In *Exod. xxiii. 28,* God threateneth to send the hornet upon the Canaanites, before the children of Israel; some stinging judgments, either on their consciences or bodies, or both: — something of the same kind is doubtless here held out. He sent plagues and diseases among them, to weaken and consume them, before his people’s entrance. His presence was with Israel; and the pestilence consuming the Canaanites before their entrance is said to be לַפְּנֵי, — “at his faces,” or appearances, before him, before the entrance of the presence of his holiness. And the following judgments, that quite devoured them, were “the coals going out at his feet,” which he sent abroad when he entered their land with his own inheritance, to cast out those “malæ fidei possessores.” Sickesses, diseases, and all sorts of judgments, are wholly at God’s disposal. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born to trouble, as the sons of the burning coal lift up in flying,” *Job v. 6, 7.* When God intends the total destruction of a people, he commonly weakens them by some previous judgments. Let the truth of this be found upon them that hate us, and the interpretation thereof be to the enemies of this nation; but the Lord knows all our hearts may well tremble at what will be the issue of the visitations of the last year.

IX. Observation. *God never wants instruments to execute his anger, and ruin his enemies.*

His treasury of judgments can never be exhausted. If Israel be too weak for the Amorites, he will call in the pestilence and burning diseases to their assistance. What creature hath not this mighty God used against his enemies? An angel destroys Sennacherib’s host, *Isa. xxxvii. 36,* and smites Herod with worms, *Acts xii. 23.* Heaven above sends down a hell of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah; *Gen. xix. 24.* The stars in their courses fought against Sisera, *Judges v. 20.* Devils do his will herein; he sent evil angels among the Egyptians, *Ps. lxxviii. 49.* Fire consumes persecuting Ahaziah’s companies, *2 Kings i. 10, 11.* The water drowns Pharaoh and his chariots, *Exod. xiv. 28.* Earth swallows up Korah, with his fellow-rebels, *Num. xvi. 32.* Bears rend the children that mocked Elisha, *2 Kings ii. 24.* Lions destroy the strange nations in Samaria, *2 Kings xvii. 25.* Frogs, lice, boils, hail, rain, thunder, lightning, destroy the land of Egypt, *Exod. viii. 9, 10.* Locusts are his mighty army to punish Israel,

174 *Exod. ix. 15; Lev. xxvi. 25; 2 Sam. xxiv. 13; Ezek. xiv. 19; Matt. xxiv. 7.*

Joel ii. 25. Hailstones destroy the Canaanites, Josh. x. 11. Stones of the wall slay the Syrians, 1 Kings xx. 30. Pestilence and burning diseases are his ordinary messengers. In a word, all creatures serve his providence, and wait his commands for the execution of his righteous judgments. Neither the beasts of the field nor the stones of the earth will be any longer quiet than he causeth them to hold a league with the sons of men.

Use 1. To teach us all to tremble before this mighty God. Who can stand before him, — “qui tot imperat legionibus?” If he will strike, he wants no weapons; if he will fight, he wants no armies. All things serve his will. He saith to one, Come, and it cometh; to another, Go, and it goeth; to a third, Do this, and it doth it. He can make use of ourselves, our friends, our enemies, heaven, earth, fire, water, any thing, for what end he pleaseth. There is no standing before his armies, for they are all things, and himself to make them effectual. There is no flying from his armies, for they are every where, and himself with them. Who would not fear this King of nations? He that contends with him shall find “as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him,” Amos v. 19. No flying, no hiding, no contending. Worms kill Herod; a fly choked Adrian, etc.

Use 2. To be a bottom of confidence and dependence in an evil day. He that hath God on his side, hath also all things that are seen, and that are not seen. The mountain is full of fiery chariots for Elisha’s defence, when outwardly there was no appearance, 2 Kings vi. 17. All things wait their Master’s beck, to do him service, — as for the destruction of enemies, so for the deliverance of his. What though we had no army in the time of war? God hath millions, many thousands of angels, Ps. lxxviii. 17, — one whereof can destroy so many thousands of men in a night, Isa. xxxvii. 36. He can choose (when few others will appear, with him against the mighty, as in our late troubles) “foolish things to confound the wise, and weak things to confound the strong.” Sennacherib’s angel is yet alive, and the destroyer of Sodom is not dead: and all those things are at our command, if their help may be for our good. “Judah ruleth with God,” Hos. xi. 12, — hath a rule by faithful supplications over all those mighty hosts. Make God our friend, and we are not only of the best, but also the strongest side. You that would be on the safest side, be sure to choose that which God is on. Had not this mighty, all-commanding God, been with us, where had we been in the late tumults? So many thousands in Kent, so many in Wales, so many in the north, so many in Essex, — shall they not speed? shall they not divide the prey? is not the day of those factious Independents come? was the language of our very neighbours. The snare is broken, and we are delivered.

The Lord having sent messengers before him into Canaan, stands himself as it were upon the borders, and takes a view of the land.



**Verse 6.** “He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.”

Two things are here considerable:—

1. The Lord’s exact foreview of the promised land: “He stood, and measured the earth, and beheld the nations.”

2. His operation at that time: “He drove asunder the nations,” etc.

1. “He stood and measured:” The prophet here representeth the Lord on the frontier of Canaan, as one taking view of a piece of land, and exactly measuring it out, as intending it for his own; weighing and considering the bounds and limits of it, to see if it will answer the end for which he purposeth it. God’s exact notice and knowledge of his people’s possession is in those words held out. He views where the lines of every tribe shall run. Nothing happens or is made out to any of God’s people, without his own careful providential predisposition. He views the circuit of the whole, where and how divided, and separated from the dwellings of the unclean, and habitations of the uncircumcised. Fixed bounds, measured limits of habitation is a necessary ingredient to the making up of a national church.

2. What he did, which is two ways expressed: (1.) In reference to the inhabitants; (2.) To the land itself.

(1.) For the inhabitants: He drove them asunder, **וַיִּרְדֵּם** “and he made to leap” out of their old channels. Those nations knit and linked together amongst themselves, by leagues and civil society, he separated, disturbed, divided in counsels and arms (as in the case of the Gibeonites<sup>175</sup>), persecuted by the sword, that they suddenly leaped out of their habitations, the residue wandering as no people. God’s justly nation-disturbing purposes are the bottom of their deserved ruin.

(2.) For the land: “The everlasting mountains,” etc., those strong, firm, lasting mountains of Canaan, not like the mountains of sand in the desert where the people were, but to continue firm to the world’s end, as both the words here used, **וְעַד** and **וְעוֹלָם**, “perpetuity” and “everlasting,” do in the Scripture frequently signify. Now, these are said to be scattered, and to bow, because of the destruction of the inhabitants of those lasting hills, being many of them high and mighty ones,<sup>176</sup> like perpetual mountains; they being given in possession to the sons of Israel, even “the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills,” [Deut. xxxiii. 15](#).

X. Observation. *God takes an exact foreview of his people’s portion and inheritance.*

175 [Josh. ix. 3](#).

176 [Numb. xiii. 33](#).



Like a careful father, he knows beforehand what he intends to bestow upon them. He views it, measures it, prepares it to the utmost bounds. They shall not have a hair's breadth which he hath not allotted them, nor want the least jot of their designed portion.

*Use.* Learn to be contented with your lot. He is wise also who took a view of it, and measured it, and found it just commensurate to your good:— had he known that a foot's breadth more had been needful, you would have had it. Had he seen it good, you had had no thorns in your lands, no afflictions in your lives. O how careful, how solicitous are many of God's people! how full of desires! — Oh, that it were with me thus or thus! Possess your souls in patience; as you cannot add to, no more shall any take from your proportion. He took the measure of your wants and his own supplies long since. That which he hath measured out he will cut off for you. He knows how to suit all his children.

XI. Observation. *It is dangerous encroaching, for any of the sons of men, upon God's people's portion, lot, privileges, or inheritance.*

God hath measured it out for them, and he will look that they enjoy it. Shall men remove his bounds and land-marks,<sup>177</sup> and be free? will it be safe trespassing upon the lands of the Almighty? will it be easy and cheap? will he not plead his action with power, — especially seeing he hath given them their portion? If he hath given Seir to Edom, what doth he vexing and wasting Jacob? Shall they not possess what the Lord their God gives them to possess? [Judges xi. 24](#). He hath cautioned all the world, kings and others, in this kind, “Touch not mine anointed, do my prophets no harm,” [Ps. cv. 14, 15](#). Touch them not, nor any thing that is theirs: harm them not in any thing I bestow on them. They have nothing but what their Father gives them, and Christ hath bought for them. Will a tender father, think you, contentedly look on, and see a slave snatch away his children's bread? If a man hath engaged himself to give a jewel to a dear friend, will he take it patiently to have an enemy come and snatch it away before his face? God is engaged to his people for all their enjoyments, and will he quietly suffer himself to be robbed, and his people spoiled? Shall others dwell quietly in the land which he hath measured for his own?

*Use 1.* See whence the great destructions of people and nations in these latter ages have come. Is it not for touching these forbidden things? The holy vessels of the temple at Jerusalem ruined Babylon. Is not the wasting of the western nations at this day from hence, that they have served the whore to deck herself with the spoils of the spouse? helped to trim her with the portion of God's people, taking away their liberties, ordinances, privileges, lives, to lay at her feet? Doubtless God is pleading with all these kingdoms for their encroaching. They who will not let him be at peace with his, shall have little quiet of their own. The eagle that stole a coal from the altar fired her nest I know how this hath been abused to countenance the holding of Babylonish wedges. God will preserve to his people his own allowance, not

177 Vid. *Tertul. ad Scapulam, de persecutione.*

Rome's supplement. This nation hath yet itching fingers, and a hankering mind after the inheritance of God's people. Let them take heed; he hath knocked off their hands a hundred times, and sent them away with bloody fingers. O that we were wise, that we be not quite consumed! Of you I hope better things, and such as accompany salvation; yet give me leave to cautionate you a little.

(1.) As to privileges and liberties of this life. Their liberties and estates are not as other men's, but more exactly measured for their good, and sanctified to them in the blood of Christ. If in these things God hath called you to the defence and protection of his, he will expect a real account, You had better give away a kingdom that belongs to others, than the least of that which God hath made for his saints. Think not any thing small which God accounts worthy to bestow on his. If he hath meted out liberty for them, and you give them slavery, you will have a sad reckoning.

(2.) In point of ordinances, and Christ-purchased privileges. Here it is dangerous encroaching indeed.<sup>178</sup> God exactly measured Canaan, because it was to be the seat of a national church, If you love your lives, if you love your souls, be tender on this point. Here if you meddle with that which belongs not unto you, were you kings, all your glory would be laid in the dust, [2 Chron. xxvi. 18](#). Woe to them who cut short the saints of God in the least jot of what he hath allotted to them in spirituals! Is it for any of you, O ye sons of men! to measure out God's children's portion, long since bequeathed them by Christ? Let them alone with what is given them. If God call Israel out of Egypt to serve him, shall Pharaoh assign who, and how they shall go, — first men only, then all, without their cattle? “Nay,” says Moses, “we will go as God calls,” [Exod. x. 26](#).

Was not one main end of the late tumults to rob God's people of their privileges, — to bring them again under the yoke of superstition What God brake in war, do not think he will prosper in peace. If you desire to thrive, do not the same, nor any thing like it. Take they any thing of yours that belongs to Cæsar, the civil magistrate, restrain them, keep them within bounds; but if they take only what Christ hath given them, — O touch them not, harm them not! The heap is provided for them, let them take for themselves. Think it not strange that every one should gather his own manna. The Lord forbid that I should ever see the magistrates of England taking away liberties, privileges, ordinances, or ways of worship, from them to whom the Almighty hath made a free grant of them!

(3.) If in taking what God hath measured out for them, they should not all comply with you in the manner and measure of what they take, do them no harm, impoverish not their families, banish them not, slay them not. Alas!<sup>179</sup> your judgments, were you kings and em-

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178 “Nero primus in Christianos ferociit, tali dedicatore damnationis nostræ etiam gloriamur, qui enim scit ilium, intelligere potest, non nisi aliquod bonum grande à Nerone damnatum.” — *Tertul. Apol.*

179 “Nova et inaudita est ista prædicatio, quæ verberibus exigit fidem.” — *Greg., Epist. lii.*

perors, is not a rule to them. They must be tried by their own faith. Are their souls, think you, more precious to you than themselves? You say they take amiss; — they say, No, and appeal to the Word.<sup>180</sup> Should you now smite them? Speak, blood; is that the way of Jesus Christ? Should it be as you affirm, you would be puzzled for your warrant. To run when you are not sent, surely in this case is not safe. But what if it should prove, in the close, that they have followed divine directions? Do you not then fight against God, wound Jesus Christ, and prosecute him as an evil-doer? I know the usual colours, the common pleas, that are used for the instigation of authority to the contrary. They are the very same, and no other, that have slain the saints of God this twelve hundred years. Arguments for persecution are dyed in the blood of Christians for a long season; — ever since the dragon gave his power to the false prophet, they have all died as heretics and schismatics. Suppose you saw in one view all the blood of the witnesses of Christ, which had been let out of their veins by vain pretences, — that you heard in one noise the doleful cry of all pastorless churches, dying martyrs, harbourless children of parents inheriting the promise, wilderness-wandering saints, dungeoned believers, wrested out by pretended zeal to peace and truth; — and perhaps it may make your spirits tender as to this point.

*Use 2.* See the warrantableness of our contests for God's people's rights. It was Jephthah's only argument against the encroaching Ammonites, [Judges xi. 1](#). By God's assistance they would possess what the Lord their God should give them. If a grant from heaven will not make a firm title, I know not what will. Being called by lawful authority, certainly there is not a more glorious employment than to serve the Lord in helping to uphold the portion he hath given his people. If your hearts be upright, and it is the liberties, the privileges of God's saints, conveyed from the Father, purchased by Christ, you contend for, — go on and prosper, the Lord is with you.

XII. Observation. *The works and labours of God's people are transacted for them in heaven, before they once undertake them.*

The Israelites were now going to Canaan: God doth their work for them beforehand; they did but go up and take possession. Joshua and Caleb tell the people, not only that their enemies' defence was departed from them, but that they were but bread for them, [Num. xiv. 9](#), — not corn that might be prepared, but bread, ground, made up, baked, ready to eat. Their work was done in heaven. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," [Acts xv. 18](#). All that is done here below, is but the writing of a visible copy, for the sons of men to read, out of the eternal lines of his own purpose.

*Use.* Up and be doing, you that are about the work of the Lord. Your enemies are bread ready to be eaten and yield you refreshment. Do you think if our armies had not walked in

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180 Magistrum neminem habemus nisi solum Deum; hic ante te est, nec abscondi potest, sed cui nihil facere possis.

a trodden path, they could have made such journeys as they have done of late? Had not God marched before them, and traced out their way from Kent to Essex, from Wales to the north, their carcasses had long ere this been cast into the field. Their work was done in heaven before they began it. God was gone over the mulberry-trees, [2 Sam. v. 24](#). The work might have been done by children, though he was pleased to employ such worthy instruments. They see, I doubt not, their own nothingness in his all-sufficiency. Go on, then; but with this caution, search by all ways and means to find the footsteps of the mighty God going before you.

The trembling condition of the oppressing nations round about, when God appeared so gloriously for his people, is held out, [verse 7](#).

[Verse 7](#). “I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.”

You have here three things considerable.

1. The mention of two nations, enemies of the church: Cushan and Midian.
2. The state and condition of those nations: the tents of the one in affliction, and the curtains of the other in trembling.
3. The view the prophet had of this, — I saw it, saith he: “I saw,” etc.

1. For the first; — these two nations, Cushan and Midian, were the neighbouring people to the Israelites, being in the wilderness when God did such great things for them.

(1.) Cushan; that is, the tent-dwelling Arabians on the south side, towards Ethiopia, — being, as the Ethiopians, of the posterity of Cush (thence called Cushan), the eldest son of scoffing Ham, [Gen. x. 6](#); enemies and opposers of the church (doubtless) all the way down from their profane ancestors.<sup>181</sup> These now beheld the Israelites going to root out their allies and kindred, the Amorites of Canaan, the posterity of Canaan, the younger brother of their progenitor Cush, [Gen. x. 6](#).

(2.) Midian was a people inhabiting the east side of Jordan, on the borders of Moab; so called from their forefather, Midian, the son of Abraham by Keturah, [Gen. xxv. 2](#). These obtained a temporal blessing for a season, from the love borne to their faithful progenitor. In the days of Jacob they were great merchants, [Gen. xxxvii. 28](#). At this time, in less than four hundred years, they were so multiplied, that they had five kings of their nation, [Num. xxxi. 8](#). Some knowledge of the true God was retained, as it should seem, until now, amongst some of them, being received by tradition from their fathers. Moses’ father-in-law was a priest of this country, [Exod. ii. 15, 16](#), — not altogether unacquainted with Jehovah, [Exod. xviii. 1](#), — and was himself, or his son, persuaded to take up his portion in Canaan, [Num. x. 29, 30](#). But for the generality of the nation, being not heirs of the promise, they were fallen off to superstition and idolatry. Exceeding enemies they were to the people in the wilderness,

181 [2 Kings xix. 9](#); [Jer. xiii. 23](#); *Joseph. Antiq.*; [Isa. xxxvii. 9](#).

vexing them with their wiles, and provoking them to abominations, that the Lord might consume them, [Num. xxv. 18](#). None so vile enemies to the church as superstitious apostates. These two nations then set out all manner of opposers; — gross idolaters, as Cushan; and superstitious, envious apostates, as Midian.

2. Their state and condition severally.

(1.) “The tents of Cushan” were in affliction; the tents, the Arabian Ethiopians of Cush, dwelling in tents, the habitation for the inhabitant, by a hypallage. They were “in affliction, under vanity, under iniquity, the place of vanity,” so variously are the words rendered, **תַּחַת** **וְתַחַת**, “under affliction, vanity, or iniquity.” Sin and the punishment of it are frequently in the Scripture of the same name, so near is the relation. **וְתַחַת** is properly and most usually iniquity; but that it is here taken for the consequent of it, — a consuming, perplexed, vexed condition, — can be no doubt. The Cushanites, then, were in affliction, full of anguish, fear, dread, vexation, to see what would be the issue of those great and mighty things which God was doing in their borders for his people:<sup>182</sup> — afflicted with Israel’s happiness and their own fears; as is the condition of all wicked oppressors.

(2.) “The curtains of the land of Midian,” for the Midianites dwelling in curtained tabernacles, by the same figure as before. They trembled, — **וַיִּזְדָּעוּ**, “moved themselves, were moved;” that is, shaken with fear and trembling, as though they were ready to run from the appearance of the mighty God with his people. The story of it you have in the Book of Numbers,<sup>183</sup> as it was prophetically foretold by Moses concerning other nations, [Exod. xv. 14–16](#), “The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab,” etc. God filled those nations with anguish, sorrow, and amazement, at the protection he granted his people.

3. The prophet’s view of all this: “I saw” it, or “I see” it. Though it were eight hundred and seventy years before, supposing him to prophesy about the end of Josiah or beginning of Jehoiakim, yet, taking it under the consideration of faith, he makes it present to his view.

Faith looketh backwards and forwards, — to what God hath done, and to what he hath promised to do. Abraham saw the day of Christ, so many ages after, because he found it by faith in the promise. Habakkuk saw the terrors of Cushan and Midian so many days before, because faith found it recorded among the works of God, to support itself in seeking the

182 “Tantos invidus habet poenà justà tortores, quantos invidiosus habuerit laudatores.” — *Prosp. de Vita Contemplativa*.

183 [Numb. xxv., xxxi.](#)

like mercies to be renewed. So that this is the sum of this verse: “O Lord, faith makes it evident, and presents it before my view, how in former days, when thou wast doing great things for thy people, thou filledst all thine and their enemies with fear, vexation, trembling, and astonishment.”

XIII. Observation. *Faith gives a present subsistence to forepast works as recorded, and future mercies as promised, to support the soul in an evil day.*

I have made the doctrine, by analogy, look both ways, though the words of the text look but one.

The apostle tells us, that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” [Heb. xi. 1.](#)

1. “Of things hoped for.” It looks forward to the promises, and so gives the substance of them in present possession, confirming our minds and hearts, that they may have a subsistence, as it were, within us, though not actually made out unto us.

2. It is “the evidence of things not seen.” It extends itself not only to things promised, but, taking for its object the whole word of God, it makes evident and present things that are past also. The faith commended, [verse 3](#), is of things long since done, — even the “making of the things that are seen of the things that do not appear.” “Abraham saw my day,” saith our Saviour, [John viii. 56](#). He saw it as Habakkuk saw the tents of Cushan in affection; — faith made it present to him; all the ages between him and his promised seed were as nothing to his keen-sighted faith. Hence the apostle puts the mercies of the promise all in one form and rank, as already wrought, though some of them were enjoyed, and some of them in this life cannot be, [Rom. viii. 30](#), “Whom he hath justified, them he hath glorified:” he hath done it for them already, because he hath made them believe it, and that gives it a present subsistence in their spirit. And for forepast works, they are still mentioned by the saints as if they had been done in their days, before their eyes. Elisha calls up to remembrance a former miracle, to the effecting the like, [2 Kings ii. 14](#).

There be three things in the past or future mercies which faith makes present to the soul, giving, in the substance of them, — (1.) Their love; (2.) Their consolation; (3.) Their use and benefit.

(1.) The *love* of them. The love that was in former works, and the love that is in promised mercies, *that* faith draws out, and really makes ours. The love of every recorded deliverance is given to us by faith. It looks into the good-will, the free grace, the loving-kindness of God, in every work that ever he did for his, and cries, *Yet this is mine*:— this is the kernel of that blessing, and this is mine; for the same good-will, the same kindness he hath towards me also. Were the same outward actings needful, I should have them also. The free love of every mercy is faith’s proper object. It makes all Joshua’s great victories present to every one of us. The promise that had the love and grace in it, which ran through them all, is given him, [Josh. i. 5](#), “I will be with thee, I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” Now the apostle tells us



that the truth and love of this promise is ours, [Heb. iv. 8](#). Faith may, doth assure itself, that what good-will soever was in all the great mercies which Joshua received upon that promise, is all ours. All the good-will and choice love of, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” is mine and thine, if we are believers. He that hath this present, hath all Joshua’s victories present. The very glory of the saints in heaven is ours in the love of it. We enjoy that love which gave them glory, and will crown us also in due time.

(2.) In their *comforts* and *refreshments*: “Thou gavest leviathan to be meat to the people in the wilderness,” [Ps. lxxiv. 14](#). They fed their souls full of the sweetness of that mercy, the destruction of their oppressing tyrant; we chew the cud upon the blessings of former ages. Who hath not, with joy, delight, and raised affections, gone over the old preservations of the church in former years? How does David run them over with admiration, closing every stop with, “His mercy endureth for ever!” [Ps. cxxxvi](#). And for things, to come, as yet in the promise only, — whether general to the whole church, as the calling of the Jews, the coming in of the fulness of the Gentiles, the breaking out of light, beauty, and glory upon the churches and saints, the confusion of nations not subjecting themselves to the standard of the gospel, etc., — or in particular, farther assurance of love than at present enjoyed, nearer communion with Father and Son, being with Christ, freed from misery and corruption, dwelling with God for ever; — how does faith act over these and the like things in the heart, leaving a savour and relish of their sweetness continually upon the soul? O how sweet are the things of the world to come unto poor believers! Christ leads the soul by faith, not only into the chambers of present enjoyed loves, but also into the fore-prepared everlasting mansions in his Father’s house. Thus it gives poor mortal creatures a sweet relish of eternal joys; — brings heaven into a dungeon, glory into a prison, a crown into a cottage, Christ into a slaughter-house. And this arises, —

[1.] From the nature of faith. Though it do not make the thing believed to be (the act cannot create its own object), yet applying it, it makes it the believer’s. It is the bond of union between the soul and the thing promised. He that believes in Christ, by that believing receives Christ, [John i. 12](#); — he becomes his. It is a grace uniting its subject and object, — the person believing and the thing believed. There needs no ascending into heaven, or descending; the word of faith makes all things nigh, even within us, [Rom. x. 6–8](#). Some glasses will present things at a great distance very near; faith looking through the glass of the gospel, makes the most remote mercies to be not only in a close distance, but in union. It “is the subsistence of things hoped for;” — that which they have not in themselves, it gives them, — in the full-assured minds of believers.

[2.] From the intendment of all mercies. They are for every believer. All things are theirs, — “world, life, death, things present, things to come,” [1 Cor. iii. 22](#). All promises being made to every believer, and all mercies being the fruit of these promises, they must all belong to every believer. Now, if all these should be kept from us, at that distance wherein they fail in

their accomplishment in respect of time, what would they avail us? God, therefore, hath appointed that they shall have a real, though not a natural presence and subsistence at all times, to all believers.

*Use 1.* See hence what use you make of past mercies, deliverances, blessings, with promised incomings; — carry them about you by faith, that you may use them at need. “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” “Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord!” etc. “I saw the tents of Cushan.” Take store mercies along with you in every trial. Use them, or they will grow rusty, and not pass in heaven. Learn to eat leviathan many years after his death. Forget not your perils; — scatter not away your treasure; — be rich in a heap of mercies, — faith will make you so. The love, the comfort, the benefit, of all former and future blessings are yours, if you know how to use them. Oh, how have we lost our mercies in every hedge and ditch! Have none of us skill to lay up the last eminent deliverance against a rainy day?

*Use 2.* Learn how to make the poorest and most afflicted condition comfortable and full of joy. Store thy cottage, thy sick-bed, by faith, with all sorts of mercies; they are the richest furniture in the world. Gather up what is already cast out, and fetch the rest from heaven. Bring the first-fruits of glory into thy bosom. See the Jews called, — the residue of opposers subdued, the gospel exalted, — Christ enthroned, — all thy sins pardoned, — corruption conquered, — glory enjoyed. Roll thyself in those golden streams every day. Let faith fetch in new and old; — ancient mercies for thy supportment, everlasting mercies for thy consolation. He that hath faith, hath all things.

XIV. Observation. *God’s dealing with his enemies in the season of his church’s deliverance is of especial consideration.*

“I saw the tents,” etc. So did the Israelites behold the Egyptians dead on the shore, [Exod. xiv. 30, 31](#). “The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth,” [Ps. xlvi. 6–8](#). The enemies’ undertaking, [verse 6](#), — God’s protection to his people, [verse 7](#), — a view of the adversaries’ desolation, [verse 8](#), — are all orderly held out.

The Lord tells Moses that he will harden the heart of Pharaoh, that he might show his power; to this very end, that it might be considered, and told to one another, [Exod. x. 2, 3](#). How many psalms have we, that are taken up in setting forth God’s breaking, yoking, befooling, terrifying his adversaries at such a season! The remembrance of the slaughter of the firstborn of Egypt was an ingredient in the chiefest ordinance the ancient church enjoyed, [Exod. xii](#). The reasons of this are, —

1. Much of the greatness and intenseness of God’s love to his own is seen in his enemies’ ruin, [Isa. xliiii. 3, 4](#), “I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.” When God gives such mighty kingdoms for a small





handful, it appears they are precious to him: “Whosoever shall gather together against thee, shall fall for thy sake,” [Isa. liv. 15](#). When God will maintain a quarrel with all the world, — swear that he will never have peace with Amalek until he be consumed, — break nations, kings, and kingdoms, — stretch out his hand in judgment round about, — and all to save, preserve, prosper, protect a small handful; — surely he hath endeared affections for them. In the days wherein we live, can we look and see wise men befooled, mighty warriors vanquished, men of might become as children, their persons slain and trodden down in the field, — can we but cry, “Lord, what are we, and what is our house, that thou shouldst do such things for us?” A serious view of what God hath done in this nation of late, — what armies he hath destroyed, what strongholds demolished, what proud, haughty spirits defeated, what consultations made vain, — is enough to make us admire the riches of his love all our days. We may know what esteem a man sets upon a jewel, by the price he gives for it. Surely God values them for whom he hath given the honours, the parts, the polities, the lives of so many tall cedars, as of late he hath done. The loving-kindness of God to his church is seen, as in a glass, in the blood of their persecutors.

2. The manifestation of God’s sovereignty, power, and justice, is as dear to him as the manifestation of his mercy. The properties he lays out in destruction are equally glorious with those he lays out in preservation.

In the proclamation of his glorious name he omits them not, [Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7](#). In these he triumpheth gloriously when he hath overthrown the horse and his rider in the sea, [Exod. xv. 1](#).

*Use.* Let not our eyes in the late deliverance be always on the light side of the work, our own mercies; — the dark side of terror and judgment is not without its glory. The folly that was in their counsels, the amazement that was in their armies, the trembling that accompanied all their undertakings, the tympanous products of all their endeavours, do all cry out, “*Digitus Dei est hic.*” Had not God showed infinite wisdom, they had not been so abundantly foolish: had not he been infinite in power, the many thousands of enemies had not been so weak.

In the late engagement in this country, when God stirred us up, with some others in these parts, to make some opposition to the enemy gathering at Chelmsford, what were, think you, the workings of God’s providences against them? How came it to pass that we were not swallowed up by them? For, —

1. *They were desirous to ruin us*, if we may judge their desires to answer their interest; or their expressions, with the language of their friends round about us, to answer their desires.

2. *They were able to do it.* They had from the beginning, and so all along, near as many thousands as we had hundreds; — of them very many old, experienced soldiers; with us not three men that had ever seen any fighting.



3. *They were resolved to do it.* Witness their own confessions, and frequent declarations of their purposes, whilst the business was in agitation.

4. *They were provoked to it.* For the first and only considerable opposition was made to them in this place; — first, By hindering their assistance from Colchester; which how much they valued, witness the senseless letter they would have forced the committee to subscribe, to persuade us not to disturb their levies there; — secondly, Suppressing and discouraging all those affected to them and their designs in these parts of the country; restraining some, disarming others, awing all; — thirdly, Hastening the coming of the army, lest their friends should suffer; — fourthly, Encouraging their coming, by declaring that they had friends here: by which, and the like, they were abundantly provoked.

5. *That they were also invited to it,* though by persons somewhat inconsiderable, with promises of a full party of friends to assist them, which they might have had, and a rich booty from their enemies to support them, which they might have found, is too apparent.

Now, being thus advantaged, thus encouraged, thus provoked and resolved, why did they not attempt it, why did they not accomplish their desires? Is it not worth the while to consider how they were restrained?<sup>184</sup> Was not much of God's wisdom seen in mixing a spirit of giddiness and error in the midst of them, that they knew not well how to determine, nor at all to execute their determinations? Was not his power seen in causing experienced soldiers, as they were, with their multitudes, to be afraid of a poor handful of unskilful men, running together because they were afraid to abide in their houses? Was not his justice exalted in keeping them only for the pit which they had digged for others? Doubtless the hand of God was lifted up. O that we could all learn righteousness, peculiarly amongst ourselves of this place! Is there nothing of God to be discerned in the vexations, birthless consultations, and devices of our observers? — nothing of power in their restraint? — nothing of wisdom in the self-punishment of their anxious thoughts? — nothing of goodness, that after so long waiting for advantage, they begin themselves to think that neither divination nor enchantment will prevail?

XV. Observation. *The measuring out of God's people's portion fills Cushan with affliction and Midian with trembling.*

Their eye is evil, because God is good. Israel's increase is Pharaoh's trouble, [Exod. i. 10](#). When Nehemiah comes to build the walls of Jerusalem, it grieved the enemy exceedingly "that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel," [Neh. ii. 10](#). This is the season of that dispensation which you have mentioned, [Isa. lxxv. 13–15](#), "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: be-

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184 [Gen. xx. 6](#); [Ps. lxxvi. 10](#).

hold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall,” etc.

The reasons of this are taken, — 1. From their envy; 2. From their carnal fear; — the two principles whereby they are acted in reference to the saints of God.

1. Their envy. They have a devouring envy at them,<sup>185</sup> which at length shall shame them and consume them, [Isa. xxvi. 11](#). They are of their father the devil, and he (through envy) was a “murderer from the beginning,” [John viii. 44](#). The portion God measureth out unto his people is in distinguishing mercies, differencing blessings, — in such things as the world hath not, giveth not. Now, this is that which envy takes for its proper object. That others should have enjoyments above them, beyond them, this envious men cannot bear. God accepts Abel, not Cain; presently Cain is wroth, and his countenance falls, [Gen. iv. 6](#). Jacob gets the blessing, and this fills the heart of Esau with murderous revenge, [Gen. xxvii. 41](#). Upon all God’s appearances with the apostles, how were the Jews cut to the heart, vexed, perplexed! God gives distinguishing mercies to his people, such protections, such deliverances; — this Cushan and Midian cannot bear.

2. Their carnal fear. They have all of them that conclusion in their breasts which Haman’s wise men and wife made to him, [Esth. vi. 13](#). If they begin to fall before the seed of the Jews, utter ruin will follow. When God begins to own his people, as them in the [Acts v. 24](#), “they doubt whereunto this will grow;” — their hearts tell them secretly they are usurpers of all they have, and when God owns any, they instantly fear lest for their sakes they should be called to account. When a distinction begins to be made in ordinances, privileges, deliverances, protections, evidently given to some peculiar ones, they tremble within that they are set apart for no good. This picking and choosing of men by the Lord, [Ps. iv. 3](#), they cannot bear with. Such mighty works attend the Israelites! what, thinks Midian, will be the end of this? It is true, their pride calls on them to act openly more of their malice than their fear; but yet this lies at the bottom, like a boasting Atheist’s nightly thoughts.<sup>186</sup> The chief priests and Pharisees having gotten the apostles before them, — what big words they use to countenance the business! “Who gave you this power?” [Acts iv. 7](#). But when they are by themselves, they cry, “What shall we do?” and, “Whereunto will this grow?” This lies at the bottom with many at this day; — though they boast, and lift up their mouth to heaven, their hearts do tremble as an aspen leaf.

*Use.* Learn not to be troubled at the great tumultuating which is amongst many against the ways of God at this day. God is measuring out his children’s portion, giving them their

185 “Quis facile potest, quale sit hoc malum, verbis exprimere, quo invidus odio hominis persequitur divinum munus in homine?” — *Pros. Vit. Cont.* “Invidia est tristitia de bono proximi, prout proprium malum æstimatur et est diminutivum proprii boni.” — *Aq 22, æ. q. 36, A. 1, c.*

186 Noctu dubitant.

bread in season, viewing for them the lot of their inheritance. Men of the world, profane Cushanites, superstitious, apostatical Midianites, will not, cannot be quiet. Vexed they are, envious, and afraid, and will act according to those principles. Cushanites see religion owned, Midianites theirs disclaimed, and both are alike provoked. The Lord convert them, or rebuke them; or the one will have the *armies*, the other their *wiles*. Only judge not their hearts by the outward appearance always. They seem gallant to you; — indeed they are frightened, galled, vexed. I have seen a galled horse, under dressing, leap and curvet as though it had been out of mettle and spirit, when indeed it was pain and smart that made him do it. They pretend to despise us, when they envy us. They look like contemnners, but are tremblers. Be not troubled at their outward appearance, they have inward anguish; — they bite others, but are lashed themselves.

XVI. Observation. *The season of the church's deliverance being come, Cushan and Midian must wax vain, and perish.*

That there is such a season, I told you before. When four hundred and thirty years are expired, Egypt must be destroyed, the Amorites rooted out, and all the nations round made to tremble. When seventy years of captivity expire, Babylon must be ruined, and the Chaldean monarchy quite wasted, that the Jews may return. The church being to be delivered, Haman must be hanged. This you have fully set out, [Rev. vi. 12–17](#). It is the fall of heathenish tyranny, by the prevailing of the gospel, which you have there described. Rome and Constantinople, Pope and Turk, are preserved for a day and an hour wherein they shall fall, and be no more. If the season of enjoying ordinances and privileges be come to this nation, that the tabernacle of God will be here amongst men; woe be to Cushanites! woe be to Midianites! — open opposers, and secret apostates. They shall not be able to be quiet, nor to prevail; God will not let them rest, nor obtain their purposes. The story of Haman must be acted over again; their hearts shall be stirred up to their own ruin, [Rev. xx. 8](#). This is the frame of perishing Babylonians in the day of Zion's restoration. The reasons are:—

1. Because at the deliverance of his people, God will plead with their enemies for their oppressions. "It is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion," [Isa. xxxiv. 8](#). It is the vengeance of the Lord and his temple that lights upon them in that day, [Jer. l. 28](#). "The violence done to me and my flesh be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and, My blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say," [Jer. li. 35](#). In this day great Babylon must come into remembrance, [Rev. xvi. 19, 20](#).

2. The discerning trial that shall and doth come along with the church's vindication, will cut off all superfluous false professors, so that they also shall perish, [Mal. iii. 2, 3](#). Christ comes with a fan, to send away the chaff in the wings of the wind. Have we not seen this end of many zealots?

3. The Amorites live in Canaan, and must be removed. Oppressors and hypocrites enjoy many rites of the church, which must be taken from them. Rome and her adherents shall

not have so much left as the name or title, appearance or show of a church. The outward court, which they have trodden down and defiled, shall be quite left out in the measuring of the temple, [Rev. xi. 2](#).

*Use.* Bring this observation home to the first from this verse, and it will give you the use of it: proceed we to the next verse.

**Verse 8.** “Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation?”

“Was the Lord displeased?” וַיִּזְדַּחֵם “kindled,” did he burn? — that is, in wrath. Heat is a great ingredient in the commotion of anger in us, here alluded to, or because the effects of anger are so often compared to fire. “Against the rivers” or floods? Again: “Was thine anger?” אָפְנֵי “thy nose or face, or thine anger,” אָפְנֵי signifies both. The face<sup>187</sup> is the seat of anger’s appearance: fury comes up into the face. “Was thine anger, thy troubling anger” (so the word) “against the sea,” — the Red sea, through which thy people passed; “that thou didst ride upon thy horses, and thy chariots of salvation?” or, “thy chariots were salvation, — ‘currus salutare,’ thy safety-bringing chariots.”

The words are an admiring expostulation about the mighty works of the Lord for his people, upon the sea, rivers, and inanimate creatures.

1. The *rivers*:— Jordan and its driving back is doubtless especially intended. The Lord showed his power in disturbing that ancient river in his course, and making his streams run backward. The story of it you have [Josh. iii. 15, 16](#). The people being to enter into Canaan, the Lord divides the waters of that river, making them beneath to sink away, and those above to stand on a heap. This the prophet magnifies, [Ps. cxiv. 5](#), “What ailed thee, O Jordan, that thou wast driven back?” What marvellous, powerful, disturbing thing is happened to thee, that, contrary to thy ancient natural course, thy streams should be frightened, and run back to the springs from whence they came?

2. The *sea*:— that is, the Red sea, which, in like manner, was divided, [Exod. xiv. 21](#); which the prophet also admires in the fore-cited psalm: “The sea saw it, and fled. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?” What strong, mighty impression of power was on thee, that the multitudes of thy waters should be parted, and thy channel discovered dry to the bottom?

3. “That thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation” This you have again, [verse 15](#), “Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses.” These were those clouds and winds which the Lord sent before the Israelites, to the sea and Jordan, to drive them back. “He maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind,”

187 “Caetera licet abscondere, et in abdito alere; ira se profert, et in faciem exit.” — *Senec. de ira*.

Ps. civ. 3. So Ps. xviii. 10, “He did fly upon the wings of the wind.” After the manner of men, God is represented as a mighty conqueror, riding before his armies and making way for them. The power and majesty of God was with and upon those clouds and winds which went before his people, to part those mighty waters, that they might pass dry; and therefore they are called his saving chariots, because by them his people were delivered. Or by horses and chariots here you may understand the angels, who are the host of God. Ps. lxviii. 17, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.” They have appeared as horses and chariots of fire, 2 Kings vi. 17. And their ministry, no doubt, the Lord used in these mighty works of drying rivers and dividing seas. Either way, the glorious power and majesty of God, in his delivering instruments, is set forth.

Thus the words severally; — now jointly.

This admiring interrogation includes a negation. “Was the Lord kindled against the rivers? was thy face against the rivers,” etc. Was it that the deep had offended the Most High, that, by thine angels, winds, and clouds, thou didst so disturb the floods in their ancient course, and madest naked their hidden channels, until the hoary deep cried out for fear, and lifted up his aged hands to the Almighty, as it were, for pity? [verse 10](#). No, surely, no such thing. All those keep the order by thee unto them appointed; it was all for the salvation and deliverance of thy people. God was not angry with Jordan when he drove it back, nor with the sea when he divided it; but all was effected for Israel’s deliverance.

XVII. Observation. *The very senseless creatures are, as it were, sensible of the wrath and power of the Almighty.*

Effects of anger being in and upon the deep, “he utters his voice, and lifts up his hands on high,” [verse 10](#). God often in the Scripture sets forth his power and majesty by the trembling of heaven and the shaking of the earth, the vanishing of mountains and the bowing of perpetual hills, the professed humble subjection of the most eminent parts of the creation. The sea shall fly, as afraid; the rocks, as weak, rend and crumble; the heavens be darkened; the mountains skip like rams, and the little hills like young sheep, [Ps. cxiv. 4](#).

Τρέμει δ’ ὄρη, καὶ πελώριος  
 Βυθὸς θαλάσσης, κώρέων ὕψος μέγα,  
 Ὅταν ἐπεβλέψῃ γοργὸν ὄμμα δεσπότης.

*Æsch. apud Justin., Apol. ii.*

“The earth shook, the heavens dropped at the presence of God,” [Ps. lxiii. 8](#). The almighty Creator holds the whole frame of the building in his own hand, and makes what portion he pleaseth, and when he pleaseth, to tremble, consume, and vanish before him. Though many things are not capable of sense and reason, yet he will make them do such things as sense and reason should prompt the whole subjected creation unto, to teach that part their duty who were endued therewith. A servant is beat, to make a child learn his duty.



*Use.* See hence the stoutness of sinful hearts, — more stubborn than the mountains, more flinty than the rocks, more senseless than the great deep. Friend, art thou stronger than Horeb? yet that trembled at the presence of this mighty God, whom it never had provoked. Are thy lusts like the streams of Jordan? yet they ran back from his chariots of salvation. Are thy corruption? more firmly seated on thy soul than the mountains on their bases? yet they leaped like frightened sheep before that God against whom they had not sinned. And wilt thou, a small handful of sinful dust, that hast ten thousand times provoked the eyes of his glory, not tremble before him, coming on his horses and chariots of salvation, — his mighty works and powerful word? Shall a lion tremble, and thou not be afraid, who art ready to tremble with a thought of that poor creature? Shall the heavens bow, the deep beg for mercy, and thou be senseless? Shall all creatures quake for the sin of man, and sinful man be secure? Know you not that the time is coming wherein such men will desire the trembling rocks to be a covert to their more affrighted souls?

XVIII. Observation. *No creatures, seas nor floods, greater or lesser waters, shall be able to obstruct or hinder God's people's deliverance, when he hath undertaken it.*

Is the sea against them? it shall be parted. Is Jordan in the way? it shall be driven back. Both sea and Jordan shall tremble before him. Euphrates shall be dried up, to give the kings of the east a passage, [Rev. xvi. 12](#). Waters in the Scriptures are sometimes afflictions, sometimes people and nations. Be they seas (kings and princes), or be they rivers (inferior persons), they shall not be able to oppose. God has decked his house, and made it glorious with the spoils of all opposers. There you have the spoils of Pharaoh, gathered up on the shore of the Red sea, and dedicated in the house of God, [Exod. xv. 1](#). There you have all the armour of Sennacherib's mighty host, with the rest of their spoils, hung up to show, [2 Chron. xxxii. 21](#). There you have the glory, and throne, and dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, himself being turned into a beast, [Dan. iv. 33](#). There you shall have the carcasses of Gog and Magog, with all their mighty hosts, for coming to encamp against the city of God, [Ezek. xxxix. 1](#). There you have the imperial robes of<sup>188</sup> Diocletian and his companion, abdicating them — selves from the empire for very madness that they could not prevail against the church. Kings of armies shall fly apace; and she that tarries at home shall divide the spoil, [Ps. lxxviii. 12](#). All opposers, though nations and kingdoms, shall perish and be utterly destroyed, [Isa. lx. 12](#), [Rev. xix. 18](#).

God will not exalt any creature unto a pitch of opposition to himself, or to stand in the way of his workings. The very end of all things, in their several stations, is to be serviceable to his purposes towards his own. Obedience in senseless creatures is natural, even against



188 *Euseb. Vit. Con. Const. Orat.*

the course of nature, in the season of deliverance. “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon,” [Josh. x. 12](#). “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain,” [Zech. iv. 7](#). The most mountainous opposers shall be levelled, when the Spirit of God sets in for that purpose. There is a strength in every promise and engagement of God unto his people, that is able to carry the whole frame of heaven and earth before it. If they can believe, all things are possible to them that believe. When the decree is to bring forth the fruit of the promise, it will overturn empires, destroy nations, divide seas, ruin armies, open prisons, break chains and fetters, and bear down all before it; as the wind shut up in the earth will shake the pillars, as it were, of its mighty body, but it will find or make a passage. The least promise of deliverance, if the season thereof be come, though it were shut up under strong and mighty powers, crafty counsels, dungeons, and prisons, like the doors and lasting bars of the earth, the truth and power of God shall make them all to tremble, and give birth to his people’s deliverance.

*Use 1.* Have we seen nothing of this in our days? — no seas divided? no Jordans driven back? no mountains levelled? no hills made to tremble? Whence, then, was the late confusion of armies? casting down of mighty ones? reviving of dead bones? opening of prison doors? bringing out the captives appointed to be slain? Is it not from hence, that nothing can stand against the breaking out of a promise in its appointed season? “Was the Lord displeased with the rivers?” was his anger against the walls and houses, “that he rode upon his horses, and chariots of salvation?”

*Use 2.* Let faith be strengthened in an evil time. Poor distressed soul, all the difficulty of thy deliverance lies in thine own bosom! If the streams of thy unbelief within be not stronger than all seas of opposition without, all will be easy. O learn to stand still with quietness, between a host of Egyptians and a raging sea, to see the salvation of God! Be quiet in prison, between your friends’ bullets and your enemies’ swords; God can, God will, make a way. If it were not more hard with us to believe wonders than it is to the promise to effect wonders for us, they would be no wonders, so daily, so continually, would they be wrought.

XIX. Observation. *God can make use of any of his creatures to be chariots of salvation.*

This is the other side of that doctrine which we gathered from [verse 5](#), “Winds and clouds shall obey him.” Ravens<sup>189</sup> shall feed Elijah, that will not feed their own young. The sea shall open for Israel, and return upon the Egyptians. And this both in an ordinary way, as [Hos. ii. 21, 22](#); and in an extraordinary way, as before. So many creatures as God hath made, so many instruments of good hath he for his people. This is farther confirmed, [verse 9](#).

189 Ἐχβάλλει τοὺς νεοττοὺς ὁ χόραξ, — *Arist. Hist. Anima.*, vi. “Pellunt nidis pullos sicut et Corvi.” — *Plin. Nat. Hist.*



**Verse 9.** “Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.”

“With nakedness thy bow was made naked.” The rest is elliptical, and well supplied in the translation.

The verse hath two parts.

1. A general proposition: “Thy bow was made naked,” etc.

2. A particular confirmation of that proposition by instance: “Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.”

1. The proposition holds out two things.

(1.) What God did: “He made his bow quite naked.”

(2.) The rule he proceeded by herein: “According to the oaths of the tribes, even his word.”

The assertion of this verse is not of some particular act or work, as the former, but a general head or fountain of those particular works which are enumerated in the following verses.

(1.) A *bow* is a weapon of war, an instrument of death; and being ascribed to God, after the manner of men, holds out his strength, power, might, and efficacy, to do whatever he pleaseth. And this is said to be quite naked. When a man goes about to use his bow, he pulls it out of his quiver,<sup>190</sup> and so makes it naked. The exercising of God’s power is the making naked of his bow. This he did in all those wonders wherein he stretched out his hand, in bringing his people into the promised land, here pointed at. And it is said that with nakedness it was made naked, because of those very high dispensations and manifestations of his almighty power. This is the making naked of his bow.

(2.) For the *rule* of this, it is “the oaths of the tribes;” or as afterward, “his word,” — the oaths of the tribes, that is, the oaths made to them, — the word he stood engaged to them in. The promise God made by oath unto Abraham, that he would give him the land of Canaan for an inheritance, even to him and his posterity, [Gen. xiii. 14–17](#), is here intimated. This promise was often renewed to him and the following patriarchs. Hence it is called oaths, though but the same promise often renewed: and it had the nature of an oath, because it was made a covenant. Now, it was all for the benefit of the several tribes, in respect of actual possession, and was lastly renewed to them, [Exod. iii. 17](#); hence called “the oaths of the tribes,” not which they swear to the Lord, but that which the Lord swear to them. So afterward it is called his word, — “Thy word.” This, then, is the purport of this general proposition, “O Lord, according as thou promisedst, and engagedst thyself by covenant to Abraham,



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190 [The gorytus or bow-case; so explained by Grotius, Drusius, etc. Sir J. Chardin states, that the oriental bows were usually carried in a case of cloth or leather attached to the girdle. — *Harmer, ii. 513*. Vid. *Hom. Odys., xxi. 53, 54*.]

Isaac, and Jacob, with their posterity, that thou wouldst give them the land of Canaan to be theirs for an inheritance; so by the dispensation of thy mighty power thou hast fully accomplished it.” And this he layeth down for the supportment of faith in a time of trouble.

The words would afford many observations; I shall insist only on one.

XX. Observation. *The Lord will certainly make good all his promises and engagements to his people, though it cost him the making of his bow quite naked, — the manifestation of his power in the utmost dispensations thereof.*

God’s workings are squared to his engagements. This is still the close of all gracious issues of providence, — God hath done all according “as he promised,” [Josh. xxii. 4](#); [2 Sam. vii. 21](#). He brought out his people of old with a mighty hand, with temptations, signs, and wonders, and a stretched-out arm; and all because he would keep the oath which he had sworn, and the engagement which he had made to their fathers, [Deut. vii. 8](#). What obstacles soever may lie in the way, he hath done it, he will do it. Take one instance; particular places are too many to be insisted on. It was the purpose of his heart to bring his elect home to himself, from their forlorn condition. This he engageth himself to do, [Gen. iii. 15](#), — assuring Adam of a recovery from the misery he was involved in by Satan’s prevalency. This, surely, is no easy work. If the Lord will have it done, he must lay out all his attributes in the demonstration of them to the uttermost. His wisdom and power must bow their shoulders, as it were, in Christ unto it. He was “the power of God, and the wisdom of God;”<sup>191</sup> his engaged love must be carried along through so many secret, mysterious marvels, as the angels themselves “desire to look into,”<sup>192</sup> and shall for ever adore. Though the effecting of it required that which man could not do, and God could not suffer; yet his wisdom will find out a way, that he shall both do it and suffer it who is both God and man. To make good his engagement to his elect, he spared not his only Son: and in him were hid, and by him laid out, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>193</sup>

Now, this is a precedent of God’s proceeding in all other engagements whatsoever. Whatever it cost him, he will spare nothing to make them good to the uttermost. He is our rock, and his work is perfect. A good man, if he want not power, will go through with his serious promises, though he be engaged to his own hurt, [Ps. xv. 4](#). The power of the mighty God is serviceable to his will to the uttermost. He cannot will what he cannot do: his will and power are essentially the same. And his power shall not be wanting to execute what his goodness hath moved him to engage unto for his own glory. The reasons of this are, —

1. [Deut. xxxii. 4](#), “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity.” Here are many attributes of God to make good this one

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191 [1 Cor. i. 24](#).

192 [1 Pet. i. 12](#).

193 [Col. ii. 3](#).

thing, that his work is perfect, — this ἀυτάρκεια, self-sufficiency, perfection, righteousness. I will pitch on one, — he is a God of truth. So he is again called, [Ps. xxxi. 5](#), and in other places. The truth of God in his promises and engagements requires an accomplishment of them, whatever it cost, what power soever is required thereunto. This the saints make their bottom to seek it: “Where are thy loving-kindnesses, which thou swarest in thy truth,” [Ps. lxxxix. 49](#). It is impossible but that should come to pass which thou hast sworn in thy truth. No stronger plea than “Remember the word wherein thou hast caused thy servants to put their trust.” Jacob says, he is less than all the mercy and all the truth of God, [Gen. xxxii. 10](#). He sees God’s truth in all his mercy, by causing all things to come to pass which he hath promised him. It is true, some particular promises have their conditions, whose truth consists not in the relation between the word and the thing, unless the condition intercede. But the great condition under the gospel being only the good of them to whom any engagement is made, we may positively lay down, that God’s truth requires the accomplishment of every engagement for his people’s good, [Rom. viii. 28](#). It is neither mountain nor hill, king, kingdom, nor nation, hell nor mortality, nor all combined, that can stand in the way to hinder it, [Matt. xvi. 18](#).

2. His people stand in need of all that God hath engaged himself to them for. God’s promises are the just measure of his people’s wants. Whatever he hath promised, that his people do absolutely want; and whatsoever they want, that he hath promised:— our wants and his promises are every way commensurate. If thou knowest not what thou standest in need of, search the promises and see: whatever God hath said he will do for thee, that thou hast absolute need should be done. Or if thou art not so well acquainted with the promises, search thine own wants: what thou standest absolutely in need of for thy good, that assuredly God hath promised. If, then, this be the case of engagements, they shall all be made good. Think you, will God let his people want that which they have absolute necessity of? By absolute necessity I mean such as is indispensable, as to their present estate and occasions. That may be of necessity in one generation which is not in another, according to the several employments we are called to. Does God call forth his saints “to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written,” as [Ps. cxlix. 7–9](#)? — doth he bring them forth to burn the whore, to fight with the beast, and overcome him and his followers? — it is of indispensable necessity that he give them glorious assistance in their undertakings. They shall be assisted, protected, carried on, though it cost him the making of his bow quite naked. According to the several conditions he calls them to, the several issues of providence which he will have them serve in, so want they his appearance in them, with them, for them; and it shall be present. Let them be assured they are in his way, and then, though some prove false and treacherous, some base and cowardly, — though many combine and associate themselves against them in many places, in all places, — though whole king-

doms and mighty armies appear for their ruin, — be they reviled and clamoured by all round about them, — all is one; help they need, and help they shall have, or God will make his bow quite naked.

*Use.* 1. This day is this doctrine fulfilled before us. God’s bow is made quite naked, according to his word. We are less than all the truth he hath showed unto us. Though great working and mighty power hath been required, such as he hath not shown in our days, nor in the days of our fathers; yet the Lord hath not stood at it, for his word’s sake, wherein he hath made us to put our trust. I speak of the general mercies we have received. The surrender of Colchester, the particular celebrated this day, though marching in the rear for time, is for the weight in the van, — a mercy of the first magnitude. Essex hath seen more power in a three months’ recovery than in the protection of six years. That the mouths of men are stopped, and their faces filled with shame, who made it their trade to revile and threaten the saints of God; — that the adverse strength, which hath lain hid these seven years, should be drawn forth, united, and broken to pieces; — that the people of God, divided, and naturally exasperated through their abuse of peace, should, by the sword of a common enemy and the help of a common friend, have their wrath abated, their counsels united, and their persons set in a hopeful way of closing or forbearance; — that God by their own counsels should shut up men, collected from sundry parts to ruin others, in a city with gates and walls, for their own ruin; — that they should deny peace tendered upon such conditions, because of the exigencies of the time, as might have left them power as well as will for a farther mischief; — that such salvation should go forth in other parts as that the proceedings here should not be interrupted; — that the bitter service which men here underwent should ever and anon be sweetened with refreshing tidings from other places, to keep up their spirits in wet, watching, cold, and loss of blood:— all these, I say, and sundry other such-like things as these, are “the Lord’s doing, and marvellous in our eyes.”

Especially let us remember how in three things the Lord made his bow quite naked in his late deliverance.

(1.) *In leavening the counsels of the enemy with their own folly.*

(2.) *In ordering all events to his own praise.*

(3.) *By controlling with his mighty power the issue of all undertakings.*

(1.) *In leavening their counsels with their own folly.* God’s<sup>194</sup> power and the efficacy of his providence is not more clearly manifested in any thing than in his effectual working in the debates, advices, consultations, and reasonings of his enemies, compassing his ends by

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194 “Quod homines peccant eorum est, quod peccando hoc vel illud agant ex virtute Dei est, tenebras prout visum est dividit.” — *Aug., de Præd.* “Oportet hæreses esse, sed tamen non ideo bonum hæreses, quia eas esse oportebat, quasi non et malum oportuerit esse; nam et Dominum tradi oportebat, sed væ traditori!” — *Tertul., Præf. ad Hær.*

their inventions. When God is in none of the thoughts of men by his fear, he is in them all by his providence. The sun is operative with his heat where he reacheth not with his light, and hath an influence on precious minerals in the depths and dark bottoms of rocks and mountains. The all-piercing providence of God dives into the deep counsels of the hearts of the sons of men, and brings out precious gold from thence, where the gracious light of his countenance shines not at all. Men freely advise, debate, use and improve their own reasons, wisdom, interests, not once casting an eye to the Almighty; and yet all this while do his work more than their own. All the counselings, plottings of Joseph's brethren, — all the transactions of the Jews, Herod, and Pilate, about the death of Christ, with other the like instances, abundantly prove it.<sup>195</sup> Take a few instances wherein God "made his bow quite naked" in the counsels of his and our enemies.

In general, they consult to take arms, wherein God had fully appeared against them, — when, in all probability, their work would have been done without them. Had they not fought, by this time they had been conquerors. One half-year's peace more, — which we desired on any terms, and they would on no terms bear, — in all likelihood had set them where they would be. Their work went on, as if they had hired the kingdom to serve them in catching weather. What with some men's folly, others' treachery, all our division, — had not their own counsels set them on fighting, — I think we should suddenly base chosen them and theirs to be umpires of our quarrels. God saw when it was time to deal with them. In their undertaking in our own county, I could give sundry instances how God mixed a perverse spirit of folly and error in all their counsels. A part of the magistracy of the county is seized on. Therein their intention towards the residue is clearly discovered; yet not any attempt made to secure them, — which they might easily have accomplished, — although they could not but suppose that there were some gentlemen of public and active spirits left that would be industrious in opposition unto them. Was not the Lord in their counsels also, when they suffered a small, inconsiderable party, in a little village within a few miles of them, to grow into such a body as at length they durst not attempt, when they might have broken their whole endeavour with half a hundred of men? Doubtless, of innumerable such things as these we may say, with the prophet, "The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced" the people, "even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused" the people "to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit," [Isa. xix. 13, 14](#). Doubtless the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of it will he restrain.

(2.) *In ordering all events to his own praise.* The timing of the enemies' eruptions in several places is that which fills all hearts with wonder, and all mouths with discourse, in

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195 [Gen. xlv. 7, l. 20](#); [Acts iv. 27, 28](#).

these days. From the first to the last they had their season. Had they come together, to the eyes of flesh the whole nation had been swallowed up in that deluge. In particular, let Essex take notice of the goodness of God. The high thoughts and threats of men, which made us for divers weeks fear a massacre, were not suffered to break out into open hostility until the very next day after their strength was broken, in the neighbour county of Kent; — as if the Lord should have said, “I have had you in a chain all this while: though you have showed your teeth, you have not devoured; now go out of my chain, — I have a net ready for you.” For the armies coming to our assistance, I cannot see how we needed them many days sooner, or could have wanted them one day longer. Farther, these home-bred eruptions were timely seasoned, to rouse the discontented soldiery and divided nation to be ready to resist the Scottish invasion; — God also being magnified in this, that in this sweet disposal of events unto his glory, the counsels of many of those in whom we thought we might confide ran totally cross to the appearance of God in his providence. What shall we say to these things? If the Lord be for us, who shall be against us? All these things came forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in operation, [Isa. xxviii. 29](#). Whoso is wise will ponder them, and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

(3.) *In controlling mighty actions*, — I mean, giving success to his people in all their undertakings. The commander-in-chief of all the forces in this kingdom, since his sitting down before Colchester, was proffered a pass to go beyond the seas for his security. Whence is it that he hath now the necks of his enemies, and hath given any of them their lives at their entreaty? Greater armies than this have been buried under lesser walls. Did not the number of the besieged at first exceed the number of the besiegers? were not their advantages great? their skill in war, amongst men of their own persuasion, famous and renowned? so that the sitting down before it was judged an action meet only for them who could believe they should see the bow of God made quite naked. It had been possible, doubtless, to reason’s eye, that many of those fictions wherewith a faction in the great city fed themselves, — of the many routings, slaughters, and destructions of the army, — might have been true. Some of them, I say; for some were as childish as hellish. In brief, they associated themselves, and were broken in pieces; — high walls, towering imaginations, lofty threats, — all brought down. “So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might;” and let the land have rest for many years, [Judges v. 31](#).

*Use 2.* This will discover unto us the bottom and rise of all God’s appearances for his people, — even the engaging of his own free grace. He doth not “make his bow quite naked,” according to their deservings, but his own word; not because they of themselves are better than others, but because he loves them more than others. Were God’s assistances suited to our walkings, they would be very uneven; but his good-will is constant; so are our deliverances.



Use 3. Be exhorted to thankfulness; not verbal,<sup>196</sup> but real; not the exultation of carnal affections, but the savoury obedience of a sound mind. There are many ingredients in thanksgiving; — suitable and seasonable obedience to answer the will of God in his mercies is doubtless the crown of all. Look, then, under the enjoyment of blessings in general, to close walking with God in the duties of the covenant, — and in particular, to the especial work of this your generation, — and you are in the way to be thankful.

Use 4. Be sedulously careful to prevent that which God hath mightily decried by our late mercies, — viz., mutual animosities, strife, contention, and violence against one another;<sup>197</sup> I mean, of those that fear his name. God hath interposed in our quarrels from heaven The language of our late deliverance is, Be quiet, “lest a worse thing happen unto you.” Our poor brethren of Scotland would not see the hatefulness of their animosities towards their friends, until God suffered that very thing to be the means to deliver them up to the power of their enemies. The weapons they had formed were used against themselves. Let us learn betimes to agree about our pasture, lest the wolves of the wilderness devour us. Persecution and idolatry have ruined all the states of the Christian world.

2. Of the assertion we have spoken hitherto: come we now to the particular confirmation of it by instance. “Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers,” — cleave the earth, or make channels in the earth, for waters to flow in.

Another most eminent work of almighty power is here set forth, — eminent in itself, and eminent in its typical signification. And the same thing being twice done, hath a plural expression, — “rivers.”

(1.) *Eminent of itself.* The bringing of streams of waters from the rock, for the thirsty people in the wilderness, is that which is here celebrated. Now this the Lord did twice:— First, [Exod. xvii. 6](#), when the people were in Rephidim, in the first year after their coming from Egypt, they fainted in their journeys for want of water, and (according to the wonted custom of that rebellious people) complained with murmuring. So they extorted all their mercies; and therefore they were attended with such sore judgments. Whilst the meat was in their mouths, the plague was on their bones. *Mercies extorted by murmurings, unseasoned with loving-kindness, though they may be quails in the mouth, will be plagues in the belly.* Let us take heed lest we repine the Almighty into a full harvest and lean soul, [Ps. cvi. 15](#). Get and keep mercies in God’s way, or there is death in the pot.

Forty years after this, when the first whole evil generation was consumed, the children, who were risen up in their fathers’ stead, fall a murmuring for water in the wilderness of Zin, and, with a profligacy of rebellion, wish they had been consumed with others in the

196 “In beneficio reddendo plus animus, quam census operatur.” — *Ambr. Offi., lib. i. cap. 32.*

197 Ἡ διαφωνία τῆς νηστείας, τὴν ὁμόνοιαν τῆς πίστεως συνίστησιν. — *Iren. Epist. ad Vict. apud Euseb., lib. v. cap. 23.* Φιλόνικοι ἔστε ἀδελφοὶ καὶ ζηλωταὶ περὶ μὴ ἀνηκόντων εἰς σωτηρίαν. — *Clem. Ep. ad Cor.*

former plagues, [Num. xx. 4](#). Here also the Lord gives them water, and that in abundance, [verse 11](#). Now, of this observe, —

[1.] The places from whence this water marvellously issued. They were rocks that, in all probability, never had spring from the creation of the world. Farther, they are observed to be rocks of flint, [Ps. cxiv. 8](#), “Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters:” so [Deut. viii. 15](#). A rock into a pool, and a flint into a stream, is much beyond Samson’s riddle of sweetness from the eater.

[2.] The abundance of waters that gushed out, — waters to satisfy that whole congregation, with all their cattle, consisting of some millions. Yea, and not only they, but all the beasts of that wilderness were refreshed thereby also, [Isa. xliii. 20](#), “The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragon and the owl; because I give waters in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.” *The very worst of the sons of men, dragons and owls, fare the better for God’s protecting providence towards his own.*<sup>198</sup>

And all this was in such abundance, that it was as plentiful as a sea. “He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers,” [Ps. lxxviii. 15, 16](#). So also it is celebrated, [Isa. xli. 18, xlvi. 21, Hos. xiii. 5](#), and in many other places. *Great deliverances call for frequent remembrances.*

Thus were rivers brought out of the rocks, and with or for these rivers God did cleave the earth; — that is, either he provided channels for those streams to run in, that they might not be wasted on the surface of that sandy wilderness, but preserved for the use of his people; or else the streams were so great and strong, that they pierced the earth, and parted channels for themselves. Great rivers of water, brought out of flinty rocks, running into prepared channels, to refresh a sinful, thirsty people, in a barren wilderness, I think, is a remarkable mercy.

(2.) *As it was eminent in itself, so likewise is it exalted in its typical concernment.* Is there nothing but flints in this rock? nothing but water in these streams? nothing but the rod of Moses in the blows given to it? Did the people receive no other refreshment, but only in respect of their bodily thirst? Yes, saith the apostle, “They drank of that spiritual rock which followed them; and that rock was Christ,” [1 Cor. x. 4](#). Was not this rock a sign of that Rock of Ages on which the church is built? [Matt. xvi. 18](#). Did not Moses’ smiting hold out his being smitten with the rod of God? [Isa. liii. 4, 5](#). Was not the pouring out of these plentiful streams as the pouring out of his precious blood, in a sea of mercy, abundantly sufficient to refresh the whole fainting church in the wilderness? “*Latet Christus in petra;*” — “Here is Christ in this rock.” Had Rome had wisdom to build on this Rock, though she had not had an infallibility as she vainly now pretends, she might have had an infallibility (if I may so

198 “Vir bonus commune bonum.” — [Gen. xxxi. 3](#).





speak), yea, she had never quite failed. Give me leave to take a few observations from hence. As, —

[1.] *Sinners must be brought to great extremities, to make them desire the blood of Jesus; — weary and thirsty, before rock-water come. Thirst is a continually galling pressure. When a soul gaspeth like a parched land, and is as far from self-refreshment as a man from drawing waters out of a flint, then shall the side of Christ be opened to him. You that are full of your lusts, drunk with the world, here is not a drop for you. If you never come into the wilderness, you shall never have rock-water.*

[2.] *Mercy to a convinced sinner seems oftentimes as remote as rivers from a rock of flint. The truth is, he never came near mercy, who thought not himself far from it. When the Israelites cried, We are ready to die for thirst, then stood they on the ground where rivers were to run.*

[3.] *Thirsty souls shall want no water, though it be fetched for them out of a rock. Panters after the blood of Jesus shall assuredly have refreshment and pardon, through the most unconquerable difficulties. Though grace and mercy seem to be locked up from them, like water in a flint, — whence fire is more natural than water; yet God will not strike the rock of his justice and their flinty hearts together, to make hell-fire sparkle about their ears; but with a rod of mercy on Christ, that abundance of water may be drawn out for their refreshment.*

[4.] *The most eminent temporal blessings, and suitable refreshment (water from a rock for them that are ready to perish), is but an obscure representation of that love of God, and refreshment of souls, which is in the blood of Jesus. Carnal things are exceeding short of spiritual, — temporal things of eternal.*

[5.] *The blood of Christ is abundantly sufficient for his whole church to refresh themselves, — streams, rivers, a whole sea.*

These, and the like observations, flowing from the typical relation of the blessing intimated, shall not farther be insisted on; — one only I shall take from the historical truth.

XXI. Observation. *God sometimes bringeth plentiful deliverances and mercies for his people from beyond the ken of sense and reason; yea, from above the ordinary reach of much precious faith.*

I mean not what it ought to reach, which is all the omnipotency of God; but what ordinarily it doth, as in this very business it was with Moses. I say, plentiful deliverances, mercies like the waters that gushed out in abundant streams, until the earth was cloven with rivers, — that the people should not only have a taste and away, but drink abundantly, and leave for the beasts of the field, — from beyond the ken of sense and reason, by events which a rationally wise man is no more able to look into, than an eye of flesh is able to see water in a flint; or a man probably suppose that divers millions of creatures should be refreshed with waters out of a rock where there was never any spring from the foundation of the world.



Now, concerning this, observe, —

1. *That God hath done it.*
2. *That he hath promised he will yet do it.*
3. *Why he will so do.*

1. *He hath done it.* I might here tire you with precedents. I could lead you from that mother deliverance, the womb of all others, the redemption that is in the blood of Jesus, down through many dispensations of old and of late, holding out this proposition to the full One shall suffice me; and if some of you cannot help yourselves with another, you are very senseless.

Look upon Peter's deliverance, [Acts xii. 1](#). The night before he was to be slain, he was kept safe in a prison, — a prison he had neither will nor power to break. He was bound with two chains, beyond his skill to unloose or force asunder. Kept he was by sixteen soldiers, doubtless men of blood and vigilancy, having this to keep them waking, that if Peter escaped with his head, they were to lose theirs. Now, that his deliverance was above sense and reason himself intimates, [verse 11](#), "He hath delivered me from the expectation of the Jews." The wise, subtle Jews, concluded the matter so secure, that, without any doubts or fears, they were in expectation of his execution the next day. That it was also beyond the ready reach of much precious faith, you have an example in those believers who were gathered together in the house of Mary, [verse 12](#), calling her mad who first affirmed it, [verse 15](#), and being astonished when their eyes beheld it, [verse 16](#); — the whole seeming so impossible to carnal Herod, after its accomplishment, that he slays the keepers as false in their hellish trust; — a just recompense for trusty villains.

The time would fail me to speak of Isaac,<sup>199</sup> and Joseph, Gideon, Noah, Daniel, and Job, — all precedents worthy your consideration. View them at your leisure; and you will have leisure, if you intend to live by faith.

2. *He hath said it.* It is a truth abounding in promises and performances. I shall hold out one or two; it will be worth your while to search for others yourselves. He that digs for a mine finds many a piece of gold by the way.

[Isa. xli. 14–16](#), "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye few men of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp thrashing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thrash the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them," etc. To make a worm a thrashing instrument with teeth, to cause that instrument to beat mountains and hills into chaff, that chaff to be blown away with the wind, that that worm may rejoice in God; — to advance a small handful of despised ones to the ruin of mountainous empires and kingdoms, until they be broken and scattered to nothing, — is a mercy that comes from beyond the ken of an ordinary eye. [Ezek. xxxvii. 3](#), the prophet professeth that the deliverance

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199 [Gen. xxii. 14, xxxix. 1](#), etc.

promised was beyond his apprehension: “Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest.” The Lord intimates in the following verses that he will provide a means for his church’s recovery when it seemeth as remote therefrom as dry bones scattered upon the face of the earth are from a mighty living army. This he calls opening their graves, [verses 12, 13](#).

3. The *reasons of this are*, —

(1.) Because he would have his people wholly wrapt up in his all-sufficiency, not to straiten themselves with what their faith can ken in a promise, much less to what their reason can perceive in appearance. In the application of promises to particular trials and extremities, faith oftentimes is exceedingly disturbed, either in respect of persons, or things, or seasons; but when it will wholly swallow up itself in all-sufficiency, the fountain of all promises, there is no place for fear or disputing. Have your souls in spiritual trials never been driven from all your out-works unto this main fort? Hath not all hold of promises in time of trial given place to temptations, until you have fallen down in all-sufficiency, and there found peace? God accounts a flight to the strong tower of his name to be the most excellent valour. This is faith’s first, proper, and most immediate object. To particular promises it is drawn out on particular occasions; here is, or should be, its constant abode, [Gen. xvii. 1](#). And, indeed, the soul will never be prepared to all the will of God, until its whole complacency be taken up in this sufficiency of the Almighty. Here God delights to have the soul give up itself to a contented losing of all its reasonings, even in the infinite unsearchableness of his goodness and power. Therefore will he sometimes send forth such streams of blessings as can flow from no other fountain, that his may know where to lie down in peace. Here he would have us secure our shallow bottoms in this quiet sea, this infinite ocean, whither neither wind nor storm do once approach. Those blustering temptations which rage at the shore, when we were half at land and half at sea, — half upon the bottom of our own reason and half upon the ocean of providence, — reach not at all unto this deep. Oh, if we could in all trials lay ourselves down in these arms of the Almighty, his all-sufficiency in power and goodness! Oh, how much of the haven should we have in our voyage, how much of home in our pilgrimage, — how much of heaven in this wretched earth! Friends, throw away your staves, break the arm of flesh, lie down here quietly in every dispensation, and you shall see the salvation of God. I could lose myself in setting out of this, wherein I could desire you would lose yourselves in every time of trouble. “Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon



the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint,” [Isa. xl. 28–31](#).

(2.) To convince the unbelieving world itself of his power, providence, and love to them that put their trust in him, that they may be found to cry, “Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth,” [Ps. lviii. 11](#).

When the Egyptian magicians see real miracles, beyond all their juggling pretences, they cry out, “This is the finger of God,” [Exod. viii. 19](#).

Profane Nebuchadnezzar, beholding the deliverance of those three worthies from the fiery furnace, owns them for the “servants of the most high God,” [Dan. iii. 26](#). Daniel being preserved in the lions’ den, Darius acknowledgeth the power and kingdom of “the living God,” [Dan. vi. 26](#).

Glorious appearances of God for his people, beyond the reach of reason, wrest from the world amazement or acknowledgment; and in both God is exalted. He will appear in such distresses, as that he win be seen of his very enemies. They shall not be able, with the Philistines, to question whether it be his hand or a chance happened to them, [1 Sam. vi. 9](#); but conclude, with the Egyptians, that fly they must, for God fights for his people, [Exod. xiv. 25](#). If God should never give blessings but in such a way as reason might discover their dependence on secondary causes, men would not see his goings, nor acknowledge his operations. But when he mightily makes bare his arm, in events beyond their imaginations, they must vail before him.

*Use 1.* Consider whether the mercy celebrated this day ought not to be placed in this series of deliverances, brought from beyond the ken of sense and reason, from above the reach of much precious faith. For the latter, I leave it to your own experience; — to the former let me for the present desire your consideration of these five things.

(1.) *By whom you were surprised and put under restraint.* Now these were of two sorts: [1.] The heads and leaders; [2.] The tumultuous multitude.

[1.] *For the first*, some of them being dead, and some under durance, I shall not say any thing. “Nullum cum victis certamen, et æthere cassis.” I leave the stream from the flint to your own thoughts.

[2.] *For the multitude*, — an enraged, headless, lawless, godless multitude, gathered out of inns, taverns, alehouses, stables, highways, and the like nurseries of piety and pity. Such as these having got their superiors under their power, governors under their disposal, their restrainers under their restraint, their oppressors, as they thought, under their fury, — what was it that kept in their fury and their revenge, which upon the like occasions and advantages hath almost always been executed? Search your stories, — you will not find many that speak of such a deliverance. For a few governors prevailed on unto durance, by a godless rout, in



an insurrection, and yet come off in peace and safety, is surely a work of more than ordinary providence.

(2.) *Consider the season of your surprisal*; — when all the kingdom was in an uproar, and the arm of flesh almost quite withered as to supply, — the north invaded, the south full of insurrections, Wales unsubdued,<sup>200</sup> the great city at least suffering men to lift up their hands against us; so that, to the eye of reason, the issue of the whole was, if not lost, yet exceedingly hazardous, and so your captivity endless. Had they gone on, as was probable they would, whether you had this day been brought out to execution, or thrust into a dungeon, or carried up and down as a pageant, I know not; but much better condition, I am sure, rationally you could not expect.

(3.) *The end of your surprisal*. Amongst others, this was apparently one, to be a reserve for their safety who went on in all ways of ruin. You were kept to preserve them in those ways wherein they perished. Whether could reason reach this or no, that you being in their power, kept on purpose for their rescue if brought to any great strait, with the price of your heads to redeem their own, — that they should be brought to greater distress than ever any before in this kingdom, and you be delivered, without the least help to them in their need? It was beyond your friends' reason, who could not hope it; — it was beyond our enemies' reason, who never feared it: if you believed it, you have the comfort of it.

(4.) *The refusal of granting an exchange for such persons* as they accounted more considerable than yourselves, and whose enlargement might have advantaged the cause they professed to maintain exceedingly more than your restraint, — what doth it but proclaim your intended ruin?

This was the way of deliverance which for a long season reason chiefly rested on, the main pillar of all its building; — which, when it was cut in two, what could be seen in it but desolation.

(5.) *The straits you were at length reduced to*, between your enemies' swords and your friends' bullets, which, intended for your deliverance, without the safeguard of Providence might have been your ruin, piercing more than once the house wherein you were. Surely it was, then, an eminent work of faith, to “stand still, and see the salvation of God.”

The many passages of Providence, evidently working for your preservation, which I have received from some of yourselves, I willingly pass over. What I have already said is sufficient to declare that to reason's eye you were as dead bones upon the earth. For our parts, who were endangered spectators at the best, we were but in the prophet's frame; and to any question about your enlargement, could answer only, The Lord alone knows. And

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200 “Idem huic urbi dominandi finis erit, qui parendi fuerit.” — *Senec. de Rom.*

now, behold, the Lord hath chosen you out to be examples of his loving-kindness, in fetching mercy for you from beyond the ken of reason; yea, from above the reach of much precious faith. He hath brought water for you out of the flint. Reckon your deliverance under this head of operations, and I hope you will not be unthankful.

*Use 2.* You that have received so great mercy, we that have seen it, and all who have heard the doctrine confirmed, let us learn to live by faith Live above all things that are seen; subject them to the cross of Christ. Measure your condition by your interest in God's all-sufficiency. Do not in distress calculate what such and such things can effect; but what God hath promised. Reckon upon that, for it shall come to pass. If you could get but this one thing by all your sufferings and dangers, to trust the Lord to the utmost extent of his promises, it would prove a blessed captivity. All carnal fears would then be conquered, all sinful compliances with wicked men removed, etc.

*Use 3.* Be exhorted to great thankfulness,<sup>201</sup> you that have been made partakers of great deliverances. In great distresses very nature prompts the sons of men to great promises. You have heard the ridiculous story of him who in a storm at sea promised to dedicate a wax candle to the blessed Virgin as big as the mast of his ship, which he was resolved when he came on shore to pay with one of twelve in the pound! Let not the moral of that fable be found in any of you. Come not short of any of your engagements. No greater discovery of a hypocritical frame, than to flatter the Lord in trouble, and to decline upon deliverance, in cold blood. The Lord of heaven give you strength to make good all your resolutions:— as private persons, in all godliness and honesty, following hard after God in every known way of his; — as magistrates, in justice, equity, and faithful serving the kingdom of Christ. Especially, let them never beg in vain for help at your hands, who did not beg help in vain for you at the hands of God.

*Use 4.* Consider, if there be so much<sup>202</sup> sweetness in a temporal deliverance, oh! what excellency is there in that eternal redemption which we have in the blood of Jesus! If we rejoice for being delivered from them who could have killed the body, what unspeakable rejoicing is there in that mercy whereby we are freed from the wrath to come! Let this possess your thoughts, let this fill your souls, — let this be your haven from all former storms. And here strike I sail, in this to abide with you and all the saints of God forever.

201 “Erunt homicidæ, tyranni, fures, adulteri, raptores, sacrilegi, proditores; infra ista omnia, ingratus est.” — *Senec. Benef., lib. i.* “Gratiarum cessat decursus, ubi recursus non fuerit.” — *Bern. Serm 50.*

202 “Si tanti vitrum, quanti Margaritum?” — Tertul.

Sermon III.  
Righteous Zeal Encouraged  
by  
divine protection:  
with  
a discourse about toleration, and the duty of the civil magistrate about religion, thereunto  
annexed.



### Prefatory note.

The following sermon was preached before the House of Commons on January 31, 1648, which had been appointed as a day of solemn humiliation in connection with the event of the preceding day, — the decapitation of Charles I. Accordingly, no sermon of Owen has excited keener discussion. Because he consented to preach in these circumstances, he is held to have connived at a great crime, and actually invested it with the sanctions of religion. In the opinion of Dr M'Crie (see "*Miscellaneous Writings*," p. 501), his conduct in this instance was "the greatest blot on his public life," and both his text and the title of his sermon could not fail to be interpreted as encouragement to those who had been accessory to the destruction of the unhappy monarch. On the other hand, some, like Mr Orme, urge that Owen preached by *command*; that no sentiment of the sermon can be construed as approval of the regicide; and that the very passages (see paragraph at the foot of p. 134 and on p. 136) adduced in proof that Owen concurred in it, indicate his desire to keep free and aloof from the expression of any positive opinion on the subject. A bolder line of defence has been instituted, according to which Owen, like Milton, might have regarded the death of Charles as only the appropriate penalty for a long career of violence and duplicity, during which he had made the blood of the best subjects in the realm to flow like water; and that our author, in preaching on this occasion, might have acted under a sense of duty, while discharging a task solemn and painful certainly, but still a task to which he might feel himself bound by higher considerations than mere regard to the authority which enjoined it. The argument to this effect is stated with great point and ability in his "*Life*," etc., vol. i., p. 40. This much is clear, that after the Restoration he was never called to account for his public appearance on this occasion by a government whose measures of vindictive retaliation against the Puritans are notorious. Asty's explanation of the fact has obvious weight:— "His discourse was so modest and inoffensive, that his friends could make no just exception, nor his enemies take an advantage of his words another day." — *Memoirs*, p. 8. The only public expression of displeasure at this sermon was given in 1683, about a month before the grave closed over its author. In the school quadrangle of the University, — not too rich in honours to repudiate without serious loss the lustre shed upon it from the name of its great Puritan Vice-Chancellor, — a document containing some positions, extracted from the sermon and denounced as pernicious and damnable, was publicly burned. He suffered in good company; for propositions from the works of Knox, Buchanan, Baxter, and others, were condemned in the same decree, and committed to the same flames. Some reparation for the insult offered in this mean revenge was made, too late to soothe his feelings, had he needed solace under the affront, but tending so far to rescue his memory from unjust reproach, when, in 1710, by an order from the House of Lords, the Oxford decree was burned by the hands of the common hangman.





It is strange, that the appendix to a sermon preached, as some think, in the very consummation of license and misrule, should be an earnest and able pleading for toleration, in a tone of calmness and moderation rare at any time in controversy, and especially rare in the controversies of that stormy age.

The entire body of the Independents have been blamed for consenting to the death of Charles I., because Owen, the chief ornament of their denomination, was called, in such critical and delicate circumstances, to preach before the House of Commons. Mr Orme successfully disproves the justice of the charge. Whatever offence Owen may thus have committed, to visit it upon the religious body with which he generally acted, is in accordance neither with the principles of justice nor the facts of history. — Ed.

*Die Mercurii, 31 Januarii 1648.*

Ordered by the Commons assembled in Parliament, That Mr Allen do give the thanks of this House to Mr Owen for the great pains he took in his sermon preached before the House this day at Margaret's, Westminster; and that he be desired to print his sermon at large; wherein he is to have the like privilege of printing it as others in the like kind usually have had.

Hen. Scobell, *Cler. Parl. Dom. Com.*

## To the right honourable the Commons of England, assembled in Parliament.

Sirs,

It hath always suited the wisdom of God to do great things in difficult seasons. He sets up walls in troublous times, [Dan. ix. 25](#). His builders must hold swords and spears, as well as instruments of labour, [Neh. iv. 16](#). Yea, while sin continueth in its course here (which began in heaven, and, having contempORIZED with the earth, shall live forever in hell), great works for God will cause great troubles amongst men. The holy, harmless Reconciler of heaven and earth bids us expect the sword to attend his undertakings for and way of making peace, [Matt. x. 34](#). All the waves in the world arise to their height and roaring from the confronting of the breath of God's Spirit and the vapours of men's corruptions. Hence seasons receive their degrees of difficulty according to the greatness and weight of the works which in them God will accomplish. To their worth and excellency is man's opposition proportioned. This the instruments of his glory in this generation shall continually find true, to their present trouble and future comfort.

As the days approach for the delivery of the decree, to the shaking of heaven and earth,<sup>203</sup> and all the powers of the world, to make way for the establishment of that kingdom which shall not be given to another people (the great expectation of the saints of the Most High before the consummation of all); so tumults, troubles, vexations, and disquietness, must certainly grow and increase among the sons of men.

A dead woman (says the proverb) will not be carried out of her house under four men. Much less will living men of wisdom and power be easily and quietly dispossessed of that share and interest in the things of Christ which long-continued usurpation hath deluded them into an imagination of being their own inheritance. This, then, being shortly to be effected, and the scale being ready to turn against the man of sin, notwithstanding his balancing it, in opposition to the witness of Jesus, with the weight and poise of earthly power; no wonder if heaven, earth, sea, and dry land, be shaken, in their giving place to the things that cannot be moved. God Almighty having called you forth, right honourable, at his entrance to the rolling up of the nation's heavens like a scroll,<sup>204</sup> to serve him in your generation in the high places of Armageddon,<sup>205</sup> you shall be sure not to want experience of that opposition which is raised against the great work of the Lord, which generally swells most against the visible instruments thereof.

203 [Heb. xii. 26, 27](#); [Dan. vii. 27](#). "Ego nisi tumultus istos viderem, verbum Dei in mundo non esse dicerem."  
— Luth.

204 [Isa. xxxiv. 4, 5](#).

205 [Rev. xvi. 16](#).

And would to God you had only the devoted sons of Babel to contend withal, — that the men of this shaking earth were your only antagonists, — that the malignity of the dragon's tail had had no influence on the stars of heaven, to prevail with them to fight in their courses against you!<sup>206</sup> But “*jacta est alea*,” — the providence of God must be served, according to the discovery made of his own unchangeable will, and not the mutable interests and passions of the sons of men. For verily “the Lord of hosts hath purposed to pollute the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth,” [Isa. xxiii. 9](#).

The contradictions of sinners against all that walk in the paths of righteousness and peace, with the supportment which their spirits may receive (as being promised) who pursue those ways, notwithstanding those contradictions, are in part discovered in the ensuing sermon. The foundation of that whole transaction of things which is therein held out, in reference to the present dispensations of Providence, — being nothing but an entrance into the unravelling of the whole web of iniquity, interwoven of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, in opposition to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, — I chose not to mention. Neither shall I at present add any thing thereabout, but only my desire that it may be eyed as the granted basis of the following discourse. Only, by your very favourable acceptance of the making out those thoughts, — which were the hasty conception, and, like Jonah's gourd, the child of a night or two (which, with prayer for a rooting in the hearts of them to whom they were delivered, had certainly withered in their own leaves, had they not received warmth and moisture from your commands in general, and the particular desires of many of you, to give them a life of a few days longer), — I am encouraged to the annexing of a few lines, as a free-will offering to attend the following product of obedience.

Now, this shall not be as to the opposition which you do and shall yet farther meet withal; but as to the causes, real or pretended, which are held forth as the bottom of that contradiction wherewith on every side you are encompassed.

The things in reference whereunto your procedence is laden with such criminations as these sad days of recompense have found to be comets portending no less than blood, are first civil, then religious.

For the first, as their being beyond the bounds of my calling gives them sanctuary from being called forth to my consideration; so neither have I the least thoughts with Absalom of a more orderly carrying on of affairs, might my desires have any influence into their disposal. Waiting at the throne of grace, that those whom God hath intrusted with, and enabled for, the transaction of these things, may be directed and supported in their employment, is the utmost of my undertaking herein.

For the other, or religious things, the general interest I have in them as a Christian, being improved by the superadded title of a minister of the gospel (though unworthy the one

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206 [Rev. xii. 4](#).

name and the other), gives me not only such boldness as accrueth from enjoyed favour, but also such a right as will support me to plead concerning them before the most impartial judicature.

And this I shall do (as I said before) merely in reference to those criminations which are laid by conjectural presumptions on your honourable assembly, and made a cause of much of that opposition and contradiction you meet withal. Now, in particular, it is the toleration of all religions, or invented ways of worship, — wherein your constitutions are confidently antedated in many places of the nation; the thing itself, withal, being held out as the most enormous apprehension, and desperate endeavour, for the destruction of truth and godliness, that ever entered the thoughts of men professing the one and the other. The contest hereabout being “*adhuc sub judice*,” and there being no doubt but that the whole matter, commonly phrased as above, hath (like other things) sinful and dangerous extremes, I deemed it not amiss to endeavour the pouring a little cold water upon the common flames which are kindled in the breasts of men about this thing. And who knows whether the words of a weak nothing may not, by the power of the Fountain of beings, give some light into the determination and establishment of a thing of so great concernment and consequence as this is generally conceived to be? What is in this my weak undertaking of the Lord, I shall beg of him that it may be received; — what is of myself, I beg of you that it may be pardoned. That God Almighty would give you to prove all things that come unto you in his way, and to hold fast that which is good, granting you unconquerable assistance in constant perseverance, is the prayer of,

Your devoted Servant  
In our dearest Lord,

John Owen.

Coggeshall, *Feb.* 28.

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### Sermon III. Righteous zeal encouraged by divine protection.

“Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.” — [Jer. xv. 19, 20](#).

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The words of my text having a full dependence upon, and flowing out from, the main subject-matter of [the whole chapter](#), I must of necessity take a view thereof, and hold out unto you the mind of God contained therein, before I enter upon the part thereof chiefly intended. And this I shall do with very brief observations, that I may not anticipate myself from a full opening and application of the words of my text.

And this the rather are my thoughts led unto, because the whole transaction of things between the Lord and a stubbornly sinful nation, exceedingly accommodated to the carrying on of the controversy he is now pleading with that wherein we live, is set out (as we say) to the life therein.

Of [the whole chapter](#) there be these five parts:—

First, *The denunciation of fearful wasting, destroying judgments against Judah and Jerusalem, [verse 3](#), and so on to [verse 10](#).*

Secondly, *The procuring, deserving cause of these overwhelming calamities, [verses 4 and 6](#).*

Thirdly, *The inevitableness of these judgments, and the inexorableness of the Lord as to the accomplishment of all the evils denounced, [verse 1](#).*

Fourthly, *The state and condition of the prophet, with the frame and deportment of his spirit under those bitter dispensations of Providence, [verse 10](#), and [15–18](#).*

Fifthly, *The answer and appearance of God unto him upon the making out of his complaint, [verses 11–14](#), and [19–21](#).*

My text lieth in the last part, but yet with such dependence on the former as enforceth to a consideration of them.

First. There is the denunciation of fearful wasting, destroying judgments, to sinful Jerusalem, [verse 2](#), and so onwards, with some interposed ejaculations concerning her inevitable ruin, as [verses 5, 6](#).

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Here's death, sword, famine, captivity, [verse 2](#); — banishment, [verse 4](#); — unpitied desolation, [verse 5](#); — redoubled destruction, bereaving, fanning, spoiling, etc., [verses 6–9](#). That universal devastation of the whole people which came upon them in the Babylonish captivity is the thing here intended, — the means of its accomplishment by particular plagues and judgments, in their several kinds (for the greater dread and terror), being at large enumerated, — the faithfulness of God, also, being made hereby to shine more clear in the dispersion of that people; — doing not only for the main what before he had threatened, but

in particular executing the judgments recorded, [Luke xxi. 24](#), etc.; [Deut. xxviii. 15–57](#), — fulfilling hereby what he had devised, accomplishing the word he had commanded in the days of old, [Lam. ii. 17](#).

That which hence I shall observe is only from the variety of these particulars, which are held out as the means of the intended desolation.

Observation. *God's treasures of wrath against a sinful people have sundry and various issues for the accomplishment of the appointed end.*

When God walks contrary to a people, it is not always in one path; he hath seven ways to do it, and will do it seven times, [Lev. xxvi. 24](#). He strikes not always with one weapon, nor in one place. As there is with him ποικίλη χάρις, “manifold and various grace,” [1 Pet. iv. 10](#), — love and compassion making out itself in choice variety, suited to our manifold indigencies; so there is ὀργὴ τεθησαυρισμένη, [Rom. ii. 5](#), — stored, treasured wrath, suiting itself in its flowings out to the provocations of stubborn sinners.

The first emblem of God's wrath against man was a “flaming sword turning itself every way,” [Gen. iii. 24](#). Not only in one or two, but in all their paths he meeteth them with his flaming sword. As a wild beast in a net,<sup>207</sup> so are sinners under inexorable judgments; the more they strive, the more they are enwrapped and entangled; they shuffle themselves from under one calamity, and fall into another: “As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him,” [Amos v. 19](#). Oh! remove this one plague, saith Pharaoh.<sup>208</sup> If he can escape from under this pressure, he thinks he shall be free; — but when he fled from the lion, still the bear met him; and when he went into the house, the serpent bit him. And as the flaming sword turns every way, so God can put it into every thing. To those that cry, Give me a king, God can give him in his anger; and from those that cry, Take him away, he can take him away in his wrath, [Hos. xiii. 10, 11](#).

Oh, that this might seal up instruction to our own souls! What variety of calamities have we been exercised withal, for sundry years! What Pharaoh-like spirits have we had under them! Oh, that we were delivered this once, and then all were well! How do we spend all our thoughts to extricate ourselves from our present pressures! If this hedge, this pit were passed, we should have smooth ground to walk on; — not considering that God can fill our safest paths with snares and serpents. Give us peace, give us wealth, — give us as we were, with our own, in quietness. Poor creatures! suppose all these desires were in sincerity, and not, as with the most they are, fair colours of foul and bloody designs; yet if peace were, and wealth were, and former things were, and God were not, what would it avail you? Cannot he poison your peace, and canker your wealth? and when you were escaped out of the field

207 [Isa. li. 20](#).

208 [Exod. x. 17](#).

from the lion and the bear, appoint a serpent to bite you, leaning upon the walls of your own house? In vain do you seek to stop the streams, while the fountains are open; turn yourselves whither you will, bring yourselves into what condition you can, nothing but peace and reconciliation with the God of all these judgments can give you rest in the day of visitation. You see what variety of plagues are in his hand. Changing of condition will do no more to the avoiding of them, than a sick man's turning himself from one side of the bed to another; during his turning, he forgets his pain by striving to move, — being laid down again, he finds his condition the same as before.

This is the first thing, — we are under various judgments, from which by ourselves there is no deliverance.

Secondly. The second thing here expressed is, the procuring cause of these various judgments, set down, [verse 4](#), “Because of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.”

The sins of Manasseh filled the ephah of Judah's wickedness, and caused the talent of lead to be laid on the mouth thereof.<sup>209</sup> Oftentimes in the relation of his story doth the Holy Ghost emphatically express this, that for his sin Judah should be destroyed, [2 Kings xxi. 11](#). Yea, when they had a little reviving under Josiah, and the bowels of the Lord began to work in compassion towards them; yet, as it were remembering the provocation of this Manasseh, he recalls his thoughts of mercy, [2 Kings xxiii. 26, 27](#). The deposing of divine and human things is oftentimes very opposite.<sup>210</sup> God himself proceeds with them in a diverse dispensation. In the spiritual body the members offend, and the Head is punished: “The iniquity of us all did meet on him,” [Isa. liii. 1](#). In the civil politic body the head offends, and the members rue it: Manasseh sins, and Judah must go captive.

Three things present themselves for the vindication of the equity of God's righteous judgments, in the recompensing the sins of the king upon the people.

1. The *concurrence and influence* of the people's power into their rule and government: they that set him up may justly be called to answer for his miscarriage. The Lord himself had before made the sole bottom of that political administration to be their own wills: “If thou wilt have a king, after the manner of the nations,” [Deut. xvii. 14](#); [1 Sam. viii. 7](#). Though for particulars, himself (according to his supreme sovereignty) placed in many [appointed many of the kings], by peculiar exemption; otherwise his providence was served by their plenary consent, or by such dispensation of things as you have related, [1 Kings xvi. 21, 22](#), “Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni, the son of Ginath, to make him king; and half followed Omri. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned.”

209 [Zech. v. 7, 8](#).

210 “Est quædam æmulatio divinæ rei, et humanæ.” — *Ter. Apol.*



Now, they who place men in authority to be God's vicegerents, do undertake to God for their department in that authority, and therefore may justly bear the sad effects of their sinful miscarriages.

2. Because, for fear of Manasseh's cruelty, or to flatter him in his tyranny for their own advantage, the greatest part of the people had *apostatized* from the ways and worship of Hezekiah, to comply with him in his sin; as at another time "they willingly walked after the commandment," [Hos. v. 11](#). And this is plainly expressed, [2 Kings xxi. 9](#), "Manasseh seduced the people to do more evil than the nations." When kings turn seducers, they seldom want good store of followers, Now, if the blind lead the blind, both will, and both justly may, fall into the ditch. When kings command unrighteous things, and people suit them with willing compliance, none doubts but the destruction of them both is just and righteous. See [verse 6 of this chapter](#).

3. Because the people, by virtue of their retained sovereignty, did not restrain him in his provoking ways So Zuinglius, Artic. 42, "Qui non vetat, cum potest, jubet." When Saul would have put Jonathan to death, the people would not suffer him so to do, but delivered Jonathan, that he died not, [1 Sam. xiv. 45](#). When David proposed the reducing of the ark, his speech to the people was, "If it seem good unto you, let us send abroad to our brethren everywhere, that they may gather themselves to us: and all the congregation said that they would do so: because the thing was fight in the eyes of all the people," [1 Chron. xiii. 2, 4](#). So they bargain with Rehoboam about their subjection, upon condition of a moderate rule, [1 Kings xii](#). By virtue of which power, also, they delivered Jeremiah from the prophets and priests that would have put him to death, [Jer. xxvi. 16](#). And on this ground might they justly feed on the fruit of their own neglected duty. See Bilson on Obed., part 3, page 271.

Be it thus, or otherwise, by what way soever the people had their interest therein, certain it is, that for the sins of Manasseh, one way or other made their own, they were destroyed. And therefore, these things being written for our example, it cannot but be of great concernment to us to know what were those sins which wrapped up the people of God in irrevocable destruction Now, these the Holy Ghost fully manifesteth in the story of the life and reign of this Manasseh, and they may all be reduced unto two chief heads.

(1.) False worship or superstition: "He built high places, made altars for Baal, and a grove, as did Ahab," [2 Kings xxi. 3](#).

(2.) Cruelty: "He shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem with blood from one end of it to another," [verse 16](#).

Whether this cruelty be to be ascribed to his tyranny in civil affairs, and so the blood shed is called innocent because not of malefactors; or to his persecution in subordination to his false worship, instituted as before (as the pope and his adherents have devoured whole nations "in ordine ad spiritualia"), is not apparent; but this is from hence and other places

most evident, that superstition and persecution, will-worship and tyranny, are inseparable concomitants.<sup>211</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar sets up his great image, and the next news you hear, the saints are in the furnace, [Dan. iii. 20](#). You seldom see a fabric of human-invented worship, but either the foundation or top-stone is laid in the blood of God's people. "The wisdom" (religion, or way of worship) "that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," [James iii. 17](#); — when the other is "earthly, sensual, devilish, bringing along envying, strife, confusion, and every evil work," [verse 16](#). Persecution and blood is the genuine product of all invented worship. I might from hence name and pursue other observations, but I shall only name one, and proceed.

Observation. *When false worship, with injustice by cruelty, have possessed the governors of a nation, and wrapped in the consent of the greatest part of the people who have been acquainted with the mind of God; that people and nation, without unprecedented mercy, is obnoxious to remediless ruin.*

Those two are the Bel and dragon that, what by their actings, what by their deservings, have swallowed that ocean of blood which has flowed from the veins of millions slain upon the face of the earth. Give me the number of the witnesses of Jesus whose souls under the altar cry for revenge against their false worshipping murderers<sup>212</sup> and the tale of them whose lives have been sacrificed to the insatiable ambition and tyranny of blood-thirsty potentates, with the issues of God's just vengeance on the sons of men for compliance in these two things; and you will have gathered in the whole harvest of blood, leaving but a few straggling gleanings upon other occasions. And if these things have been found in England, and the present administration with sincere humiliation do not run across to unravel this close-woven web of destruction, all thoughts of recovery will quickly be too late. And thus far sin and providence drive on a parallel.

Thirdly. The inevitableness of the desolation threatened, and the inexorableness of God in the execution of it, [verse 1](#), is the third thing considerable: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people."

Should I insist upon this, it would draw me out unto Scripture evidences of a nation's travelling in sin beyond the line of God's patience, and so not to be exempted from ruin; but, instead thereof, I shall make it a part of my daily supplications, that they may be to our enemies, if God's enemies, and the interpretation of them to those that hate us.

In brief, the words contain an impossible supposition, and yet a negation of the thing for whose sake it is supposed. Moses and Samuel were men who, in the days of their flesh,

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211 See the appendix at the end of this sermon.

212 [Rev. vi. 9, 10](#).

offered up strong supplications, and averted many imminent judgments from a sinful people. As if the Lord should say, All that I can do, in such a case as this, I would grant at the intercession of Moses and Samuel, or others interceding in their spirit and zeal; but now the state of things is come to that pass, the time of treaty being expired, the black flag hung out, and the “decree having brought forth,” [Zeph. ii. 2](#), that, upon their utmost entreaty, it cannot, it shall not, be reversed.

Observation. *There is a time when sin grows ripe for ruin:* “For three transgressions, and for four, the Lord will not turn away the iniquity of a people,” [Amos i. 9](#).

When the sin of the Amorites hath filled the cup of vengeance, they must drink it, [Gen. xv. 16](#). England, under several administrations of civil government, hath fallen twice, yea thrice, into nation-destroying sins. Providence hath once more given it another bottom; if you should stumble (which the Lord avert) at the same block of impiety and cruelty, there is not another sifting to be made, to reserve any grains from the ground. I doubt not but our three transgressions, and four, will end in total desolation. The Lord be your guide; — poor England lieth at stake.

Observation. *The greatest difficulty that lieth in bringing of total destruction upon a sinful people, is in the interposition of Moses and Samuel.*

If Moses would but have stood out of the gap, and let the Almighty go, he had broken in upon the whole host of Israel, [Exod. xxxii. 9, 10](#). And let it by the way be observed, of the spirit of Samuel, that when the people of God were most exorbitant, he crieth, “As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,” [1 Sam. xii. 23](#). Scarce answered by those who, if their interest be not served, or at least their reason satisfied, will scarce yield a prayer for, yea, pour out curses against, their choicest deliverers. The Lord lay it not to their charge! For us, seeing that praying deliverers are more prevalent than fighting deliverers (it is, Though Moses and Samuel, not Gideon and Samson, stood before me), as some decay, let us gather strength in the Lord, that he may have never the more rest for their giving over, until he establish mount Zion a praise in the earth.

Fourthly. Come we now to the fourth thing in this chapter, the prophet’s state and condition, with the frame and deportment of his heart and spirit under these dispensations. And here we find him expressing two things of himself:—

1. *What he found from others, [verse 10](#).*
2. *What he wrestled withal in his own spirit, [verses 15–18](#).*

1. What he found from others. He telleth you it was cursing and reproach, etc.: “I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury, yet every one of them doth curse me,” [verse 10](#).

Now this return may be considered two ways.

- (1.) *In itself:* “Every one (saith he) of this people doth curse me.”



(2.) *In reference to his deportment:* “I have neither borrowed nor lent on usury, yet they curse me.”

(1.) From the first, observe:—

Observation. *Instruments of God’s greatest works and glory are oftentimes the chiefest objects of a professing people’s cursings and revenges.*

The return which God’s labourers meet withal in this generation is in the number of those things whereof there is none new under the sun. Men that, under God, deliver a kingdom, may have the kingdom’s curses for their pains.

When Moses had brought the people of Israel out of bondage, by that wonderful and unparalleled deliverance, being forced to appear with the Lord for the destruction of Korah and his associates, who would have seduced the congregation to its utter ruin, he receives at length this reward of all his travail, labour, and pains, — all the congregation gathered themselves against him and Aaron, laying murder and sedition to their charge; telling them they had “killed the people of the Lord,” [Num. xvi. 41, 42](#); — a goodly reward for all their travails. If God’s works do not suit with the lusts, prejudices, and interests of men, they will labour to give his instruments the devil’s wages. Let not upright hearts sink because they meet with thankless men. “*Bona agere, et mala pati, Christianorum est.*” A man may have the blessing of God and the curse of a professing people at the same time. “Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me, are for signs and for wonders in Israel,” [Isa. viii. 18](#). “*Cum ab hominibus damnamur, a Deo absolvimur.*”<sup>213</sup> Man’s condemnation and God’s absolution do not seldom meet upon the same persons, for the same things. If you labour to do the work of the Lord, pray think it not strange if among men curses be your reward, and detestation your wages.

(2.) *In reference to the prophet’s deportment:* “He had neither lent, nor had any lent to him, upon usury.” He was free from blame among them, — had no dealings with them in those things which are usually attended with reproaches; as he shows by an instance in usury, a thing that a long time hath *heard very ill.*

Observation. *Men every way blameless, and to be embraced in their own ways, are oftentimes abhorred and laden with curses for following the Lord in his ways.*

“*Bonus vir Caius Sejus, sed malus quia Christianus.*” What precious men should many be, would they let go the work of God in this generation! No advantage against them but in the matter of their God; — and that is enough to have them to the lions, [Dan. vi. 5](#). He that might be honoured for compassing the ends suiting his own worldly interest, and will cheerfully undergo dishonour for going beyond, to suit the design of God, hath surely some impression upon his spirit that is from above.

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2. You have the prophet's deportment, and the frame of his spirit during those transactions between the Lord and that sinful people; and this he holds out, in many pathetic complaints, to be fainting, decaying, perplexed, weary of his burden, not knowing how to ease himself, as you may see at large, [verses 15–18](#).

Observation. *In dark and difficult dispensations of providence, God's choicest servants are oftentimes ready to faint under the burden of them.*

How weary was David when he cried out in such a condition, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest," [Ps. lv. 6](#). Long had he waited for a desired issue of his perplexed state, and had perhaps oftentimes been frustrated of his hope of drawing to a period of his miseries; and now, finding one disappointment to follow on the neck of another, he is weary, and cries, What! nothing but this trouble and confusion still? "Oh that I had wings like a dove!" — a ship to sail to a foreign nation (or the like), there to be at peace. In the like strait another time, see what a miserable conclusion he draws of all his being exercised under the hand of God; [Ps. lxxii. 13](#), "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." And again, [Ps. cxvi. 11](#), he saith, in the perturbation of his mind, "All men are liars;" that all the promises, all the encouragements, which in his way he had received from God, should fail of their accomplishment.

It is not with them as it was with that wicked king of Israel, who, being disappointed of peace and deliverance in his own time, cries out, "This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" [2 Kings vi. 33](#). The season of deliverance suited not his expectation; therefore he quite throweth off the Lord and his protection:— not unlike many among ourselves, whose desires and expectations being not satisfied in the closing of our distractions, according to the way which themselves had framed for the Lord to walk in, are ready to cast off his cause, his protection, to comply with the enemies of his name, "Si Deus homini non placuerit, Deus non erit." But it may be observed, that deliverance came not to that people until Jehoram was weary of waiting, and then instantly God gives it in. When God hath tired the patience, of corrupted men, he will speak peace to them that wait for him. Thus it is not with the saints of God; only, being perplexed in their spirits, dark in their apprehensions, and fainting in their strength, they break out oftentimes into passionate complaints (as Jeremiah for a cottage in the wilderness), but yet for the main holding firm to the Lord.

And the reasons of this quailing are, —

(1.) *The weakness of faith, when the methods of God's proceedings are unfathomable to our apprehensions.* While men see the paths wherein the Lord walketh, they can follow him through some difficulties; but when that is hid from them, though providence so shut up all other ways that it is impossible God should be in them, yet if they cannot discern (so proud are they) how he goeth in that wherein he is, they are ready to faint and give over. God is pleased sometimes to make darkness his pavilion and his secret place. "A fire devours before him, and it is very tempestuous round about him," [Ps. l. 3](#). When once God is attended

with fire, darkness, and tempest, because we cannot so easily see him, we are ready to leave him. Now, this the Lord usually doth in the execution of his judgments, “Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep,” Ps. xxxvi. 6. His righteousness, his kindness, is like a great mountain that is easy to be seen, — a man cannot overlook it, unless he wilfully shut his eyes; but his judgments are like the great deep. Who can look into the bottom of the sea, or know what is done in the depths thereof? God’s works in their accomplishment are oftentimes so unsuited to the reasons and apprehensions of men, that very many who have been strong in their desires, and great in expectation of them, upon their bringing forth to light, have quite rejected and opposed them as none of his, because distant from what they had framed to themselves. It is evident from the gospel, that the people of the Jews were full of expectation and longing for the great work of the coming of the Messiah just at the season wherein he came; yet being come, because not accommodated to their pre-imaginings, they rejected him, as having neither form nor comeliness in him to be desired, Isa. liii. 2. And the prophet Amos telleth many who desired the day of the Lord, that that day should be darkness to them, and not light, Amos v. 18, 20. So in every generation many desirous of the accomplishment of God’s work are shaken off from any share therein, by finding it unsuited to their reasons and expectations.

Now, when the Lord is pleased thus to walk in darkness, many not being able to trace him in his dispensations, are ready to lie down and sink under the burden. David seems to profess that he had nothing at such a time to uphold him but this, that God must be there, or nowhere. I had said (saith he) that it was in vain to walk as I do, but that I should have condemned the generation of thy children, Ps. lxxiii. 15. And truly God never leaves us without so much light, but that we may see clearly where he is not; and so, by recounting particulars, we may be rolled where he is, though his goings there be not so clear. Ask if God be in the counsels of men who seek themselves, and in the ways of those who make it their design to ruin the generation of the just. If you find him there, seek no farther; if not, let that give you light to discern where he makes his abode, that you turn not aside to the flocks of others.

(2.) *A reducing the works of Providence to inbred rules of their own.* But this I cannot pursue.

Be tender toward fainters in difficult seasons. If they leave waiting on the Lord because the evil is of him, — if they cast in their lot with the portion of the ungodly, — they will in the end perish in their gainsaying; but as for such as, what for want of light, what for want of faith, sit down and sigh in darkness, be not too hasty in laying farther burdens on them. When first the confederacy was entered into by the Protestant princes in Germany against Charles V., Luther himself for a season was bewildered, and knew not what to do, until, being instructed in the fundamental laws of the empire, he sat down fully in that undertaking,

though the Lord gave it not the desired issue.<sup>214</sup> Our Saviour Christ asks, if, when he comes, he shall find faith on the earth, [Luke xviii. 8](#). It is his coming with the spirit of judgment and burning, a day of trial and visitation, he there speaks of. Now, what faith shall he want which will not be found in that day? Not the faith of adherence to himself for spiritual life and justification, but of actual closing with him in the things he then doth; that shall be rare, — many shall be staggered and faint in that day.

And thus, by the several heads of this chapter, have I led you through the very state and condition of this nation at this time.

First, *Variety of judgments* are threatened to us, and incumbent on us; as in the first part. Secondly, Of these, *false worship, superstition, tyranny, and cruelty*, lie in the bottom, as their procuring causes; which is the second. Thirdly, These, *if renewed under your hand*, will certainly bring inevitable ruin upon the whole nation; which is the third. Fourthly, All which make many precious hearts, what for want of light, what for want of faith, to fail, and cry out for “the wings of a dove;” which is the fourth.

Fifthly, I come, in the fifth place, to God’s direction to you for the future, in this state and condition; which being spread in divers verses, as the Lord gives it to the prophet, I shall meddle with no more of it than is contained in the words which at our entrance I read unto you: “Let them return,” etc.

In the words observe four things, —

I. God’s *direction* to the prophet, and in him to all that do his work in such a season as this described: “Let them return to thee; return not thou to them.”

II. Their *assistance and supportment* in pursuance of that direction: “I will make thee to this people a brasen fenced wall.”

III. The *opposition*, with its success and issue, which in that way they should meet withal: “They shall fight against thee, but shall not prevail.”

IV. Their *consolation and success* from the presence of the Lord: “For I am with thee to deliver thee,” etc.

I. There is God’s direction.

Many difficulties in this troublesome season was the prophet intricated withal. The people would not be prevailed with to come up to the mind of God; — they continuing in their stubbornness, the Lord would not be prevailed with to avert the threatened desolation. What now shall he do? To stand out against the bulk of the people suits not his earthly interest; — to couple with them answers not the discharge of his office; — to wait upon them any longer is fruitless; — to give up himself to their ways, comfortless. Hence his complaints, hence his moanings; — better lie down and sink under the burden, than always to swim against the stream of an unreformable multitude. In this strait the Lord comes in with his

214 *Sleid. Com., lib. viii.*

direction: "Let them return unto thee," etc. Keep thy station, perform thy duty, comply not with the children of backsliding. But whatever be the issue, if there be any closing wrought, let it be by working them off from their ways of folly. All condescension on thy part, where the work of God is to be done, is in opposition to him. If they return, embrace them freely; if not, do thy duty constantly.

That which is spoken immediately to the prophet, I shall hold out to all, acting in the name and authority of God, in this general proposition:—

Observation. *Plausible compliances of men in authority with those against whom they are employed, are treacherous contrivances against the God of heaven, by whom they are employed.*

If God be so provoked that he curseth him who doth his work negligently, what is he by them that do it treacherously? — when he gives a sword into the hands of men, and they thrust it into his own bowels, his glory and honour, those things so dear to him? He that is intrusted with it, and dares not do justice on every one that dares do injustice, is afraid of the creature, but makes very bold with the Creator. [Prov. xxv. 2](#), "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." That which God aimeth to be glorious in, to manifest his attributes by, is the concealing and covering our iniquities in Christ; but if the magistrate will have glory, if he will not bring upon himself dishonour by dishonouring God, he is to search and find out the transgressions with whose cognizance he is intrusted, and to give unto them condign retribution. If the Lord curse them who come not forth to his help against the mighty, [Judges v. 23](#) — what is their due who, being called forth by him, do yet help the mighty against him? For a man to take part with the kingdom's enemies, is no small crime; but for a commission-officer to run from them by whom he is commissioned, to take part with the adversary, is death without mercy. Yet have not some in our days arrived at that stupendous impudence, that when, as private persons, they have declaimed against the enemies of the nation, and by that means got themselves into authority, they have made use of that authority to comply with and uphold those by an opposition to whom they got into their authority? which is no less than an atheistical attempt to personate the Almighty, unto such iniquities as without his appearance they dare not own. But "he that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord," [Prov. xvii. 15](#); and not only to the Lord, but to good men also: "He that saith to the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him," [Prov. xxiv. 24](#).

I speak only as to the general (for me, let all particulars find mercy), with a sad remembrance of the late workings of things amongst us, with those vile, sordid compliances, which grew upon the spirits of magistrates and ministers, with those whose garments were dyed with the blood of God's saints and precious ones, — as formerly they were called, for now these names are become terms of reproach. And would this complying went alone; but



pretences and accusations must be found out against such as follow with them. When they begin to call darkness light, they will ere long call light darkness; by which means our eyes have seen men of their own accord laying down the weapons wherewith at first they fought against opposers, and taking up them which were used against themselves; as hath happened more than once to penmen, both in our own and our neighbour nation.

Now, this revolting from principles of religion and righteousness, to a compliance with any sinful way or person, is a treacherous opposition to the God of heaven. For, —

It cannot be done but by preferring the creature before the Creator, especially in those things which are the proximate causes of deviation.

Two principal causes I have observed of this crooked walking.

(1.) Fear.

(2.) That desire of perishing things which hath a mixture of covetousness and ambition.

The first maketh men waxy what they do against men; the other maketh them weary of doing any thing for God, as whereby their sordid ends are not like to be accomplished.

(1.) Fear. When once magistrates begin to listen after “quid sequitur’s,” and so to withdraw from doing good for fear of suffering evil, paths of wickedness are quickly returned unto, and the authority of God despised. “Let this man go, and take heed of Cæsar,” [John xix. 12](#), did more prevail on Pilate’s treacherous heart than all the other clamours of the Jews. Yea, was not the whole Sanhedrim swayed to desperate villainy for fear the Romans should come and take away their kingdom? [John xi. 48](#). When men begin once to distrust that God will leave them in the briers, to wrestle it out themselves (for unbelief lieth at the bottom of carnal fear), they quickly turn themselves to contrivances of their own for their own safety, their own prosperity; which commonly is by obliging those unto them by compliances, in an opposition to whom they might oblige the Almighty to their assistance. Surely they conclude he wants either truth or power to support them in his employment.

If a prince should send an ambassador to a foreign state, to treat about peace, or to denounce war; who, when he comes there, distrusting his master’s power to make good his undertaking, should comply and wind up his interest with them to whom he was sent, suffering his sovereign’s errand to fall to the ground, — would he not be esteemed as arrant a traitor as ever lived? And yet, though this be clipped coin among men, it is put upon the Lord every day as current.

From this principle of carnal fear and unbelief, — trembling for a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass, forgetting the Lord our maker, [Isa. li. 12](#), — are all those prudential follies which *exercise* the minds of most men in authority, making them, especially in times of difficulties, to regulate and square all their proceedings by what suits their own safety and particular interests, — counselling, advising, working for themselves, quite forgetting by whom they are intrusted, and whose business they should do.



(2.) A desire of perishing things tempered with covetousness and ambition. Hence was the sparing of the fat cattle and of Agag by Saul, [1 Sam. xv. 1](#).

When those two qualifications close on any, they are diametrically opposed to that frame which of God is required in them, — viz., “That they should be men fearing God, and hating covetousness.” The first will go far, being only a contrivance for safety; but if this latter take hold of any, being a consultation to exalt themselves, it quickly carrieth them beyond all bounds whatsoever. The Lord grant that hereafter there may be no such complaints in this nation, or [that they] may be causeless, as have been heretofore, — viz., that we have poured out our prayers, jeopardated our lives, wasted our estates, spent our blood, to serve the lusts and compass the designs of ambitious, ungodly men!

The many ways whereby these things intrench upon the spirits of men, to bias them from the paths of the Lord, I shall not insist upon; it is enough that I have touched upon the obvious causes of deviation, and manifested them to be treacheries against the God of all authority.

*Use.* Be exhorted to beware of relapses, with all their causes and inducements, and to be constant to the way of righteousness; and this I shall hold out unto you in two particulars.

1. Labour to recover others, even all that were ever distinguished and called by the name of the Lord, from their late fearful returning to sinful compliances with the enemies of God and the nation. I speak not of men’s persons, but of their ways. For three years this people have been eminently sick of the folly of backsliding, and without some special cordial are like to perish in it, as far as I know.

Look upon the estate of this people as they were differenced seven years ago, so for some continuance, and as they are now; and you shall find in how many things we have returned to others, and not one instance to be given of their return to us. That this may be clear, take some particulars.

(1.) In words and expressions; — those are “*index animi*.” Turn them over, and you may find what is in the whole heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Now, is not that language, are not those very expressions which filled the mouths of the common adversaries only, grown also terms of reproach upon the tongues of men that suffered sometimes under them, and counted it their honour so to do? Hence that common exprobration, A parliament of saints, an army of saints, and such like derisions of God’s ways, — now plentiful with them who sat sometimes and took sweet counsel with us. Ah! had it not been more for the honour of God that we had kept our station until others had come to us, — so to have exalted the name and profession of the gospel, — than that we should so return to them as to join with them in making the paths of Christ a reproach? Had it not been better for us, with Judah, to continue “ruling with God, and to be faithful with the saints,” [Hos. xi. 12](#), than to stand in the congregation of the mockers, and to sit in the seat of the scornful? What shall we say, when the saints of God “are as signs and wonders



[to be spoken against] in Israel?" [Isa. viii. 18](#). O that men would remember how they have left their first station, when themselves use those reproaches unto others which for the same cause themselves formerly bare with comfort! It is bitterness to consider how the gospel is scandalized by this woful return of ministers and people, by casting scriptural expressions by way of scorn on those with whom they were sometimes in the like kind companions of contempt. Surely in this we are returned to them, and not they to us.

(2.) In actions, and those, —

[1.] Of religion. Not only in opinion, but practice also, are we here under a vile return. We are become the lions, and the very same thoughts [are] entertained by us against others as were exercised towards ourselves. Are not others as unworthy to live upon their native soil in our judgments, as we ourselves in the judgments of them formerly over us? Are not groans for liberty, by the warmth of favour, in a few years hatched into attempts for tyranny? And for practice, what hold hath former superstition, in observing days and times, laid upon the many of the people again! Witness the late solemn superstition, and many things of the like nature.

[2.] For civil things, the closing of so many formerly otherwise engaged with the adverse party in the late rebellion, with the lukewarm deportment of others at the same time, is a sufficient demonstration of it. And may not the Lord justly complain of all this? "What iniquity have you seen in me or my ways, that you are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" [Jer. ii. 5](#). "Why have you changed your glory for that which doth not profit," [verse 11](#). "Have I been a dry heath or a barren wilderness to you?" Oh, that men should find no more sweetness in following the Lamb under wonderful protections, but that they should thus turn aside into every wilderness! What indignity is this to the ways of God! I could give you many reasons of it; but I have done what I intended, — a little hinted that we are a returning people, that so you might be exhorted to help for a recovery. And how shall that be?

2. By your own keeping close to the paths of righteousness. If you return not, others will look about again. This breach, this evil is of you; within your own walls was the fountain of our backsliding. Would you be the repairers of breaches, the restorers of paths for men to walk in? — do these two things:—

(1.) Turn not to the ways of such as the Lord hath blasted under your eyes. And these may be referred to three heads.

[1.] Oppression; [2.] Self-seeking; [3.] Contrivances for persecution.

[1.] Oppression. How detestable a crime it is in the eyes of the Almighty, — what effects it hath upon men, "making wise men mad!" [Eccles. vii. 7](#), — how frequently it closeth in the calamitous ruin of the oppressors themselves, — are things known to all. Whether it hath not been exercised in this nation, both in general by unnecessary impositions, and in particular by unwarrantable pressures, let the mournful cries of all sorts of people testify.

Should you now return to such ways as these, would not the anger of the Lord smoke against you? Make it, I beseech you, your design to relieve the whole, by all means possible, and to relieve particulars, yea, even of the adverse party where too much overborne. O let it be considered by you, that it be not considered upon you! I know the things you are necessitated to are not to be supported by the air. It is only what is unnecessary as to you, or insupportable as to others, that requires your speedy reforming; that so it may be said of you as of [Neh. v. 14, 15](#). And for particulars (pray pardon my folly and boldness), I heartily desire a committee of your honourable House might sit once a-week, to relieve poor men that have been oppressed by men sometimes enjoying parliamentary authority.

[2.] Self-seeking, when men can be content to lay a nation low, that they may set up themselves upon the heaps and ruins thereof. Have not some sought to advance themselves under that power which, with the lives and blood of the people, they have opposed; seeming to be troubled at former things, not because they were done, but because they were not done by them? But innocent blood will be found a tottering foundation for men to build their honours, greatness, and preferments upon. O return not in this unto any! If men serve themselves of the nation, they must expect that the nation will serve itself upon them. The best security you can possibly have that the people will perform their duty in obedience, is the witness of your own consciences that you have discharged your duty towards them, — in seeking their good by your own trouble, and not your own advantages in their trouble. I doubt not but that in this your practice makes the admonition a commendation; otherwise the word spoken will certainly witness against you.

[3.] Contrivances for persecution. How were the hearts of all men hardened like the nether millstone, and their thoughts did grind blood and revenge against their brethren! What colours, what pretences, had men invented to prepare a way for the rolling of their garments in the tears, yea, blood of Christians! The Lord so keep your spirits from a compliance herein, that withal the bow be not too much bent on the other side, — which is not impossible.

Be there a backsliding upon your spirit to these, or such-like things as these, the Lord will walk contrary to you; and were you “as the signet upon his hand,” he would pluck you off.

(2.) Return not to the open enemies of our peace. I could here enlarge myself, to support your spirits in the work mentioned, [Job xxix. 14, 15](#); but I must go on to the following parts of my text. And therefore, —

II. I pass from the direction given to the supportment and assistance promised: “I will make thee to this people a brasen and a fenced wall.”

An implied objection, which the prophet might put in, upon his charge to keep so close to the rule of righteousness, is here removed. If I must thus abide by it, to execute whatsoever the Lord calls me out unto, not shrinking nor staggering at the greatest undertakings, what



will become of me in the issue? will it not be destructive to stand out against a confirmed people? No, saith the Lord, it shall not be; "I will make thee," etc.

Observation. *God will certainly give prevailing strength and unconquerable defence unto persons constantly discharging the duties of righteousness, especially when undertaken in times of difficulty and opposition.*

The like engagement to this you have made to Ezekiel chap. iii. 8, 9. Neither was it so to the prophets alone, but to magistrates also. When Joshua undertook the regency of Israel in a difficult time, he takes off his fear and diffidence with this very encouragement, Josh. i. 5. He saith, he will make them a wall, — the best defence against opposition; and that not a weak, tottering wall, that might easily be cast down, but a brazen wall, that must needs be impregnable. What engines can possibly prevail against a wall of brass? And to make it more secure, this brazen wall shall be fenced with all manner of fortifications and ammunition; so that the veriest coward in the world, being behind such a wall, may, without dread or terror, apply himself to that which he findeth to do. God will so secure the instruments of his glory against a backsliding people, in holding up the ways of his truth and righteousness, that all attempts against them shall be vain, and the most timorous spirit may be secure, provided he go not out of the Lord's way; for if they be found beyond the line, the brazen wall, they may easily be surprised. And, indeed, who but a fool would run from the shelter of a brazen wall, to hide himself in a little stubble? And yet so do all who run to their own wisdom, from the most hazardous engagement that any of the ways of God can possibly lead them unto. It is a sure word, and forever to be rested upon, which the Lord gives in to Asa, 2 Chron. xv. 2, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him." An unbiased magistracy shall never want God's continued presence. Very Jeroboam himself receives a promise, upon condition of close walking with God in righteous administrations, of having a house built him like the house of David, 1 Kings xi. 38. What a wall was God to Moses in that great undertaking, of being instrumental for the delivery of Israel from a bondage and slavery of four hundred years' continuance? Pharaoh was against him, whom he had deprived of his sovereignty and dominion over the people. And what a provocation the depriving of sovereignty is unto potentates needs no demonstration: to the corruption of nature which inclines to heights and exaltations, in imitation of the fountain whence it flows, they have also the corruption of state and condition, which hath always inclined to absoluteness and tyranny. All Egypt was against him, as being by him visibly destroyed, wasted, spoiled, robbed, and at length smitten in the apple of the eye, by the loss of their first-born. And if this be not enough, that the king and people whom he opposed were his enemies, — the very people for whose sakes he set himself to oppose the others, they also rise up against him, yea, seek to destroy him. One time they appeal to God for justice against him, Exod. v. 21, "The Lord look upon you, and judge." They appeal to the righteous God to witness that he had not fulfilled what he promised them, — to wit, liberty, safety, and freedom from oppression;



but that rather by his means their burdens were increased: and in this they were so confident (like some amongst us), that they appealed unto God for the equity of their complaints. Afterward, being reduced to a strait, such as they could not see how possibly they should be extricated from, without utter ruin (like our present condition in the apprehension of some), they cry out upon him for the whole design of bringing them into the wilderness, and affirm positively, that though they had perished in their former slavery, it had been better for them than to have followed him in this new and dangerous engagement, [Exod. xiv. 11, 12](#); — that generation being, as Calvin observes,<sup>215</sup> so inured to bondage, that they were altogether unfit to bear with the workings and pangs of their approaching liberty. Afterward, do they want drink? — Moses is the cause. Do they want meat? — this Moses would starve them, [Exod. xv. 24, xvi. 7](#). He could not let them alone by the flesh-pots of Egypt; for this they are ready to stone him, [Exod. xvii. 3](#). At this day, have we too much rain, or too short a harvest? — it is laid on the shoulders of the present government. It was no otherwise of old. At length this people came to that height, as, being frightened by the opposition they heard of and framed to themselves in that place whither Moses would carry them, they presently enter into a conspiracy and revolt, consulting to cast off his government, and choose new commanders, and with a violent hand to return to their former condition, [Num. xiv. 4](#), — an attempt as frequent as fruitless among ourselves. When this would not do, at length, upon the occasion of taking off Korah and his company, they assemble themselves together, and lay, not imprisonment, but murder to his charge; and that of “the people of the Lord,” [Num. xvi. 41](#). Now, what was the issue of all those oppositions? what effect had they? how did the power of Pharaoh, the revenge of Egypt, the backsliding of Israel prevail? Why, God made this one Moses a fenced brazen wall to them all; he was never in the least measure prevailed against; — so long as he was with God, God was with him, no matter who was against him.

One thing only would I commend to your consideration, — viz., that this Moses, thus preserved, thus delivered, thus protected, falling into one deviation, in one thing, from close following the Lord, was taken off from enjoying the closure and fruit of all his labour, [Num. xx. 12](#). Otherwise he followed the Lord in a difficult season, and did not want unconquerable supportment. Take heed of the smallest turning aside from God. Oh! lose not the fruit of all your labour, for self, for a lust, or any thing that may turn you aside!

Now, the Lord will do this, —

1. Because of *his own engagement*.

2. For *our encouragement*.

1. Because of his own engagement. And that is twofold.

(1.) Of truth and fidelity.

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215 In [Num. cap. iv.](#)

(2.) Of honour and glory.

(1.) His truth and veracity is engaged in it. “Those that honour him, he will honour,” 1 Sam. ii. 30. If men honour him with obedience, he will honour them with preservation. “He will be with them, while they are with him,” 2 Chron. xv. 2. While they are with him in constancy of duty, he will be with them to keep them in safety. He will never leave them, nor forsake them, Josh. i. 5. “No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper,” Isa. liv. 17. Now, God is never as the waters that fail to any that upon his engagements wait for him; he will not shame the faces of them that put their trust in him. Why should our unbelieving spirits charge that upon the God of truth which we dare not impute to a man that is a worm, a liar? Will a man fail in his engagement unto him who, upon that engagement, undertakes a difficult employment for his sake? The truth is, it is either want of sincerity in our working, or want of faith in dependence, that makes us at any time come short of the utmost tittle that is in any of the Lord’s engagements.

[1.] We want sincerity, and do the Lord’s work, but with our own aims and ends, like Jehu; — no wonder if we be left to ourselves for our wages and defence.

[2.] We want faith, also, in the Lord’s work, — turn to our own counsels for supportment: no marvel if we come short of assistance. “If we will not believe, we shall not be established.”

Look to sincerity in working, and faith in dependence; God’s truth and fidelity will carry him out to give you unconquerable supportment:— deflexion from these will be your destruction. You that are working on a new bottom, work also on new principles; put not new wine into old bottles, new designs into old hearts.

(2.) He is engaged in point of honour. If they miscarry in his way, what will he do for his great name? Yea, so tender is the Lord herein of his glory, that when he hath been exceedingly provoked to remove men out of his presence, yet because they have been called by his name, and have visibly held forth a following after him, he would not suffer them to be trodden down, lest the enemy should exalt themselves, and say, Where is now their God? They shall not take from him the honour of former deliverances and protections. In such a nation as this, if the Lord now, upon manifold provocations, should give up parliament, people, army, to calamity and ruin, would not the glory of former counsels, successes, deliverances, be utterly lost? would not men say it was not the Lord, but chance that happened to them?

2. For our encouragement. The ways of God are oftentimes attended with so many difficulties, so much opposition, that they must be embraced merely because his; no other motive in the world can suit them to us. I mean, for such as keep them immixed from their own carnal and corrupt interests. Now, because the Lord will not take off the hardship and difficulty of them, lest he should not have the honour of carrying on his work against tumultuating opposition, he secures poor weaklings of comfortable assistance and answerable success, lest his work should be wholly neglected. It is true, the Lord, as our sovereign master,



may justly require a close labouring in all his ways without the least sweetening endearments put upon them, only as they are his, whose we are, who hath a dominion over us. But yet, as a tender father, — in which relation he delights to exercise his will towards his own in Christ, — he pitieth our infirmities, knowing that we are but dust; and therefore, to invite us into the dark, into ways laboursome and toilsome to flesh and blood, he gives us in this security, — that we shall be as a fenced brazen wall to the opposing sons of men.

*Use 1.* To discover the vanity and folly of all opposition to men called forth of God to his work, and walking in his ways. Would you not think him mad that should strike with his fist, and run with his head against a fenced brazen wall, to cast it down? Is he like to have any success, but the battering of his flesh, and the beating out of his brains? What do the waves obtain by dashing themselves with noise and dread against a rock, but their own beating to pieces? What prevails a man by shooting his arrows against the sky, but a return upon his own head? Nor is the most powerful opposition to the ways of God like to meet with better success God looks no otherwise upon opposers than you would do upon a man attempting to thrust down a fenced brazen wall with his fingers. Therefore it is said, that in their proudest attempts, strongest assaults, deepest counsels, combinations, and associations, “he laughs them to scorn,” derides their folly, contemns their fury, lets them sweat in vain, until their day be come, [Ps. ii.](#) How birthless in our own, as well as other generations, have been their swelling conceptions! What, then, is it that prevails upon men to break through so many disappointments against the Lord as they do? — doubtless that of [Isa. xxiii. 9](#), “Surely the Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.” God gives up men unto it, that he may leave no earthly glory or honour without pollution or contempt. And therefore hath opposition in our days been turned upon so many hands, that God might leave no glory without contempt: yet with this difference, that if the Lord will own them, he will recover them from their opposition; as has happened of late to the ministry of one, and will happen ere long to the ministry of another nation. When the Lord hath a little stained the pride of their glory, they shall be brought home again by the spirit of judgment and burning; but if he own them not, they shall perish under the opposition. And when it hath been wheeled about on all sorts of men, the end will be.

*Use 2.* “Be wise now therefore, O ye [*rulers*]; be instructed, ye judges of the earth; serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling,” [Ps. ii. 10, 11](#). See whence your assistance cometh; see where lie the hills of your salvation, and say, “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy,” [Hos. xiv. 3](#). It is God alone who is “a sun and shield: his ways do good to the upright in heart.” Behold, here is a way to encompass England with a brazen wall: let the rulers of it walk in right ways with upright hearts. Others have been careful to preserve the people to them, and the city to them; oh, be you careful to pre-



serve your God unto you! He alone can make you a fenced wall; if he departs, your wall departs, your shade departs. Give me leave to insist a little on one particular, which I choose out among many others. When God leads out his people to any great things, the angel of his presence is still among them. See at large, [Exod. xxiii. 20–22](#). The angel of the covenant, in whom is the name of God, that hath power of pardoning or retaining transgressions, — Jesus Christ, the angel that redeemeth his out of all their troubles, [Gen. xlviii. 16](#), — he is in the midst of them, and amongst them. And God gives this special caution, if we would have his assistance, that we should beware of him, and obey him, and provoke him not. Would you, then, have God’s assistance continued? — take heed of provoking the angel of his presence: provoke him not by slighting of his ways; provoke him not by contemning his ordinances: if you leave him to deal for himself, he will leave you to shift for yourselves. What though his followers are at some difference,<sup>216</sup> (the best knowing but in part) about the administration of some things in his kingdom; the envious one having also sown some bitter seeds of persecution, strife, envy, and contention among them? — what though some poor creatures are captivated by Satan, the prince of pride, to a contempt of all his ordinances, — whose souls I hope the Lord will one day free from the snare of the devil; — yet I pray give me leave (it is no time to contest or dispute it) to bear witness in the behalf of my Master to this one truth, that if by your own personal practice and observance, your protection, countenance, authority, laws, you do not assert, maintain, uphold the order of the gospel, and administration of the ordinances of Christ, — notwithstanding the noise and clamours of novel fancies, which, like Jonah’s gourd, have sprung up in a night, and will wither in a day, — you will be forsaken by the angel of God’s presence, and you will become an astonishment to all the inhabitants of the earth. And herein I do not speak as one hesitating or dubious, but positively assert it, as the known mind of God, and whereof he will not suffer any long to doubt, [Ps. ii. 12](#).

*Use 3.* “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you,” [Isa. xxxv. 3, 4](#). Let the most weak and fearful, the fainting heart, the trembling spirit, and the doubting mind, know, that full and plenary security, perfect peace, attends the upright in the ways of God. You that are in God’s way, do God’s work, and take this cordial for all your distempers, — Return not to former provoking ways, and he will make you” a fenced brasen wall.”

And so I come to the third thing which I proposed to consider, —

III. The opposition which men cleaving to the Lord in all his ways shall find, with the issue and success of it: “They shall fight against thee; but shall not prevail.”

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The words may be considered either as a *prediction* depending on God's prescience of what will be; or a *commination* from his just judgment of what shall be.

In the first sense the Lord tells the prophet, from the corruption, apostasy, stubbornness of that people, what would come to pass; — in the second, what, for their sins and provocations, by his just judgment, should come to pass. Time will not allow me to handle the words in both acceptations, wherefore I shall take up the latter only, — viz., that it is a commination of what shall be for the farther misery of that wretched people; they shall judicially be given up to a fighting against him.

Observation. *God oftentimes gives up a sinful people to a fruitless contention and fighting with their only supporters and means of deliverance..*

Jeremiah had laboured with God for them, and with them for God, that, if possible, peace being made, they might be delivered; and, to consummate their sins, they are given up to fight against him.

I cannot now insist upon particular instances; consult the history of the church in all ages, — you shall find it continually upon all occasions verified. From the Israelites opposing Moses, to the Ephrahnites' contest with Jephthah, the rejecting of Samuel, and so on, to the kings of the earth giving their power to the beast to wage war with the Lamb, with the inhabitants of the world combining against the witnesses of Christ, is this assertion held out. In following story, no sooner did any plague or judgment break out against the Roman empire, but instantly, "Christianos ad leones;" — their fury must be spent upon them who were the only supporters of it from irrecoverable ruin.

Now the Lord doth this, —

1. *To seal up a sinful people's destruction.* Eli's sons hearkened not, "because the Lord would slay them," [1 Sam. ii. 25](#). When God intends ruin to a people, they shall walk in ways that tend thereunto. Now, is there a readier way for a man to have a house on his head, than by pulling away the pillars whereby it is supported? If by Moses standing in the gap the fury of the Lord be turned away, certainly if the people contend to remove him, their desolation sleepeth not. When, therefore, the Lord intends to lay cities waste without inhabitants, and houses without men, to make a land utterly desolate; the way of its accomplishment is by making the hearts of the people fat, and their ears heavy, and shutting their eyes, that they should not see and attend to the means of their recovery, [Isa. vi. 10, 11](#), — so gathering in his peace and mercies from a provoking people, [Jer. xvi. 5](#).

2. *To manifest his own power and sovereignty* in maintaining a small handful, oftentimes a few single persons, a Moses, a Samuel, two witnesses, against the opposing rage of a hardened multitude. If those who undertake his work and business in their several generations should have withal the concurrent obedience and assistance of others whose good is intended, neither would his name be so seen nor his ways so honoured as now, when he bears them up against all opposition. Had not the people of this land been given up (many of them) to

fight against the deliverers of the nation, and were it not so with them even at this time, how dark would have been the workings of providence which now, by wrestling through all opposition, are so conspicuous and clear! When, then, a people, or any part of a people, have made themselves unworthy of the good things intended to be accomplished by the instruments of righteousness and peace, the Lord will blow upon their waves, that with rage and fury they shall dash themselves against them; whom he will strengthen with the munition of rocks, not to be prevailed against. So that God's glory and their own ruin lie at the bottom of this close working of providence, in giving up a sinful people to a fruitless contending with their own deliverers, if ever they be delivered.

*Obj.* But is not a people's contending with the instruments by whom God worketh amongst them, and for them, a sin and provocation to the eyes of his glory? How, then, can the Lord be said to give them up unto it?

*Ans.* Avoiding all scholastical discourses, as unsuited to the work of this day, I shall briefly give in unto you how this is a sinful thing, yet sinners are given up unto it without the least extenuation of their guilt, or colour for charge on the justice and goodness of God.

(1.) Then, to give up men unto a thing in itself sinful is no more but so to dispose and order things, that sinners may exercise and draw out their sinful principles in such a way. Of this that the Lord doth the Scripture is full of examples, and hath testimonies innumerable. That herein the Holy One of Israel is no ways co-partner with the guilt of the sons of men, will appear by observing the difference of these several agents in these four things:—

- [1.] The *principle* by which they work.
- [2.] The *rule* by which they proceed.
- [3.] The *means* which they use.
- [4.] The *end* at which they aim.

[1.] The principle of operation in God is his own sovereign will and good pleasure. He doth whatsoever he pleaseth, [Ps. cxv. 3](#). He saith his purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure, [Isa. xlvi. 10](#). He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth, [Rom. ix. 18](#); giving no account of his matters, [Job xxxiii. 13](#). This our Saviour rendereth the only principle and reason of his hidden operations, "O Father, so it seemed good in thy sight," [Matt. xi. 26](#). His sovereignty in doing what he will with his own, as the potter with his clay, is the rise of his operations; so that whatever he doth, "who will say unto him, What doest thou?" [Job ix. 12](#). "Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" [Rom. ix. 20](#). And hence two things will follow:—

*1st.* That what he doth is just and righteous; for so must all acts of supreme and absolute dominion be.

*2dly.* That he can be author of nothing but what hath existence and being itself; for he works as the fountain of beings. This sin hath not. So that though every action, whether good or bad, receives its specification from the working of providence, — and to that is their



existence in their several kinds to be ascribed, — yet an evil action, in the evilness of it, depends not upon divine concurrence and influence; for good and evil make not sundry kinds of actions, but only a distinction of a subject in respect of its adjuncts and accidents.

But now the principle of operation in man is *nature* vitiated and corrupted; — I say nature, not that he worketh naturally, being a free agent, but that these faculties, will and understanding, which are the principles of operation, are in nature corrupted, and from thence can nothing flow but evil. “An evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit.” “Men do not gather figs from thistles.” “A bitter fountain sends not forth sweet waters.” “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” If the fountain be poisoned, can the streams be wholesome? What can you expect of light and truth from a mind possessed with vanity and darkness? what from a will averted from the chiefest good, and fixed upon present appearances? what from a heart the figment of whose imagination is only evil?

[2.] Consider the difference in the *rule of operation*. Every thing that works hath a rule to work by; — this is called a law. In that thing which to man is sinful, God worketh as it is a thing only; man, as it is a sinful thing. And how so? Why, every one’s sin is his aberration from his rule of operation or working. Ἀμαρτάνειν, is “aberrare à scopo:” to sin is not to collime aright at the end proposed. Ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία is a most exact definition of it. Irregularity is its form, if it may be said to have a form; a privation’s form is deformity. Look, then, in any action wherein an agent exorbitates from its rule, — that is sin. Now, what is God’s rule in operation? His own infinite, wise will alone. He takes neither motive, rise, nor occasion for any internal acts from any thing without himself; he doth whatever he pleaseth, [Ps. cxv. 3](#); he “worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will,” [Eph. i. 11](#); — that is his own law of operation, and the rule of righteousness unto others:— working them agreeably to his own will, which he always must do, he is free from the obliquity of any action. What, now, is the rule of the sons of men? Why, the revealed will of God, “Revealed things belong to us, that we may do them,” [Deut. xxix. 29](#). God’s revealed will is the rule of our walking, our working; whatever suits not, answers not this, is evil. “Sin is the transgression of the law,” [1 John iii. 4](#). Here, then, comes in the deformity, the obliquity, the ataxy, of any thing. God works, and man worketh; those agents have several rules. God works according to his rule; hence the action is good, as an action; — man deviates from his rule; hence it is sinful, in respect of its qualifications and adjuncts. Man writes fair letters upon a wet paper, and they run all into one blot; not the skill of the scribe, but the defect in the paper, is the cause of the deformity. He that makes a lame horse go, is the cause of his going; but the defect in his joints is the cause of his going lame. The sun exhales a steam from the dunghill; the sun is the cause of the exhalation, but the dunghill of the unwholesome savour. The first cause is the proper cause of a thing’s being, but the second of its being evil.

[3.] Consider the *several operations and actings* of God and man; for instance, in a rebellious people’s fighting against their helpers under him.

Now, the acts of God herein may be referred to six heads.

1st. A continuance of the creature's being and life; — “upholding him by the word of his power,” [Heb. i. 3](#), when he might take him off in a moment; — “enduring them with much long-suffering,” [Rom. ix. 22](#), when he might cut them off, as he did the opposers of Elijah, with “fire from heaven,” [2 Kings i. 12](#).

2dly. A continuance of power of operation to them, when he could make their hands to wither, like Jeroboam's, when they go about to strike, [1 Kings xiii. 4](#); or their hearts to die within them, like Nabal's, when they intend to be churlish, [1 Sam. xxv. 37](#). But he raiseth them up, or makes them to stand, that they may oppose, [Rom. ix. 17](#).

3dly. Laying before them a suitable object for the drawing forth their corruption unto opposition, giving them such helpers as shall in many things cross their lusts, and exasperate them thereunto, — as Elijah, a man of a fiery zeal, for a lukewarm Ahab.

4thly. Withholding from them that effectual grace by which alone that sin might be avoided, — a not actually keeping them from that sin by the might of his Spirit and grace. That alone is effectual grace which is actual. “He suffers them to walk in their own ways.”

And this the Lord may do, —

(1st.) In respect of them *judicially*, — they deserve to be forsaken: Ahab is left to fill up the measure of his iniquities, — “Add iniquity to iniquity,” [Ps. lxix. 27](#).

(2dly.) *In respect of himself, by way of sovereignty*, — doing what he will with his own, — hardening whom he will, [Rom. ix. 18](#).

5thly. He positively sends upon their understandings that which the Scripture sets out under the terms of blindness, darkness, folly, delusion, slumber, a spirit of giddiness, and the like: the places are too many to rehearse. What secret actings in and upon the minds of men, — what disturbing of their advices, — what mingling of corrupt affections with false, carnal reasonings, — what givings up to the power of darkness, in Satan the prince thereof, — this judicial act doth contain, I cannot insist upon. Let it suffice, God will not help them to discern, yea, he will cause that they shall not discern, but hide from their eyes the things that concern their peace, and so give them up to contend with their only helpers.

6thly. Suitably upon the will and affections he hath several acts, — obfirming the one in corruption, and giving up the other to vileness, [Rom. i. 24, 26](#), until the heart become thoroughly hardened, and the conscience seared; not forcing the one, but leaving it to follow the judgment of practical reason, — which being a blind, yea, a blinded guide, whither can it lead a blind follower, but into the ditch? — not defiling the other with infused sensuality, but provoking them to act according to inbred, native corruption, and by suffering frequent vile actings to confirm them in ways of vileness.

Take an instance of the whole: God gives helpers and deliverers to a sinful people; because of their provocations, some or all of them shall not taste of the deliverance by them to be procured. Wherefore, though he sustains their lives in being, whereby they might have op-

portunity to know his mind and their own peace; yet he gives them a power to contend with their helpers, causing their helpers to act such things as, under consideration of circumstances, shall exceedingly provoke these sinners. Being so exasperated and provoked, the Lord, who is free in all his dispensations, refuseth to make out to them that healing grace whereby they might be kept from a sinful opposition: yea, being justly provoked, and resolved that they should not taste of the plenty to come, he makes them foolish and giddy in their reasonings and counsels, — blinds them in their understandings, that they shall not be able to discern plain and evident things, tending to their own good, but in all their ways shall err like a drunken man in his vomit; whence, that they may not be recovered, because he will destroy them, he gives in hardness and obstinacy upon their hearts and spirits, leaving them to suitable affections, to contend for their own ruin.

Now, what are the ways and methods of sinful man's working in such opposition, would be too long for me to declare; what prejudices are erected, what lusts pursued, what corrupt interests acted and followed, — how self is honoured, what false pretences coined, how God is slighted, — if I should go about to lay open, I must look into the hell of these times, than which nothing can be more loathsome and abominable. Let it suffice, that sinful self, sinful lusts, sinful prejudices, sinful blindness, sinful carnal fears, sinful corrupt interests, sinful fleshly reasonings, sinful passions, and vile affections, do all concur in such a work, are all woven up together in such a web.

[4.] See the *distance of their aims*. God's aim is only the manifestation of his own glory — than which nothing but himself is so infinitely good, nothing so righteous that it should be [his aim] — and this by the way of goodness and severity, [Rom. xi. 22](#); — goodness, in faithfulness and mercy, preserving his who are opposed, whereby his glory is exceedingly advanced; — severity towards the opposers, that, by a sinful, cursed opposition, they may fall up the measure of their iniquities, and receive this at the hand of the Lord, that they lie down in sorrow, — wherein also he is glorious.

God forbid that I should speak this of all that for any time, or under any temptation, may be carried to an opposition, in any kind or degree, to the instruments of God's glory amongst them. Many for a season may do it, and yet belong to God, who shall be recovered in due time. It is only of men given up, forsaken, opposing all the appearances of God with his saints and people in all his ways, of whom I speak.

Now, what are the ends of this generation of fighters against this brazen wall? and how distant from those of the Lord's! "They consult to cast him down from his excellency" whom God will exalt, [Ps. lxii. 4](#). They think not as the Lord, neither doth their heart mean so; but it is in their heart to destroy and to cut off, [Isa. x. 7](#). To satisfy their own corrupt lusts, ambition, avarice, revenge, superstition, contempt of God's people because his, hatred of the yoke of the Lord, fleshly interests, — even for these, and such like ends as these, is their undertaking.

Thus, though there be a concurrence of God and man in the same thing, yet, considering the distance of their principles, rules, actings, and ends, it is apparent that man doth sinfully what the Lord doth judicially; which being an answer to the former objection, I return to give in some uses to the point.

Use 1. Let men, constant, sincere, upright in the ways of God, especially in difficult times, know what they are to expect from many, yea, the most of the generation, whose good they intend, and among whom they live; — opposition and fighting are like to be their lot; — and that not only *it will be so* because of men's lusts, corruptions, prejudices, but also *it shall be so* from God's righteous judgments against a stubborn people. *They* harden their hearts that *it may be so*, to compass their ends; and *God* hardens their hearts that *it shall be so*, to bring about his aims. They *will* do it, to execute their revenge upon others; they *shall* do it, to execute God's vengeance upon themselves. This may be for consolation, that in their contending there is nothing but the wrath of man against them whom they oppose (which God will restrain, or cause it to turn to his praise); but there is the wrath of God against themselves, which who can bear? This, then, let all expect who engage their hearts to God, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

Men walking in the sincerity of their hearts are very apt to conceive that all sheaves should bow to theirs, that all men should cry, "Grace, grace," to their proceedings. Why should any oppose? "Quid meruere?" Alas! the more upright they are, the fitter for the Lord by them to break a gainsaying people. Let men keep close to those ways of God whereto protection is annexed, and let not their hearts fail them because of the people of the land. The storm of their fury will be like the plague of hail in Egypt; it smote only the cattle that were in the field; — those who, upon the word of Moses, drove them into the houses, preserved them alive. If men wander in the field of their own ways, of self-seeking, oppression, ambition, and the like, doubtless the storm will carry them away; but for those who keep house, who keep close to the Lord, though it may have much noise, terror, and dread with it, it shall not come nigh them. And if the Lord, for causes best known, known only to his infinite wisdom, should take off any Josiahs in the opposition, he will certainly effect two things by it.

(1.) To give them rest and peace.

(2.) To further his cause and truth, by drawing out the prayers and appeals of the residue; and this living they valued above their lives.

All you, then, that are the Lord's workmen, be always prepared for a storm. Wonder not that men see not the ways of the Lord, nor the judgments of our God; — many are blinded. Admire not that they will so endlessly engage themselves into fruitless oppositions; — they are hardened. Be not amazed that evidence of truth and righteousness will not affect them; — they are corrupted. But this do; Come, and enter into the chambers of God, and you shall be safe until this whole indignation be overpast. I speak of all them, and only them,

who follow the Lord in all his ways with upright hearts and single minds: if the Lord will have you to be a rock and a brazen wall for men to dash themselves against, and to break in pieces, though the service be grievous to flesh and blood, yet it is his, whose you are. Be prepared, the wind blows, — a storm may come.

*Use 2.* Let men set upon opposition make a diligent inquiry, whether there be no hand in the business but their own? whether their counsels be not leavened with the wrath of God, and their thoughts mixed with a spirit of giddiness, and themselves carried on to their own destruction? Let me see the opposer of the present ways of God, who, upon his opposition is made more humble, more self-denying, more empty of self-wisdom, more fervent in supplications and waiting upon God, than formerly; and I will certainly blot him out of the roll of men judicially hardened. But if therewith men become also proud, selfish, carnally wise, revengeful, furious upon earthly interests, full, impatient; doubtless God is departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord prevaleth on them. O that men would look about them before it be too late; see the Lord disturbing them, before the waves return upon them; know that they may pull down some antics that make a great show of supporting the church, and yet indeed are pargeted posts supported by it! The foundation is on a rock that shall not be prevailed against.

*Use 3.* See the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of Almighty God, that is able to bring light out of darkness, and to compass his own righteous judgments by the sinful advisings and undertakings of men. Indeed the Lord's sovereignty and dominion over the creature doth not in any thing more exalt itself, than in working in all the reasonings, debates, consultations of men, to bring about his own counsels through their free workings. That men should use, improve their wisdom, freedom, choice, yea, lusts, not once thinking of God; yet all that while do his work more than their own, — "this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

Of the last part of my text I shall not speak at all; neither indeed did I intend.



## **Of toleration; and the duty of the magistrate about religion.**

The times are busy, and we must be brief. Prefaces for the most part are at all times needless, — in these, troublesome. Mine shall only be, that ἄνευ προοιμίων καὶ παθῶν, “without either preface or solemnity,” I will fall to the business in hand. The thing about which I am to deal is commonly called Toleration in Religion, or toleration of several religions. The way wherein I shall proceed is not by contest, thereby to give occasion for the reciprocation of a saw of debate with any; but by the laying down of such positive observations, as being either not apprehended or not rightly improved by the most, yet lie at the bottom of the whole difference between men about this business, and tend in themselves to give light unto a righteous and equitable determination of the main thing contended about.

And lastly, herein for method I shall first consider the grounds upon which that non-toleration whereunto I cannot consent has been, and is still, endeavoured to be supported; which I shall be necessitated to remove —

- I. By considering the arguments brought from holy writ;
- II. From some other general observations. And then in order;
- III. I shall assert the positive truth, as to the substance of the business under contest.

All in these ensuing observations.

I. As to the first of these —

1. Although the expressions of “toleration,” and “non-toleration,” wherewith the thing in controversy is vested, do seem to cast the affirmative upon them who plead for a forbearance in things of religion towards dissenting persons, yet the truth is, they are purely upon the negation, and the affirmative lies fully on the other part; and so the weight of proving, which oftentimes is heavy, lies on their shoulders. Though non-toleration sound like a negation, yet punishment (which terms in this matter are ἰσοδυναμοῦντα is a deep affirmation. And, therefore, it sufficeth not men to say that they have consulted the mind of God, and cannot find that he ever spake to any of his saints or people to establish a toleration of error; and yet this is the first argument to oppose it produced in the late Testimony of the reverend and learned Assembly of the Church of Scotland.<sup>217</sup> Affirmative precepts must be produced for a non-toleration; that is, the punishing of erring persona. For actings of such high concernment, men do generally desire a better warrant than this — “There is nothing in the word against them.” Clear light is needful for men who walk in paths which lead directly to houses of blood. God hath not spoken of non-toleration, is a certain rule of forbearance;

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<sup>217</sup> See a “*Solemn Testimony against Toleration and the Present Proceedings of Sectaries and their Abettors in England, in reference to Religion and Government,*” etc. — a document sanctioned by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Jan. 16, 1649, and published in the course of the same year — Ed.

but God hath not spoken of toleration, is no rule of acting in opposition thereunto. What he hath spoken, one way or other, shall be afterward considered. Positive actings must have positive precepts and rules for them, as conscience is its own guide. If, then, you will have persons deviating in their apprehensions from the truth of the gospel civilly punished, you must bring better warrant than this, that God hath not spoken against it; or I shall not walk in your ways, but refrain my foot from your path.

2. That undoubtedly there are very many things under the command of the Lord, so becoming our duty, and within his promise, so made our privilege, which yet, if not performed, or not enjoyed, are not of human cognizance — as faith itself; yet because the knowledge of the truth is in that rank of things, this also is urged as of weight, by the same learned persons, to the business at hand.

3. Errors, though never so impious, are yet distinguished from peace-disturbing enormities. If opinions in their own nature tend to the disturbance of the public peace, either that public tranquility is not of God, or God alloweth a penal restraint of those opinions. It is a mistake, to affirm that those who plead for toleration do allow of punishment for offences against the second table — not against the first. The case is the same both in respect of the one and the other. What offences against the second table are punishable? Doubtless not all, but only such as, by a disorderly eruption, pervert the course of public quiet and society; yea, none but such fall under human cognizance. The warrant of exercising vindictive power amongst men is from the reference of offences to their common tranquillity. “*Delicta puniri publicè interest.*” Where punishment is the debt, “*Bonum totius*” the creditor to exact it. And this is allowed as to the offences against the first table. If any of them in their own nature (not some men’s apprehensions) are disturbances of public peace, they also are punishable. Only, let not this be measured by disputable consequences, no more than the other are. Let the evidence be in the things themselves, and “*Actum est,*” let who will plead for them. Hence —

Popish religion, warming in its very bowels a fatal engine against all magistracy amongst us, cannot upon our concessions plead for forbearance; it being a known and received maxim, that the gospel of Christ clashes against no righteous ordinance of man.

And let this be spoken to the third argument of the fore-named reverend persons, from the analogy of delinquencies against the first and second table.

4. The plea for the punishment of erring persons from the penal constitution under the Old Testament against idolaters (which in the next place is urged), seems not very firm and convincing. The vast distance that is between idolatry and any errors whatsoever, as merely such, however propagated or maintained with obstinacy, much impaireth the strength of this argumentation.

Idolatry is the yielding unto a creature the service and worship due to the Creator, Rainold. *de Idol.*, lib. ii. cap. 1, sect. 1. “*Idololatria est circa omne idolum famulatus et*



servitus,” Tertul. de Pol. — “The attendance and service of any idol.” “Idololatræ dicuntur Qui simulacris eam servitutum exhibent, quæ debetur Deo,” August., lib. i. de Trinit. cap. 6 — “They are idolaters who give that service to idols which is due unto God.” To render glory to the creature as to God is idolatry, say the Papists, Bell, de Eccles. Triumph, lib. ii. cap. 24; Greg. de Valen. de Idol, lib. i. cap. 1; — suitable to the description of it given by the apostle, [Rom. i. 25](#): plainly, that whereunto the sanction under debate was added, as the bond of the law against it (which was the bottom of the commendable proceedings of divers kings of Judah against such), was a voluntary relinquishment of Jehovah revealed unto them, to give the honour due unto him to dunghill idols. Now, though error and ignorance oftentimes lie at the bottom of this abomination, yet error, properly so called, and which under the name of heresy is opposed, is sufficiently differenced therefrom. That common definition of heresy — that it is an error, or errors, in or about the fundamentals of religion, maintained with stubbornness and pertinacy after conviction (for the main received by most Protestant divines) — will be no way suited unto that which was before given of idolatry, and is as commonly received, being indeed much more clear; as shall be afterward declared. That this latter is proper and suitable to those scriptural descriptions which we have of heresy, I dare not assert; but being received by them who urge the punishment thereof it may be a sufficient ground of affirming that those things whose definitions are so extremely different are also very distant and discrepant in themselves; and therefore constitutions for the disposal of things concerning the one cannot “eo nomine” include the other. Neither is the inference any stronger, than that a man may be hanged for coveting, because he may be so for murdering.

The penal constitutions of the Judaical polity (for so they were, which yet I urge not) concerning idolaters, must be stretched beyond their limits, if you intend to inwrap heretics within their verge. If heretics be also idolaters, as the Papists (the poor Indians who worship a piece of red cloth, the Egyptians who adored the deities which grew in their own gardens, being not more besotted with this abomination than they who prostrate their souls unto, and lavish their devotion upon, a piece of bread, a little before they prepare it for the draught — so casting the stumbling-block of their iniquities before the faces of poor Heathens and Jews, causing Averroes to breathe out his soul in this expression of that scandal, “Quoniam Christiani manducant Deum quem adorant, sit anima mea cum Philosophis!”) then, the case seems to me to have received so considerable an alteration, that the plea of forbearance is extremely weakened as to my present apprehension. However, for the present I remove such from this debate.

5. The like to this also may be said concerning blasphemy, the law whereof is likewise commonly urged in this cause. The establishment for the punishment of a blasphemer is in [Lev. xxiv. 16](#). Given it was upon the occasion of the blaspheming and cursing of the son of an Egyptian, upon his striving and contending with an Israelite. Being probably, in his own



apprehension, wronged by his adversary, he fell to reviling his God. The word here used to express his sin, is **כָּפַר**, signifying also to pierce, and is twice so rendered — [Isa. xxxvi. 6](#); [Heb. iii. 14](#). Desperate expressions, piercing the honour and glory of the Most High willingly and willfully, were doubtless his death-deserving crime. It is the same word that Balak used to Balaam, when he would have persuaded him to a deliberate cursing and pouring out of imprecations on the people of God, [Num. xxiii. 13, 14](#). A resolved piercing of the name and glory of God, with cursed reproaches, is the crime here sentenced to death. The schoolmen tell us, that to complete blasphemy, the perverse affection of the heart, in detestation of the goodness of God, joined with the reproaches of his name, is required.<sup>218</sup> Which, how remote it is from error of any sort (I mean within the compass of them whereof we speak), being a pure misapprehension of the understanding, embraced (though falsely) for the honour of God, I suppose is easily conceived; and so, consequently, that the argument for the death of a person erring, because he came off no easier of old who blasphemed, is “à baculo ad angulum.

If any shall say that blasphemy is of a larger extent and more general acceptance in the Scripture, I shall not deny it; but yet that that kind of blasphemy which was punishable with violent death, was comprehensive of any inferior crime, I suppose cannot be proved. However, blasphemy in the Scripture is never taken in any place, that I can remember, for a man’s maintaining his own error; but for his reviling and speaking evil of the truth which he receiveth not: and so Paul before his conversion was a blasphemer.<sup>219</sup> Now, if men to whom forbearance is indulged in by-paths of their own, shall make it their work to cast dirt on the better ways of truth, it is to me very questionable whether they do not offend against that prime dictate of nature for the preservation of human society, “*Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris;*” and for such I will be no advocate. Neither can, indeed, the law of blasphemy be impartially urged by us in any case of heresy whatsoever. For —

(1.) The penal sanctions of the laws of God are not in England esteemed of moral equity, and perpetually indispensable; for if so, why do adulterers unmolested behold the violent death of stealers?

(2.) The blasphemer by that law was not allowed his clergy; die he must without mercy, no room being left for the intervention of repentance, as to the removal of his temporal punishment; when once the witnesses’ garments were rent, he was anathema. But in case of any heresy, repentance, yea, recantation, is a sure antidote (at least for once, so it is among the Papists) against all corporeal sufferings.

6. Neither doth that place in [Zech. xiii. 3](#), concerning the running through of the false prophet, more prove or approve of the punishment of death to be inflicted for misapprehen-

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218 *Thom. 22æ. g. 13, a. 1, ad 1um.*

219 [Acts xviii. 6, xxvi. 11](#); [1 Tim. i. 13](#).

sions in the matters of religion (and if it proves not that, it proverb nothing; for slaying is the thing expressed, and certainly if proofs be taken from the letter, the letter must be obeyed, or we force the word to serve our hypothesis) than that place of [John x. 1](#), “He that entereth not by the door is a thief and a robber;” which Bellarmine strongly urgeth to this very purpose, because thieves and robbers are so dealt withal righteously.<sup>220</sup> If such deductions may be allowed, it will be easy to prove “quidlibet ex quolibet,” at any time.

If the letter be urged, and the sense of the letter as it lies (indeed<sup>221</sup> the figurative sense of such places is the proper, literal sense of them), let that sense alone be kept to. Let parents, then, pass sentence, condemn, and execute their children, when they turn seducers; and that in any kind whatsoever — into what seduction soever they shall be engaged, be it most pernicious, or in things of less concernment. The letter allows of none of our distinctions; be they convinced or not convinced, obstinate or not obstinate, all is one — so it must be: thrust through and slain by their parents must they fall to the ground. Only observe, his father and his mother that begat him must be made magistrates — prophets with unclean spirits be turned into heretics:— only “thrusting through,” that must be as it is in the letter; yea, though plainly the party of whom it is said, “Thou shalt not live,” [verse 3](#), is found alive, [verse 6](#). Surely such an Orleans gloss<sup>222</sup> is scarce sufficient to secure a conscience in slaying heretics. But, when men please, this whole place shall directly point at the discipline of the churches, and their spiritual censures under the gospel — curing deceivers, and bringing them home to confession and acknowledgment of their folly. See the late Annot. of the Bible.

7. From the asserting of the authority and description of the duty of the magistrate, [Rom. xiii.](#), the argument is very easy that is produced for the suppressing by external force of erroneous persona The paralogism is so foul and notorious in this arguing — “He is to suppress evil deeds; heresy is an evil deed: therefore that also” that it needs no confutation. That he is to punish all evil deeds was never yet affirmed. Unbelief is a work of the flesh — so is coveting; one, the root-sin, against the first, the other against the second table: yet in themselves both exempted from the magistrate’s cognizance and jurisdiction. The evil-doers, doubtless, for whose terror and punishment he is appointed, are such as by their deeds disturb that human society the defence and protection whereof is to him committed. That among the number of these are errors, the depravations of men’s understandings, hath not yet been proved.

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220 *Bell. Lib. de Laicis., cap. xxi.*

221 *August. de Util. Creden., cap. iii. Thom. pp. q. 1, a. 10. Zanch. de SS. q. 12, cap. 2, reg. 10. Tilen. Syntag. Theol. de Interpret. S. Thes. 8. Whitak. de SS., qu. 5, cap. 2. Armin. Disput. Pri. Thes. 9, 1. Ames. Med. Theol. cap. 34. Thes. 22.*

222 *Orleans gloss, — a very ancient proverbial saying in France, used in ridicule of comments more obscure than the text — Menage, Dict. Etymol., sub. v. Glozè. — Ed.*

8. The case of the seducer, from [Deut. xiii.](#), is urged with more show of reason than any of the others to the business in hand; but yet the extreme discrepancies between the proof and the thing intended to be proved make any argumentation from this place, as to the matter in hand, very intricate, obscure, and difficult. For —

(1.) The person here spoken of pretends an immediate revelation from heaven: he pretends dreams, and gives signs and wonders, [verse 1](#), and so exempts his spirit from any regular trial Heretics, for the most part, offer to be tried by the rule that is “in medio,” acknowledged of all — a few distempered enthusiasts excepted.

(2.) His business is to entice from the worship of Jehovah — not in respect of the manner, but the object, [verse 5](#). All heretics pretend the fear of that great name.

(3.) The accepting and owning idol, dunghill gods in his room, is the thing persuaded to, [verse 2](#) (and those were only stocks and stones); and this in opposition to Jehovah, who had revealed himself by Moses. Heretics worship him, own him, and abhor all thoughts of turning away from following after him, according to their erroneous apprehensions. Manichees, Marcionites, Valentinians, and such like names of infidels, I reckon not among heretics; neither will their brain-sick, paganish follies be possibly comprehended under that definition of heresy which is now generally received. Mohammedans are far more rightly termed heretics than they.

(4.) This seducer was to die without mercy. And Ainsworth observes from the rabbins, that this offender alone had traps laid to catch him; and were he but once overheard to whisper his seduction, though never so secretly, there was no expiation of his transgression without his own blood. But now this place is urged for all kind of restraint and punishment whatsoever. Now, where God requires blood, is it allowed to man to commute at an inferior rate? So, I confess, it is urged. But yet what lies at the bottom, in the chambers of their bellies who plead for the power of the magistrate to punish erring persons from those, and such like places as these, is too apparent. Blood is there: swiftly or slowly, they walk to the chambers of death.

(5.) Obstinacy after conviction, turbulency, etc., which are now laid down as the main weights that turn the scale on the side of severity, are here not once mentioned, nor by any thing in the least intimated. If he have done it, yea, but once, openly or secretly, whether he have been convinced of the sinfulness of it or no, be he obstinate or otherwise, it is not once inquired — die he must, as if he had committed murder, or the like indispensable death-procuring crime. If the punishment, then, of erring persons be urged from this place, all consideration of their conviction, obstinacy, pertinacy, must be laid aside: the text allows them no more plea in this business than our law doth in the case of wilful murder.

(6.) Repentance and recantation will, in the judgment of all, relieve an erring person from any sentence of any punishment corporeal whatsoever; and many reasons may be



given why they should so do. Here is no such allowance. Repent or not repent, recant or not recant, he hath no sacrifice of expiation provided for him — die he must.

(7.) The law contains the sanction of the third commandment, as the whole was a rule of the Jewish polity in the land of Canaan. This amongst us is generally conceived not binding, as such.

(8.) The formal reason of this law, by some insisted on — because he sought to turn a man from Jehovah, —

[1.] Is of force only in this case of the object whereunto seduction tends — viz., strange gods — and no other.

[2.] Turning from Jehovah respects not any manner of backsliding in respect of the way of worship, but a falling away from him as the object of worship.

Now, there being these and many other discrepancies hindering the cases proposed from running parallel, I profess, for my part, I cannot see how any such evident deductions can possibly be drawn from hence as to be made a bottom of practice and acting in things of so high concernment. What may be allowed from the equity of those and the like constitutions, and deduced by analogy and proportion to the business in hand, I shall afterward declare.

II. The sum of what is usually drawn from holy writ against such forbearance as I suppose may be asserted, and for the punishing heretics with capital punishments, being briefly discussed, I proceed, in the next place, to such other general observations as may serve to the farther clearing of the business in hand; and they are these that follow:—

The forbearance of or opposition unto errors, may be considered with respect either unto civil or spiritual judicature.

First, For the latter, it is either personal or ecclesiastical, properly so called. Personal forbearance of errors, in a spiritual sense, is a moral toleration or approbation of them; so also is ecclesiastical. The warrant for procedence against them on that hand is plain and evident: certainly this way no error is to be forborne. All persons who have any interest and share in truth are obliged, in their several ways and stations, to an opposition unto every error — an opposition to be carried on by gospel mediums and spiritual weapons. Let them, according as they are called or opportuned, disprove them from the word, “contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” Erring persons are usually “*bono animo*,” says Salvian — very zealous to propagate their false conceptions; and shall the children of truth be backward in her defence? Precepts unto this as a duty, commendations of it, encouragements unto it, are very frequent in the gospel. Alike is this duty incumbent on all churches walking to the rule. The spiritual sword of discipline may be lawfully sheathed in the blood of heresies. No spiritual remedy can be too sharp for a spiritual disease. When the cure is suited to the malady, there is no danger of the application. And this is not denied by any. He that submits himself to any church society, does it “*ea lege*,” — of being obedient



to the authority of Christ in that church in all its censures. “Volenti non fit injuria.” Error is offensive, and must be proceeded against. Examples and precepts of this abound in the Scriptures. The blood of many erring persons, I doubt not, will one day have a “quo warranto” granted them against their (as to the particulars in debate) orthodox slayers, who did it to promote the service of God. Let them not fear an after-reckoning who use the discipline of Christ according to his appointment.

This being considered, the occasion of a most frequent paralogism is removed. If errors must be tolerated, say some, then men may do what they please, without control. No means, it seems, must be used to reclaim them. But is gospel conviction no means? Hath the sword of discipline no edge? Is there no means of instruction in the New Testament established, but a prison and a halter? Are the hammer of the word and the sword of the Spirit, which in days of old broke the stubbornest mountains, and overcame the proudest nations, now quite useless? God forbid! Were the churches of Christ established according to his appointment, and the professors of the truth so knit up “in the unity of the Spirit and bond of peace” as they ought to be, and were in the primitive times, I am persuaded those despised instruments would quickly make the proudest heretic to tremble. When the churches walked in sweet communion, giving each other continual account of their affairs, and warning each other of all or any such persons as, either in practice or doctrine, walked not with a right foot (as we have examples in *Clem. Epist. ad Corinth.* — the churches of Vienne and Lyons to those of Asia, *Euseb.*; — of Ignatius to several persons and churches — of *Irenæus to Victor.*, *Euseb.*; — to *Stephen*, *ibid.*, and the like), heretics found such cold entertainment as made them ashamed, if not weary, of their chosen wanderings. But this is not my present business.

Secondly, There is an opposition or forbearance in reference to a civil judicature and precedence of things which respecteth errors in a real sense, as to the inflicting or not inflicting of punishment on religious delinquents. And this is the sole thing under debate, viz.

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Whether persons enjoying civil authority over others — being intrusted therewithal according to the constitutions of the place and nation where the lot of them both, by providence, is fallen — are invested with power from above, and commanded in the word of God, to coerce, restrain, punish, confine, imprison, banish, hang, or burn, such of those persons under their jurisdiction as shall not embrace, profess, believe, and practice, that truth and way of worship which is revealed unto them of God? or how far, into what degrees, by what means, in any of these ways, may they proceed?

The general propositions and considerations of the penal laws of God, which were before laid down, have, as I suppose, left this business to a naked debate from the word of truth, without any such prejudices on either part as many take from a misapprehension of the mind of God in them; and therefore, by the reader’s patience, I shall venture upon the whole



anew, as if no such arguments had ever been proposed for the affirmative of the question in hand, not declining the utmost weight that is in any of them, according to equity and due proportion. And here, first, I shall give in a few things —

(1.) To the question itself.

(2.) To the manner of handling it.

(1.) To the question itself. For herein I suppose —

[1.] That the persons enjoying authority do also enjoy the truth; which is to the advantage of the affirmative.

[2.] That their power in civil things is just and unquestionable; which also looks favorably on that side.

[3.] That non-toleration makes out itself in positive infliction of punishment; which is so, or is nothing. Casting men out of protection, exposing them to vulgar violence, is confessedly unworthy of men representing the authority of God, and contrary to the whole end of their trust.

(2.) To the manner of handling this question among persons at variance. And here I cannot but observe —

[1.] That if I have taken my aim aright, there is no one thing under debate amongst Christians that is agitated with more confidence and mutual animosity of the parties litigant — each charging other with dreadful inferences — streams of blood, and dishonour to God, flowing out from their several persuasions; so that oftentimes, instead of a fair dispute, you meet on this subject with a pathetical outcry, as though all religion were utterly contaminated and trampled under foot, if both these contradictory assertions be not embraced. Now, seeing that in itself it is a thing wherein the gospel is exceedingly sparing, if not altogether silent, certainly there must be a farther interest than of judgment alone, or else that very much prejudicated with corrupt affections, or men could not possibly be carried out with so much violence upon supposed self-created consequences, wherewith in this cause they urge one another.

[2.] That generally thus much of private interest appears in the several contesters, that non-toleration is the opinion of the many, and these enjoying the countenance of authority — toleration, of the oppressed, who always go under the name of the faction, or factions — the unavoidable livery of the smaller number professing a way of worship by themselves, be it right or wrong. I do not desire to lay forth the usual deportment of men seeking the suppressing of others differing from them, towards those in authority. It is but too clearly made out by daily experience. If they close with them, they are “*custodes utriusque tabulæ,*” — the church’s nursing-fathers, etc. — what they please; but if they draw back, for want of light or truth to serve them, logs and storks find not worse entertainment from frogs than they from some of them. Such things as these may, nay, ought to be, especially heeded by



every one that knows what influence corrupt affections have upon the judgments of men, and would willingly take the pains to wipe his eyes for the discerning of the truth.

These things premised, I assert that —

Non-toleration — in the latitude which is for persons in authority enjoying the truth (or supposing they do enjoy it) to punish in an arbitrary way, according to what they shall conceive to be condign, men who will not forsake their own convictions about any head or heads of Christian religion whatsoever, to join with what they hold out, either for belief or worship, after the using of such ways of persuasion as they shall think fit — is no way warranted in the gospel; nor can any sound proof for such a course be taken from the Old Testament.

The testimonies out of the law, which I can apprehend to have any colour or appearance of strength in them, with the examples approved of God that seem to look this way, I considered at our entrance into this discourse.

I speak of punishing in an arbitrary way; for all instances produced to the purpose in hand, that speak of any punishment, mention nothing under death itself; which yet, at least in the first place, is not aimed at by those that use them in our days, as I suppose. Now, some divines of no small name maintain, that God hath not left the imposition of punishment in any measure to the wills of men.

Some arguments for the proof of the former assertion as laid down I shall in due place make use of; for the present, I desire to commend to the serious pondering of all Christians in general, especially of those in authority, these ensuing considerations —

1. That it is no privilege of truth to furnish its assertors with this persuasion, that the dissenters from it ought forcibly to be opposed, restrained, punished.

No false religion ever yet in the world did enthrone itself in the minds of men enjoying a civil sovereignty over the persons of others, but it therewithal commanded them, under pain of neglect and contempt of itself, to crush any underling worship that would perk up in inferior consciences.

The old heathens carried their gods into the war (as did the Philistines, [1 Chron. xiv. 12](#), and the Israelites the ark, with heathenish superstition, [1 Sam. iv. 3](#)), to whom they ascribed the success they obtained; and in requital of their kindness, they forced the dunghill deities of the conquered nations to attend the triumph of their victorious idols; and unless they adopted them into the number of their own gods, all farther worship to them was forbidden. Hence were these inventions among the old Romans, by spells and enchantments, to entice away a deity from any city they besieged (they being as expert at the getting of a devil as Tobias's Raphael, or the present Romanists at his fumigation); by which means they shrived into the honour of having thirty thousand unconquered idols,<sup>223</sup> and deserved

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223 Varro in *Augustin. de Civit. Dei.*



worthily that change of their city's epithet from Ἐπιτομή οἰκουμένης to Ἐπιτομή δεισιδαιμονίας — which it justly inheriteth to this very day. Rabshakeh's provocation to the example of the gods of the nations, [2 Kings xviii. 33, 34](#), and the Roman senate's consultation concerning the admitting of Christ to a place among their idols, that he might have been freely worshipped (their consent being prevented by his almighty providence, who will not be enrolled among the vilest works of his most corrupted creatures), do both declare this thing.

Now, not to speak of Cain, who seems to me to have laid the foundation of that cruelty which was afterwards inserted into the church's orthodoxies by the name of Hæreticidium; we find the four famous empires of the world to have drunk in this persuasion to the utmost, of suppressing all by force and violence that consented not to them in their way of worship.

Nebuchadnezzar, the "crown of the golden head," set up a furnace with an image; and a negative answer to that query, "Do you not serve my gods, nor worship my image?" served to cast the servants of the living God into the midst of the fire, [Dan. iii. 1](#).

Daniel's casting into the lions' den, [chapter vi.](#), shows that the Persian silver breast and arms did not want iron hands to crush or break the opposers of, or dissenters from, their religious edicts.

And though we find not much of the short-lived founder of the Grecian dominion, yet what was the practice of the branches of that empire, especially in the Syrian and Egyptian sprouts, the books of the Maccabees, Josephus, and others, do abundantly manifest.

For the Romans, though their judgment and practice — which fully and wholly are given over from the dragon to the beast and false prophet — be written in the blood of thousands of Christians, and so not to be questioned; yet, that it may appear that we are not the only men in this generation, that this wisdom of punishing dissenters was not born with us, I shall briefly give in what grounds they proceeded on, and the motives they had to proceed as they did.

(1.) First, then, they enacted it as a law, that no religious worship should be admitted or practised without the consent, decree, and establishment of the senate. Mention is made of a formal law to this purpose in Tertullian, *Apol., cap. v.*, though now we find it not. The foundation of it was doubtless in that of the twelve tables: "Separatim nemo habessit deos, neve novos, sed ne advenas, nisi publicè ascitos, privatim colunto;" — "Let none have gods to himself, neither let any privately worship new or strange deities, unless they be publicly owned and enrolled." And that it was their practice, and in the counsels of the wisest amongst them, appears in that advice given by Mæcenas to Augustus, in *Dion Cassius*: Τὸ μὲν ζεῖον πάντη πάντως αὐτός τε σέβου, κατὰ τὰ πάτρια, καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τιμᾶν ἀνάγκαζε· τοὺς δὲ δὴ ζενίζοντάς τι περὶ αὐτὸ, καὶ μίσει καὶ κόλαζε, μὴ μόνον τῶν θεῶν ἕνεκα, ὧν

καταφρονήσας οὐδ' ἄλλου ἄν τινος προτιμήσειεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καινά τινα δαιμόνια οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἀντεισφέροντες πολλοὺς ἀναπέιθουσιν ἀλλοτρινομεῖν· καὶ τούτου καὶ συνωμοσίαι καὶ συστάσεις, ἑταιρείαι τε γίνονται, ἅπερ ἤκιστα μοναρχία συμφέρει — “Worship,” saith he, “the divine power thyself according to the constitutions of thy country, everywhere and at all times; and compel others so to honour it. But hate and punish those who introduce foreign religions; not only for the god’s sake — whom he who contemneth will regard nothing else — but because such, introducing new deities, do persuade many to transgress (or to change affairs); whence are conjurations, seditions, private societies — things no way conducing to monarchy,” Hist. Rom., lib. 52:36.



Hence, doubtless, was that opposition which Paul met withal in divers of the Roman territories. Thus, at Athens (though, as I suppose, they enjoyed there their own laws and customs, very suitable, as it should seem, to those of the Romans), preaching Jesus, he was accused to be “a setter forth of strange gods,” [Acts xvii. 1](#). For although, as Strabo observeth of the Athenians, that publicly, by the authority of the magistrates, πολλὰ τῶν ζενικῶν ἱερῶν παρεδέξαντο, “they received many things of foreign worships;” yet that none might attempt any such things of themselves is notorious from the case of Socrates, who, as Laertius witnesseth, was condemned as οὓς μὲν νομίζει ζεοὺς — “one who thought not those to be gods whom the city thought so to be, but brought in certain new deities.” Hence, I say, was Paul’s opposition, and his haling to Mars-hill. Without doubt, also, this was the bottom of that stir and trouble he met withal about Philippi. It is true, private interest lay in the bottom with the chief opposers; but this legal constitution was that which was plausibly pretended. [Acts xvi. 21](#), “They teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans:” οὐκ ἔξεστι Ῥωμαίοις, — “it is not lawful for us Romans” to receive the religion they hold out, because statutes are made amongst us against all religious worship not allowed by public authority. Let Calvin’s short annotation on that place be seen. Gallio’s refusing to judge between Jews (as he thought) in a Jewish controversy, is no impeachment of this truth; had it been about any Roman establishment, he would quickly have interposed. Now, this law amongst them was doubtless “*fundi Christiani calamitas*.”

This, then, in the first place, was enacted, that no worship should be admitted, no religion exercised, but what received establishment and approbation from them who supposed themselves to be intrusted with authority over men in such things. And this power of the dragon was given over to the beast and false prophet. The anti-christian power succeeding in the room of the paganish — the pope and councils, of the emperors and senate — it was quickly confirmed that none should be suffered to live in peace who received not his mark and name, [Rev. xiii. 16, 17](#). Whereunto, for my part, I cannot but refer very many of those following imperial constitutions, which were made at first against the opposers of the church’s orthodoxism, but were turned against the witnesses of Jesus in the close.



(2.) This being done, they held out the reasons of this establishment. I shall touch only one or two of them, which are still common to them who walk in the same paths with them.

[1.] Now, the first was, That toleration of sundry ways of worship, and several religions, tends to the disturbance of the commonwealth and that civil society which men under the same government do and ought to enjoy. So Cicero tells us, *lib. ii., De Leg.*, “Suosque deos, aut novos, aut alienigenas coli, confusionem habet,” etc.; — it brings in confusion of religion and civil society. The same is clearly held out in that counsel of Mæcenas to Augustus before mentioned. “They,” saith he, “who introduce new deities, draw many into innovations; whence are conspiracies, seditions, conventicles, no way profitable for the commonwealth.”

[2.] The other main reason was, That hereby the gods, whom they owned and worshipped, were dishonoured and provoked to plague them. That this was continually in their mouths and clamours, all the acts at the slaying of the martyrs, the rescripts of emperors, the apologies of the Christians, as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Arnobius, Minutius Felix, do abundantly testify. All trouble was still ascribed to their impiety. Upon the first breaking out of any judgment, as though the cause of it had been the toleration of Christians, presently the vulgar cry was, “Christianos ad leones.” Now, that those causes and reasons have been traduced to all those who have since acted the same things, especially to the emperors’ successor at Rome, needs not to be proved. With the power of the dragon, the wisdom also is derived. See that great champion, Cardinal Bellarmine, fighting with these very weapons, *Lib. de Laicis, cap. 21*. And indeed, however illustrated, improved, adorned, supported, flourished, and sweetened, they are the sum of all that to this day hath been said in the same case.

(3.) Having made a law, and supported it with such reasons, as these, in proceeding to the execution of the penalty of that law as to particular persons (which penalty being, as now, arbitrary, was inflicted unto banishment, imprisonment, mine-digging, torturing in sundry kinds, maiming, death, according to the pleasure of the judges), they always charged upon those persons, not only the denying and opposing their own deities, religion, and worship; but also, that that which they embraced was foolish, absurd, detestable, pernicious, sinful, wicked, ruinous to commonwealths, cities, society, families, honesty, order, and the like. If a man should go about to delineate the Christian religion by the lines and features drawn thereof in the invectives and accusations of their adversaries, he might justly suppose that indeed that was their god which was set up at Rome with this inscription, “Deus Chistianorum Ononychites;” being an image with ass’s ears, in a gown, claws or talons upon one foot, with a book in his hand. Charged they were that they worshipped an ass’s head; which impious folly — first fastened on the Jews by Tacitus, *Hist., lib. v. cap. 1*, in these words, “Effigiem animalis, quo monstrante errorem sitimque depulerant, penetrati sacravere” (having before set out a feigned direction received by a company of asses), which he had

borrowed from Apion, a railing Egyptian of Alexandria<sup>224</sup> — was so ingrafted in their minds that no defensative could be allowed. The<sup>225</sup> sun, the cross, “sacerdotis genitalia,” were either really supposed, or impiously imposed on them, as the objects of their worship. The blood and flesh of infants, at Thyestean banquets, was said to be their food and provision; promiscuous lust, with incest, their chiefest refreshment. Such as these it concerned them to have them thought to be, being resolved to use them as if they were so indeed. Hence I am not sometimes without some suspicion, that many of the impure abominations, follies, villainies, which are ascribed unto the primitive heretics, yea, the very Gnostics themselves (upon whom the filth that lies is beyond all possible belief),<sup>226</sup> might be feigned and imposed, as to a great part thereof. For though not the very same, yet things as foolish and opposite to the light of nature, were at the same time charged on the most orthodox.

But you will say, They who charged these things upon the Catholics were Pagans, enemies of God and Christ; but these, who so charged heretics, were Christians themselves. And so say I also, and therefore, for reverence of the name (though perhaps I could), I say no more. But yet this I say, that story which you have in Minutius Felix (or Arnobius, *viii. book apologetical*), of the meeting of Christians, the drawing away of the light by a dog tied to the candlestick, so to make way for adulteries and incests, I have heard more than once told with no small confidence of Brownists and Puritans. Hath not this very same course been taken in latter ages? Consult the writings of Waldensis and the rest of his companions, about Wickliffe and his followers, — see the occasion of his falling off from Rome in our own chronicles, in Fabian of old, yea, and Daniel of late, to gratify a popish court; — of Eckius, Hosius, Staphylus, Bolsec, Bellarmine, and the rest who have undertaken to portray out unto us Luther and Calvin, with their followers; — and you will quickly see that their great design was to put on (as they did upon the head of John Huss at the *Council of Constance*, when he was led to the stake) the ugly visard of some devilish appearance, that under that form they might fit them for fire and fagot. And herein also is the polity of the dragon derived to the false prophet, and a colour tempered for persecutors to imbrue their hands in the blood of martyrs.

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224 *Joseph. ad. Ap., lib. i.*

225 “Moses novos ritus contrariosque cæteris mortalibus indidit. Profana illic omnia, quæ apud nos sacra; rursum concessa apud illos, quæ nobis incesta. Projectissima ad libidinem gens alienarum concubitum abstinent, inter se nihil illicitum.” — *Tacitus (de Judæis) Hist., lib. v.* “Judæos, impulsore Chresto quotidie tumultuantes Roma expulit,” falsely and foolishly. — *Suet. Claud., cap. xxv.* “Quæsitissimis pœnis afficiebat, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos apellabat.” *Tac. An., lib. xv.* “Afflicti supplicii Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ ac maleficæ.” — *Sueton. in Nerone, cap. xvi.*

226 *Epiphan. tom. ii. lib. 1, Hær. 26.*

This was the old Roman way, and I thought it not amiss to cautionate those enjoying truth and authority, that, if it be possible, they may not walk in their steps and method. The course accounted so sovereign for the extirpation of error was, as you see, first invented for the extirpation of truth.

2. I desire it may be observed, that the general issue and tendency of unlimited arbitrary persecution, or punishing for conscience' sake (because in all ages, οἱ πλείονες κακοὶ, and the worst of men have sat at the upper end of the world, for the most part more false worshippers having hitherto enjoyed authority over others than followers of the Lamb), hath been pernicious, fatal, and dreadful to the profession and professors of the gospel, — little or not at all serviceable to the truth.

I have heard it averred by a reverend and learned personage, that more blood of heretics hath been shed by wholesome severity, in the maintenance of the truth and opposition unto errors, than hath been shed of the witnesses of Jesus by the sword of persecution, in the hands of heretics and false worshippers; — an assertion, I conceive, under favour, so exceedingly distant from the reality of the thing itself, that I dare take upon me, against any man breathing, that in sundry Christian provinces, — almost in every one of the west, — more lives have been sacrificed to the one idol Hæreticidium, of those that bear witness to the truth, in the belief for which they suffered, than all the heretics, properly so called, that ever were slain in all the provinces of the world by men professing the gospel. And I shall give that worthy divine, or any other of his persuasion, his option among all the chiefest provinces of Europe, to tie me up unto which they please. He that shall consider that above sixty thousand persons were, in six years or little more, cut off in a judicial way, by Duke D'Alva in the Netherlands, in pursuit of the sentence of the inquisition, will conclude that there is "causa facilis" in my hand.

The ancient contest between the Homoousians and the Arians, — the first controversy the churches were agitated withal after they enjoyed a Christian magistrate (and may justly be supposed to be carried on to the advantage of error beyond all that went before it, because of the civil magistrates interesting themselves in the quarrel), — was not carried out to *violence* and blood before the several persuasions lighted on several dominions and state interests: as between the Goths, Vandals, and the rest of their companions on one side, who were Arians; and the Romans on the other. In all whose bickerings, notwithstanding, the honour of severity did still attend the Arians, especially in Africk, where they persecuted the Catholics with horrible outrage and fury:— five thousand at one time were barbarously exposed to all manner of cruel villainy. Some eruptions of passion had been before among emperors themselves; but still with this difference, that they who Arianized carried the bell for zeal against dissenters. Witness Valens, who gave place in persecution to none of his pagan predecessors, killing, burning, slaying, making havoc of all orthodox professors; yea, perhaps that which he did — at least was done by the countenance of his authority — at Alexandria,

upon the placing in of Lucius an Arian in the room of Athanasius, thrusting Peter beside the chair, who was rightly placed according to the custom of those times; perhaps, I say, the tumults, rapes, murders, then and there acted, did outgo what before had been done by the Pagans. See Theodoret, *Eccles. Hist., lib. iv., cap. 19*. It were tedious to pursue the lying, slandering invectives, banishments, deaths, tumults, murders, which attend this council all along, after once they began to invoke the help of the emperors one against another; yet in this space some magistrates, weary with persecuting ways, did not only abstain practically from force and violence, — as most of the orthodox emperors did, — but also enacted laws for the freedom of such as dissented from them. Jovianus, a pious man, grants all peace that will be peaceable; offended only with them who would offer violence to others, *Socrates Eccles. Hist., lib. iii. cap. 25*. Gratianus makes a law, whereby he granted liberty to all sects, but Manichees, Photinians, and Eunomians, *Sozom. Eccles. Hist., lib. vii. cap. 1*. Many more the like examples might be produced.

The next difference about the worship of God, to the Arian and its branches, that was controverted in letters of blood, was about images and their worship; in which, though some furious princes — in opposition to that growing idolatry which, by popes, bishops, priests, and especially monks, was in those days violently urged — did mingle some of their blood with their sacrifices; yet not to the tithe almost of what the Iconolatræ, getting uppermost, returned upon them and their adherents.

This, if occasion were, might be easily demonstrated from Paulus Diaconus, and others. After this, about the year 850, — about which time the Iconolatræ having ensnared the west by polity (the posterity of Charles the Great, who had stoutly opposed the worship of images, complying with the popes, the fathers of that worship, for their own ends), and wearied the east by cruelty, — that contest growing towards an end, the whole power of punishing for religion became subservient to the dictates of the pope, the kings of the earth giving their power to the beast; unto which point things had been working all along; — from thence, I say, until the death of Servetus in Geneva, the pursuit of Gentilis, Blandrata, and some other madmen in Helvetia, for the space well-nigh of seven hundred years, — the chiefest season of the reign of Satan and Antichrist, — all punishing for religion was managed by the authority of Rome, and against the poor witnesses of Jesus, prophesying in sackcloth in the several regions of the west. And what streams of blood were poured out, what millions of martyrs slain in that space, is known to all. Hence Bellarmine boasteth that the Albigenses were extinguished by the sword, *De Laic. cap. xxii*. It is true, there were laws enacted of old by Theodosius, Valentinian, Martian, — as *C. De. hæreticis, 1; Manichseis, 1; Arianis, 1; Unicuique*, which last provideth for the death of seducers; but yet, truly, though they were made by Catholics, and in the favour of Catholics, considering to what end they were used, I can look upon them no otherwise but as very bottom-stones of the tower of Babel.



This, then, in its latitude proving so pernicious to the profession of the gospel, — having for so long driven the woman into the wilderness and truth into corners, — being the main engine whereby the tower of Babel was built, and that which at this day they cry grace unto, as the foundation-stone of the whole antichristian fabric,<sup>227</sup> — we had need be cautious what use we make (as one terms it well) of the broom of Antichrist, to sweep the church of Christ. Whether that we are in the truth, and they blinded with error of whom we have spoken, be a sufficient plea, we shall see anon. In the meantime we may do well to remember what Louis XII. of France said, yea, swore, concerning the inhabitants of Mirindol, whom, by the instigation of his prelates, he had ordered to be slain, when news was brought him what was their conversation and way of life: “Let them be heretics if you please,” saith he, “but assuredly they are better than I and my Catholics.” Take heed lest the punished be better than the punishers.

Let me add to this observation only this, that the attempt to suppress any opinions whatsoever by force hath been for the most part fruitless. For either some few particular persons are proceeded against, or else greater multitudes; if some particulars only, the ashes of one hath always proved the seed of many opinionatists. Examples are innumerable; take one, which is boasted of as a pattern of severity, taken from antiquity. About the year 390, Priscillianus, a Manichee, and a Gnostic, by the procurement of Ithacius and Idacius, two bishops, was put to death by Maximus, an usurping emperor, who ruled for a season, having slain Gratianus; as that kind of men would always close with any authority that might serve their own ends. Now, what was the issue thereof? Martinus, a Catholic bishop, renounces their communion who did it; the historian that reports it giving this censure of the whole, “Sic pessimo exemplo sublati sunt homines luce indignissimi;” — though the men (Priscillianus and his companions) were most unworthy to live, yet their sentence of death was most unjust. But no matter for this, was not the heresy suppressed thereby? See what the same historian, who wrote not long after, and was able to testify the event, says of it:<sup>228</sup> “Non solum non repressa est hæresis, sed confirmata, et latius propagata est,” etc.; — “The heresy was so far from being suppressed hereby, that it was confirmed and propagated.” His followers, who before honoured him as a saint, now adore him as a martyr. The like in all ages hath been the issue of the like endeavours.

But now, if this course be undertaken against multitudes, what is or hath been the usual end of such undertakings? Take some examples of late days. Charles V., the most mighty emperor of Germany, undertakes by violence to extirpate the Lutherans and Calvinists out of the empire. After a tedious war, the death of many thousands, the wasting of the nation, in the close of all himself is driven out of Germany, and the business left much where it

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227 “Becanus de fide hæreticis servanda.” — *Bell., De Laicis*, etc.

228 *Sulpitius Severus, lib. ii., Eccles. Hist.*

began, *Sleid. Com.* Philip of Spain, will needs force the inquisition upon the Netherlands. What is the issue? After the expense of an ocean of blood, and more coin than would have purchased the country twice over, his posterity is totally deprived of all sovereignty over those parts.

Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart are put to death in Scotland by the procurement of a cardinal; the cardinal is instantly murdered by some desperate young men, and a war raised there about religion, which was never well quieted until, having hunted their queen out of her native kingdom, she had her head chopped off in England.<sup>229</sup> The wars, seditions, tumults, murders, massacres, rapes, burnings, etc., that followed the same attempt in France, cannot be thought of without horror and detestation. Neither knew those things any end, until the present forbearance was granted. Instances might be multiplied, but these things are known to all. If any shall say, All these evils followed the attempting to suppress truth, not error, I shall answer him another time, being loath to do it unless compelled. Only for the present I shall say, that error hath as much right to a forcible defence as truth.

3. To stir us up yet farther to a serious consideration of the grounds and reasons which are laid down for the inflicting of punishment upon any for exorbitancies in things of religion (upon what hath been said), the perpetual coincidence of the causes by them held forth who pretend to plead for just severity, with their pretences who have acted unjust persecution, should be well heeded.

The position is laid down in general on both sides, That erring persons are so and so to be dealt withal, — that such is the power and duty of the magistrate in such cases. The definition of heresy is agreed on for the main; only the Papists place the church's determination where others thrust in the heretic's conviction, — a thing much more obscure to bystanders and judges also. The appellations wherewith truth persecuted and error pursued are clothed, still the same. The consequences urged on all sides — of dishonour to God, trouble to the state, and the like — not at all discrepant. The arguments for the one and other for the most part the same. Look what reasons one sect gives for the punishing of another, — the names being changed, are retorted. He blasphemeth to the heretic, who chargeth blasphemy upon him. We use no other arguments, cite no other texts, press no other consequences for the punishing of other heretics, than the Papists, the wisest heretics breathing, do for the punishment of us.

No colour, no pretence, but hath been equally used in all hands. None can say, This is mine. To Luther's objection, that the Church of Christ never burned a heretic, for Huss and Jerome were none; Bellarmine answers, they were heretics to them Catholics, which did suffice, *De Laic. cap. xxi.* And indeed this vicissitude of things is very pernicious. All Christians almost are heretics to some enjoying authority (as Salvian said the case was between

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229 *Hist. of Reformation in Scotland.*

the Homoousians and Arians in his time); and most of those enjoying authority are persuaded it is their duty to suppress them whom they account heretics, and, answerably, have more or less acted according to this persuasion, until, by blood, wars, and horrid devastations of nations, some of them have been wearied. From the first croisade against the Albigenses, through the war of the Hussites under Zisca and the Procopii, those dreadful massacres before recounted, what a stage of blood hath Europe been made on this account! I desire that to this point the declaration of the Netherlands, at the beginning of their troubles (whom Bellarmine affirms to have petitioned for liberty of conscience, as he was writing "*De Hæreticidio*," the thing being long before granted at Spira, at the convention of the states of the empire, in the year 1526), may be seriously considered.

4. For the necessity of courses of extremity against erroneous persons, for the upholding "the faith once delivered to the saints," and the keeping the churches in peace, it doth not appear to me to be so urgent as is pretended.

For three hundred years the church had no assistance from any magistrate against heretics; and yet in all that space there was not one long-lived or far-spreading heresy, in comparison of those that followed. As the disease is spiritual, so was the remedy which in those days was applied; and the Lord Jesus Christ made it effectual. The Christians also of those days disclaimed all thoughts of such proceedings. The expressions of the most ancient, as Polycarpus, Ignatius, Irenæus, concerning heretics, are sharp and cutting; their avoiding of them, being admonished, precise and severe; their confutations of them laborious and diligent; their church censures and ejections piercing and sharp; communion amongst the churches close, exact, and carefully preserved, so that a stubborn heretic was thrust out of Christian society; — but for corporeal punishment, to be inflicted on them, in their writings not a syllable. Until Augustine was changed from his first resolution and persuasion, by the madness of Donatistical Circumcellions, this doctrine had but poor footing in antiquity. And whether his reasons as to this point be convincing, let any impartial man read his Epistle 50, and determine. What some say, — The Christians would have been of another mind had they enjoyed Christian magistrates, — is so suited to our present frame and temper, but so unworthy of them, that I should wrong them by a defensative. What was their sense of them, in a spiritual way, is clear. John, they say, would not abide in a bath where Cerinthus the heretic, infected with Judaism and Paganism, was; saying, "Let us depart, lest the building fall on us where Cerinthus is," *Iren., lib. iii. cap. 3*; *Euseb. Eccles. Hist., lib. iii. cap. 28*. Marcion meeting Polycarpus, and asking him whether he knew him, or acknowledged him, his answer was, "Yea, to be the first-born of the devil," *Euseb., lib. iv. cap. 14*. Ignatius's epistles are full of the like expressions. Irenæus says, he would have no words with them, *lib. iii. cap. 3*. Tertullian's books testify for him at large, with what keenness of spirit he pursued the heretics of his days, though before the end of them he had the unhappiness to be almost one himself. Cyprian cries out, "Nulla cum talibus convivia, nulla colloquia, nulla commercia misceantur,"



Epist. iii. ad Cornel; — “Neither eat, nor talk, nor deal with them.” Antonius the hermit leaves testimony when he was dying, “that he never had peaceable conference with them all his days,” *Vita Anton. inter Oper. Athan.* Surely had these men perceived the mind of God for their bodily punishment, they would not have failed to signify their minds therein; but truly their expressions hold out rather the quite contrary. Τοὺς μισοῦντας τὸν Θεὸν, μισεῖν χρὴ καὶ ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς αὐτοῦ ἐκτίκεσθαι· οὐ μὴν καὶ τύπτειν αὐτοὺς ἢ διώκειν, καθὼς τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν Κύριον καὶ Θεὸν, ἀλλ’ ἐχθοὺς μὲν ἠγεῖσθαι καὶ χωρίζεσθαι ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, says Ignatius, *Epist. ad Philad.*; — “Count them enemies, and separate from them who hate God; but for beating or persecuting them, that is proper to the heathen who know not God, nor our Saviour: do not you so.” Tertullian in very many places lays down general maxima tending to more liberty than is now pleaded for. One or two places may be pointed at: “Videte ne et hoc ad irreligiositatis elogium concurrat, adimere libertatem religionis, et interdicere optionem divinitatis, ut non liceat mihi colere quem velim, sed cogar colere quem nolim. Nemo se ab invito coli vellet, ne homo quidem,” *Apol., cap. xxiv.* And again to Scapula the governor of Carthage, to dissuade him from the persecution he intended: “Tamen humani juris et naturalis potestatis est unicuique quod putaverit colere, nec alii obest, aut prodest alterius religio: sed nec religionis est cogere religionem, quæ sponte suscipi debeat, non vi; cum et hostiæ ab animo libenti expostulentur: ita et si nos compuleritis ad sacrificandum, nihil præstabitis diis vestris, ab invitis enim sacrificia non desiderabunt.” And I desire to know, whether that which he maketh to be the plea of Christians may not also be used by all erring persons: “Quasi non totum quod in nos potestis, nostrum sit arbitrium. Certe si velim, Christianus sum, tunc ergo me damnabis, si damnari velim. Cum vero quod in me potes, nisi velim, non potes, jam meæ voluntatis est quod potes, non tuæ potestatis,” *Apol., cap. xlix.* Hence was that query of Lactantius, “Quis imponet mihi necessitatem aut credendi quod nolim, aut quod velim non credendi?” And long after these, Gregory of Rome, *lib. ii. Epist. lii.*, tells us, “Nova et inaudita est ista prædicatio, quæ verberibus exigit fidem;” — to beat in faith with stripes, was then a new kind of preaching. These and the like were their expressions.

It is true, in the three first centuries many fond, foolish, corrupt opinions were broached by sundry brain-sick men; but they laid little hold of the churches, kept themselves in the breasts of some few disorderly wanderers, and did very little promote the mystery of iniquity: but afterward, when the Roman emperors, and the great men of the earth, under and with them, began to interpose in the things of religion, and were mutually wooed, instigated, and provoked by the parties at variance (as indeed it is a shame to consider, upon all meetings, assemblies, disputes, councils, what running, what flattering, what insinuation at court, were used on all hands), what root did divers heresies take! how far were they propagated! Witness Arianism, which had almost invaded the whole world.

Furthermore, by the ways which were invented, oft from the rule, for the extirpation of errors, when, by the instigation of prelates, the emperors were (to their own ruin) persuaded to them, the man of sin walked to his throne. Those very laws, edicts, and declarations, which were obtained against erring persons, did the bishops of Rome invert and use against all the witnesses of Jesus. The devil durst not be so bold as to employ that his grand agent in his apprenticeship against the saints; but he first suffers him to exercise his hand against heretics, intending to make use of him afterward to another purpose. In most of those contests which the Roman pontiffs had with their fellow-bishops, by which they insensibly advanced their own supremacy, it was the defence of Catholics they undertook; as in the case of Athanasius and others.

Neither did the Christians of old at once step into the persuasion of punishing corporeally in case of religion. Constantine makes a decree at first, Τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ζρησκείας οὐκ ἀρνητέαν εἶναι, “that liberty of worship is not to be denied; and therefore the Christians, as others, should have liberty to keep the faith of their religion and heresy,” *Euseb., Eccles. Hist., lib. x. cap. 5*. And in the same edict he saith (how truly I know not, but yet great Constantine said it), “That it is most certain, that this is conducing to the peace of the empire, that free option and choice of religion be left to all.” Afterward, when he began a little farther to engage himself in the business of religion, being indeed wearied with the petitions of bishops and their associates for the persecution of one another, what troubles in a few years did he intricate himself withal! Perplexed he was in his spirit to see the untoward revengefulness of that sort of people; insomuch that he writes expressly to them, being assembled in council at Tyre, “That they had neither care of the truth, nor love to peace, nor conscience of scandal, nor would by any means be prevailed on to lay down their malice and animosities,” *Socrat. Hist., lib. i. cap. 34*. At length an Arian priest curries favour with his sister Constantia: she gets him into the esteem of her brother: after some insinuations of his, new edicts, new synods, new recallings, new banishments of other persons, follow one upon the neck of another, *Rufin. Eccles. Hist., lib. i. cap. 11*. And when this knack was once found out of promoting a sect by imperial favour, it is admirable to consider how those good princes, Constantine and his sons, were abused, misled, enraged, engaged into mutual dissensions, by the lies, flatteries, equivocations of such as called themselves bishops, *Rufin., lib. i. cap. 15, 16*, etc. As also, how soon, with the many, the whole business of religion was hereupon turned into a matter of external pomp and dominion. But it is beside my purpose to rake into that hell of confusion which by this means brake in upon the churches in succeeding ages. Only for the following imperial edicts and constitutions in the behalf of the catholic faith, and for the punishing of erring persons, I desire to observe, —

(1.) That the emperors were stirred up to them by turbulent priests and aspiring prelates. Let the pope’s letters to them witness this. Leo, *Epist. lxxv.* etc.

(2.) That they were still bottomed upon such and such councils, that were not to be opposed or spoken against, when all of them were spent for the most part about things quite beside and beyond the Scripture (as feasting, and lastings, and bishops' jurisdictions); and some of them were the very ulcers and imposthumations of Christian religion, as those of Nice and Ephesus, both the second; and in general all of them the sea upon which the whore exalted her seat and throne. And these things did those good men, either deceived by the craft of heretics, or wearied by the importunity of the orthodox.

And yet, notwithstanding all this (as I shall afterward declare), I cannot close with that counsel which Themistius, a philosopher, gave to Valens the emperor, and am most abhorrent from the reason of his counsel, — viz., “That he should let all sects alone, because it was for the glory of God to be honoured with diversities of opinions and ways of worship.” Yet though this reason be false and impious, the advice itself was well conducing at that time to the peace of the churches, something qualifying the spirit of that heretical emperor, who before had cruelly raged against all orthodox professors of the Deity of Christ, *Socrat., lib. iv. cap. 27.*

5. Lastly, add unto all that hath been said, “Vice coronidis,” for the use of such as, enjoying authority, may have misapprehensions of some truths of Christ, — a sad consideration concerning the end and issue which the Lord, in his righteous judgment, hath in all ages given to persecutors and persecution.

Nero (of whom says Tertullian, “Tali dedicatore gaudet sanguis Christianus”), who was the first that employed the sword against our religion, being condemned by the senate to be punished “more majorum,” slew himself, with this exprobration of his own sordid villainy, “Turpiter vixi, turpius morior,” *Sueton. in Ner. Domitian*, the inheritor of his rage and folly, was murdered in his own house by his servants, *Idem in Domit.* Trajan, by a resolution of his joints, numbedness of body, and a choking water, perished miserably, Dio Cassius *de Traj.* This is he whose order not to seek out Christians to punishment, but yet to punish them appearing, you have in his epistle to Pliny, a provincial governor under him, *Plin. Epist. xcvi.*; which, though commended by Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist., lib. iii. cap. 33,* yet is canvassed by Tertullian as a foolish, impious, wicked constitution, *Apol. cap. ii.* Hadrian, perishing with a flux and casting of blood, paid some part of the price of the innocent blood which he had shed, Ælius Spart. in *Had.* Severus poisoned himself, to put an end to his tormenting pains, *Jul. Capitol.* Maximinus, with his son yet a child, was torn in pieces of the soldiers, all crying out, “that not a whelp was to be left of so cursed a stock.” Decius, having reigned scarce two years, was slain with his children, *Euseb., lib. vii. cap. 1.* Valerian, being taken by Sapore king of Persia, was carried about in a cage, and being seventy years old, was at length flayed alive, *Euseb., lib. vii. cap. 13.* Another Valerian, of the same stamp with his brother and kindred, was murdered at Milan. Diocletian being smitten with madness, had his palace consumed with fire from heaven, and perished miserably. The city of Alexan-

dria, in the time of Gallienus, was, for its persecution, so wasted with variety of destroying plagues and judgments, that the whole number of its inhabitants answered not the grey-headed old men that were in it before, Dionys. apud *Euseb.*, lib. vii. cap. 21. What was the end of Julian is known to all. Now, truly, of many of these we might well say, as one of old did, “Quales imperatores.” As Trajan, Hadrian, Severus, Julian, what excellent emperors had they been, had they not been persecutors! And all this, says Tertullian, is come to pass that men might learn μη̄ θεομαχεῖν. He that desires to see more of this, let him consult Tertul. *Apol. et ad Scap.*; *Euseb. Eccles. Hist.*, lib. vii. cap. 21; *August. de Civit. Dei*, lib. xviii. cap. 52; *Eutrop.*, lib. viii. It would be tedious to descend to examples of latter ages, our own and the neighbour nations do so much, too much, abound with them. Let this that hath been spoken suffice to cautionate mortal men how they meddle with the vessels of the sanctuary.

But now may some say, What will be the issue of this discourse? Do you, then, leave every one at liberty in the things of God? Hath the magistrate nothing to do in or about religion? Is he to depose the care thereof? Shall men, exasperated in their spirits by different persuasions, be suffered to devour one another as they please?

III. I have only showed the weakness of those grounds which some men make the bottom of their testimonies against the toleration of any thing but what themselves conceive to be truth; as also, taken away the chief of those arguments upon which such a proceeding against erring persons is bottomed as tends to blood and death. What positively the civil magistrate may, nay, ought to do, in the whole business of religion, comes in the next place to be considered, being the third and last part of our discourse.

Now, my thoughts unto this I shall hold out under these three heads.

1. What is the magistrate’s duty as to the truth, and persons professing it.
2. What in reference to the opposers and revilers of it.
3. What in respect of dissenters from it.

1. I shall begin with the first, which to me is much of chiefest importance.

His power, or rather his duty herein, I shall hold out in these ensuing propositions:—

(1.) As all men in general, so magistrates, even as such, are bound to know the mind and will of God in the things which concern his honour and worship. They are bound, I say, to know it. This obligation lies upon all creatures capable of knowing the Creator, answerably to that light which of him they have, and the means of revelation which they do enjoy. He of whom we speak is supposed to have that most sovereign and supreme of all outward teachings, the word of God, with such other helps as are thereby revealed, and therein appointed; so as he is bound to know the will of God in every thing him concerning. Wherein he foals and comes short of the truth, it is his sin; — the defect being not in the manner of the revelation, but in the corruption of his darkened mind. Now, that he is to make this inquiry in reference to his calling, is evident from that of David, [2 Sam. xxiii. 3](#),

“He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” This fear is only taught by the word. Without a right knowledge of God and his mind, there can be no true fear of him. That command, also, for the Jewish magistrate to study it day and night, and to have the book of the law continually before him, because it was the rule of that civil polity whereof he was, under God, the head and preserver, by analogy confirmeth this truth, [Deut. xvii. 18, 19](#).

(2.) If he desire this wisdom sincerely, and the Lord intend him “as a light of the morning, as a rising sun, a morning without clouds” to his people, doubtless he will reveal himself to him, and teach him his mind; as he did David and Solomon, and other holy men of old. And as to this, I shall only with due reverence cautionate the sons of men that are exalted in government over their brethren, that they take heed of a lifted-up spirit, — the greatest closer of the heart against the truth of God. He hath promised to teach the humble and the lowly in mind; the proud he beholdeth afar off. Is not this the great reason that the rulers believe not on him, and the nobles lay not their necks to the yoke of the Lord, even because their hearts are lifted up within them, and so lie in an unteachable frame before the Lord?

(3.) The truth being revealed to them, and their own hearts made acquainted therewith, after their personal engagements to the practice of the power of godliness, according to the “revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” three things are incumbent on him in reference thereunto.

[1.] That, according to the measure of its revelation unto him, he declare, or take care that it be declared, unto others, even all committed to his governing charge. The general equity that is in the obligation of “strengthening others when we are confirmed,” desiring them to be like ourselves in all participation of grace from God, — the nature of true zeal for the glory and name of the Lord, are a sufficient warrant for this, yea, demand the performance of this duty. So Jehoshaphat, being instructed in the ways of God, sent princes and priests to teach it in all the cities and towns of Judah, [2 Chron. xvii. 7–9](#). As also did Hezekiah, [2 Chron. xxx. 6–9](#). Let this, then, be our first position:—

i. It belongs to the duty of the supreme magistrate, the governor or shepherd of the people, in any nation, being acquainted with the mind of God, to take care that the truth of the gospel be preached to all the people of that nation, according to the way appointed, either ordinary or extraordinary.

I make no doubt but God will quickly reject them from their power who, knowing their Master’s will, are negligent herein.

[2.] As he is to declare it, so he is to protect it from all violence whatever. Jesus Christ is the great king of nations, as well as the holy king of saints. His gospel hath a right to be preached in every nation, and to every creature under heaven. Whoever forbids or hinders





the free passage of it, is not only sinful and impious towards God, but also injurious towards men.

Certainly the magistrate is to protect every one and every thing in their own right, from the violence and injury of unruly men. In the preaching and receiving the gospel there is a right acted, superior to all earthly privileges whatever. In this, then, the magistrate is to protect it, that under him the professors thereof “may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.” And for this cause they to whom the sword is committed may with the sword lawfully defend the truth, as the undoubted right and privilege of those who do enjoy it, and of which they cannot be deprived without the greatest injury. Jephthah laid it down as the ground of the equity of the wars he waged against the Ammonites, that they would possess what the Lord their God gave them to possess; the defence whereof he pursued to the subversion of their (at first) invading enemies, [Judges xi. 24, 33](#). It is no new thing to begin in defence, and end in offence. Now, if the truth be given us of the Lord our God to possess, certainly it may be contended for by those who owe protection thereunto.

And if this were not so, we may pray, and prevail, for the prosperity of those in authority, and yet, when we have done, not have a right to a quiet and peaceable life. Let this, then, be the second assertion:—

ii. The gospel being preached and declared, as of right it ought to be, it is the duty of the magistrate, by the power wherewith he is intrusted, to protect and defend it against all or any persons that, by force or violence, shall seek to hinder the progress or stop the passage of it, under what pretence soever.

And that a neglect of this also will be attended with the anger of the Lord, and the kindling of his wrath, shall not long be doubted of any.

[3.] The protecting, assisting, and supporting of all the professors of it in that profession, and in ways of truth’s appointment, for the practice of that which is embraced, and the furtherance of it towards them who as yet embrace it not, is also required. And of this there are sundry parts.

1st. That, seeing Christ Jesus hath appointed his disciples to walk in such societies, and requireth of them such kind of worship, as cannot be performed without their meeting together ὁμοθυμαδὸν, “in one place;” that he either provide, or grant being provided, the use of such places under his protection as may, in all or any kind, be suited and fitted for that end and purpose. And the ground of this is, —

(1st.) From the right which the gospel of Christ hath to be received amongst men, according to his own appointment; whether that be the appointment of Christ or not, amongst us is no question.

(2dly.) Because the magistrate hath the sole power of all public places, and the protection of them is committed to him alone, by virtue of that consent unto government which is among any people. This proved as above. 2dly. A protection in the use of those places, and

all things exercised in them, answerable to that which he doth and is bound to grant unto men in their own private dwellings and families. The reason why I am protected from all hurt or violence in my family is, because I have a right to dispose of all things in my family, being my own; and so hath not another. It was asserted before that Christians have a right to the ordinances of Christ, and truth a right to be at liberty; and therefore, if any shall invade, disturb, or trouble them in their rights and liberties, he is bound, “*ex officio*,” to give them a protection, “not bearing the sword in vain.”

Now, being in my family, in my private house, the assistance of those in authority is due, —

(1st.) In respect of them without.

(2dly.) In respect of them within.

(1st.) For them without, if any one will, against my consent, intrude himself upon my family enjoyments, to share with me, or violently come to take away that is mine, or disturb me in the quiet possession of it, the magistrate takes cognizance of such disturbances, and punisheth them according to equity. Suitably, if any person or persons whatsoever shall with violence put themselves upon the enjoyment of such ordinances as those enjoying the rights of the gospel have obtained to themselves, or shall come in their celebration of them to cause disturbance, certainly that magistrate protects not every one in his undoubted rights, who doth not accommodate the wronged parties with the assistance of his power to the punishment of the transgressors.

(2dly.) For house dwellers, servants, or any others, who may break out into such offences and incorrigibleness as the amendment thereof may be beyond what I am intrusted to do to any by law of God or man, shall not the magistrate here also interpose? is not his assistance here abundantly required and always granted?

From parity of reason, is it not as due for their protection who, in the enjoyment of their public religious rights, may receive disturbance, and be under force from some incorrigible by any rule among themselves? For instance, — suppose a person justly excommunicated and ejected any society of Christians, as to any spiritual communion, yet will with outward force and violence put himself upon them in their closest acts of communion; doubtless their rights are here to be by power preserved.

3dly. That whereas the preachers of the gospel are now to be maintained in an ordinary way, and to expect their supportment in a usual course of providence; and seeing that many to whom we have proved that the gospel is to be declared by the care of the magistrate, will not or cannot make such provisions for them as is needful in these last evil days of the world; it is incumbent on those nursing-fathers to provide for them, who, because of their continual labours in the work of the Lord, are disabled to make provision for themselves. Where churches are settled according to the rule of the gospel, and not too much straitened by reason of want, there may be an alteration as to this proposal. That this engagement lies



first upon the churches, was seen of old. Hence that caution or canon of the Council of Chalcedon, cap. vi., Μηδεὶς χειροτονείσθω ἀπολελυμένος, “Let none be ordained at large.” “Ne dicatur, mendicat in palæstra infelix clericus,” says the scholiast, — “lest he should be driven to beg for want of maintenance.”

This being the sum of what, as to this head, I have to assert, I shall give in the proofs of it, and then draw some farther positions.

*Reason 1.* The bottom of the whole ariseth from that right which the gospel hath to be preached to all nations and people; and that right, paramount to all civil sanctions and constitutions, which every soul hath to receive it in the profession thereof. And all this flows from the donation of the Father unto Jesus Christ, whereby he is made “heir of all things,” [Heb. i. 2](#), having the “nations given him for his inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession,” [Ps. ii. 8](#); — being also “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” acting nothing in taking possession of his own but what his sovereignty bears him out in.

*Reason 2.* All this tends to the apparent good of these committed to his charge, that they may lead their lives in godliness and honesty; which is the very chief end of magistracy committed unto men. This is directly intended; all other things come in by accident, and upon suppositions.

*Reason 3.* No person living can pretend to the least injury by this, — none is deprived, none wronged.

*Reason 4.* The precepts given unto them, and the promises made concerning them, do abundantly confirm all that hath been asserted. [Ps. ii. 10, 11](#), they are commanded as kings and judges to serve the Lord, in promoting the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is promised, [Isa. xlix. 23](#), that “they shall be nursing-fathers and nursing-mothers to the church” of Christ, even then when she shall “suck the breasts of kings” (earthly things are the milk of kingly breasts), “when her officers shall be peace, and her exactors righteousness,” [Isa. ix. 16, 17](#). This, at least, reacheth to all we have ascribed to them. All is but bowing the knee of magistracy at the name of Jesus.

Hence are these positions:—

iii. The providing or granting of places requisite for the performance of that worship which in the gospel is instituted, is the duty of the Christian magistrate.

iv. Protection, as to peace and quietness in the use of the ordinances of the Lord Jesus Christ, from violent disturbers, either from without or within, is also incumbent on him.

v. Supportment and provision, as to earthly things, where regularly failing, is of him required.

And in the neglect of any of these that takes place, which is threatened, [Isa. lx. 12](#), two or three consecrations, added hereunto, shall close this part of the magistrate’s power, or rather duty, about the things of religion. As, —

*Consect.* 1. Positive actings, by way of supportment and assistance, maintenance, allowance of public places, and the like, in the behalf of persons deviating from the truth, in those things wherein they deviate, are contrary to the rule of the word, and duty of them in authority. For, —

Error hath neither right nor promise; nor is any precept given in the behalf thereof.

*Consect.* 2. The defence and protection of erring persons from violence and injury, in those things wherein they have a right, is no acting of his duty about religious things, but a mere dealing for the preservation of human society, by the defence of persons not acting against the rules thereof.<sup>230</sup>

*Consect.* 3. Every particular minute difference among the professors of the truth cannot be proved to come under the cognizance of the magistrate, he being to attend the worship which for the main is acceptable to God in Christ; neither do any testimonies extend his duty any farther. Hence, —

*Corollary* 1. The present differences about church society and the subject or seat of discipline, which are between those dissenters who are known by the names of Presbyterians and Independents, as they are in themselves (not heightened by the prejudices, lusts, corruptions, and interests of men), hinder not at all, but that the magistrate is bound to the performance of the duties before mentioned unto both parties. And the reasons of this are, because, —

*Reason* 1. The things wherein they are agreed are clearly as broad as the magistrate's duty can be stretched to cover them.

*Reason* 2. Neither party, I am persuaded, in their retired thoughts dare avow the main of the worship by their dissenters embraced, to be, as such, rejected of the Lord.

*Reason* 3. No example in the world can be produced out of the Old Testament, or New, or ecclesiastical history, of a forcible decision of such minute differences. See *Socrat. Eccles. Hist., lib. vi. cap. 20.*

*Corollary* 2. All the plea of persons erring in doctrine or worship is not from what the magistrate must do, but from what he may not do.

And this for the first part shall suffice.

2. There is another part of the magistrate's power, — the other side of his sword, — to be exercised towards the opposition of that truth which he hath embraced.

And this hath a twofold object:—

(1.) Things; (2.) Persons.

(1.) Things are of two sorts:—

[1.] Ways of worship.



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230 For this cause the emperors of old still allowed the Novatians the liberty of worship.

[2.] Outward appearances, monuments, accommodations, and declarations of those ways.

Of the first I shall speak afterward.

By the second I mean all the outward attendances of any false or erroneous worship, which are either helps to or declarations of the superstition, idolatry, error, or falseness of it; as temples for idolatrous service, crosses, pictures, and the like abused relics of old, unwarranted zeal. Now, concerning these, I affirm, —

1st, That the magistrate ought not to make provision of any public places for the practice of any such worship as he is convinced to be an abomination unto the Lord. When I say he ought not to make provision, I understand not only a not actual caring that such be, but also a caring that such may not be. He should not have a negation of acting as to any thing of public concernment. His not opposing here is providing. For instance, he must not allow — that is, it is his duty to oppose — the setting apart of public places under his protection for the *service* of the mass (as of late in Somerset House), or for any kind of worship in itself disallowed, because not required, and so not accepted. This were to be bound to help forward sin, and that such sin whereof he is convinced; — which is repugnant to the whole revealed will of God. A magistrate, I told you before, is not to act according to what he may do, but what he must do. Now, it cannot be his duty to further sin.

2dly. Outward monuments — ways of declaring and holding out false and idolatrous worship — he is to remove; as the Papists' images, altars, *pictures*, and the like; Turks' mosques; prelates' service-book. Now these are of two sorts:—

(1st.) Such things as, in their whole use and nature, serve only for the carrying on of worship in itself wholly false, and merely invented; as altars, images, crosses.

(2dly.) Such as are used for the carrying on of worship true in itself, though vilely corrupted; as praying and preaching; — such are those places commonly called churches.

The first are to be abolished; the latter aright used. I speak as to public appearances; for private disquisitions after such things I may be otherwise minded. The reason of this difference is evident to all.

Thus, in days of old, Constantine shut up Pagans' temples, *Euseb. de Vita Constant., lib. iv. cap. 23, 24*; and demolished some of the most filthy of them, *lib. iii. cap. 52*. Theodosius utterly cast them to the ground, though not without some blows and bloodshed, *Socrat. Eccles. Hist., lib. v. cap. 16*. The command of God for the abolishing all monuments of idolatry, *Deut. xii. 1–3*, with the commendation of those kings of Judah who accordingly performed this duty, *2 Chron. xvii. 6, xxx. 14*, are enough to confirm it, and to bottom this position:—

vi. It is the duty of the magistrate not to allow any public places for (in his judgment) false and abominable worship; as also, to demolish all outward appearances and demonstrations of such superstitious, idolatrous, and unacceptable service.

Let Papists, who are idolaters, and Socinians, who are anthropolatræ, plead for themselves.

(2.) Now, for persons there seems something more of difficulty; yet certain clear rules may be proposed concerning them also, to hold out when they and their proceedings come under the cognizance of the civil magistrate, and are obnoxious to the sword which he beareth. And they are these:—

[1.] Such persons as, having embraced any false principles and persuasion in or about things concerning God and his worship, do pursue the upholding or propagating of such principles in a disorderly manner, to the disturbance of civil society, are doubtless under his restraining power, to be acted and put forth in such ways as to other persons running out into the same or the like compass of disorder, upon other grounds, and from the instigation of other lusts. The pretence of disturbance and confusion, upon the bearing with differences in opinion about things commanded in religion, we before rejected, as a colour fitted chiefly for the wearing of persecution. But actual disturbances, indeed, must have actual restraints. For instance, if a man, being persuaded that the power of the magistrate is in Christian religion groundless, unwarrantable, unlawful, should thereupon stir up the people to the abolishing and removal of that power; such stirrings up, and such actings upon that instigation, are as opposite to the gospel of Christ (which opposeth no lawful regimen among the sons of men), so also prejudicial to human society; and therefore to be proceeded against by them who bear not the sword in vain. This case we know happened once in Germany, and may do so again in other places. If such as these suffer, it is “as murderers, or thieves, or evil-doers, or busy-bodies in other men’s matters;” which is a shameful thing, no way commendable or praiseworthy, [1 Pet. iv. 15](#).

[2.] If any persons whatsoever, under any pretence whatsoever, shall offer violence or disturbance to the professors of the true worship of God, so owned, established, and confirmed as above said, in and for the profession of that true, so-owned worship, service, and declaration of the mind of God; such persons are to fear that power which is the minister of God, and a revenger to them that do evil. Let us suppose of them what they suppose, and for their own justification and support in irregular ways bear out of themselves, — that they enjoy the truth, others walking in paths of their own; yet then this practice is contrary to that prime dictate of nature which none can pretend ignorance of, viz., “Do not that to another which thou wouldst not have done unto thyself.” If men that would not think it equitable to be so dealt with as they deal with others, supposing themselves in their condition, do yet so deal with them, they are *αὐτοκατάκριτοι*, and do pronounce sentence against themselves out of their own mouths. This, then, deserveth punishment; and breaking out to the disturbance of public order ought to be punished. We before proved the protection of public places to belong to the magistrate; so that he not only may, but, if he will not be false to Him by whom he is intrusted, he must, put forth his authority for the safe-guarding

and revenging of them. Yea, also, and this rule may pass, when some things in the way publicly established are truly offensive. What the ancient Christians thought of the zeal of Audas, a Christian bishop, who would needs demolish a Pagan temple in Persia, I know not; but I am sure his discretion is not much extolled who, by that one fiery act of destroying πυρῆϊον, — that is, “a temple of fire” (for the Persians looked upon fire as a god, as the historian observes), — occasioned a cruel persecution of thirty years’ continuance, *Theod. Eccles. Hist., lib. v. cap. 38.*

[3.] When any have entertained any singular opinion in matters of great weight and importance, — such as nearly concern the glory of God, and the minds of Christians, in reverence of his holy name, are most tenderly affected withal, so that without much horror of mind they can scarce hear those errors whereby those grand truths are opposed, — yet those persons who have entertained such uncouth opinions shall not be content so to have done, and also in all lawful ways (as to civil society) endeavoured to propagate the said opinions to others; but, in the pursuit of this their design of opposing truth, shall publicly use such expressions, or perform such acts, as are fit to pour contempt and scorn upon the truth which they do oppose, — reviling it also, or God himself so represented as he is in the truth they abominate, with odious and execrable appellations (as, for instance, the calling the holy Trinity, “Tricipitem Cerberum”); — if the question be put, Whether in this case the magistrate be not obliged to vindicate the honour of God by corporeal restraints, in some degrees at least, upon the persons of those men? — truly, for my part, I incline to the affirmative. And the reason hereof is this:— Though men, through the incurable blindness of their minds, falling into error of judgment and misinterpretation of the word, may disbelieve the Deity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit; yet that any pretence from the word, persuasion of conscience, or dictate of religion, should carry them out to reviling, opprobrious speeches of that which of God is held out contrary to their apprehensions, is false and remote from reason itself. For this cause Paul says he was a blasphemer; — not because, being a Jew, he disbelieved the gospel; but because, so disbelieving it, he moreover loaded the truths thereof with contumelious reproaches. Such expressions, indeed, differ not from those piercing words of the holy name of God which he censured to death, [Lev. xxiv. 15](#), but only in this, that there seemeth in that to be a plain opposition unto light, in this not so. The like may be said of a Jew’s crucifying a dog.

[4.] There are a sort of persons termed in Scripture ἄτακτοι, [1 Thess. v. 14](#); ἀγοραῖοι. [Acts xvii. 5](#); ἄτοποι, [2 Thess. iii. 2](#); ἀνυπότακτοι, [1 Tim. i. 9](#), and the like, — disorderly, vagabond, wandering, irregular persons, fixed to no calling, abiding in no place, taking no care of their families; that, under a pretence of teaching the truth, without mission, without call, without warrant, uncommanded, undesired, do go up and down, from place to place, creeping into houses, etc. Now, that such ways as these, and persons in these ways, may be

judicially inquired into, I no way doubt. The story is famous of Sesostris, king of Egypt, who made a law, that all the subjects of his kingdom should once a year give an account of their way and manner of living, and if any one were found to spend his time idly, he was certainly punished; and the laws of most nations have provided that their people shall not be wanderers, and whosoever hath not a place of abode and employment is by them a punishable vagabond. And in this, by much experience of the ways, walking, and converse of such persons, I am exceedingly confirmed in. I did as yet never observe any other issue upon such undertakings, but scandal to religion, and trouble to men in their civil relations.

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[5.] When men, by the practice of any vice or sin, draw others to a pretended religion; or, by pretence of religion, draw men to any vice or known sin, let them be twice punished, — for their real vice, and pretended religion. The truth is, I have been taught exceedingly to disbelieve all the strange imputations of wickedness and uncleanness that are imposed upon many, to be either the end or the medium of the practice of that communion in religion which they do profess and embrace. I remember that, when I was a boy, all those stories were told me of Brownists and Puritans which afterward I found to have been long before the forgeries of Pagans, and imposed on the primitive Christians. I dare boldly say, I have heard stories of them a hundred times, holding out that very thing, and those deeds of darkness, which Minutius Felix holds out in the tongue of an infidel concerning the Christians of those days; but yet, because sundry venerable persons, to whom antiquity hath given sanctuary from being arraigned on the point of false testimony, have left it upon record of sundry heretics in their days, — as the Gnostics and others, that they were conjoined into “societates tesserâ pollutionis,” and some assert that the like iniquities are not wholly buried, I made the supposition, and hope that, if they depose themselves from common sense and reason, the magistrate will never exalt them to the privilege and exemption of religion.

In these, and such like cases as these, when men shall break forth into disturbance of common order and enormities against the light of nature, beyond all positive command of any pretended religion whatsoever, that the magistrate ought to set hedges of thorns in their ways, sharpened according to their several delinquencies, I suppose no man not abhorred of common sense can once hesitate or doubt. And I am the more inclined to assert a restraint to all such as these, because it may be established to the height without the least prejudice unto the truth, though persons erring should enjoy the place of authority.

3. That which now remaineth in this head to be considered, is concerning persons maintaining and upholding any great and pernicious errors, but in such ways as are not, by any of the former disorders, to be brought under the cognizance of the civil magistrate, but good, honest, allowable, and peaceable in themselves; not at all to be questioned, but in reference to the things that are carried on in and by those ways, — as communication by discourse and private preaching, and the like.

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Now, concerning these, it is generally affirmed, that persons maintaining any error in or against any fundamental article of faith or religion, and that with obstinacy or pertinacy after conviction, ought to be proceeded against by the authority of the civil magistrate, whether unto death or banishment, imprisonment or confiscation of goods.

(1.) Now unto this — supposing what I have written heretofore concerning the incompetency of all and the non-constitution of any judge in this case, with the answers given at the beginning of this treatise to most of the places produced usually for the affirmative — I shall briefly give in my thoughts; reserving the consideration of pressing conformity to the next head to be handled. And, —

[1.] That I cannot but observe, that, in the question itself, there are sundry things gratis assumed; as, —

*1st.* That it is known and confessed what articles in religion are fundamental, and this also to the magistrate; when no one thing among Christians is more questionable, most accounting them so (be they what they will) wherein they differ from others. So that, one way or other, all dissenters shall be hooked in, directly or indirectly, to clash upon fundamentals. In this Papists are secure, who make the church's propositions sufficient to make an article fundamental.

*2dly.* That the persons holding the error are convinced, when perhaps they have been only confuted; between which two there is a wide difference. He that holds the truth may be confuted; but a man cannot be convinced but by the truth. That a man should be said to be convinced of a truth, and yet that truth not shine in upon his understanding to the expelling of the contrary error, to me is strange. To be convinced, is to be overpowered by the evidence of that which before a man knew not. I myself once knew a scholar invited to a dispute with another man about something in controversy in religion. In his own, and in the judgment of all the bystanders, the opposing person was utterly confuted; and yet the scholar, within a few months, was taught of God, and clearly convinced that it was an error which he had maintained, and the truth which he opposed: and then, and not till then, did he cease to wonder that the other person was not convinced by his strong arguments, as before he had thought. May not a Protestant be really worsted in a dispute by a Papist? hath it not so ere now fallen out? — if not, the Jesuits are egregious liars. To say a man is convinced, when, either for want of skill and ability or the like, he cannot maintain his opinion to and against all men, is a mere conceit. The truth is, I am so far from this morose severity of looking upon all erring persons as convinced that have been confuted, that I rather, in charity, incline to believe that no erring person, whilst he continues in his error, is convinced. It will not easily enter into my dull apprehension, how a man can be convinced of an error that is enlightened with a contrary truth, and yet hold that error still. I am loath to charge more corrupt and vile affections upon any than do openly appear. That of Paul, affirming that some men are self-condemned, is quite of another nature. I think a person is said to be

convinced, not when there is sufficiency in the means of conviction, but when there is such an efficacy in them as to lay hold upon his understanding.

*3dly.* That they are obstinate and pertinacious is also a cheap supposal, taken up without the price of a proof. What we call obstinacy, they call constancy; and what we condemn them for as pertinacy, they embrace as perseverance. As the conviction is imposed, not owned, so is this obstinacy. If we may be judges of other men's obstinacy, all will be plain; but if ever they get uppermost, they will be judges of ours. Besides, I know not what good it will do us, or how it will advantage our cause, to suppose men obstinate and convinced before we punish them, — no such qualifications being anywhere in the book of God urged in persons deserving punishment: — if they have committed the crime whereunto the penalty is annexed, be they obstinate or not, they shall be punished.

[2.] But now, supposing all this, — that we are clear in all fundamentals, — that we are convinced that they are convinced, and doubt not but that they are obstinate; — if they keep themselves in the former bounds, what is to be done? I say, besides what we spake at the entrance of this discourse, I shall, as to any ways of corporeal co-action and restraint, oppose some few things.

*1st.* The non-constitution of a judge in case of heresy is a thing civilly criminal. As to spiritual censures, and an ecclesiastical judgment of errors and false doctrines, we find them appointed, and a lawful judge as to the determining concerning them divinely instituted; so that in such ways they may be warrantably proceeded against, [Rev. xxii. 15](#). But now, for any judge that should make disquisition concerning them, or proceed against them, as things criminal, to be punished with civil censures, I conceive the Scripture is silent. And indeed, who should it be? The custom of former ages was, that some persons of one sort should determine of it as to right, — viz., that such or such a thing was heresy, and such or such a one a heretic, — which was the work of priests and prelates; and persons of another sort should “de facto” punish, and determine to be punished, those so adjudged by the former, — and these were, as they called them, the secular magistrates, officers of this world. And indeed, had not the god of this world blinded their eyes, and the God of the spirits of all flesh hardened their hearts, they would not have so given up their power to the man of sin as to be made so sordidly instrumental to his bloody cruelty. We read, [Jer. xxvi. 10, 11](#), that the priests and prophets assemble themselves in judgment, and so pronounce sentence upon the prophet Jeremiah that he should die for a false prophet; [verse 12](#), Jeremiah makes his appeal to the secular magistrate, and all the people; who, taking cognizance of the cause, pronounce sentence in the behalf of the condemned person against the priests and prophets, and deliver him whether they will or not, [verse 16](#). I spare the application of the story: but that princes and magistrates should, without cognizance of the thing or cause, proceed to punishment or censure of it, upon the judgment of the priests condemning such or such a man for a heretic or a false prophet, — blessed be the Lord, we have no warrant. Had this

proceeding been regular, Jeremiah had died without mercy for a false prophet, as thousands since, standing before the Lord in his spirit, have done. This course, then, that the civil magistrate should proceed to sentence of corporeal punishment upon others judging of the fault, is vile, sordid, unwarrantable, and exceedingly unworthy of any rational man, much more such as are set over the people of the land. That the same persons must determine of the cause and appoint the punishment is clear.

Now, who must these be?

(1st.) Are they the ministers of the gospel? — of all others, they are the most likely to be the most competent judges in spiritual causes. Let it be so; but then, also, they must be the determiners and inflictors of the punishment upon default. Now, let them pour out upon obstinately erring persons all the vengeance that God hath entrusted them withal, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God,” etc. By this course, admonition, avoiding, rejection, excommunication, will be the utmost that can be inflicted on them; which, for my part, I desire may be exercised to the utmost extent of the rule.

(2dly.) Shall the magistrate be made judge of the cause as well as of the person? Is he intrusted to determine what is error, what not, — what heresy, what not, — who is an heretic, who not; and so what punishment is due to such and such errors, according to the degrees wherein they are?

[1st.] I desire an institution of this ordinance in the church. Where is the magistrate intrusted with such a power? where are rules prescribed to him in his proceedings?

[2dly.] Is not a judiciary determination concerning truth and error (I mean truths of the gospel) a mere church act? and that church power whereby it is effected? Must not, then, the magistrate, “*quâ talis*,” be a church officer? Will men of this mind tolerate Erastianism?

[3dly.] If there be a twofold judicature appointed for the same person, for the same crime, is it not because one crime may in divers respects fall under several considerations? and must not these considerations be preserved immixed, that the formal reason of proceeding in one court may not be of any weight in the other? We proved before, and it is granted of all, that the church is judge in case of heresy and error, as such, to proceed against them, as contrary to the gospel; — their opposition to the faith delivered to the saints is the formal reason upon which that proceedeth to censure. If, now, this be afterward brought under another sentence, of another judicature, must it not be under another consideration? Now, what can this be, but its disturbance of civil society; which, when it doth so, — not in pretence, but really and actually, — none denies it to be the magistrate’s duty to interpose with his power.

[4thly.] If the magistrate be judge of spiritual offences, and it be left to him to determine and execute judgment, in such proportion as he shall think meet, according to the quality and degrees thereof, — it is a very strange and unlimited arbitrariness over the lives and

estates of men: and surely they ought to produce very clear testimonies that they are intrusted from the Lord herewith, or they can have no great quiet in acting.

[5thly.] It seems strange to me, that the Lord Jesus Christ should commit this architectonical power in his house unto magistrates, foreseeing of what sort the greatest number of them would be, yea, determining that they should be such, for the trim and affliction of his own. View the times that are past, consult the stories of former ages, take a catalogue of the kings and rulers that have been, since first magistrates outwardly embraced Christian religion in this and other nations where the gospel hath been planted; and ask your own consciences whether these be the men to whom this high trust in the house of God is committed? The truth is, they no sooner left serving the dragon in the persecution of the Pagans, but presently, in a very few years, they gave up their power to the beast, to set up another state in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel; in the supportment whereof the most of them continue labouring till this very day. “Hæ manus Trojam exigent?” What may be added in this case, I refer to another opportunity.

2dly. Gospel constitutions in the case of heresy or error seem not to favour any course of violence, — I mean, of civil penalties. Foretold it is that heresies must be, [1 Cor. xi. 19](#); but this for the manifesting of those that are approved, not the destroying of those that are not; — I say destroying, I mean with temporal punishment, that I may add this by the way; for, — all the arguments produced for the punishment of heretics, holding out capital censures, and these being the tendence of all beginnings in this kind, — I mention only the greatest, including all other arbitrary penalties, being but steps of walking to the utmost censures. Admonitions, and excommunication upon rejection of admonition, are the highest constitutions (I suppose) against such persons: “Waiting with all patience upon them that oppose themselves, if at any time God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.” Imprisoning, banishing, slaying, is scarcely a patient waiting. God doth not so wait upon unbelievers. Perhaps those who call for the sword on earth are as unacquainted with their own spirits as those that called for fire from heaven, [Luke ix. 54](#). And perhaps the parable of the tares gives in a positive rule as to this whole business: occasion may be given of handling it at large; for the present I shall not fear to assert, that the answers unto it, borrowed by our divines from Bellarmine, will not endure the trial. We hope that spiritual quiet, and inoffensiveness in the whole mountain of the Lord, which is wrapped up in the womb of many promises, will at length be brought forth to the joy of all the children of Zion.

3dly. Sundry other arguments, taken from the nature of faith, heresy, liberty of conscience, the way of illumination, means of communication of truth, nature of spiritual things, pravitous tendence of the doctrine opposed, if it should be actually embraced by all enjoying authority, and the like, I thought at present to have added; but I am gone already beyond my purposed resting place.



(2.) Come we, in a few words, to the last thing proposed (wherein I shall be very brief, the main of what I intended being already set down), — the power of the magistrate to compel others to the embracing of that religion and way of worship which he shall establish and set up; which, for the greater advantage, we shall suppose to be the very same, both for the things proposed to be believed and also practised, which God himself hath revealed, and requireth all men everywhere to embrace. What is to be done for the settling and establishing of the profession of the gospel, and the right apprehension of the mind of God therein, contradistinct from all those false and erroneous persuasions which, in these or former days, [are] or have been held forth in opposition thereunto, was before declared; — how it is to be supported, maintained, protected, defended, safe-guarded from all oppositions, disturbances, blasphemings, was then and there set down.

Now, supposing that sundry persons, living under the power, and owning civil obedience to the magistrate, will not consent to sound doctrine, nor receive in some things (fewer or more, less or greater) that form of wholesome words which he holds forth and owns as the mind of Christ in the gospel, nor communicate with him in the worship which, by the authority of those words or that truth, he hath as before established, it is inquired, What is the duty of the magistrate in reference to the bringing of them into that subjection which is due unto, and an acknowledgment of, the truth?

And to this I shall briefly give in my answer in these following positions:—

[1.] In reference unto us in this nation, the greatest difficulty in giving a full return to this question ariseth from the great disorder of the churches of God amongst us. Were the precious distinguished from the vile, churches rightly established, and church discipline [so] exercised that Christians were under some orderly view, and men might be considered in their several capacities wherein they stand, an easy finger would untie the knot of this query. But being in that confusion wherein we are, gathering into any order being the great work in hand, I suppose, under favour, that the time is scarce come for the proposal of this question; but yet something may be given in unto it, though not so clear as the former supposal, being effected, would cause it to be.

[2.] The constant practice of the churches in former ages, in all their meetings for advice and counsel, to consent unto some form of wholesome words, that might be a discriminating “tessera” [symbol] of their communion in doctrine, being used in prime antiquity, — as is manifest in that ancient symbol commonly esteemed apostolical (of the chief heads whereof mention in the like summary is made in the very first writers among them), — having also warrant from the word of God, and being of singular use to hold out unto all other churches of the world our apprehensions of the mind of God in the chief heads of religion, may be considered. If this be done by the authority of the magistrate, — I mean, if such a declaration of the truth wherein the churches by him owned and protected do consent be held out as the confession of that truth which he embraceth, — it will be of singular use unto, yea, indeed,

must necessarily precede, any determination of the former question. Of the nature and use of confessions, etc., so much hath of late been learnedly disputed, that I shall not pour out any of mine own conceptions for the present about them in that hasty, tumultuary manner wherein I am enforced to expose this essay.

[3.] Those who dissent from the truth so owned, so established, so decreed, do so either in less matters of small consequence, and about things generally confessed not fundamental; or in great and more weighty heads of doctrine, acts of worship, and the like; — both agreeing in this, that they will not hold communion, either as to all or some parts and duties thereof, with those churches and persons who do embrace the truth so owned, as before, and act accordingly.

1st, For the first of these, or such as dissent about things of no great concernment, in comparison of those other things wherein they do agree with them from whom they do dissent, I am bold positively to assert, that, saving and reserving the rules and qualifications set down under the second head, the magistrate hath no warrant from the word of God, nor command, rule, or precept, to enable him to force such persons to submit unto the truth as by him established, in those things wherein they express a conscientious dissent, or to molest them with any civil penalty in case of refusal or non-submission; nor yet did I ever in my life meet with any thing in the shape of reason to prove it, although the great present clamour of this nation is punctually as to this head:— whatever be pretended, this is the Helena about which is the great contest.

What, I pray, will warrant him, then, to proceed? Will the laws against idolatry and blasphemy, with their sanctions towards the persons of blasphemers and idolaters? (For I must ingenuously confess, all that which, in my poor judgment, looks with any appearance of pressing towards Hæreticidium is the everlasting equity of those judicial laws, and the arbitrariness of magistrates from a divine rule in things of the greatest concernment to the glory of God, if free from them; and that [as] these laws, I doubt, will scarcely be accommodated unto any thing under contest now in this age of the world among Christians.) — But shall I say a warrant [may be] taken from hence for the compelling of men sound in so many fundamentals as, were it not for the contest with them, we would acknowledge sufficient for the entertainment of the Lord Jesus in their bosoms, to subject [themselves] to, and close with, the things contrary to their present light and apprehension (though under a promise of being taught of God), or to inflict penalties upon a refusal so to do? — “Credat Apella!”

Shall the examples of extraordinary judgments upon idolaters, false prophets, by sword and fire from heaven, on magicians, apostates, and the like, be here produced? Though such arguments as these have made thousands weep tears of blood, yet the consequence, in reason, cannot but provoke laughter to all men not wholly forsaken of directing principles.

What, then, shall be done? they will say. They have been admonished, rebuked, convinced, — must they now be let alone?

Something as to this I shall add in the close of this discourse; — for the present, let learned Whitaker answer for me. And first, to the first, — of their being confuted: “Possunt quidem controversiæ ad externum forum deferri, et ibi definiri; sed conscientia in eo foro non acquiescit, non enim potest conscientia sedari sine Spiritu sancto.” Let controversies (saith he) be determined how you please, — until the conscience be quieted by the Holy Spirit, there will be little peace. Unto which I shall not add any thing, considering what I said before of conviction. And to the latter, — of letting them alone to their own ways, “Ecclesiæ quidem optatius est levibus quibusdam dissensionibus ad tempus agitari, quam in perfida pace acquiescere; non ergo sufficit aliquo modo pacem conservari, nisi illam esse sanctam pacem constituerit,” *Whit., Con. 4 de Rom. Pont. qu. 1, cap. 1, sect. 2*. Better some trouble, than a perfidious, compelled peace. See him handle this more at large, with some excellent conclusions to this purpose, *Con. 4 de Rom. Pont. qu. 1, cap. 1, sect. 19, pp. 48 et 50*.

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For these, then (and under this head I compare all such persons as, keeping in practice within the bounds before laid forth, do so far hold the foundation, as that, neither by believing what is not, nor disbelieving what indeed is, they do take in or keep off any such thing as wherewithal being embraced, or without which being rejected, the life of Christ cannot in any case possibly consist, nor salvation by him be obtained), as the magistrate is not bound by any rule or precept to assist and maintain them in the practice of those things wherein they dissent from the truth; so he is bound to protect them in peace and quietness in the enjoyment of all civil rights and liberties; — nor hath he either warrant or allowance to proceed against them, as to the least penalty, for their dissent in those things they cannot receive. Attempts for uniformity among saints, or such as, for aught we can conclude either from their opinions or practices, may be so, by external force, are purely antichristian.

*2dly.* Now, for those that stand at a greater distance from the publicly owned and declared truths, — such as before we spake of, — the orderly way of dealing with such is, in the first place, to bring them off from the error of the way which they have embraced; and until that be done, all thoughts of drawing in their assent to that from which at such a distance they stand is vain and bootless. Now, what course is to be taken for the effecting of this? Spiritual ways of healing are known to all, — let them be used; and in case they prove fruitless, for aught that yet I can perceive, the persons of men so erring must be left in the state and condition we described under the second head.

And now, to drive on this business any farther by way of contest, I will not. My intention at the beginning was only positively to assert, and to give in briefly, the scriptural and rational bottoms and proofs of those assertions; wherein I have gone aside, to pull or thrust a line of debate, I have transgressed against my own purpose, — I hope it will be pardoned; though I am heartily desirous any thing which passeth my pen may be brought to the test, and myself reduced where I have gone amiss. Yet my spirit faints within me to think of that way of

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handling things in controversy which some men, by reciprocation of answers and replies, have wound themselves into. Bolsec,<sup>231</sup> and Staphylus, and Stapleton, seem to live again, and much gall from beneath to be poured into men's ink. O the deep wounds the gospel hath received by the mutual keen invectives of learned men! I hope the Lord will preserve me from being engaged with any man of such a frame of spirit. What hath been asserted may easily be cast up in a few positions; — the intelligent reader will quickly discern what is aimed at, and what I have stood to avow.

If what is proposed be not satisfactory, I humbly offer to the honourable Parliament, that a certain number of learned men, who are differently minded as to this business of toleration, which almost every where is spoken against, may be desired and required to a fair debate of the matter in difference before their own assembly; that so, if it be possible, some light may be given to the determination of this thing, of so great concernment in the judgments of all men, both on the one side and on the other; that so they may “try all things, and hold fast that which is good.”

*Corol.* 1. That magistrates have nothing to do in matters of religion, as some unadvisedly affirm, is exceedingly wide from the truth of the thing itself.

*Corol.* 2. Corporeal punishments for simple error were found out to help to build the tower of Babel.

Si quid novisti rectius istis,  
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.

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231 Bolsec was a bitter opponent of Calvin, and wrote with much acrimony against him. — De J. Calv. Hist. Col. 1580. Staphylus was at one time an evangelical theologian of the Lutheran Church, and afterwards became a violent enemy of the Reformation, 1558–1564. Stapleton was a celebrated Roman Catholic divine, born in Sussex 1535. He left England on the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and was appointed Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Louvain. He died in 1598. His works were published at Paris in 1620, in four vols. folio. — Ed.



Sermon IV.

The steadfastness of the promises,

and

the sinfulness of staggering:

opened in a sermon preached at Margaret's in Westminster, before the Parliament,  
February 28, 1649,

being a day set apart for solemn humiliation throughout the nation.



## Prefatory note.

The following discourse was preached after Owen's return from Ireland. The expedition of Cromwell had been eminently successful in establishing peace, after the massacres and commotions which had long prevailed in that island. Owen, however, had set his heart upon securing for it higher blessings than outward peace, enforced by the conquering sword of the Protector. It is affecting to note the depth of spiritual concern and anxiety he evinces, that Ireland should enjoy the gospel of Christ, as the only cure for its manifold and inveterate disorders. How humbling, that extensive districts of it should have remained to our day substantially under the same wants and necessities which had a voice so clamant in the ear of Owen! It reads as if the utterance of yesterday, when we find him declaring his heartfelt wish, that "the Irish might enjoy Ireland as long as the moon endureth, so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish."

Mr Orme holds, apparently on good grounds, that this sermon was really delivered before the House of Commons, not in February 1649, as the title bears, but in February 1650. The epistle dedicatory to the preceding sermon on "Righteous Zeal," etc., has the address and date, "*Coggeshall, Feb. 28,*" (undoubtedly 1649), which is the same day on which, by the title of the present sermon, he was preaching at *London*. Some allusions in this sermon are thought to indicate that Owen had been in Ireland; and though, in all the editions of it, the year is said to have been 1649, by the present mode of reckoning it would be 1650. We may add, that in the old collections of Owen's sermons, this one follows the sermon next in the present order, on [Heb. xii. 27](#). On the other hand, Asty affirms that it was preached before Owen went to Ireland, and speaks of it as giving rise to his acquaintance with Cromwell. The allusions to Ireland may not be regarded by some as very decisive on the point; and it is singular that the number of the year should differ from the mode of reckoning common to the dates of the other sermons published by Owen about this time. Since authorities differ, we have given the evidence on both sides, and the sermons appear in the order in which, by the dates and titles, they are said to have been preached. Mr Orme seems to us clearly in the right; and, though the matter is not of much importance, we have, under this view, some record in this discourse of the impressions left on the mind of Owen by his visit to Ireland. On the first occasion on which he ever preached before the House of Commons, he entreated that the destitute parts of England and Wales might be supplied with the gospel; and now on his return from his mission to Dublin, as soon as he has the ear of Parliament, he implores, in fervent terms, that the gospel may be sent to Ireland. The fact bespeaks his own heartfelt sense of its value, and shows how wisely he could turn opportunities to account for the advancement of his Master's cause. — Ed.



*Die Veneris, 1 Martii, 1649.*

Ordered by the Parliament, That the thanks of this House be given to Mr Owen for his great pains taken in his sermon preached yesterday before the Parliament, at Margaret's, Westminster (being a day set apart for public humiliation); and that he be desired to print his sermon; and that he have the like privilege in printing as others in like cases have usually had. Ordered, That Sir William Masham do give the thanks of this House to Mr Owen accordingly.

Hen. Scobell, *Cler. Parl.*

## **To the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled.**

Sirs,

That God in whose hands your breath is, and whose are all your ways, having caused various seasons to pass over you, and in them all manifested that his works are truth and his ways judgment, calls earnestly by them for that walking before him which is required from them who, with other distinguishing mercies, are interested in the speciality of his protecting providence. As, in a view of present enjoyments, to sacrifice to your net, and burn incense to your drag, as though by them your portion were fat and plenteous, is an exceeding provocation to the eyes of his glory; so, to press to the residue of your desires and expectations by an arm of flesh, the designings and contrivances of carnal reason, with outwardly appearing mediums of their accomplishment, is no less an abomination to him. Though there may be a present sweetness to them that find the life of the hand, yet their latter end will be, to lie down in sorrow. That you might be prevailed on to give glory to God, by steadfastness in believing, committing all your ways to him, with patience in well-doing, to the contempt of the most varnished appearance of carnal policy, was my peculiar aim in this ensuing sermon.

That which added ready willingness to my obedience unto your commands for the preaching and publishing hereof, being a serious proposal for the advancement and propagation of the gospel in another nation, is here again recommended to your thoughts, by

Your Most Humble Servant  
In Our Common Master,

J. Owen.

*March 8, 1649.*



## Sermon IV. The steadfastness of the promises, and the sinfulness of staggering.

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.” — [Rom. iv. 20.](#)

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In the first chapters of this epistle, the apostle, from Scripture and the constant practice of all sorts of men of all ages, Jews and Gentiles, wise and barbarians, proves all the world, and every individual therein, to “have sinned and come short of the glory of God;” — and not only so, but that it was utterly impossible that, by their own strength, or by virtue of any assistance communicated, or privileges enjoyed, they should ever attain to a righteousness of their own that might be acceptable unto God.

Hereupon he concludes that discourse with these two positive assertions:—

First, That for what is past, “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God, [chap. iii. 19.](#)

Secondly, For the future, though they should labour to amend their ways, and improve their assistances and privileges to a better advantage than formerly, “yet by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God,” [verse 20.](#)

Now, it being the main drift of the apostle, in this epistle, and in his whole employment, to manifest that God hath not shut up all the sons of men hopeless and remediless under this condition, he immediately discovers and opens the rich supply which God, in free grace, hath made and provided for the delivery of his own from this calamitous estate, even by the righteousness of faith in Christ; which he unfoldeth, asserteth, proves, and vindicates from objections, [to the end of the 3d chapter.](#)

This being a matter of so great weight, as comprising in itself the sum of the gospel wherewith he was intrusted, — the honour and exaltation of Christ, which above all he desired, — the great design of God to be glorious in his saints, — and, in a word, the chief subject of the embassy from Christ to him committed (to wit, that they who neither have, nor by any means can attain, a righteousness of their own, by the utmost of their workings, may yet have that which is complete and unrefusable in Christ, by believing); he therefore strongly confirms it in [the 4th chapter](#), by testimony and example of the Scripture, with the saints that were of old; — thereby also declaring, that though the manifestation of this mystery were now more fully opened by Christ from the bosom of the Father, yet indeed this was the only way for any to appear in the presence of God, ever since sin entered the world.

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To make his demonstrations the more evident, he singleth out one for an example who was eminently known, and confessed by all to have been the friend of God, — to have been righteous and justified before him, and thereon to have held sweet communion with him all his days; to wit, Abraham, the father according to the flesh of all those who put in the

strongest of all men for a share in righteousness, by the privileges they did enjoy and the works they did perform.

Now, concerning him the apostle proves abundantly, in the beginning of the 4th chapter, that the justification which he found, and the righteousness he attained, was purely that, and no other, which he before described; to wit, a righteousness in the forgiveness of sins through faith in the blood of Christ. Yea, and that all the privileges and exaltations of this Abraham, which made him so signal and eminent among the saints of God as to be called “The father of the faithful,” were merely from hence, that this righteousness of grace was freely discovered and fully established unto him; — an enjoyment being granted him in a peculiar manner by faith of that promise wherein the Lord Christ, with the whole spring of the righteousness mentioned, was enwrapped. This the apostle pursues, with sundry and various inferences and conclusions, [to the end of verse 17, chapter 4.](#)

Having laid down this, in the next place he gives us a description of that faith of Abraham whereby he became inheritor of those excellent things, from the adjuncts of it; — that as his justification was proposed as an example of God’s dealing with us by his grace; so his faith might be laid down as a pattern for us in the receiving that grace.

Now, this he doth from, —

First, The foundation of it, whereon it rested.

Secondly, The matter of it, what he believed.

Thirdly, The manner of it, or how he believed.

First, From the bottom and *foundation* on which it rested, — viz., the omnipotency or all-sufficiency of God, whereby he was able to fulfil whatever he had engaged himself unto by promise, and which he called him to believe, [verse 17](#), “He believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.”

Two great testimonies are here of the power of God.

1. That he “quickeneth the dead:” — able he is to raise up those that are dead to life again.

2. He “calleth things that are not as though they were:” — by his very call or word gives being to those things which before were not, as when he said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” [Gen. i. 3](#); by that very word “commanding light to shine out of darkness,” [2 Cor. iv. 6](#).

These demonstrations of God’s all-sufficiency he considereth in peculiar reference to what he was to believe; to wit, that “he might be the father of many nations,” [verse 11](#), — of the Jews, “according to the flesh,” — of Jews and Gentiles, according to the faith whereof we speak. For the first, “his body being now dead, and Sarah’s womb dead,” [verse 19](#), he rests on God “as quickening the dead,” in believing that he “shall be the father of many nations.” For the other, that he should be a father of the Gentiles by faith, the Holy Ghost witnesseth that they “were not a people,” [Hos. ii. 23](#). The implanting of them in his stock



must be by a power “that calleth things that are not, as though they were,” — giving a new nature and being unto them, which before they had not.

To bottom ourselves upon the all-sufficiency of God, for the accomplishment of such things as are altogether impossible to any thing but that all-sufficiency, is faith indeed, and worthy our imitation. It is also the wisdom of faith to pitch peculiarly on that in God which is accommodated to the difficulties wherewith it is to wrestle. Is Abraham to believe that from his dead body must spring a whole nation? — he rests on God, as “him that quickeneth the dead.”

Secondly, His faith is commended from the *matter of it*, or what he did believe; which is said in general to be “the promise of God,” [verse 20](#), “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.” And particularly, the matter of that promise is pointed at, [verses 11, 18](#), — that he should be “the father of many nations;” that was, his being a “father of many nations,” of having “all nations blessed in his seed:” — a matter entangled with a world of difficulties, considering the natural inability of his body and the body of Sarah to be parents of children. But, when God calls for believing, his truth and all-sufficiency being engaged, no difficulty nor seeming impossibilities that the thing to be believed is or may be attended withal, ought to be of any weight with us. He who hath promised is able.

Thirdly, From the *manner* of his believing, which is expressed four ways.

1. “Against hope, he believed in hope,” [verse 18](#). Here is a twofold hope mentioned; — one that was against him, the other that was for him.

(1.) He “believed against hope;” that is, when all arguments that might beget hope in him were against him. “Against hope,” is against all motives unto hope whatever. All reasons of natural hope were against him. What hope could arise, in or by reason, that two dead bodies should be the source and fountain of many nations? so that against all inducements of a natural hope he believed.

(2.) He “believed in hope;” that is, such hope as arose, as his faith did, from the consideration of God’s all-sufficiency. This is an adjunct of his faith, — it was such a faith as had hope adjoined with it. And this believing in hope, when all reasons of hope were away, is the first thing that is set down of the manner of his faith. In a decay of all natural helps, the deadness of all means, an appearance of an utter impossibility that ever the promise should be accomplished, — then to believe with unfeigned hope is a commendable faith.

2. He was “not weak in faith,” [verse 19](#), μείωσις, “minimè debilis,” Beza. He was by “no means weak;” a negation that, by a figure, μὴ ἀσθενήσας, doth strongly assert the contrary to that which is denied. He was no way weak; that is, he was very strong in faith, as is afterwards expressed, [verse 20](#), He “was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” And the apostle tells you wherein this his not weakness did appear: saith he, “He considered not his own body being now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of

Sarah's womb," [verse 19](#). It was seen in this, that his faith carried him above the consideration of all impediments that might lie in the way to the accomplishment of the promise.

It is mere weakness of faith that makes a man lie poring on the difficulties and seeming impossibilities that lie upon the promise. We think it our wisdom and our strength to consider, weigh, and look into the bottom of oppositions and temptations that arise against the promise. Perhaps it may be the strength of our fleshly, carnal reason, but certainly it is the weakness of our faith. He that is strong in faith will not so much as debate or consider the things that cast the greatest seeming improbability, yea, impossibility, on the fulfilling of the promise: it will not afford a debate or dispute of the cause, nor any consideration. "Being not weak in faith, he considered not."

3. He was "fully persuaded," [verse 21](#), πληροθρορηθείς, "persuasionis plenus." This is the third thing that is observed in the manner of his believing. He fully, quietly, resolutely cast himself on this, that "he who had promised was able to perform it." As a ship at sea (for so the word imports), looking about, and seeing storms and winds arising, sets up all her sails, and with all speed makes to the harbour; Abraham, seeing the storms of doubts and temptations likely to rise against the promise made unto him, with full sail breaks through all, to lie down quietly in God's all-sufficiency.

4. The last is, that "he staggered not," [verse 20](#). This is that which I have chosen to insist on unto you, as a choice part of the commendation of Abraham's faith, which is proposed for our imitation: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief."

The words may be briefly resolved into this doctrinal proposition:—

Observation. *All staggering at the promises of God is from unbelief.*

What is of any difficulty in the text, will be cleared in opening the parts of the observation.

Men are apt to pretend sundry other reasons and causes of their staggering: The promises do not belong unto them, — God intends not their souls in them, — they are not such and such, — and this makes them stagger; when the truth is, it is their unbelief, and that alone, that puts them into this staggering condition. As in other things, so in this, we are apt to have many fair pretences for foul faults. To lay the burden on the right shoulders, I shall demonstrate, by God's assistance, that it is not this, or that, but unbelief alone, that makes us stagger at the promises.

To make this the more plain, I must open these two things:—

I. What is the promise here intended.

II. What it is to stagger at the promise.

I. The promise here mentioned is principally that which Abraham believing, it was said eminently that "it was accounted to him for righteousness." So the apostle tells us, [verse 5 of this chapter](#). When this was, you may see [Gen. xv. 6](#); there it is affirmed, that "he believed the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." That which God had there spoken



to him of, was about “the multiplying of his seed as the stars of heaven, whereas he was yet childless.”

The last verse of chapter xiv. leaves Abraham full of earthly glory. He had newly conquered five kings with all their host, was honoured by the king of Sodom, and blessed by the king of Salem; and yet, in the first verse of chapter xv., God, “appearing to him in a vision,” in the very entrance, bids him “fear not; — plainly intimating, that notwithstanding all his outward success and glory, he had still many perplexities upon his spirit, and had need of great consolation and establishment. Abraham was not clear in the accomplishment of former promises about the blessed seed; and so, though he have all outward advancements, yet he cannot rest in them. Until a child of God be clear in the main in the matter of the great promise, — the business of Christ, the greatest outward successes and advantages will be so far from quieting and settling his mind, that they rather increase his perplexities. They do but occasion him to cry, Here is this and that; here is victory and success; here is wealth and peace; — but here is not Christ.

That this was Abraham’s condition appears from verse 2 of that chapter; where God having told him that he was his shield, and his exceeding great reward, he replies, “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” As if he should have said, Lord God, thou toldest me when I was in Haran, now nineteen years ago, that in me and “my seed all the families of the earth should be blessed,” Gen. xii. 3, — that the blessed, blessing seed, should be of me: but now I wax old, all appearances grow up against the direct accomplishment of that word; and it was that which, above all, in following thee, I aimed at: if I am disappointed therein, what shall I do? and what will all these things avail me? — what will it benefit me to have a multitude of earthly enjoyments, and leave them in the close to my servant?

I cannot but observe, that this sighing, mournful complaint of Abraham, hath much infirmity, and something of diffidence mixed with it. He shakes in the very bottom of his soul, that improbabilities were growing up, as he thought, to impossibilities against him in the way of promise. Yet hence also mark these two things: First, That he doth not repine in himself, and keep up his burning thoughts in his breast, but sweetly breathes out the burden of his soul into the bosom of his God. “Lord God,” saith he, “what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” It is of sincere faith, to unlade our unbelief in the bosom of our God. Secondly, That God takes not his servant at the advantage of his complaining and diffidence; but lets that pass, until having renewed the promise to him, and settled his faith, then he gives in his testimony that he believed God. The Lord overlooks the weakness and causeless wailings of his, takes them at the best, and then gives his witness to them.

This, I say, was the promise whereof we spake, — that he should have a seed of his own, “like the stars that cannot be numbered,” Gen. xv. 4, 5. And herein are contained three things.



1. The purely spiritual part of it, that concerned his own soul in Christ. God engaging about his seed, minds him of his own interest in that seed which brings the blessing. Jesus Christ, with his whole mediation, and his whole work of redemption, is in this promise, with the enjoyment of God in covenant, “as a shield, and as an exceeding great reward.”

2. The kingdom of Christ, in respect of the propagation and establishment of it, with the multitude of his subjects, — that also is in this promise.

3. The temporal part of it, — multitudes of children to a childless man, and an heir from his own bowels.

Now this promise, in these three branches, takes up your whole interest, comprises all you are to believe for, be you considered either as believers or as rulers. As believers:— so your interest lies in these two things: That your own souls have a share and portion in the Lord Christ; and that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus be exalted and established. As rulers:— That peace and prosperity may be the inheritance of the nation, is in your desires. Look upon this in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, and so all these are in this promise.

To make this more plain, these being the three main things that you aim at, I shall lay before you three promises, suited to these several things, which, or the like, you are to view in all your actings, all staggering at them being from unbelief.

The first thing you are to believe for, is the interest of your own souls in the covenant of grace by Christ. As to this, I shall only point unto that promise of the covenant, [Heb. viii. 12](#), “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”

The second is the establishment of the kingdom of Christ, in despite of all opposition. And for this, amongst innumerable [passages], take that of [Isa. ix. 11](#). “Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought: for the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish.”

The quiet and peace of the nation, which ye regard as rulers, as it stands in subordination to the kingdom of Christ, comes also under the promise; for which take that of [Jer. xxx. 20, 21](#).

These being your three main aims, let your eye be fixed on these three, or the like promises; for in the demonstration and the use of the point I shall carry along all three together, desiring that what is instanced in any one may be always extended to both the others.

II. What is it to stagger at the promise? “He staggered not,” οὐ διεκρίθη, “he disputed not.” Διακρίνομαι is, properly, to make use of our own judgment and reason in discerning of things, of what sort they be. It is sometimes rendered, “to doubt,” [Matt. xxi. 21](#), “If ye have faith” (καὶ μὴ διακριθῆτε), “and doubt not:” that is, not use arguings and reasonings in yourselves concerning the promise and things promised. Sometimes it simply denotes to discern a thing as it is:— so the word is used, [1 Cor. xi. 29](#), Διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα, “Discerning



the body.” In the sense wherein it is here used, as also [Matt. xxi. 21](#), it holds out, as I said, a self-consultation and dispute concerning those contrary things that are proposed to us. So also [Acts x. 20](#), Peter is commanded to obey the vision, μηδὲν διακρινόμενος, “nothing doubting.” What is that? Why, a not continuing to do what he is said to have done, [verse 17](#), “He doubted in himself what the vision he had seen should mean;” he rolled and disputed it in his own thoughts; he staggered at it.

To stagger, then, at the promise, is to take into consideration the promise itself, and withal, all the difficulties that lie in the way for the accomplishment of it, as to a man’s own particular, and then so to dispute it in his thoughts, as not fully to cast it off, nor fully to close with it. For instance, the soul considers the promise of free grace in the blood of Jesus, — looks upon it, — weighs as well as it is able the truth of God, who makes the promise, with those other considerations which might lead the heart to rest firmly upon it; but withal, takes into his thoughts his own unworthiness, sinfulness, unbelief, hypocrisy, and the like, — which, as he supposes, powerfully stave off the efficacy of the promise from him. Hence he knows not what to conclude. If he add a grain of faith, the scale turns on the side of the promise; the like quantity of unbelief makes it turn upon him; and what to do he knows not; let go the promise he cannot, take fast hold he dares not; but here he staggers and wavers to and fro.

Thus the soul comes to be like Paul, in another case, [Phil. i. 23](#). He considered his own advantage on the one side by his dissolution, and the profit of the churches by his abiding in the flesh on the other; and taking in these various thoughts, he cries out he is in a strait; — he staggered, he was betwixt two, and knew not which to choose: or as David, [2 Sam. xxiv. 14](#), when he had a tender of several corrections made to him, says, “I am in a great strait;” — he sees evil in every one, and knows not which to choose.

A poor creature looking upon the promise sees, as he supposes, in a steadfast closing with the promise, that there lies presumption; on the other hand, certain destruction if he believes not. And now he staggers, — he is in a great strait: arguments arise on both sides, he knows not how to determine them; and so, hanging in suspense, he staggereth. Like a man travelling a journey, and meeting with two several paths that promise both fairly, and he knows not which is his proper way; he guesses, and guesses, and at length cries, Well, I know not which of these ways I should go; but this is certain, if I mistake, I am undone: I’ll go in neither, but here I’ll sit down, and not move one step in either of them, until some one come that can give me direction. The soul very frequently sits down in this hesitation, and refuses to step one step forward, till God come mightily and lead out the spirit to the promise, or the devil turn it aside to unbelief.

It is as a thing of small weight in the air: the weight that it hath carries it downwards; and the air, with some breath of wind, bears it up again, so that it waves to and fro: sometimes

it seems as though it would fall by its own weight; and sometimes again, as though it would mount quite out of sight; but poised between both, it tosseth up and down, without any great gaining either way. The promise draws the soul upward, and the weight of its unbelief sinks it downward. Sometimes the promise attracts so powerfully, you would think the heart quite drawn up into it; and sometimes again unbelief presses down, that you would think it gone forever; — but neither prevails utterly, the poor creature swags between both. This is to stagger. Like the two disciples going to Emmaus, [Luke xxiv. 14](#), “They talked together of the things that had happened,” — debated the business; and, [verse 21](#), they gave up the result of their thoughts. They “trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel.” They trusted once; but now, seeing him slain and crucified, they know not what to say to it. What then? do they quite give over all trusting in him? No, they cannot do so, [verses 22–24](#). Certain women had astonished them, and affirmed that he was risen; yea, and others also, going to his grave, found it so. Hereupon they have consultation within themselves, and are sad, [verse 17](#); — that is, they staggered, they were in a staggering condition; much appears for them, something against them, — they know not what to do.

A poor soul, that hath been long perplexed in trouble and anxiety of mind, finds a sweet promise, — Christ in a promise suited to all his wants, coming with mercy to pardon him, with love to embrace him, with blood to purge him, — and is raised up to roll himself in some measure upon this promise. On a sudden, terrors arise, temptations grow strong, new corruptions break out, — Christ in the promise dies to him, Christ in the promise is slain, is in the grave as to him; so that he can only sigh, and say, I trusted for deliverance by Christ, but now all is gone again; I have little or no hope, — Christ in the promise is slain to me. What then? shall he give over? never more inquire after this buried Christ, but sit down in darkness and sorrow No, he cannot do so: this morning some new arguments of Christ’s appearance again upon the soul are made out; Christ is not forever lost to him. What does he, then? Steadfastly believe he cannot, — totally give over he will not; he staggers, — he is full of self-consultations, and is sad. This it is to stagger at the promise of God.

I come now to prove, that notwithstanding any pretences whatever, all this staggering is from unbelief.

The two disciples, whom we now mentioned, that staggered and disputed between themselves in their journey to Emmaus, thought they had a good reason, and a sufficient appearing cause of all their doubtings. “We hoped,” say they, “that it was he that should have redeemed Israel.” What do they now stand at? Alas! the “chief priests and rulers have condemned him to death, and crucified him,” [Luke xxiv. 20](#). And is it possible that deliverance should arise from a crucified man? This makes them stagger. But when our Saviour himself draws nigh to them, and gives them the ground of all this, he tells them it is all from hence, they are “foolish, and slow of heart to believe,” [verse 25](#). Here is the rise of all their doubtings,

even their unbelief. Whilst you are slow of heart to believe, do not once think of establishment.

Peter venturing upon the waves at the command of Christ, [Matt. xiv. 1](#), seeing “the wind to grow boisterous,” [verse 30](#), he also hath a storm within, and cries out, “Lord, save me!” What was now the cause of Peter’s fear and crying out? Why, the wind and sea grew boisterous, and he was ready to sink; — no such thing, but merely unbelief, want of faith, [verse 31](#). “O thou of little faith,” saith our Saviour, “wherefore didst thou doubt?” It was not the great wind, but thy little faith that made thee stagger. And in three or four other places, upon several occasions, doth our Saviour lay all the wavering and staggering of his followers as to any promised mercy upon this score, as [Matt. vi. 30](#), [viii. 26](#).

[Isa. vii.](#), Ahaz being afraid of the combination of Syria and Ephraim against him, received a promise of deliverance by Isaiah, [verse 7](#). Whereupon the prophet tells him, and all Judah, that “if they will not believe, surely they shall not be established,” [verse 9](#). He doth not say, If Damascus and Ephraim be not broken, you shall not be established; no, he doth not stick there. The fear that you will not be established ariseth merely from your unbelief; — that keeps you off from closing with the promise, which would certainly bring you establishment.

And this is the sole reason the apostle gives why the word of promise, being preached, becomes unprofitable, even because of unbelief: it was not “mixed with faith,” [Heb. iv. 2](#).

But these things will be more clear under the demonstration of the points, which are two.

1. When a man doubts, hesitates, and disputes, any thing in himself, his reasonings must have their rise, either from something within himself, or from something in the things concerning which he staggereth; — either “certitudo mentis,” “the assurance of his mind,” or “certitudo entis,” the “certainty of the thing itself,” is wanting. He that doubteth whether his friend in a far country be alive or not, his staggering ariseth from the uncertainty of the thing itself; when that is made out, he is resolved, as it was with Jacob in the case of Joseph. But he that doubteth whether the needle in the compass, being touched with the loadstone, will turn northward, all the uncertainty is in his own mind.

When men stagger at the promises, this must arise either from within themselves, or some occasion must be administered hereunto from the promise. If from within themselves, that can be nothing but unbelief; — an inbred obstacle to closing with and resting on the promise, — that is unbelief. If, then, we demonstrate that there is nothing in the promise, either as to matter or manner, or any attendancy of it, that should occasion any such staggering, we lay the burden and blame on the right shoulders, — the sin of staggering on unbelief.

Now, that any occasion is not administered, nor cause given, of this staggering from the promise, will appear if we consider seriously whence any such occasion or cause should arise. All the stability of a promise depends upon the qualifications of the promiser to the

ends and purposes of the promise. If a man make me a promise to do such and such things for me, and I question whether ever it will be so or not, it must be from a doubt of the want of one of these things in him that makes the promise; — either (1.) of truth; or (2.) of ability to make good his word, because of the difficulty of the thing itself; or (3.) of sincerity to intend me really what he speaks of; or (4.) of constant memory to take the opportunity of doing the thing intended; or (5.) of stableness to be still of the same mind. Now, if there be no want of any of these in him whose promises we speak of, there is then certainly no ground of our staggering, but only from our own unbelief.

Let us now see whether any of these things be wanting to the promises of God; and begin we with the first.

(1.) Is there truth in these promises? If there be the least occasion in the world to suspect the truth of the promises or the veracity of the promiser, then may our staggering at them arise from thence, and not from our own unbelief. On this ground it is that all human faith, that is bottomed merely on the testimony of man, is at best but a probable opinion; for every man is a liar, and possibly may lie in that very thing he is engaged to us in. Though a good man will not do so to save his life, yet it is possible he may be tempted, — he may do so. But now, the author of the promises whereof we speak is truth itself, — the God of truth, who hath taken this as his special attribute, to distinguish him from all others. He is the very God of truth; and holds out this very attribute in a special manner in this very thing, in making of his promise: “He is faithful to forgive us our sins,” [1 John i. 9](#). Whence his word is said not only to be true, but “*truth*,” [John xvii. 17](#), — truth itself. All flesh is as grass, but his word abideth for ever, [Isa. xl. 6, 8](#).

But yet farther, that it may be evident that from hence there can be no occasion of staggering, this God of truth, whose word is truth, hath, in his infinite wisdom, condescended to our weakness, and used all possible means to cause us to apprehend the truth of his promises. The Lord might have left us in the dark, — to have gathered out his mind and will towards us from obscure expressions; and, knowing of what value his kindness is, it might justly be expected that we should do so. Men in misery are glad to lay hold of the least word that drops from him that can relieve them, and to take courage and advantage upon it; — as the servants of Benhadad watched diligently what would fall from the mouth of Ahab concerning their master, then in fear of death, and when he had occasionally called him his brother, they presently laid hold of it, and cry, “Thy brother Benhadad,” [1 Kings xx. 33](#). God might have left us, and yet have manifested much free grace, to have gathered up falling crumbs or occasional droppings of mercy and supply, that we should have rejoiced to have found out one word looking that way. But, to shut up all objections, and to stop for ever the mouth of unbelief, he hath not only spoken plainly, but hath condescended to use all the ways of confirming the truth of what he says and speaks that ever were in use among the sons of men.



There be four ways whereby men seek to obtain credit to what they speak as an undoubted truth, that there may be no occasion of staggering.

[1.] *By often averring and affirming of the same thing.* When a man says the same thing again and again, it is a sign that he speaks the truth, or, at least, that he would be thought so to do; yea, if an honest man do clearly, fully, plainly, often engage himself to us in the same thing, we count it a vile jealousy not to believe the real truth of his intentions. Now, the Lord in his promises often speaks the same things, — he speaks once and twice. There is not any thing that he hath promised us but he hath done it again and again. For instance, as if he should say, “I will be merciful to your sins;” I pray believe me, for “I will pardon your iniquities;” yea, it shall be so, — “I will blot out your transgressions as a cloud.”

There is not any want whereunto we are liable, but thus he hath dealt concerning it. As his command is line upon line, so is his promise. And this is one way whereby God causeth the truth of his promises to appear. To take away all colour of staggering, he speaks once, yea twice, if we will hear.

[2.] *The second way of confirming any truth is by an oath.* Though we fear the truth of some men in their assertions, yet when once they come to swear any thing in justice and judgment, there are very few so knowingly profligate, and past all sense of God, but that their asseverations do gain credit and pass for truth. Hence the apostle tells us, [Heb. vi. 16](#), that “an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife.” Though the truth be before ambiguous and doubtful, yet when any interposes with an oath, there is no more contest amongst men. That nothing may be wanting to win our belief to the promises of God, he hath taken this course also, — he hath sworn to their truth, [Heb. vi. 13](#), “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.” He confirms his promise by an oath. “O felices nos, quorum causâ Deus jurat; O infelices, si nec juranti Deo credimus!” When Christ came, “in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen,” to make sure work of the truth of them, he is confirmed in his administration by an oath, [Heb. vii. 21](#). He was made a priest by an oath by him that said, “The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever.” Now, I pray, what is the cause of this great condescension in the God of heaven, to confirm that word which in itself is truth by an oath? The apostle satisfies us as to the end aimed at, [Heb. vi. 17, 18](#). This was, saith he, the aim of God herein, that his people, seeing him engaged by two such immutable things as his promise and his oath, may be assured that there is an utter impossibility that any one word of his should come short of its truth; or that they firmly resting upon it should be deceived thereby. And this is a second way.

[3.] Another course whereby men confirm the truth of what they speak, is *by entering into covenant to accomplish what they have spoken.* A covenant gives strength to the truth of any engagement. When a man hath but told you he will do such and such things for you, you are full of doubts and fears that he may break with you; but when he hath indented in

a covenant, and you can show it under his hand and seal, you look upon that, consider that, and are very secure. Even this way also hath the Lord taken to confirm and establish his truths and promises. That all doubtings and staggerings may be excluded, he hath wrapped them all up in a covenant, and brought himself into a federal engagement, that upon every occasion, and at every temptation, we may draw out his hand and seal, and say to Satan and our own false hearts, See here, behold God engaged in covenant, to make good the word wherein he hath caused me to put my trust; and this is his property, that he is a God keeping covenant. So that having his promise *redoubled*, and that confirmed by an *oath*, all sealed and made sure by an unchangeable *covenant*, what can we require more to assure us of the truth of these things? But yet farther:—

[4.] In things of very great weight and concernment, such as whereon lives and the peace of nations do depend, men use to give hostages for the securing each other of the faith and truth of all their engagements, that they may be mutual pledges of their truth and fidelity. Neither hath the Lord left this way unused to confirm his promise. He hath given us a hostage to secure us of his truth, — one exceedingly dear to him, one always in his bosom, of whose honour he is as careful as of his own. Jesus Christ is the great hostage of his Father's truth, the pledge of his fidelity in his promises. God hath set him forth, and given him to us for this end. "Behold, the Lord himself shall give you a sign" (a sign that he will fulfil his word); "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," *Isa. vii. 14*. That you may be assured of my truth, the virgin's son shall be a hostage of it. "In him are all the promises of God yea and amen." Thus also to his saints he gives the farther hostage of his Spirit, and the first-fruits of glory; that the full accomplishment of all his promises may be contracted in a little, and presented to their view, as the Israelites had the pleasures of Canaan in the clusters of grapes brought from thence.

Now, from all this it is apparent, not only that there is truth in all the promises of God, but also that truth so confirmed, so made out, established, that not the least occasion imaginable is thence administered to staggering or doubting. He that disputes the promises, and knows not how to close with them, must find out another cause of his so doing; as to the truth of the promise, there is no doubt at all, nor place for any.

(2.) But secondly, though there be truth in the promise, yet there may want ability in the promiser to accomplish the thing promised, because of its manifold difficulties. This may be a second cause of staggering, if the thing itself engaged for be not compassable by the ability of the engager. As if a skilful physician should promise a sick man recovery from his disease, though he could rely upon the truth and sincerity of his friend, yet he cannot but question his ability as to this, knowing that to cure the least distemper is not absolutely in his power; but when he promises who is able to perform, then all doubting in this kind is removed. See, then, whether it be so in respect of these promises whereof we speak. When God comes to Abraham to engage himself in that covenant of grace from whence flow all





the promises whereof we treat, he lays this down as the bottom of all; “I am,” saith he, “God Almighty,” [Gen. xvii. 1](#); or “God all-sufficient,” very well able to go through with whatever I promise. When difficulties, temptations, and troubles arise, remember who it is that hath promised; — not only he that is true and faithful, but he that is God Almighty, before whom nothing can stand, when he will accomplish his word. And that this was a bottom of great confidence to Abraham, the apostle tells you, [Rom. iv. 21](#), “Being fully persuaded that he who had promised was able also to perform.” When God is engaged by his word, his ability is especially to be eyed. The soul is apt to ask, How can this be? It is impossible it should be so to me. But, “he is able that hath promised.” And this, [Rom. xi. 23](#), the same apostle holds out to us to fix our faith upon, in reference to that great promise of recalling the Jews, and re-implanting them into the vine. “God,” saith he, “is able to graft them in;” though now they seem as dead bones, yet the Lord knows they may live; for he is able to breathe upon them, and make them terrible as an army with banners. Yea, so excellent is this all-sufficiency, this ability of God to accomplish his whole word, that the apostle cautions us that we do not bound it, as though it could go so far only, or so far. Nay, saith he, [Eph. iii. 20](#), he “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

When men come to close with the promise indeed, to make a life upon it, they are very ready to question and inquire whether it be possible that ever the word of it should be made good to them. He that sees a little boat swimming at sea, observes no great difficulty in it, looks upon it without any solicitousness of mind at all, — beholds how it tosses up and down, without any fears of its sinking. But now, let this man commit his own life to sea in that bottom, what inquiries will he make! what a search into the vessel! Is it possible, saith he, this little thing should safeguard my life in the ocean? — It is so with us, in our view of the promises: whilst we consider them at large, as they lie in the word, alas! they are all true, — all yea and amen, — shall be all accomplished; but when we go to venture our souls upon a promise, in an ocean of wrath and temptations, then every blast we think will overturn it; it will not bear us above all these waves. Is it possible we should swim safely upon the plank of a pinnacle in the midst of the ocean.

Now, here we are apt to deceive ourselves, and mistake the whole thing in question; which is the bottom of many corrupted reasonings and perplexed thoughts. We inquire whether it can be so to us as the word holds out; when the truth is, the question is not about the nature of the thing, but about the power of God. Place the doubt aright, and it is this: Is God able to accomplish what he hath spoken — can he heal my backslidings? can he pardon my sins? can he save my soul? Now, that there may be no occasion or colour of staggering upon this point, you see God reveals himself as an all-sufficient God, as one that is able to go through with all his engagements. If you will stagger, you may so do. This is certain, you have no cause to do so from hence, — there is not any promise that ever God entered into but he is able to perform it.



But you will say, Though God be thus able, thus all-sufficient, yet may there not be defects in the means whereby he worketh? — as a man may have a strong arm, able to strike his enemies to the ground, but yet if he strike with a feather or a straw, it will not be done; — not for want of strength in his arm, but of fitness and suitableness in the instrument whereby he acteth. But, —

[1.] God using instruments, they do not act according to their own virtue, but according to the influence of virtue by him to them communicated. Look to what end soever God is pleased to use any means, — his choosing of them fills them with efficacy to that purpose. Let the way and means of accomplishing what thou expectest by the promise be in themselves never so weak, yet know that, from God's choosing of them to that end, they shall be filled with virtue and efficacy to the accomplishment of it.

[2.] It is expressly affirmed of the great mediums of the promise, that they also are able, — that there is no want of power in them for the accomplishment of the thing promised.

1st. There is the *means procuring it*, and that is Jesus Christ: the promises, as to the good things contained in them, are all purchased by him. And of him the apostle affirms expressly, that “he is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him,” [Heb. vii. 25](#). No want here, no defect; he is able to do it to the uttermost, — able to save them that are tempted, [Heb. ii. 18](#).

2dly. There is the *great means of manifestation*, and that is the word of God. And of this also it is affirmed, that it is able. It hath an all-sufficiency in its kind. Paul tells the elders of Ephesus, that “the word of grace is able to build them up, and to give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified,” [Acts xx. 32](#).

3dly. There is *the great means of operation*, and that is the Spirit of grace. He works the mercy of the promise upon the soul. He also is able, exceeding powerful, to effect the end appointed. He hath no bounds nor measure of operation but only his own will, [1 Cor. xii. 11](#).

Hence, then, it is apparent, in the second place, that there is no occasion for doubting; yea, that all staggering is excluded, from the consideration of the ability of the promiser, and the means whereby he worketh. If thou continuest to stagger, thou must get a better plea than this, — It cannot be, it is impossible. I tell thee, nay, but God is able to accomplish the whole word of his promise.

(3.) There may be want of *sincerity* in promises and engagements; which whilst we do but suspect, we cannot choose but stagger at them. If a man make a promise to me, and I can suppose that he intends not as he says, but hath reserves to himself of another purpose, I must needs doubt as to the accomplishment of what he hath spoken. If the soul may surmise that the Lord intends not him sincerely in his promise, but reserves some other thing in his mind, or that it shall be so to others and not to him, he must needs dispute in himself, stagger, and keep off from believing. This, then, must be demonstrated, in the third place,



— that the promises of God, and God in all his promises, are full of sincerity; so that none need fear to cast himself on them: they shall be real unto him. Now, concerning this, observe,

[1.] *That God's promises are not declarative of his secret purposes and intentions.* When God holds out to any a promise of the pardon of sin, this doth not signify to any singular man that it is the purpose of God that his sin shall be pardoned. For if so, then either all men must be pardoned to whom the word of promise comes, which is not; or else God fails of his purposes, and comes short of his intendments, — which would render him either impotent, that he could not, or mutable, that he would not, establish them. But “who hath resisted his will?” [Rom. ix. 19](#). He is the Lord, and he changeth not, [Mal. iii. 6](#). So that though every one to whom the promise is held out hath not the fruit of the promise, yet this derogates not at all from the sincerity of God in his promises; for he doth not hold them forth to any such end and purpose as to declare his intentions concerning particular persons.

[2.] *There are some absolute promises, comprehensive of the covenant of grace,* which, as to all those that belong to that covenant, do hold out thus much of the mind of God, that they shall certainly be accomplished in and towards them all. The soul may freely be invited to venture on these promises, with assurance of their efficacy towards him.

[3.] This God principally declares in all his promises of his mind and purpose, that every soul to whom they shall come may freely rest on; to wit, *that faith in the promises, and the accomplishment of the promises, are inseparable.* He that believeth shall enjoy. This is most certain, this God declares of his mind, his heart, towards us, — that as for all the good things he hath spoken of to us, it shall be to us according to our faith. This, I say, the promises of God do signify of his purpose, that the believer of them shall be the enjoyer of them. In them “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith,” [Rom. i. 17](#); — from the faith of God revealing, to the faith of man receiving. So that, upon the making out of any promise, you may safely conclude that, upon believing, the mercy, the Christ, the deliverance of this promise is mine. It is true, if a man stand disputing and staggering whether he have any share in a promise, and close not with it by faith, he may come short of it; and yet without the least impeachment of the truth of the promise or sincerity of the promiser, — for God hath not signified by them that men shall enjoy the good things of them whether they believe or not. Thus far the promises of grace are general, and carry a truth to all, that there is an inviolable connection between believing and the enjoyment of the things in them contained. And in this truth is the sincerity of the promiser, which can never be questioned without sin and folly. And this wholly shuts up the spirit from any occasion of staggering. “O ye of little faith! wherefore do ye doubt?” Ah! lest our share be not in this promise, — lest we are not intended in it. — Poor creatures! there is but this one way of keeping you off from it; that is, disputing it in yourselves by unbelief. Here lies the sincerity of God towards thee, that believing, thou shalt not come short of what thou aimest at. Here, then, is no room for

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staggering. If proclamation be made granting pardon to all such rebels as shall come in by such a season, do men use to stand questioning whether the state bear them any good-will or not? No, saith the poor creature, I will cast myself upon their faith and truth, engaged in their proclamation: whatever I have deserved in particular, I know they will be faithful in their promises. The gospel proclamation is of pardon to all comers in, to all believers: it is not for thee, poor staggerer, to question what is the intendment towards thee in particular, but roll thyself on this, there is an absolute sincerity in the engagement which thou mayest freely rest upon. But, —

(4.) Though all be present, truth, power, sincerity; yet if he that makes the promise should *forget*, — *this* were a ground of staggering. Pharaoh's butler, without doubt, made large promises to Joseph; and probably spake the truth, according to his present intention. Afterward, standing in the presence of Pharaoh, restored to favour, he had doubtless power enough to have procured the liberty of a poor innocent prisoner. But yet this would not do, — it did not profit Joseph; because, as the text says, he "*did* not remember Joseph, but forgot him," [Gen. xl. 23](#). This forgetting made all other things useless. But neither hath this the least colour in divine promises. It was Zion's infirmity to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," [Isa. xlix. 14](#); for saith the Lord, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me," [verses 15, 16](#).

The causes of forgetfulness are, —

[1.] *Want of love*. The things that men love not, they care not for:— the matters of their love are continually in their thoughts. Now, says God to Zion, Why sayest thou I have forgotten thee? Is it for want of love? Alas! the love of a most tender mother to her sucking child comes infinitely short of my love to thee. My love to thee is more fixed than so, and how shouldst thou be out of my mind? how shouldst thou be forgotten? Infinite love will have infinite thoughtfulness and remembrance.

[2.] *Multiplicity of business*. This with men is a cause of forgetting. I had done, says one, as I promised, but multiplicity of occasions thrust it out of my mind; I pray excuse me. — Alas! though I rule all the world, yet thou art graven upon the palms of my hands; and therefore thy walls are continually before me. See also [Ps. lxxvii. 9](#). Neither, then, is there as to this the least colour given us to stagger at the promise of God.

(5.) But lastly, where all other things concur, yet if the person promising be *changeable*, if he may alter his resolution, a man may justly doubt and debate in himself the accomplishment of any promise made to him. "It is true," may he say, "he now speaks his heart and mind; but who can say he will be of this mind to-morrow? May he not be turned? and then what becomes of the golden mountains that I promised myself upon his engagement?" Wherefore, in the last place, the Lord carefully rejects all sinful surmises concerning the

least change or alteration in him, or any of his engagements. He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,” [James i. 17](#), — no shadow, no appearance of any such thing. “I am the Lord,” saith he, “I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,” [Mal. iii. 6](#). The Lord knows, that if any thing in us might prevail with him to alter the word that is gone out of his mouth, we should surely perish. We are poor provoking creatures, therefore he lays our not being consumed only on this, even his own unchangeableness. This we may rest upon, “He is in one mind, and who can turn him?”

And in these observations have I given you the first demonstration of the point: all staggering is from our own unbelief.

2. The experience which we have of the mighty workings of God for the accomplishment of all his promises gives light unto this thing. We have found it true, that where he is once engaged, he will certainly go through unto the appointed issue, though it stand him in the laying out of his power and wisdom to the uttermost, [Hab. iii. 9](#), “Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, thy word.” If God’s oath be passed, and his word engaged, he will surely accomplish it, though it cost him the making of his bow quite naked, — the manifestation of his power to the utmost.

It is true, never did any wait upon God for the accomplishment and fulfilling of a promise, but he found many difficulties fall out between the word and the thing. So was it with Abraham in the business of a son: and so with David in the matter of a kingdom. God will have his promised mercies to fall as the dews upon the parched, gasping earth, or “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” [Isa. xxxii. 2](#), — very welcome unto the traveller who hath had the sun beat upon his head in his travel all the day. Zion is a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, as a royal diadem in the hand of her God, [Isa. lxii. 3](#). The precious stones of a diadem must be cut and polished, before they be set in beauty and glory. God will have oftentimes the precious living stones of Zion to have many a sharp cutting, before they come to be fully fixed in his diadem; but yet in the close, whatever obstacles stand in the way, the promise hath still wrought out its passage; — as a river, all the while it is stopped with a dam, is still working higher and higher, still getting more and more strength, until it bear down all before it, and obtain a free course to its appointed place. Every time opposition lies against the fulfilling of the promise, and so seems to impede it for a season, it gets more and more power, until the appointed hour be come, and then the promise bears down all before it.

Were there any thing imaginable whereof we had not experience that it had been conquered, to open a door for the fulfilling of every word of God, we might possibly, as to the apprehension of that thing, stagger from some other principle than that of unbelief.

What is there in heaven or earth, but God and his ministering spirits, that hath not, one time or other, stood up to its utmost opposition, for the frustrating of the word wherein some or other of the saints of God have put their trust? Devils, in their temptations, baits,



subtleties, accusations, and oppositions; — men, in their counsels, reasonings, contrivances, interests, dominions, combinations, armies, multitudes, and the utmost of their endeavours; — the whole frame of nature, in its primitive instituted course, — fire, water, day, night, age, sickness, death, all in their courses have fought against the accomplishment of the promises. And what have they obtained by all their contendings? All disappointed, frustrated, turned back, changed, and served only to make the mercy of the promise more amiable and glorious.

I would willingly illustrate this demonstration with an instance, — that the almighty, all-conquering power that is in the promise, settling all staggering upon its own basis of unbelief, might be the more evident.

I might here mention Abraham, with all the difficulties and appearing impossibilities which the promise unto him did pass through and cast to the ground, — the mercy of it at length arising out of the grave, for he received his son from the dead “in a figure,” [Heb. xi. 19](#); or I might speak of Joseph, Moses, or David; — but I shall rather choose a precedent from among the works of God in the days wherein we live, and that in a business concerning which we may set up our Ebenezer, and say, Thus far hath God been a helper.

Look upon the affair of Ireland. The engagement of the great God of revenges against murder and treachery, the interest of the Lord Christ and his kingdom against the man of sin, furnished the undertakers with manifold promises to carry them out to a desired, a blessed issue. Take now a brief view of some mountains of opposition that lie in the way against any success in that place; and hear the Lord saying to every one of them, Who art thou, O great mountain? before my people thou shalt be made a plain, [Zech. iv. 7](#).

Not to mention the strivings and strugglings of two manner of people in the womb of this nation, totally obstructing for a long time the bringing forth of any deliverance for Ireland; nor yet that mighty mountain (which some misnamed a level) that thought at once to have locked an everlasting door upon that expedition; I shall propose some few, of many that have attended it.

(1.) *The silence that hath been in heaven for half an hour, as to this business, — the great cessation of prayers in the heavens of many churches, — hath been no small mountain in the way of the promise.* When God will do good for Zion, he requires that his remembrancers give him no rest, until he do it, [Isa. lxii. 7](#); and yet sometimes, in the close of their supplications, gives them an answer “by terrible things,” [Ps. lxxv. 5](#). He is sometimes silent to the prayers of his people,” [Ps. xxviii. 1](#). Is not then a grant rare, when his people are silent as to prayers? Of how many congregations in this nation may the prayers, tears, and supplications for carrying on of the work of God in Ireland, be written with the lines of emptiness! What a silence hath been in the heaven of many churches for this last half hour! How many that began with the Lord in that work, did never sacrifice at the altar of Jehovah-nissi, nor consider that the Lord hath sworn to have war with such Amalekites as are there “from generation

to generation!" *Exod. xvii. 15, 16.* They have forgotten that Ireland was the first of the nations that laid wait for the blood of God's people desiring to enter into his rest; and therefore "their latter end shall be to perish for ever," *Num. xxiv. 20.* Many are as angry as Jonah, not that Babylon is spared, but that it is not spared. Hath not this been held out as a mountain? What will you now do, when such or such, these and those men, of this or that party, look upon you "as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth afore it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom;" — that will not so much as say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord?" But now, shall the faithlessness of men make the "faith of God of none effect?" Shall the kingdom of Christ suffer because some of those that are his — what through carnal wisdom, what through spiritual folly — refuse to come forth "to his help against the mighty?" No, doubtless! "The Lord sees it, and it displeases him; he sees that there is no man, and wonders that there is no intercessor," — even marvels that there are no more supplications on this behalf. "Therefore his own arm brought salvation to him; and his own righteousness, it sustained him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense," *Isa. lix. 15–18.* Some men's not praying shall not hinder the promises accomplishing. They may sooner discover an idol in themselves than disappoint the living God. *This was a mountain.*

(2.) Our own advices and counsels have often stood in the way of the promises *bringing forth.* This is not a time nor place for narrations; so I shall only say to this in general, — that if the choicest and most rational advices of the army had not been overruled by the providence of God, in all probability your affairs had been more than ten degrees backward to the condition wherein they are.

(3.) *The visible opposition of the combined enemy in that nation* seemed, as to our strength, unconquerable. The wise man tells us, "A threefold cord is not easily broken." Ireland had a fivefold cord to make strong bands for Zion, twisted together. Never, I think, did such different interests bear with one another for the compassing of one common end.

He that met the lion, the fox, and the ass travelling together, wondered — "quo unâ iter facerent" — whither these ill-matched associates did bend their course; neither did his marvelling cease when he heard they were going a pilgrimage, in a business of devotion.

He that should meet Protestants, — covenanted Protestants, that had sworn, in the presence of the great God to extirpate Popery and Prelacy, as the Scots in Ulster; — others, that counted themselves under no less sacred bond for the maintenance of prelates, service-books, and the like, as the whole party of Ormond's adherents; — joined with a mighty number that had for eight years together sealed their vows to the Romish religion with our blood and their own; — adding to them those that were profound to revolt up and down as

suited their own interest, as some in Munster; — all closing with that party which themselves had laboured to render most odious and execrable, as most defiled with innocent blood:— he, I say, that should see all these, after seven years' mutual conflicting and imbruing their hands in each other's blood, to march all one way together, cannot but marvel — “*quo unâ iter facerent*” whither they should journey so friendly together. Neither, surely, would his admiration be lessened when he should hear that the first thing they intended and agreed upon was, to cover the innocent blood of forty-one<sup>232</sup> [1641], contrary to that promise, “Behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain,” *Isa. xxvi. 21*; and nextly, to establish Catholic religion, or the kingdom of Babel, in the whole nation, in opposition to the engaged truth, and, in our days, visibly manifested power of the Lord Jesus; with sundry such like things, contrary to their science and conscience, their covenant and light, yea, the trust and honesty, of most of the chief leaders of them. Now, how can the promise stand in the way of this hydra? what says it to this combined opposition?

[1.] Why, first, saith the Lord, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished,” *Prov. xi. 21*. Their covering shall be too short and narrow to hide the blood which God will have disclosed.

[2.] And nextly, though they will give their power to the beast, and fight against the Lamb, — consenting in this, who agree in nothing else in the world, — yet they shall be broken in pieces; though they associate themselves, they shall be broken in pieces. If Rezin and the son of Remaliah, Syria and Ephraim, old adversaries, combine together for a new enmity against Judah, — if covenant and Prelacy, Popery and treachery, blood and (as to that) innocency, join hand in hand to stand in the way of the promise, — yet I will not in this join with them, says the Lord. Though they were preserved all distinctly in their several interests for seven years in their mutual conflicts, that they might be scourges to one another, yet if they close to keep off the engagement of God in the word of his promise, not much more than the fourth part of one year shall consume some of them to nothing, and fill the residue with indignation and anguish.

By what means God hath mightily and effectually wrought, — by mixing folly with their counsels, putting fear, terror, and amazedness upon all their undertakings, — into carry on his own purpose, I could easily give considerable instances. That which hath been spoken in general may suffice to bottom us on this, that whilst we are in the way of God, all staggering at the issue is from unbelief; for he can, he will, do more such things as these.

*Use 1.* My first use shall be as unto temporals; for they also, as I told you, come under the promise, not to be staggered at with the limitations before mentioned. Learn hence,

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232 Dr Owen refers to the Irish massacre of 1641, when, by the lowest computation, 40,000 Protestants are said to have been slaughtered. — Ed.



then, to live more by faith in all your actings; believe, and you shall be established. I have, in the days of my pilgrimage, seen this evil under the sun, — many professors of the gospel called out to public actings, have made it their great design to manage all their affairs with wisdom and policy, like the men of the residue of the nations. Living by faith upon the promises hath appeared to them as too low a thing for the condition and employment wherein they now are; — now they must plot, and contrive, and design, — lay down principles of carnal, fleshly wisdom, to be pursued to the uttermost. And what, I pray, hath been the issue of such undertakings?

(1.) First, The power of religion hath totally been devoured by that lean, hungry, never-to-be-satisfied beast of carnal policy; — no signs left that it was ever in their bosoms. Conformity unto Christ in gospel graces is looked on as a mean, contemptible thing. Some of them have fallen to downright atheism, — most of them to wretched formality in the things of God. And then, —

(2.) Secondly, Their plots and undertakings have generally proved tympanous and birthless; vexation and disappointment hath been the portion of the residue of their days. The ceasing to lean upon the Lord, and striving to be wise in our actings, like the men of the world, hath made more Rehoboams than any one thing in this generation.

What now lies at the bottom of all this? *Merely staggering at the promise through unbelief.* What building is that like to be which hath a staggering foundation? When God answers not Saul, he goes to the devil. When the promise will not support us, we go to carnal policy: neither can it otherwise be. Engaged men finding one way to disappoint them, presently betake themselves to another. If men begin once to stagger at the promise, and to conclude, in their fears, that it will not receive accomplishment, that the fountain will be dry, they cannot but think it high time to dig cisterns for themselves. When David says, he shall one day perish by the hand of Saul, whatever God had said to the contrary, his next advice is, Let me go to the Philistines: and what success he had in that undertaking you know. Political diversions from pure dependence on the promise, do always draw after them a long time of entanglements.

Give me leave to give a word of caution against one or two things which men, staggering at the promises through unbelief, do usually in their carnal wisdom run into, for the compassing of the thing aimed at, that they may not be found in your honourable assembly.

[1.] *Take heed of a various management of religion,* of the things of God, to the advantage of the present posture and condition of your alfa The things of Christ should be as Joseph's sheaf, to which all others should bow. When they are made to cringe, and bend, and put on a flattering countenance, to allure any sort of men into their interest, they are no more the things of Christ. I would it had not been too evident formerly, that men entangled in their affairs, enjoying authority, have, with all industry and diligence, pursued such and such an appearance of religion; not that themselves were so passionately affected with it, but merely

for the satisfaction of some in that, whose assistance and compliance they needed for other things. Oh, let not the things of God be immixed any more with carnal reasonings! His truths are all eternal and unchangeable. Give them at once the sovereignty of your souls, and have not the least thought of making them bend to serve your own ends, though good and righteous. Think not to get the promise like Jacob, by representing yourselves in the things of God for other than you are.

[2.] *Hide no truth of God as to that way of manifestation which to you is committed, for fear it should prove prejudicial to your affairs.* That influence and signature of your power which is due to any truth of God, let it not be withheld by carnal reasonings. I might farther draw out these, and such like things as these; — the warning is, to live upon the faith of that promise, which shall surely be established, without turning aside to needless, crooked paths of your own.

*Use 2.* Secondly. Be faithful in doing all the work of God whereunto you are engaged, as he is faithful in working all your works whereunto he is engaged. Your work, whereunto (whilst you are in his ways) God is engaged, is your safety and protection: God's work, whereunto you are engaged, is the propagating of the kingdom of Christ, and the setting up of the standard of the gospel. So far as you find God going on with your work, go you on with his. How is it that Jesus Christ is in Ireland only as a *lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies*; and none to hold him out as a *lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends*? Is it the sovereignty and interest of England that is alone to be there transacted? For my part, I see no farther into the mystery of these things but that I could heartily rejoice, that, innocent blood being expiated, the Irish might enjoy Ireland so long as the moon endureth, so that Jesus Christ might possess the Irish. But God having suffered those sworn vassals of the man of sin to break out into such ways of villany as render them obnoxious unto vengeance, upon such rules of government amongst men as he hath appointed; is there, therefore, nothing to be done but to give a *cup of blood into their hands*? Doubtless the way whereby God will bring the followers after the beast to condign destruction for all their enmity to the Lord Jesus, will be by suffering them to run into such practices against men as shall righteously expose them to vengeance, according to acknowledged principles among the sons of men. But is this all? hath he no farther aim? Is not all this to make way for the Lord Jesus to take possession of his long since promised inheritance? And shall we stop at the first part? Is this to deal fairly with the Lord Jesus? — call him out to the *battle*, and then keep away his *crown*? *God* hath been faithful in doing great things for you; be faithful in this one, — do your utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.

Give me leave to add a few motives to this duty.

(1.) *They want it.* No want like theirs who want the gospel. I would there were for the present one gospel preacher for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland. The

land mourneth, and the people perish for want of knowledge. Many run to and fro, but it is upon other designs; knowledge is not increased.

(2.) They are sensible of their *wants*, and cry out for *supply*. The tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin after the manifestations of Christ are ever in my view. If they were in the dark, and loved to have it so, it might something close a door upon the bowels of our compassion; but they cry out of their darkness, and are ready to follow every one whosoever, to have a candle. If their being gospelless move not our hearts, it is hoped their importunate cries will disquiet our rest, and wrest help as a beggar doth an alms.

(3.) *Seducers and blasphemers* will not be wanting to sow their tares, which those fallowed fields will receive, if there be none to cast in the seed of the word. Some are come over thither already without call, without employments, to no other end but only to vaunt themselves to be God; as they have done in the open streets with detestable pride, atheism, and folly. So that as Ireland was heretofore termed by some in civil things a frippery of bankrupts, for the great number of persons of broken estates that went thither; so, doubtless, in religion it will prove a frippery of monstrous, enormous, contradictions opinions, if the work of preaching the word of truth and soberness be not carried on. And if this be the issue of your present undertakings, will it be acceptable, think you, to the Lord Jesus, that you have used his power and might to make way for such things as his soul abhors?

[1.] Will it be for his honour, that the people whom he hath sought to himself with so high a hand should, at the very entrance of his taking possession, be leavened with those high and heavenly notions which have an open and experimented tendency to earthly, fleshly, dunghill practices? or, —

[2.] Will it be for the credit and honour of your profession of the gospel, that such a *breach should be under your hand*? that it should be as it were by your means? Will it not be a sword, and an arrow, and a maul in the hands of your observers? Who can bear the just scandal that would accrue, — scandal to the magistrates, scandal to the ministers of this generation, — in neglecting such an opportunity of advancing the gospel, — sleeping all the day whilst others sow tares?

[3.] Where will be the hoped, the expected consolation of this great affair, when the testimony and pledge of the peculiar presence of Christ amongst us upon such an issue shall be wanting?

What, then, shall we do? This thing is often spoken of, seldom driven to any close!

1st. Pray. “Pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would send out,” that he would thrust forth, “labourers into his harvest.” The labourers are ready to say, There is a lion in the way, difficulties to be contended withal. And to some men it is hard seeing a call of God through difficulties; when if it would but clothe itself with a few carnal advantages, how apparent is it to them! they can see it through a little cranny. Be earnest, then, with the Master of these

labourers, in whose hand is their life and breath, and all their ways, that he would powerfully constrain them to be willing to enter into the fields that are white for the harvest.

*2dly.* Make such provision, that those who will go may be fenced from outward straits and fears, so far as the uncertainty of human affairs in general and the present tumultuating perturbations will admit. And let not, I beseech you, this be the business of an unpursued order. But, —

*3dly.* Let some be appointed (generals die and sink by themselves) to consider this thing, and to hear what sober proposals may be made by any whose hearts God shall stir up to so good a work.

This, I say, is a work wherein God expecteth faithfulness from you: stagger not at his promises nor your own duty. However, by all means possible, in this business I have striven to deliver my own soul.

Once more; — to this of faith, let me stir you up to another work of love, and that in the behalf of many poor perishing creatures, that want all things needful for the sustentation of life. Poor parentless children that lie begging, starving, rotting in the streets, and find no relief; yea, persons of quality, that have lost their dearest relations in your service, seeking for bread, and finding none; — oh, that some thoughts of this also might be seriously committed to them that shall take care for the gospel!

*Use 3.* I desire now to make more particular application of the doctrine, as to things purely spiritual. Until you know how to believe for your own souls, you will scarcely know how to believe for a nation. Let this, then, teach us to lay the burden and trouble of our lives upon the right shoulder. In our staggerings, our doubtings, our disputes, we are apt to assign this and that reason of them; when the sole reason, indeed, is our unbelief. Were it not for such a cause, or such a cause, I could believe; that is, were there no need of faith. That is, faith must remove the mountains that lie in the way, and then all will be plain. It is not the greatness of sin, nor continuance in sin, nor backsliding into sin, that is the true cause of thy staggering, whatever thou pretendest (the removal of all these is from that promise whose stability and certainty I before laid forth), but solely from thy unbelief, that “root of bitterness” which springs up and troubles thee. It is not the distance of the earth from the sun, nor the sun’s withdrawing itself, that makes a dark and gloomy day; but the interposition of clouds and vaporous exhalations. Neither is thy soul beyond the reach of the promise, nor doth God withdraw himself; but the vapours of thy carnal, unbelieving heart do cloud thee. It is said of one place, “Christ could do no great work there.” Why so? for want of power in him? Not at all; but merely for want of faith in them; — it was “because of their unbelief.” The promise can do no great work upon thy heart, to humble thee, to pardon, to quiet thee. Is it for want of fulness and truth therein? Not at all; but merely for want of faith in thee; — that keeps it off Men complain, that were it not for such things, and such things, they could believe; when it is their unbelief that casts those rubs in the way. As if a man

should cast nails and sharp stones in his own way, and say, Verily I could run, were it not for those nails and stones; when he continues himself to cast them there. You could believe, were it not for these doubts and difficulties, these staggering perplexities; when, alas! they are all from your unbelief.

*Use 4.* See the sinfulness of all those staggering doubts and perplexities wherewith many poor souls have almost all their thoughts taken up. Such as is the root, such is the fruit. If the tree be evil, so will the fruit be also. Men do not gather grapes from brambles. What is the root that bears this fruit of staggering? is it not the evil root of unbelief? And can any good come from thence? — are not all the streams of the same nature with the fountain? — if that be bitter, can they be sweet? If the body be full of poison, will not the branches have their venom also? Surely if the mother — unbelief — be the mouth of hell, the daughters — staggerings — are not the gates of heaven.

Of the sin of unbelief I shall not now speak at large. It is, in sum, the universal opposition of the soul unto God. All other sins arise against something or other of his revealed will; only unbelief sets up itself in a direct contradiction to all of him that is known. Hence the weight of condemnation in the gospel is constantly laid on this sin: “He that believeth not, on him the wrath of God abideth; he shall be damned.” Now, as every drop of sea-water retains the brackishness and saltiness of the whole; so every staggering doubt that is an issue of this unbelief hath in it the unsavouriness and distastefulness unto God that is in the whole.

Farther, to give you a little light into what acceptance our staggering thoughts find with the Lord (according to which must be our esteem of all that is in us), observe that, —

- (1.) They grieve him.
- (2.) They provoke him.
- (3.) They dishonour him.

(1.) Such a frame grieves the Lord. Nothing more presses true love than to have an appearance of suspicion. Christ comes to Peter, and asks him, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” [John xxi. 15](#). Peter seems glad of an opportunity to confess him, and his love to him, whom not long since he had denied, and answers readily, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” But when Christ comes with the same question again and again, the Holy Ghost tells us, “Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?” It exceedingly troubled Peter that his love should come under so many questionings, which he knew to be sincere. The love of Christ to his is infinitely beyond the love of his to him. All our doubtings are nothing but so many questionings of his love. We cry, Lord Jesus, lovest thou us? and again, Lord Jesus, lovest thou us? and that with distrustful hearts and thoughts, that it is not, it cannot be. Speaking of the unbelieving Jews, the Holy Ghost tells us, Jesus was “grieved for the hardness of their hearts,” [Mark iii. 5](#). And as it is bitter to him in the root, so also in the fruit. Our staggerings and debates, when we have a word of promise, is a grief to his Holy Spirit, as the unkindest return we can make unto his love.



(2.) It *provokes* him. How can this be, says Zacharias, that I should have a son? This shall be, saith the Lord; and thou thyself, for thy questioning, shalt be a sign of it, “Thou shalt be dumb, and not speak,” [Luke i. 20](#). His doubting was a provocation. And our Saviour expresses no less, in that bitter reproof to his disciples upon their wavering, [Matt. xvii. 17](#), “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?” — that is, in this unbelieving frame. Poor souls are apt to admire the patience of God in other matters, — that he spared them in such and such sins, at such and such times of danger; but his exceeding patience towards them in their carnal reasonings and fleshly objections against believing, this they admire not. Nay, generally they think it should be so, God would not have them one step farther; nay, they could be more steadfast in believing, as they suppose, might it stand with the good-will of God; — when all this while this frame of all others is the greatest provocation to the Lord; he never exercises more forbearance than about this kind of unbelief. When the spies had gone into Canaan, had seen the land, and brought of the good fruit of it, — then to repine, then to question whether God would bring them into it or no, this caused the Lord “to swear in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest.” When God hath brought men to the borders of heaven, discovered to them the riches and excellency of his grace, admitted them to enter as spies into the kingdom of glory, — then to fall a staggering whether he intends them an entrance or no is that which lies heavy on him. The like may be said of all promised mercies and deliverances whatsoever. That this is a provocation, the Lord hath abundantly testified, inasmuch as for it he hath oftentimes snatched sweet morsels from the mouths of men, and turned aside the stream of mercies when it was ready to flow in upon them. “If,” saith he, “ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established,” [Isa. vii. 9](#). The very mercy but now promised concerning your deliverance shall be withheld. Oh, stop not success from Ireland by unbelief!

(3.) It *dishonours* God. In the close of this verse it is said, Abraham was “strong in faith” (or staggered not), “giving glory to God.” To be established in believing, is to give God the greatest glory possible. Every staggering thought that ariseth from this root of unbelief robs God of his glory.

[1.] It robs him of the glory of his truth: “He that believeth not, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not his record,” [1 John v. 10](#). Let men pretend what they please (as most [pretend?] an end, we give in specious pretences for our unbelief), the bottom of all is, the questioning of the truth of God in our false hearts.

[2.] It robs him of the glory of his fidelity or faithfulness in the discharge of his promises: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us our sins,” [1 John i. 9](#). He hath engaged his faithfulness in this business of the forgiveness of iniquities, — he whose right it is; calling that in question, calls the faithfulness of God in question.

[3.] It robs him of the glory of his grace. In a word, if a man should choose to set himself in a universal opposition unto God, he can think of no more compendious way than this.

This, then, is the fruit, this the advantage, of all our staggering, — we rob God of glory, and our own souls of mercy.

*Use 5.* Be ashamed of, and humbled for, all your staggerings at the promises of God, with all your fleshly reasonings and carnal contrivances issuing therefrom. For the most part, we live upon successes, not promises:— unless we see and feel the print of victories, we will not believe; the engagement of God is almost quite forgotten in our affairs. We travel on without Christ, like his mother, and suppose him only to be in the crowd; but we must return to seek him where we left him, or our journeying on will be to no purpose. When Job, after all his complaining, had seen the end of the Lord, he cries out, “Now I abhor myself in dust and ashes.” You have seen the end of the Lord in many of his promises, — oh, that it might prevail to make you abhor yourselves in dust and ashes, for all your carnal fears and corrupt reasonings upon your staggerings! When David enjoyed his promised mercy, he especially shames himself for every thought of unbelief that he had whilst he waited for it. “I said,” saith he, “in my haste, that all men were liars:” and now he is humbled for it. Is this to be thankful, to forget our provoking thoughts of unbelief when the mercy is enjoyed? The Lord set it home upon your spirits, and give it to receive its due manifestation!

(1.) If there be any counsels, designs, contrivances, on foot amongst us, that are bottomed on our staggering at the promise under which we are, oh, let them be instantly cast down to the ground. Let not any be so foolish as to suppose that unbelief will be a foundation for quiet habitations. You are careful to avoid all ways that might dishonour you as the rulers of so great a nation; oh, be much more careful about such things as will dishonour you as believers! That is your greatest title, — that is your chiefest privilege. Search your own thoughts; and if any contrivance, any compliance, be found springing up, whose seed was sown by staggering at the promise, root them up and cast them out before it be too late.

(2.) Engage your hearts against all such ways for the future. Say unto God, How faithful art thou in all thy ways! how able to perform all thy promises! how hast thou established thy word in heaven and earth! Who would not put their trust in thee? We desire to be ashamed that ever we should admit in our hearts the least staggering at the stability of thy word.

(3.) Act as men bottomed upon unshaken things, that are not at all moved by the greatest appearing oppositions. “He that believeth will not make haste:” be not hasty in your resolves in any distress; wait for the accomplishment of the vision, for it will come. So long as you are in the way of God, and do the work of God, let not so much as your desires be too hasty after appearing strengthenings and assistance. Whence is it that there is amongst us such bleating after the compliance of this or that party of the sons of men, — perhaps priding themselves in our actings upon unbelief, as though we proclaimed, that, without such and such, we cannot be protected in the things of God? Let us, I beseech you, live above those things that are unworthy of the great name that is called upon us.



Oh, that by these and the *like* ways we might manifest our self-condemnation and abhorrency for all that distrust and staggering at the word of God, which arising from unbelief, hath had such deplorable issues upon all our counsels and undertakings!



Sermon V.

OYPANQN OYPANIA:

The

shaking and translating of heaven and earth:

a sermon preached to the honourable House of Commons in Parliament assembled,  
April 19, 1649,

a day set apart for extraordinary humiliation.



### **Prefatory note.**

This sermon, from [Heb. xii. 27](#), was preached before Parliament on a day set apart for extraordinary humiliation. It was in connection with this sermon that Owen for the first time was introduced to Oliver Cromwell; who, with other officers, listened to it, and afterwards made acquaintance with the preacher, under the circumstances mentioned in the “*Life*,” etc., vol. i. p. 42. Cromwell was preparing to go to Ireland, and procured the appointment of Owen to accompany him, in order that the affairs of Trinity College, Dublin, might be adjusted and placed on a proper footing. — Ed.



*Die Veneris, April 20, 1649.*

Ordered, by the Commons assembled in Parliament, That Sir William Masham do give hearty thanks from this House to Mr Owen for his great pains in his sermon preached before the House yesterday, at Margaret's, Westminster; and that he be desired to print his sermon at large, as he intended to have delivered it if time had not prevented him; wherein he is to have the like liberty of printing thereof as others in like kind usually have had.

Hen. Scobell, *Clerc. Parl.*

**To the right honourable, the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled.**



Sirs,

All that I shall preface to the ensuing discourse is, that seeing the nation's welfare and your own actings are therein concerned (the welfare of the nation and your own prosperity in your present actings being so nearly related, as they are, to the things of the ensuing discourse), I should be bold to press you to a serious consideration of them as now presented unto you, were I not assured — by your ready attention unto, and favourable acceptance of, their delivery — that, being now published by your command, such a request would be altogether needless. The subject-matter of this sermon being of so great weight and importance as it is, it had been very desirable that it had fallen on an abler hand; as also that more space and leisure had been allotted to the preparing of it — first, for so great, judicious, and honourable an audience; and, secondly, for public view — than possibly I could beg from my daily troubles, pressures, and temptations, in the midst of a poor, numerous, provoking people. As the Lord hath brought it forth, that it may be useful to your Honourable Assembly, and the residue of men that wait for the appearance of the Lord Jesus, shall be the sincere endeavour at the throne of grace of

Your most unworthy Servant

In the work of the Lord,

J. Owen.

Coggeshall, *May* 1, 1649

## Sermon V. The shaking and translating of heaven and earth

“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” — Heb. xii. 27.

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The main design of the apostle in this scripture to the Hebrews, is to prevail, with his countrymen, who had undertaken the profession of the gospel, to abide constant and faithful therein, without any apostasy unto, or mixture with Judaism, which God and themselves had forsaken; — fully manifesting, that in such backsliders the soul of the Lord hath no pleasure, chap. x. 38, —

A task, which whoso undertaketh in any age, shall find exceeding weighty and difficult, — even to persuade professors to hold out and continue in the glory of their profession unto the end, that with patience doing the will of God they “might receive the promise;”<sup>233</sup> — especially if there be “lions in the way,”<sup>234</sup> if opposition or persecution do attend them in their professed subjection to the Lord Jesus. Of all that deformity and dissimilitude to the divine nature which is come upon us by the fall, there is no one part more eminent, or rather no one defect more evident, than inconstancy and unstableness of mind in embracing that which is spiritually good. Man being turned from his unchangeable rest<sup>235</sup> seeks to quiet and satiate his soul with restless movings towards changeable things.

Now, he who worketh all our works for us and in us, Isa. xxvi. 12, worketh them also by us;<sup>236</sup> and, therefore, that which he will give, he persuades us to have, that at once his bounty and our duty may receive a manifestation in the same thing. Of this nature is perseverance in the faith of Christ; — which, as by him it is promised, and therefore is a grace; so to us it is prescribed, and thereby is a duty. “Petamus ut det, quod ut habeamus jubet,” Augustine; — “Let us ask him to bestow what he requires us to enjoy.” Yea, “De Domine, quod jubes, et jube vis;” — “Give what thou commandest, and command what thou pleasest.”

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As a duty it is by the apostle here considered; and therefore pressed on them who by nature were capable, and by grace enabled, for the performance thereof. Pathetical exhortations, then, unto perseverance in the profession of the gospel, bottomed on prevalent scriptural arguments and holy reasonings, are the sum of this epistle.

The arguments the apostle handleth unto the end proposed are of two sorts:— First, *Principal*; Secondly, *Deductive*, or emergencies from the first.

233 Chap. x. 36.

234 Prov. xxii. 13, xxvi. 13.

235 Ps. lxvi. 7.

236 1 Thess. i. 3; 2 Thess. i. 11; Deut. x. 16, xxx. 6; Ezek. xviii. 31, xxxvi. 26; Acts xi. 18.

First, His *principal* arguments are drawn from two chief fountains:— 1. The *author*; and, 2. The *nature and end of the gospel*.

1. The author of the gospel is either, —

(1.) *Principal and immediate*, which is God the Father, who having at sundry times and in divers manners formerly spoken by the prophets, herein speaketh by his Son, [chap. i. 1](#).

(2.) *Concurrent and immediate*, Jesus Christ, this great salvation, being begun to be spoken to us by the Lord, [chap. ii. 3](#). This latter he chiefly considereth, as in and by whom the gospel is differenced from all other dispensations of the mind of God. Concerning him to the end intended he proposeth, — [1.] His *person*; [2.] His *employment*.

[1.] For his person, that thence he may argue to the thing aimed at, he holdeth out, —

1st. The *infinite glory of his Deity*; being “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” [chap. i. 3](#).

2dly. The *infinite condescension of his love*, in assuming humanity; for, “because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same,” [chap. ii. 14](#).

And from the consideration of both these, he presseth the main exhortation which he hath in hand, as you may see, [chap. ii. 1, 2, iii. 12, 13](#), etc.

[2.] The employment of Christ he describeth in his offices, which he handleth, —

1st. *Positively*, and very briefly, [chapters i., ii., iii.](#)

2dly. *Comparatively*, insisting chiefly on his priesthood, — exalting it in sundry weighty particulars above that of Aaron, which yet was the glory of the Jewish worship; and this at large, [chapters vi., vii., viii., ix., x.](#) And this being variously advanced and asserted, he layeth as the main foundation, upon which he placeth the weight and stress of the main end pursued, as in the whole epistle is everywhere obvious.

2. The second head of principal arguments he taketh from the gospel itself; which considering as a covenant, he holdeth out two ways.

(1.) *Absolutely*, in its efficacy in respect of, —

[1.] *Justification*. In it God is merciful to unrighteousness, and sins and iniquities he remembers no more, [chap. viii. 12](#); — bringing in perfect remission, that there shall need no more offering for sin, [chap. x. 18](#).

[2.] *Sanctification*. He puts his laws in our hearts, and writes them in our minds, [chap. x. 16](#); — in it purging our consciences by the blood of Christ, [chap. ix. 14](#).

[3.] *Perseverance*: “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people,” [chap. viii. 10](#).

All three are also held out in sundry other places.

(2.) *Respectively* to the covenant of works; and in this regard assigns unto it principal qualifications, with many peculiar eminences them attending, — too many now to be named. Now, these are, —



[1.] That it is *new*: “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old,” chap. viii. 13.

[2.] *Better*. It is a better covenant, and built upon “better promises,” chap. vii. 22, viii. 6.

[3.] *Surer*, the Priest thereof being ordained, “not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life,” chap. vii. 16.

[4.] *Unalterable*. So in all the places before named, and sundry others.

All which are made eminent in its peculiar mediator, Jesus Christ; which is the sum of chap. vii.

And still, in the holding out of these things, that they might not forget the end for which they were now drawn forth, and so exactly handled, he interweaves many pathetical entreaties and pressing arguments by way of application, for the confirming and establishing his countrymen in the faith of this glorious gospel; as you may see almost in every chapter.

Secondly. His arguments less principal, deduced from the former, being very many, may be referred to these three heads:—

1. The *benefits* by them enjoyed under the gospel.

2. The *example* of others, who by faith and patience obtained the promises, chap. xi.

3. From the *dangerous* and *pernicious consequence* of backsliding; of which only I shall speak. Now this he setteth out three ways.

(1.) From the *nature* of that sin. It is a crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and putting him to open shame, chap. vi. 6; a treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace, chap. x. 29.

(2.) The remediless *punishment* which attends that sin: “There remaineth no more sacrifice for it, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,” chap. x. 26, 27.

(3.) The *person* against whom peculiarly it is committed, and that is he who is the author, subject, and mediator of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ; concerning whom, for the aggravation of this sin, he proposeth two things.

[1.] His goodness and love, and that in his great undertaking to be a Saviour; being “made like unto his brethren in all things, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people,” chap. ii. 17. And of this there is a sweet and choice line running through the whole discourse, making the sin of backsliding against so much love and condescension appear exceeding sinful.

[2.] His greatness or power; which he sets out two ways.

1st. Absolutely, as he is God, to be “blessed for ever,” chap. i.; and, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” chap. x. 31.

2dly. Comparatively, as he is the mediator of the new covenant in reference to Moses. And this he setteth forth, as by many and sundry reasonings in other places of the epistle, so by a double testimony in this [12th chapter](#), making that inference from them both which you have, [verse 25](#), “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him who speaketh from heaven.”

Now, the first testimony of his power is taken from a record of what he did heretofore; — the other from a prediction of what he will do hereafter.

The first you have, [verse 26](#), in the first part of it, “His voice then shook the earth;” then, — that is, when the law was delivered by him, as it is described, [verses 18–21](#), foregoing; when the mountain upon which it was delivered, the mediator Moses, into whose hand it was delivered, and the people for whose use it was delivered, did all shake and tremble at the voice, power, and presence of Christ,<sup>237</sup> — who, as it hence appears, is that Jehovah who gave the law, [Exod. xx. 2](#).

The other, in [the same verse](#), is taken from a prediction out of [Hag. ii. 6](#), of what he will do hereafter, — even demonstrate and make evident his power, beyond whatever he before effected: He hath promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”

And if any one shall ask, wherein this effect of the mighty power of the Lord Jesus consisteth, and how from thence professors may be prevailed upon to keep close to the obedience of him in his kingdom, — the apostle answers, [verse 27](#), “And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” And thus am I stepped down upon the words of my text, finding them in the close of the arguments drawn from the power of Christ to persuade professors to constancy in the paths of the gospel; and having passed through their coherence, and held out their aim and tendence, their opening and application come now to be considered.

And herein these three things:— I. The apostle’s *assertion*: “The things that are shaken shall be removed, as things that are made;” II. The *proof* of this assertion: “This word, Yet once more, signifieth no less;” III. His *inference* from this assertion thus proved: “The things that cannot be shaken must remain.”

I. In the first I shall consider, — 1. What are the things that are shaken; 2. What is their shaking; 3. What their removal, being shaken.

1. For the first, there is a great variety of judgment amongst interpreters.<sup>238</sup> [The foregoing verse](#) tells us it is not only the earth, but the heaven also; but now what heaven and earth



237 [Exod. xix. 18, 19, xx. 18](#).

238 “Nescio an facilius hic locus fuisset, si nemo eum exposuisset.” — *Mald. ad Luc.*, ii. 34.



this should be is dubious, — is not apparent. So many different apprehensions of the mind of God in these words as have any likeness of truth I must needs recount and remove, that no prejudice may remain from other conceptions against that which from them we shall assert.

(1.) The earth, say some, is the men of the earth, living thereon; and the heavens are the angels, their blessed inhabitants: both shaken or stricken with amazement upon the nativity of Christ and preaching of the gospel. The heavens were shaken, when so great things were accomplished as that “the angels themselves desired to look into them,” [1 Pet. i. 12](#); and the earth was filled with amazement, when, the Holy Ghost being poured out upon the apostles for the preaching of the gospel, men of every nation under heaven were amazed and marvelled at it, [Acts ii. 5–7](#). Thus Rollocus, Piscator, and sundry other famous divines. But, —

[1.] The shaking here intimated by the apostle was then, when he wrote, under the promise, not actually accomplished, as were the things by them recounted; for he holds it forth as an issue of that great power of Christ which he would one day exercise for the farther establishment of his kingdom.

[2.] This that now is to be done must excel that which formerly was done at the giving of the law; as is clearly intimated in the inference: “Then he shook the earth, but now the heavens also.” It is a gradation to a higher demonstration of the power of Christ; which that the things of this interpretation are is not apparent.

[3.] It is marvellous these learned men observed not, that the heavens and the earth shaken, [verse 26](#), are the things to be removed, [verse 27](#). Now, how are angels and men removed by Christ? are they not rather gathered up into one spiritual body and communion?<sup>239</sup> Hence, [verse 27](#), they interpret the shaken things to be Judaical ceremonies, which, [verse 26](#), they had said to be men and angels.

(2.) Others by heaven and earth understand the material parts of the world’s fabric, commonly so called; and by their shaking, those portentous signs and prodigies, with earthquakes, which appeared in them at the birth and death of the Lord Jesus. A new star, preternatural darkness, shaking of the earth, opening of graves, rending of rocks, and the like, are to them this shaking of heaven and earth.<sup>240</sup> So Junius, and after him most of ours. But this interpretation is obnoxious to the same exceptions with the former, and also others For, —

[1.] These things being past before, how can they be held out under a promise?<sup>241</sup>

239 [Eph. i. 10](#). Ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, that is, μίαν κεφαλὴν παρασχεῖν ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις τὸν Χριστὸν ἀπεσχισμένοι γὰρ ἦσαν οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ ἄνθρωποι. *Cæcumen. in loc.*

240 [Matt. ii. 2, xxvii. 45](#); [Luke xxiii. 44, 45](#); [Matt. xxvii. 51, 52](#).

241 Ὅ γὰρ βλέπει τις, τί καὶ ἐλπίζει, [Rom. viii. 24](#).

[2.] How are these shaken things removed? which with their shaking they must certainly be, as in my text.

[3.] This shaking of heaven and earth is ascribed to the power of Christ as mediator, whereunto these signs and prodigies cannot rationally be assigned; but rather to the sovereignty of the Father, bearing witness to the nativity and death of his Son; — so that neither can this conception be fastened on the words.

(3.) The fabric of heaven and earth is by others also intended, — not in respect of the signs and prodigies formerly wrought in them, but of that dissolution, or, as they suppose, alteration, which they shall receive at the last day. So Pareus, Grotius, and many more. Now, though these avoid the rock of holding out as accomplished what is only promised, yet this gloss also is a dress disfiguring the mind of God in the text. For, —

[1.] The things here said to be shaken do stand in a plain opposition to the things that cannot be shaken nor removed; and therefore they are to be removed, that these may be brought in. Now, the things to be brought in are the things of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. What opposition, I pray, does the material fabric of heaven and earth stand in to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus? Doubtless none at all, being the proper seat of that kingdom.

[2.] There will, on this ground, be no bringing in of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus until indeed that kingdom in the sense here insisted on is to cease; that is, after the day of judgment, when the kingdom of grace shall have place no more.

Those are the most material and likely mistakes about the words. I could easily give out, and pluck in again three or four other warping senses; but I hope few in these days of accomplishing will once stumble at them.

(4.) The true mind of the Spirit, by the help of that Spirit of truth, comes next to be unfolded. And first, what are the things that are shaken?

[1.] As the apostle here applies a part of the prophecy of Haggai, so that prophecy, even in the next words, gives light into the meaning of the apostle. Look what heaven and earth the prophet speaks of; — of those, and no other, speaks the apostle. The Spirit of God in the Scripture is his own best interpreter.<sup>242</sup> See, then, the order of the words as they lie in the prophet, [Hag. ii. 6, 7](#), “I will shake heaven and earth: I will shake all nations.” God, then, shakes heaven and earth when he shakes all nations; that is, he shakes the heaven and earth of the nations. “I will shake heaven and earth, and I will shake all nations,” is a pleonasm for “I will shake the heaven and earth of all nations.” These are the things shaken in my text.

The heavens of the nations, what are they? — even their political heights and glory, those forms of government which they have framed for themselves and their own interest,

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242 “Nunquam Pauli sensum ingredieris, nisi Pauli Spiritum imbiberis.” — *Ber. Ser. de Monte*. Τὸ αὐτὸ χρίσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων, [1 John ii. 27](#). Ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ νοούμεναι καὶ ἀνοιγόμεναι αἱ γραφαὶ δεικνύουσιν ἡμῖν τὸν Χριστὸν, εἰκότως ζυρωρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. — *Theophylac. in John x.*

with the grandeur and lustre of their dominions. The nations' earth is the multitudes of their people, their strength and power, whereby their heavens, or political heights, are supported. It is, then, neither the material heavens and earth, nor yet Mosaical ordinances, but the political heights and splendour, the popular multitudes and strength, of the nations of the earth, that are thus to be shaken, as shall be proved.

That the earth, in prophetic descriptions or predictions of things, is frequently, yea, almost always, taken for the people and multitudes of the earth, needs not much proving.<sup>243</sup> One or two instances shall suffice. [Rev. xii. 16](#), "The earth helped the woman" against the flood of the dragon; which that it was the multitudes of earthly people none doubts. That an earthquake, or shaking of the earth, are popular commotions, is no less evident from [Rev. xi. 13](#), where by an earthquake great Babylon receives a fatal blow. And for the heavens, whether they be the political heights of the nations or the grandeur of potentates, let the Scripture be judge; I mean, when used in this sense of shaking, or establishment, [Isa. li. 15, 16](#), "I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: the Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people." By a repetition of what he hath done, he establisheth his people in expectation of what he will do. And, —

*1st.* He minds them of that wonderful deliverance from an army behind them, and an ocean before them, by his miraculous preparing dry paths for them in the deep: "I am the Lord, that divided the sea, whose waves roared."

*2dly.* Of his gracious acquainting them with his mind, his law, and ordinances at Horeb. "I have put," saith he, "my words in thy mouth."

*3dly.* Of that favourable and singular protection afforded them in the wilderness, when they were encompassed with enemies round about: "I covered thee in the shadow of mine hand."

Now, to what end was all this? Why, saith he, "That I might plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth." What! of these material, visible heavens and earth? Two thousand four hundred and sixty years before, at least, were they planted and established. It is all but [nothing more than] making of "Zion a people," which before was scattered in distinct families. And how is this done? Why, the heavens are planted, or a glorious frame of government and polity is erected amongst them, and the multitudes of their people are disposed into an orderly commonwealth, to be a firm foundation and bottom for the government amongst them. This is the heavens and earth of the nations which is to be shaken in my text.

<sup>243</sup> [Ps. lxxviii. 8](#); [Hab. ii. 20](#); [Matt. xxiv. 7](#); [1 Sam. xiv. 25](#) — [Heb.]

Isa. xxxiv. 4, “All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine.” Now, these dissolved, rolled heavens are no other but the power and heights of the opposing nations, their government and tyranny, especially that of Idumea, as both the foregoing and following verses do declare. “The indignation of the Lord,” saith he, “is upon the nations, and his fury upon all their armies; he hath delivered them to the slaughter, their slain,” etc. Jer. iv. 23–25, “I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly.” Here’s heaven and earth shaken, and all in the razing of the political state and commonwealth of the Jews by the Babylonians, as is at large described in the verses following. Ezek. xxxii. 7, “I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.” Behold heaven and earth, sun, moon, and stars, all shaken and confounded in the destruction of Egypt, — the thing the prophet treats of, their kingdom and nation being to be ruined.

Not to hold you too long upon what is so plain and evident, you may take it for a rule, that, in the denunciations of the judgments of God, through all the prophets, heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the like appearing beauties and glories of the aspectable heavens, are taken for governments, governors, dominions in political states; as Isa. xiv. 12–15; Jer. xv. 9, li. 25.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, to confirm this exposition, St John, in the Revelation, holds constantly to the same manner of expression. Heaven and earth in that book are commonly those which we have described. In particular, this is eminently apparent, chap. vi. 12–15, “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth: and the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places,” etc. The destruction and wasting of the Pagan-Romish state, the plagues and commotions of her people, the dethroning her idol-worship, and destruction of persecuting emperors and captains, with the transition of power and sovereignty from one sort to another, is here held out under this grandeur of words,<sup>245</sup> being part of the shaking of heaven and earth in my text.

Add lastly hereunto, that the promises of the restoration of God’s people into a glorious condition after all their sufferings, is perpetually, in the Scripture, held out under the same terms, and you have a plentiful demonstration of this point. Isa. lxxv. 17, 18, “Behold, I create

244 Isa. xliii. 13; Ps. lxxviii. 8; Joel ii. 10; Rev. viii. 12; Matt. xxiv. 29; Luke xxi. 25; Isa. lx. 20; Obad. 4; Rev. viii. 13, xi. 12, xx. 11.

245 Euseb. Eccles. Hist., lib. ix., cap. 8, 10, lib. viii. cap. 17; De Vita Constant., lib. i., cap. 50–52.

new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create,” etc.<sup>246</sup> [2 Pet. iii. 13](#), “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” [Rev. xxi. 1](#), “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” The heaven and earth are restored, but the sea, — that shall be no more. Those gatherings together of many waters, rivers from all places,<sup>247</sup> or pretended clergymen from all nations into general councils, which were the sea or many waters on which the whore sat,<sup>248</sup> shall have no place at all in the church’s restored condition.

I hope it is now fully cleared what is meant by the things that are shaken, — even the political heights, the splendour and strength of the nations of the earth: the foundation of the whole is laid, and our heap (or building, if your favour will so accept it) will go on apace; for to the analogy hereof shall the residue of the words be interpreted.

2. The second thing considerable is, What is the shaking of these things?

To this the answer is now made brief and facile. Such as are the things shaken, such must their shaking be: spiritual, if spiritual; natural, if natural; civil, if civil. Now, they being declared and proved to be civil things, such also is their shaking.<sup>249</sup> Now, what is a civil shaking of civil constitutions? how are such things done in the world? what are these earthquakes? Truly, the accomplishment hereof is in all nations so under our eyes as that I need not speak one word thereunto.

Neither shall I insist upon the inquiry, when this shaking shall be?

The text is plain, that it must be previous to the bringing in of those things that cannot be moved; that is, the prosperous estate of the kingdom of Christ.<sup>250</sup> Only we may observe, that besides other shakings in particular nations, of less general concernment and importance, this prophecy hath and shall receive a twofold eminent accomplishment, with reference unto a twofold eminent opposition which the kingdom of Christ hath met withal in the world.

(1.) From the Pagan-Roman state, which, at the gospel’s first entrance, held in subjection most of the chief provinces of the then known world.<sup>251</sup> What were the bloody endeavours of the heaven and earth of that state for the suppression thereof is known to our children. The issue of the whole in the accomplishment of this promise, shaking those heavens and

246 [Isa. lxvi. 22–24](#).

247 [Gen. i. 10](#).

248 [Rev. xvii. 1](#).

249 Χρονους ἢ καιρους, οὓς ὁ πατήρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, [Acts i. 7](#).

250 Σεισμοὶ κατὰ τόπους, [Matt. xxiv. 7](#).

251 Ἐξῆλθε δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου, ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, [Luke ii. 1](#).



earth to pieces, I before pointed at from [Rev. vi. 12–17](#), beginning in the plagues of the persecuting emperors, and ending in the ruin of the empire itself. But, —

(2.) The immovable things were not yet in their glory to be brought in. More seed of blood must be sown, that the end of the gospel's year may yield a plentiful harvest. That shaking was only for vengeance upon an old, cursed, and not for the bringing in of a new, blessed state. The vials of God's wrath having crumbled the heavens and earth of pagan Rome into several pieces,<sup>252</sup> and that empire being removed as to its old form, by the craft of Satan it became moulded up again into a papal sovereignty, to exercise all the power of the first beast in persecution of the saints, [Rev. xiii. 12](#). This second pressure, though long and sore, must have an end; — the new-moulded heaven and earth of papal, antichristian Rome, running by a mysterious thread through all the nations of the west, must be shaken also; which when it is accomplished, there shall be no more sea. There is not another beast to arise, nor another state to be formed; — let endeavours be what they will, the Lord Jesus shall reign.<sup>253</sup>

3. What is the *removal* of heaven and earth, being shaken?

The word here translated “removal” is *μετάθεσις*; whence that is come to pass I dare not positively say. This, doubtless, is a common fault amongst translators, that they will accommodate the words of a text to their own apprehension of the sense and matter thereof.<sup>254</sup> Understanding, as I suppose, that the things here said to be shaken were the Jewish ordinances, they translated their disposition a “removal;” as the truth is they were removed. But the word signifies no such thing. As its natural import, from its rise and composition, is otherwise, so neither in the Scripture nor any profane author doth it ever signify properly a “removal.” Translation, or changing, is the only native, genuine import of it:<sup>255</sup> and why it should in this place be haled out of its own sphere, and tortured into a new signification, I know not. Removal is of the matter, translation of the form only. It is not, then, a destruction and total emotion of the seat things of the nations; but a change, translation, and a new-moulding of them, that is here intimated. They shall be shuffled together, almost into their primitive confusion, and come out new-moulded, for the interest of the Lord Jesus. All the present states of the worm are cemented together by antichristian lime, as I shall show afterward:— unless they be so shaken as to have every cranny searched and brushed, they will be no quiet habitation for the Lord Christ and his people. This, then, is the *μετάθεσις* of the “heaven and earth” of the nations.

252 Τὸ κατέχον, [2 Thess. ii. 6](#).

253 [Rev. xviii. 2](#); [Isa. lx. 13](#); [Ps. ii. 6](#).

254 [Heb. xi. 5](#); [Jude 4](#); [Gal. i. 6](#); [Heb. vi. 18](#), [vii. 12](#).

255 “Mutationem,” Trem. “Translationem.” *Erasm. Ar. Mont.*

Now, this is evident from that full prediction which you have of the accomplishment hereof, [Rev. xvii. 12](#), the kingdoms of the west “receive power one hour with the beast.” [Verse 13](#), in their constitution and government at first received, “they give their power to the beast,” and fight against the Lamb. [Verse 14](#), the Lamb with his faithful and chosen ones overcomes them. There their heaven and earth is shaken. [Verse 16](#), their power is translated, new-moulded, and becomes a power against the beast, in the hand of Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the shaking and removal in my text, which is said to be, “as of things that are made;” that is, by men, through the concurrence of divine Providence for a season (which making you have, [Rev. xvii. 12–17](#)); — not like the kingdom of Christ, which, being of a purely divine constitution, shall by no human power receive an end.

The other parts of the text follow briefly.

II. The next thing is the apostle’s proof of this assertion. And he tells you, “This word, Once more,” the beginning of this sentence he urged from the prophet, “signifies no less.”

The words in the prophet are, **מְעַט מְעַט הֵיא**, “Yet once it is a little.” **מְעַט הֵיא**, “It is a little,” is left out by the apostle, as not conducing to the business in hand. **Ἐτι ἄπαξ**, as he rendereth **מְעַט מְעַט**, are a sufficient demonstration of the assertion. In themselves they hold out a commutation of things, and, as they stand in conjunction in that place of the prophet, declare that that shaking and commutation must be for the bringing in of the kingdom of the Lord Christ. In brief, being interpreted by the same Spirit whereby they were indited, we know the exposition is true.

III. The last head remaineth under two particulars:— 1. What are “the things that cannot be shaken?” 2. What is their remaining?

1. For the first, “the things that cannot be shaken,” [verse 27](#), are called “a kingdom that cannot be moved,” [verse 28](#), — a kingdom subject to none of those shakings and alterations which other dominions have been tossed to and fro withal.<sup>256</sup> Daniel calls it, a not giving of the kingdom to another people, [Dan. ii. 44](#); — not that œcumenical kingdom which he hath with his Father, as king of nations; but that œconomical kingdom which he hath by dispensation from his Father, as king of saints. Now this may be considered two ways.

(1.) As purely internal and spiritual; which is the rule of his Spirit in the hearts of all his saints.<sup>257</sup> This “cometh not with observation,” it is within us, [Luke xvii. 20, 21](#), — consisting in “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” [Rom. xiv. 17](#).

256 Ps. ii. 6, cx. 2; Acts ii. 36; Rev. i. 18; 1 Cor. xv. 24–27.

257 Luke vi. 20; Mark xii. 34, etc.

(2.) As external, and appearing in gospel administrations.<sup>258</sup> So is Christ described as a king in the midst of their kingdom, [Rev. i. 14–17](#), as also [chap. iv.](#) and [chap. xi. 15](#). And both these may be again considered two ways.

[1.] In respect of their essence and being; and so they have been, are, and shall be continued in all ages. He hath built his church upon a rock, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” [Matt. xvi. 18](#).

[2.] In reference to their extent in respect of subjects, with their visible glorious appearance, which is under innumerable promises to be very great in the latter days: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it,” [Isa. ii. 2](#).<sup>259</sup>

These, then, are the things which cannot be shaken; which we may reduce to three heads.

*1st.* The growth of righteousness, peace, and joy in the saints, being filled with light and love from the special presence of Christ; with a wonderful increase of the number of them, multitudes of the elect being to be born in those days, the residue of the Jews and fulness of the Gentiles meeting in one fold, and there “dwelleth righteousness,” [2 Pet. iii. 13](#).<sup>260</sup>

*2dly.* The administration of gospel ordinances, in power and purity, according to the appointment and unto the acceptation of the Lord Jesus. The temple of God and the altar being measured anew, the outward court, defiled with Gentile worship, is left out, [Rev. xi. 1, 2](#).

*3dly.* The glorious and visible manifestation of those administrations in the eyes of all the world, in peace and quietness, — none making afraid or hurting in the whole mountain of the Lord, [Isa. lxxv. 25](#).

For the personal reign of the Lord Jesus on earth, I leave it to them with whose discoveries I am not, and curiosities I would not be, acquainted, [Acts iii. 21](#).

But as for such who from hence do, or for sinister ends pretend to fancy to themselves a terrene kingly state unto each private particular saint, — so making it a bottom “vivendi ut velis,” for every one to do that which is good in his own eyes, to the disturbance of all order and authority, civil and spiritual, — as they expressly clash against innumerable promises, so they directly introduce such confusion and disorder as the soul of the Lord Jesus doth exceedingly abhor.

It is only the three things named, with their necessary dependencies, that I do assert.

258 [Ps. xlv. 6, xlv. 13](#); [Isa. ix. 7](#); [Obad. 21](#).

259 [Isa. xi. 5–10](#), [xix. 18, 19](#), [xxx. 18, 19](#); [Mic. iv. 1](#).

260 [Isa. xlix. 18–22](#), [liv. 1–3](#), etc., [lv. 11, 12](#), [lx. 16, 17](#); [Ezek. xlvi. 35](#); [Amos ix. 11](#); [Rom. xi. 15](#), etc.; [Isa. xlix. 22, 23](#), [lxvi. 21](#); [Mal. iii. 3](#); [Ezek. xliii. 9–11](#); [Rev. xxi. 3](#); [Isa. liv. 11–13](#), etc.; [Zech. xiv. 9–11](#).



2. And lastly, of these it is said, — they must remain; that is, continue and be firmly established, as the word is often used, [Rom. ix. 11](#).

The words of the text being unfolded, and the mind of the Holy Ghost in them discovered, I shall from them commend to your Christian consideration this following position:—

*Observation.* The Lord Jesus Christ, by his mighty power, in these latter days, as anti-christian tyranny draws to its period, will so far shake and translate the political heights, governments, and strength of the nations, as shall serve for the full bringing in of his own peaceable kingdom; — the nations so shaken becoming thereby a quiet habitation for the people of the Most High.

Though the doctrine be clear from the text, yet it shall receive farther scriptural confirmation, being of great weight and concernment. [Dan. ii. 44](#), “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” That this is affirmed of the kingdom of Christ under the gospel, none ever doubted.

Three things are here remarkably intimated of it:— 1. The time wherein it shall most eminently be established; and that is, “In the days of these kings,” of which Daniel was speaking; 2. The efficacy of its being set up: “It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms;” 3. Its own stability: “It shall never be destroyed.”

1. For the first, there is great debate about the principal season of the accomplishing of this prediction; — much hesitation who those kings are in whose days the kingdom of Christ is eminently to be established. In the days when the two legs of the Roman empire shall be divided into ten kingdoms, and those kingdoms have opposed themselves to the power of Christ, — that is, in the days wherein we live, — say some; yea, most of the ancients took this for the Roman empire, and to these the bringing in of the kingdom of Christ is the establishment of it in these days. Others understand the Syrian and Egyptian branches of the Grecian monarchy, and the bringing in of Christ’s kingdom to be in his birth, death, and preaching of the gospel; wherein certainly the foundations of it were laid. I will not contend with any mortal hereabout; only I shall oppose one or two things to this latter interpretation. As, —

(1.) The kingdom of Syria was totally destroyed and reduced into a Roman province sixty years before the nativity of Christ; and the Egyptian, thirty; — so that it is impossible that the kingdom of Christ by his birth should be set up in their days.

(2.) It is ascribed to the efficacy of this kingdom, that, being established, it shall break in pieces all those kingdoms: which how can it be, when, at the first setting of it up, they had neither place nor name, nor scarce remembrance?



So that it must needs be the declining, divided Roman empire, shared among sundry nations, that is here intimated: and so, consequently, the kingdom of Christ to be established, is that glorious administration thereof which in these days he will bring in.

2. Be it so or otherwise, this from hence cannot be denied, that the kingdom of Christ will assuredly shake and translate all opposing dominions, until itself be established in and over them all, — ὅπερ ἔδει, — which is all I intend to prove from this place. The ten-partite empire of the west must give place to the stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

[Dan. vii. 27](#), “The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” Hitherto is the end of the matter. Either Antichrist is described in the close of this chapter, or one very like him, St John painting him in the Revelation with all this man’s colours; plainly intimating, that though, in the first place, that mad, raging tyrant, Antiochus the Illustrious, was pointed at, yet that another was to rise in his likeness, with his craft and cruelty, that, with the assistance of the ten horns, should plague the saints of the Christians no less than the others had done those of the Jews. Now, what shall be the issue thereof? His dominion with his adherents shall be taken away and consumed, [verse 26](#). And then shall it be given to the people of the Most High, as before; or, they shall enjoy the kingdom of Christ in a peaceable manner, their officers being made peace, and their exactors righteousness.

3. It is clearly evident, from these and other places in that prophecy, that He who is the only potentate will sooner or later shake all the monarchies of the earth, where he will have his name known, that all nations may be suited to the interest of his kingdom; which alone is to endure.

[Isa. lx. 1](#) in many places, indeed throughout, holds out the same. [Verse 12](#), “The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish;” that is, all the nations of the earth. Not a known nation, but the blood of the saints of Christ is found in the skirts thereof. Now, what shall be the issue when they are so broken?

[Verses 17, 18](#), “I will make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders: but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” See at your leisure to this purpose, [Amos ix. 11–15](#); [Jer. xxxi. 23–25](#); [Isa. xxxiii. 20–24](#).

I shall only add that punctual description which you have of this “whole matter,” as Daniel calls it, in the Revelation, with respect unto its accomplishment. [Chap. xvii.](#), the Roman harlot having procured the ten kings or kingdoms, into which the last head of the Roman empire sprouted, about the year 450, by the inundation of the northern nations, to join with her, they together make war against the Lamb. [Verse 12](#), “The ten horns which thou sawest” upon the last head of the great beast, the Roman monarchy, “are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet,” — to wit, when John saw the vision, — “but receive



power as kings one hour with the beast." About four hundred years after this, the pope ascended to his sovereignty, and these western nations grew into distinct dominions about the same time. [Verse 13](#), "These have one mind," — that is, as to the business in hand, for otherwise they did and do vex one another with perpetual broils and wars, — "and shall give their power and strength unto the beast," or swear to defend the rights of holy church (which is no other than Babylon), and act accordingly. [Verse 14](#), "These shall make war with the Lamb;" — having sworn and undertaken the defence of holy church, or Babylon, they persecuted the poor heretics with fire and sword; that is, the witnesses of the Lamb, and in them the Lamb himself, striving to keep his kingdom out of the world; — "and the Lamb shall overcome them," shaking and translating them into a new mould and frame; "for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and they that are with him," whose help and endeavours he will use, "are called, and chosen, and faithful." [Verse 16](#), "The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast," being now shaken, changed, and translated in mind, interest, and perhaps government, "these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate" — are instrumental in the hand of Christ for the ruin of that antichristian state which before they served — "and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

Hence, [chap. xviii. 2](#), Babylon, and that whole antichristian state which was supported upon their power and greatness, having lost its props, comes toppling down to the ground: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen." And the saints take vengeance on the whore for all her former rage and cruelty: "Double unto her double, according to her works," [verse 6](#). And [verse 9](#), "And the kings of the earth," — being some of them shaken out of their dominion for refusing to close with the Lamb, — "who have committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her," — learning and practising false worship of her institution, — "shall bewail her, and lament for her," — as having received succour from her, her monasteries and shavelings, in their distress, whereunto indeed they were brought for her sake, — "when they shall see the smoke of her burning," — beholding her darkness, stink, and confusion, in her final desolation.

Now, all this shall be transacted with so much obscurity and darkness, Christ not openly appearing unto carnal eyes, that though "many shall be purified, and made white, and tried, yet the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand," [Dan. xii. 10](#). There shall be no such demonstration of the presence of Christ as to open the eyes of hardened men; but at length, having suffered the poor, deceived wretches to drink of the cup prepared for them, he appears himself gloriously, [Rev. xix. 13](#), in a more eminent manner than ever before, to the total destruction of the residue of opposers. And that this will be the utmost close of that dispensation wherein now he walketh, I no way doubt.

The assertion being cleared and proved, the reasons of it come next to be considered. And, —



(1.) It shall be done by the way of recompense and vengeance. It is the great day of the wrath of the Lamb, [Rev. vi. 17](#). “Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion,” [Isa. xxxiv. 7, 8](#). The day of vengeance is in his heart, when the year of his redeemed is come, [Isa. lxiii. 4](#).<sup>261</sup>

The kings of the earth have given their power to Antichrist, endeavouring to the utmost to keep the kingdom of Christ out of the world. What, I pray, hath been their main business for seven hundred years and upwards, — even almost ever since the man of sin was enthroned? How have they earned the titles, Eldest Son of the Church, The Catholic and Most Christian King, Defender of the Faith, and the like? Hath it not been by the blood of saints? Are there not, in every one of these kingdoms, the slain and the banished ones of Christ to answer for? In particular, —

Hath not the blood of the saints of Jesus<sup>262</sup> (eclipsed by Antichrist and his adherents), Wickliffites and Lollards, cried from the ground for vengeance upon the English “heaven and earth” for a long season Did not their bodies lie in the streets of France, under the names of Waldenses, Albigenses, and poor men of Lyons? Hath not Germany and the annexed territories her Huss and Hussites, Jerome, and Subutraquians,<sup>263</sup> to answer for? Is not Spain’s inquisition enough to ruin a world, much more a kingdom? Have not all these, and all the kingdoms round about, washed their hands and garments in the blood of thousands of Protestants? and do not the kings of all these nations as yet stand up in the room of their progenitors with the same implacable enmity to the power of the gospel? Show me seven kings that ever yet laboured sincerely to enhance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, and I dare boldly say, “*Octavus quis fuerit, nondum constat.*” And is there not a cry for all this, — “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” [Rev. vi. 10](#). Doth not Zion cry, “The violence done to me and my flesh be upon Babylon;” and, My blood upon those heavens of the nations? And will not the Lord avenge his elect, that cry unto him clay and night? will he not do it speedily? Will he not call the fowls of heaven to eat the flesh of kings, and captains, and great men of the earth?



261 [Ps. ii. 4, 5, cxxxvii. 8, 9](#); [Isa. xlvii. 1–3, xlix. 26](#); [Jer. l. 33, 34, li. 24, 25, 34, 35](#); [Zech. xii. 2–4, xiv. 12](#); [Rev. xviii. 6](#), etc.

262 Acts; and *Mon. Histor. Pap.*

263 Utraquists? — another name for the Calixtines, — adherents of Huss and Jacobellus, who in 1421 exhibited their peculiar creed under four articles:— 1. The preaching of the word in the natural tongue; 2. The dispensation of the Lord’s supper to all Christians, the private members of the church as well as the clergy, *sub utrâque specie*, in both kinds, — and hence the name “Utraquists;” 3. The renunciation of secular dignities by the clergy; 4. The introduction of a stricter discipline in regard to the clergy. — *Guericke, ii. 439*; *Gieseler on the Period 1409–1517*. — Ed.

Rev. xix. 18. Will he not make these heavens like the wood of the vine, — not a pin to be taken off them to hang a garment on in his whole tabernacle? The time shall come wherein the earth shall disclose her slain, and not the simplest heretic (as they were counted) shall have his blood unrevenged: neither shall any atonement be made for this blood, or expiation be allowed, whilst a toe of the image or a bone of the beast is left unbroken.

(2.) A second reason is, That by his own wisdom he may frame such a power as may best conduce to the carrying on of his own kingdom among the sons of men.<sup>264</sup>

He hath promised his church that he will give unto it holy priests and Levites, Isa. lxvi. 20, 21, which shall serve at the great feast of tabernacles, Zech. xiv. 16, — a sufficient demonstration that he will dwell still in his churches by his ordinances, whatsoever some conceive; — so also, that he will “make her civil officers peace, and her exactors righteousness,” Isa. ix. 17, 18. They shall be so established that the nations, as nations, may serve it, and the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, Rev. xi. 15.

For the present, the government of the nations (as many of them as are concerned therein) is purely framed for the interest of Antichrist. No kind of government in Europe, or line of governors, so ancient but that the beast is as old as they, and had a great influence into their constitution or establishment, to provide that it might be for his own interest.<sup>265</sup> I believe it will be found a difficult task to name any of the kingdoms of Europe (excepting only that remotest northward) in the setting up and establishment whereof, either as to persons or government, the pope hath not expressly bargained for his own interest, and provided that should have the chiefest place in all the oaths and bonds that were between princes and people. Bellarmine, to prove that the pope had a temporal power indirectly over all kings and nations (if he mean by indirectly, gotten by indirect means, it is actually true as to too many of them),<sup>266</sup> gives sundry instances, in most of the most eminent nations in Europe, how he hath actually exercised such a power for his own interest.

There have been two most famous and remarkable changes of the government of these nations; and into both of them what an influence the pope had, is easily discernible.

The first was between the years 400 and 500 after Christ, when the Roman empire of the west — that which withheld the man of sin from acting his part to the life<sup>267</sup> — was shivered to pieces by many barbarous nations;<sup>268</sup> who, settling themselves in the fruitful soils of Europe, began to plant their heavens, and lay the foundations of their earth, growing

264 Ps. ii. 9–12; Rev. xvii. 14; Matt. xxviii. 20; 1 Cor. xi. 26; Eph. iv. 11–13; 1 Tim. vi. 13, 14; Ps. xlv. 16; Isa. xlix. 7, 23.

265 Bell. de Rom. Pon., lib. v. cap. 8.

266 Rev. xviii. 3 Οί βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς μετ’ αὐτῆς ἐπόρνευσαν.

267 2 Thess. ii. 6, 7.

268 Dan. ii. 41.

up into civil states, — for the most part appointing them to be their kings in peace who had been their leaders in war. This furious inundation settled the Franks in Gaul, the Saxons in England, the West Goths in Spain, the East Goths and Longobards into Italy, and set up the Allemanns in Germany; from some whereof though for divers years the papal world was exceedingly tormented, and Rome itself sacked, yet in the close and making up of their governments, their manners and religion, they all submitted to the usurpation of the man of sin, so that in all their windings up there was a salve for him and his authority.<sup>269</sup>

The second great alteration took up a long space, and was in action about three hundred years, — reckoning it from the translation of the French crown from Childeric IV.<sup>270</sup> unto Pepin and his son Charles by papal authority, unto the conquest of England by the Normans; in which space the line of Charles in France was again by the same authority and the power of Hugh Capet cut off. No state in Europe — the choice patrimony of the beast — that did not receive a signal alteration in this space; nor was there any alteration but that the pope had a hand in every one of them; and, either by pretended collations of right, to pacify the consciences of blood-thirsty potentates in the undertaking and pursuing their unjust conquests, or foolish *mitred-confirmations of sword-purchases*, he got them all framed to his own end and purpose, — which was to bring all these nations into subjection to his Babylonish usurpations; which their kings finding no way inconsistent with their own designs, did willingly promote, labouring to enforce all consciences into subjection to the Roman see.

Hence it is, as I observed before, that such an interposition was made of the rights of holy church that is, Babylon, the mother of fornications — in all the ties, oaths, and bonds between princes and people.<sup>271</sup> And for the advancement of the righteous judgments of God, that the sons of men may learn to fear and tremble before him, it may be observed, that that which doth and shall stick upon potentates to their ruin, is not so much their own or any other interest, as the very dregs of this papal, antichristian interest thrust into their oaths and obligations, for no end in the world but to keep the Lord Jesus out of his throne.<sup>272</sup>

This is a second reason why the Lord Jesus, by his mighty power, at the bringing in of his immovable kingdom, “will shake the heavens and the earth of the nations;” even because in their present constitution they are directly framed to the interest of Antichrist, which, by

269 Οὗτοι μίαν γνώμην ἔχουσι, καὶ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἑαυτῶν τῷ ζηριῷ διαδιδώσουσιν, [Rev. xvii. 13.](#)

270 Childeric III.— the last of the Merovingian race of French kings, — deposed in a.d. 750 by Pepin, to whom the crown of France, by the sanction of Pope Zachary, was transferred. The date of the Norman Conquest is a.d. 1066. — Ed.

271 [Rev. xiii. 15, 16.](#)

272 Πέμψει αὐτοῖς ὁ Θεὸς ἐνέργειαν πλάνης, [2 Thess. ii. 11.](#)

notable advantages at their first moulding, and continued insinuations ever since, hath so riveted itself into the very fundamentals of them, that no digging or mining, but an earthquake, will cast up the foundation-stones thereof.<sup>273</sup> The Lord Jesus, then, having promised the service of the nations to his church, will so far open their whole frame to the roots, as to pluck out all the cursed seeds of the mystery of iniquity, which, by the craft of Satan and exigencies of state, or methods of advancing the pride and power of some sons of blood, have been sown amongst them.

(3.) A third reason is, because as is their interest, so is their acting. The present power of the nations stands in direct opposition to the bringing in of the kingdom of Christ. Two things there are which confessedly are incumbent on him in this day of his advancement.

[1.] The bringing home of his ancient people to be one fold with the fulness of the Gentiles, raising up the tabernacle of David, and building it as in days of old, in the accomplishment of innumerable promises,<sup>274</sup> and in answer to millions of prayers put up at the throne of grace for this very glory, in all generations. Now, there be two main hinderances of this work that must be removed. The first whereof is, —

*1st, Real:* the great river Euphrates, the strength and fulness of whose streams doth yet rage so high that there is no passage for the kings of the east to come over. Wherefore this must be dried up, as other waters were for their forefathers in the days of old, [Rev. xvi. 12.](#)<sup>275</sup> Doubtless this is spoken in allusion to Abraham's coming over that river into Canaan, when the church of God in his family was there to be erected, — whence he was called the Hebrew (that is, the passenger, to wit, over that river, [Gen. xiv. 13](#)); — and then it may well enough denote the Turkish power; which, proud as it is at this day, possessing in peace all those regions of the east, yet God can quickly make it wither and be dried up; — or the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, when it was taken and destroyed by the drying up of the streams of that river, and so the yoke of her tyranny broken from the church's neck;<sup>276</sup> — and so it can be no other but the power of the Romish Babylon, supported by the kings of the nations, which must therefore be shaken and dried up.

*2dly, Moral,* or the idolatry of the Gentile worshippers.<sup>277</sup> The Jews stick hard as yet at this, that God should abolish any kind of worship which himself had once instituted; but, that he should ever accept any false worship, which he had once strictly prohibited, and nowhere to this day appointed, — to this they will never be reconciled. Now, such is all the

273 “Roma sedes Petri, quæ Pastoralis honoris Facta caput mundo, quicquid non possidet armis, Relligione tenet.” Prosp., de Ingrat.

274 [John x. 16](#); [Isa. xxxvii. 31](#); [Jer. xxx. 9](#); [Ezek. xxxiv. 27, xxxvii. 24, 25](#); [Hos. iii. 5](#); [Amos ix. 11](#).

275 [Exod. xiv. 21, 22](#); [Josh. iii. 15, 16](#); [Hab. iii. 8](#).

276 [Jer. li. 31, 32](#).

277 [Rev. xi. 2](#).



invented idolatrous worship which the kings of the earth have sucked in from the cup of fornication held out to them in the hand and by the authority of the Roman whore; this still they cleave close unto, and will not hearken to the angel preaching the everlasting gospel, that men should worship Him who made the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters, [Rev. xiv. 6, 7](#), — that is, the God of heaven in Jesus Christ, — in opposition to all their iconolatry,<sup>278</sup> artolatry, hagiolatry, stauolatry, and mass abominations. This, then, must also be removed; and because, as you saw before, it is so riveted and cemented into and with all the orbs of the nations, heaven and earth, they must be shaken, and brought εἰς μετάθεσιν, before it can be effected.

[2.] The second thing he hath to accomplish is the tremendous, total destruction of Babylon, ([Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9](#); [Isa. xlvii. 7–9](#)) the man of sin, and all his adherents, that are not obedient to the heavenly call, [Rev. xviii. 4](#).<sup>279</sup> Now, as Samson, intending the destruction of the princes, lords, and residue of the Philistines, who were gathered together in their idol-temple, effected it by pulling away the pillars whereby the building was supported, whereupon the whole frame toppled to the ground;<sup>280</sup> so the Lord, intending the ruin of that mighty power, whose top seems to reach to heaven, will do it by pulling away the pillars and supporters of it, after which it cannot stand one moment. Now, what are the pillars of that fatal building? Are they not the powers of the world, as presently stated and framed? Pull them away, and, alas! what is Antichrist? It is the glory of the kings put upon her that makes men's eyes so dazzle on the Roman harlot. Otherwise she is but like the Egyptian deities, whose silly worshippers through many glorious portals and frontispieces were led to adore the image of an ugly ape.

Add hereunto, that in this mighty work the Lord Jesus Christ will make use of the power of the nations, the horns of them; that is, their strength, [Rev. xvii. 16](#). They must hate the whore, and make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. Now, whether this can be accomplished or no in their present posture, is easily discernible. Doth not the papal interest lie at the bottom of all, or the most ruling lines of Christendom?<sup>281</sup> Can that be ejected without unbottoming their own dominion? Do they not use the efficacy of the Roman jurisdiction to balance the powers of their adversaries abroad, and to awe their subjects at home? Hath not the pope a considerable strength in every one of their own bosoms? Are not the locusts of their religious orders (all sworn slaves to him) for number sufficient to make an army to fight the greatest emperor in the world? Are not most potentates tied by oath, or other compact, to maintain either the whole or some part of the old power,

278 Worship of images — bread — saints — the cross — Ed.

279 [Jer. li. 25, 26](#); [Rev. xvii. 1, 2](#); [Zech. ii. 7](#); [Jer. li. 6](#).

280 [Judges xvi. 28, 29](#).

281 Petra dedit Petro, Petrus diadema Rudolfo.



under the name of rites of holy church, prelates, and the like? And can any expect that such as these should take up the despised quarrel of the saints against that flourishing queen? Doubtless no such fruit will grow on these trees, before they are thoroughly shaken.

(4.) A fourth reason is, that His own people, seeing all earthly things shaken and removing, may be raised up to the laying hold of that durable kingdom that shall not be removed.<sup>282</sup> All carnal interests will doubtless be shaken with that of Babylon. Many of God's people are not yet weaned from the things that are seen:<sup>283</sup> — no sooner is one carnal form shaken out, but they are ready to cleave to another, yea, to warm themselves in the feathered nests of unclean birds. All fleshly dominion within doors, and all civil dominion that opposeth without doors, shall be shaken. Now, these things are so glued also to men's earthly possessions, the talons of the birds of prey having firmly seized on them, that they also must be shaken with them; and therefore from them also will he have us to be loosed, [2 Pet. iii. 12, 13](#).

And these are some of the reasons of the position laid down, which is so bottomed, so proved, as you have heard. Of the speedy accomplishment of all this I no way doubt. "I believe, and therefore I have spoken." Whether I shall see any farther perfection of this work whilst I am here below, I am no way solicitous; being assured that if I fail of it here, I shall, through the grace of him who loved us, and gave himself for us, meet with the treasures of it elsewhere.

Come we to the uses.

*Use 1.* The rise of our first use I shall take from that of the prophet, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein," [Hos. xiv. 9](#). Labour for this heavenly wisdom and prudence, that we may know these things, and be acquainted with the mind and will of God in the season and generation wherein we live. His way is not so in the dark, nor his footsteps in the deep, but that we may perceive what he is about.

[Luke xii. 54–56](#), our Saviour gives it in as a sure testimony of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, notwithstanding all their pretences, and possession of Moses' chair, that they were wise in earthly things, and had drawn out experiences, by long observation, of what was like to come to pass as to the weather, by considering the ordinary signs of the alterations thereof; but notwithstanding that mighty effectual concurrence of signs in heaven and earth, with the accomplishment of prophecies, all pointing to the instant establishment of the kingdom of God in the coming of the Messiah, not discerning them at all, they come and cry, "If thou be the Christ, give us a sign;" when, without satisfying their sinful curiosity, heaven and

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282 [Heb. xii. 28](#).

283 [2 Cor. iv. 18](#).

earth were full of signs round about them. Men who will not receive God's signs, suppose they should be wonderful proficient in credulity might they have signs of their own fancying. The rich glutton thought that if his way of teaching might have been set up by men rising from the dead, there would have been a world of converts, — more than were made by preaching the word of God.<sup>284</sup> Men suppose that if God from heaven should give in some discriminating prodigy, oh, how abundantly should they be satisfied! The truth is, the same lust and corruption that makes them disbelieve God's signs, moves them to look after signs of their own. For this very thing, then, were the Pharisees branded as hypocrites, that having wisdom in natural things, to calculate and prognosticate from necessary signs, yet in the works of the Lord, though the signs which in his wisdom he was pleased to give were plentiful round about them, they must have some of their own choosing. I pray God none such be found in our day.

1 Chron. xii. 32, it is said of the men of Issachar, that they “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”<sup>285</sup> Israel is in the dark, and knows not what to do, if the times and seasons be not discovered to them. If the mind and will of the Lord in their generation be not made out unto a people, it will be their ruin. Hence it is that the Lord encourageth us to make inquiry after these things, to find out the seasons wherein he will do any great work for his people, knowing that without this we shall be altogether useless in the generation wherein we live, Isa. xlv. 11, “Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.” And what is this that the Lord will have his people to inquire of him about? Even the great work of the ruin of Babylon, and restoration of his church; which yet was not to be accomplished for two hundred and forty years. And this he tells you plainly in the following verses: “I have raised him up” (Cyrus) “in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts,” [verse 13](#). The Lord is earnest with his people to inquire into the season of the accomplishment of his great intentions for the good of his church, when as yet they are afar off; how much more when they are nigh at hand, even at the doors! “Whoso is wise, and will observe these thing, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord,” [Ps. cvii. 43](#). The prophet tells you<sup>286</sup> that this was his great study, and at length he understood by books the approach of the time wherein God would deliver his church from Babylonish captivity and pollution. Now, this discovery hath two or three notable products.



284 Ἐχουσι Μωσαία καὶ τοὺς προφήτας. Οὐχὶ πᾶτερ Ἀβραάμ· ἀλλ' ἐάν τις ἀπὸ νεκρῶν πορευθῆ, [Luke xvi. 29, 30](#).

285 [Esth. i. 13](#).

286 [Dan. ix. 2](#).

(1.) It puts him upon earnest supplications for the accomplishment of their promised deliverance in the appointed season; — wide from that atheistical frame of spirit which would have a predetermination of events and successes to eradicate all care and endeavour to serve that Providence which will produce their accomplishment. A discovery of the approach of any promised and before-fixed work of God should settle our minds to the utmost endeavour of helping the decree to bring forth.

(2.) He finds great acceptance in this his address to the Lord by supplications, for the establishing of that work which he had discovered was nigh at hand. For, —

[1.] An answer is returned him fully to his whole desire in the midst of his supplications, [verse 21](#), “Whiles I was praying, the man Gabriel came,” etc.

[2.] The work which he had discovered to be approaching was instantly hastened and gone in hand withal, [verse 23](#), “At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth.” Oh, that God would stir up his saints, in the spirit of Daniel, to consider and understand by books the time that he hath appointed for the deliverance of his people, that, fixing their supplications for the speeding thereof, the commandment may come forth for its full accomplishment!

[3.] Having attained this, the Lord gives him fresh discoveries, — new light of the time for the birth of the Messiah, which he thought not of, prayed not for: “Seventy weeks are determined,” etc., [verse 24](#). So delighted is the Lord with his people’s diligent inquiry into his ways and walkings towards them, that thereupon he appears unto them, in the revelation of his mind, beyond all that they did expect or desire.

Now, all this have I spoken to stir you up unto that whereunto at the entrance of this use you were exhorted, — that you would labour for that spiritual wisdom and prudence which may acquaint your hearts, at least in some measure, with the mind and will of God concerning his work in the generation wherein you live. And farther to provoke you hereunto, know that you cannot but wander, as in many other, so especially in four sinful things:— *1st*, Sinful cares; *2dly*, Sinful fears; *3dly*, Sinful follies; *4thly*, Sinful negligence.

*1st. Sinful cares*, — *anxious* and dubious thoughts about such things as, perhaps, the Lord intends utterly to destroy, or, at least, render useless. Had it not been the greatest folly in the world for Noah and his sons, when the flood was approaching to sweep away the creatures from the face of the earth, to have been solicitous about flocks and herds that were speedily to be destroyed?<sup>287</sup> Many men’s thoughts at this day do even devour them about such things as, if they knew the season, would be contemptible unto them. Wouldst thou labour for honour, if thou knewest that God at this time were labouring to lay all the “honour of the earth in the dust?”<sup>288</sup> Couldst thou set thy heart upon the increase of riches, wert

287 [Gen. vi. 13.](#)

288 [Isa. xxiii. 9.](#)

thou acquainted that God intends instantly to make “silver as stones, and cedars as sycamores,”<sup>289</sup> — though not for plenty, yet for value? Would men be so exceedingly solicitous about this or that form of religion, this or that power to suppress such or such a persuasion, if they knew that the Lord would suddenly fill the earth with his knowledge, as the waters cover the sea?<sup>290</sup> Should our spirits sink for fear of this or that persecutor or oppressor, were it discovered unto us that in a short time nothing shall hurt or destroy in the whole mountain of the Lord?<sup>291</sup> Should we tremble at the force and power of this or that growing monarchy giving its power to the beast, had God revealed unto us that he is going to shake it until it be translated? Certain it is, that the root of all the sinful cares, which sometimes are ready to devour the hearts of God’s people, is this unacquaintedness with the work and mind of the Lord.

*2dly. Sinful fears.* Luke xxi. 28, our Saviour having told his disciples of wars, tumults, seditions, famines, earthquakes, etc., which were to come upon the earth, bids them, when they see these things, to “lift up their heads for joy.” But how should this be? — rejoice in the midst of so many evils and troubles, in the most whereof they were to have a Benjamin’s mess, — a double portion! Yea, saith our Saviour, Rejoice; for I have told you before, that then it is that your deliverance and redemption draweth nigh. It is for them to shake and tremble who are in the dark, — who know not what the Lord is doing. They may be at their wits’ end who know no other end of these things; but for you who know the mind of the Lord, what he intendeth and will effect by these things, cast off all sinful fears, and rejoice in him who cometh.

Amongst us in these days new troubles arise, — wars, and rumours of wars, appearances of famine, invasions, conspiracies, revolts, treacheries, sword, blood. Oh, how do men’s faces wax pale, and their hearts die within them! Sometimes, with David, they could fly to the Philistines, and wind up their interest with them whom God will destroy. Every new appearance of danger shuffles them off from all their comforts, all their confidence. Hence poor souls are put upon doubling and shifting in the ways of God, in such a frame as God exceedingly abhors. They know not why any mercy is given, nor to what end; and therefore are afraid to own it, lest some sudden alteration should follow, and make it too hot for them to hold it; and all this because they know not the mind of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. Were they but acquainted with it, so far as it is evidently revealed, they would quickly see all things working together to the appointed end.

*3dly. Sinful follies.* Toil and labour in vain is, of all follies, the greatest folly; — like the Jews under Julian, building of their temple in the day, God casting it to the ground in the

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289 1 Kings x. 27.

290 Hab. ii. 14.

291 Isa. lxx. 25.

night. When a man labours, toils, wearies and spends himself for the accomplishing of that which shall never come to pass, and that which, if he would but inquire, he might know shall never come to pass, he cannot well want the livery of a brutish man. How many poor creatures that think themselves wiser than those of Teman, and Dedan, and all the children of the east, do spend and consume their days and time in such ways as this, labouring night and day to set up what God will pull down, and what he hath said shall fall! "Come on, let us deal wisely," saith Pharaoh to his Egyptians, [Exod. i. 10](#), to root out and destroy these Israelites. Poor fool! is there any wisdom or counsel against the Most High? I could give instances plenty in these days of men labouring in the dark, not knowing what they are doing, endeavouring with all their strength to accomplish that whereof the Lord hath said, "It shall not prosper;" and all because they discern not the season.

*4thly. Sinful negligence.* You are no way able to do the work of God in your generation. It is the commendation of many saints of God, that they were "upright, and served the will of God in their generation." Besides the general duties of the covenant, incumbent on all the saints at all seasons, there are special works of providence which, in sundry generations, the Lord effecteth, concerning which he expects his people should know his mind, and serve him in them. Now, can a servant do his master's work if he know not his will? The Lord requireth that, in the great things which he hath to accomplish in this generation, all his should close with him. What is the reason that some stand in the market-place idle all the day? Some work for a season, and then give over; they know not how to go a step farther, but after a day, a week, a month, or year, are at a stand; — worse than all this, some counterwork the Lord with all their strength, — the most neglect the duty which of them is required. What is the reason of all this? They know in no measure what the Lord is doing, and what he would have them apply themselves unto. The best almost live from hand to mouth, following present appearances to the great neglect of the work which the Lord would have hastened amongst us. All this comes from the same root.

But now, if all these sad and sinful consequences attend this nescience of the mind of God as to the things which he is doing in the days wherein we live, so far as he hath revealed himself and requires us to observe his walkings; by what ways and means may we come to the knowledge thereof, that we be not sinfully bewildered in our own cares, fears, and follies, but that we may follow hard after God, and be upright in our generation?

There be four things whereby we may come to have an insight into the work which the Lord will do and accomplish in our days. (*1st.*) The light which he gives. (*2dly.*) The previous works which he doth. (*3dly.*) The expectation of his saints. (*4thly.*) The fear of his adversaries.

(*1st.*) The *light which he gives.* God doth not use to set his people to work in the dark. They are the "children of light," and they are no "deeds of darkness" which they have to do. However others are blinded, they shall see; yea, he always suits their light to their labour, and gives them a clear discerning of what he is about. The Lord God doth nothing, but he



reveals his secrets to his servants. The light of every age is the forerunner of the work of every age.

When Christ was to come in the flesh, John Baptist comes a little before — a new light, a new preacher. And what doth he discover and reveal? Why, he calls them off from resting on legal ceremonies, to the doctrine of faith, repentance, and gospel ordinances; — tells them “the kingdom of God is at hand;” — instructs them in the knowledge of Him who was coming. To what end was all this? Only that the minds of men being enlightened by his preaching, who was a “burning and a shining lamp,” they might see what the Lord was doing.

Every age hath its peculiar work, hath its peculiar light. Now what is the light which God manifestly gives in our days? Surely not new doctrines, as some pretend — (indeed old errors, and long since exploded fancies). Plainly, the peculiar light of this generation is that discovery which the Lord hath made to his people of the mystery of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. The opening, unravelling, and revealing the Antichristian interest, interwoven and coupled together, in civil and spiritual things, into a state opposite to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, is the great discovery of these days. Who almost is there amongst us now who doth not evidently see, that for many generations the western nations have been juggled into spiritual and civil slavery by the legerdemain of the whore, and the potentates of the earth made drunk with the cup of her abominations? — how the whole earth hath been rolled in confusion, and the saints hurried out of the world, to give way to their combined interest? Hath not God unveiled that harlot, made her naked, and discovered her abominable filthiness? Is it not evident to him that hath but half an eye, that the whole present constitution of the government of the nations is so cemented with antichristian mortar, from the very top to the bottom, that without a thorough shaking they cannot be cleansed? This, then, plainly discovers that the work which the Lord is doing relates to the untwining of this close combination against himself and the kingdom of his dear Son; and he will not leave until he have done it. To what degree in the several nations this shaking shall proceed, I have nothing to determine in particular, the Scripture having not expressed it. This only is certain, it shall not stop, nor receive its period, before the interest of Antichristianity be wholly separated from the power of those nations.

(2dly.) The *previous works* he doth. How many of these doth our Saviour give as signs of the destruction of Jerusalem, — and so, consequently, of propagating the gospel more and more to the nations! [Matt. xxiv. 1](#); [Luke xxi. 1](#). How fearful and dreadful they were in their accomplishment, Josephus the Jewish historian relateth; and how by them the Christians were forewarned, and did by them understand what the Lord was doing, Eusebius and others declare. “When,” saith he, “you shall see the abomination of desolation” (the Roman eagles and ensigns) “standing in the holy place,” [Matt. xxiv. 15](#), — or “Jerusalem compassed with armies,” as [Luke xxi. 20](#), — then know by that, that “the end thereof is come, and your deliverance at hand.”

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The works of God are to be sought out of them that have pleasure in them. They are vocal-speaking works; the mind of God is in them. They may be heard, read, and understood: the “rod may be heard, and who hath appointed it.” Now, generally, he begins with lesser works, to point out to the sons of men what he is about to accomplish. By these may his will be known, that he may be met in righteousness.

Now, what, I pray, are the works that the Lord is bringing forth upon the earth? what is he doing in our own and the neighbouring nations? Show me the potentate upon the earth that hath a peaceable molehill to build himself a habitation upon. Are not all the controversies, or the most of them, that at this day are disputed in letters of blood among the nations, somewhat of a distinct constitution from those formerly under debate? — those tending merely to the power and splendour of single persons, these to the interest of the many. Is not the hand of the Lord in all this? Are not the shaking of these heavens of the nations from him? Is not the voice of Christ in the midst of all this tumult? And is not the genuine tendence of these things open and visible unto all? What speedy issue all this will be driven to, I know not; — so much is to be done as requires a long space. Though a tower may be pulled down faster than it was set up, yet that which hath been building a thousand years is not like to go down in a thousand days.

(3dly.) The *expectation of the saints* is another thing from whence a discovery of the will of God and the work of our generation may be concluded. The secret ways of God’s communicating his mind unto his saints, by a fresh favour of accomplishing prophecies and strong workings of the Spirit of supplications, I cannot now insist upon. This I know, they shall not be “led into temptation,” but kept from the hour thereof, when it comes upon the whole earth. When God raiseth up the expectation of his people to any thing, he is not unto them as waters that fail; nay, he will assuredly fulfil the desires of the poor.

Just about the time that our Saviour Christ was to be born of a woman, how were all that waited for salvation in Israel raised up to a high expectation of the kingdom of God! — such as that people never had before, and assuredly shall never have again;<sup>292</sup> yea, famous was the waiting of that season through the whole Roman empire. And the Lord, whom they sought, came to his temple. Eminent was their hope, and excellent was the accomplishment.

Whether this will be made a rule to others or no, I know not: this I am assured, that, being bottomed on promises, and built up with supplications, it is a ground for them to rest upon. And here I dare appeal to all who with any diligence have inquired into the things of the kingdom of Christ, — that have any savour upon their spirits of the accomplishment of prophecies and promises in the latter days, — who count themselves concerned in the glory of the gospel, — whether this thing of consuming the mystery of iniquity, and vindicating the churches of Christ into the liberties purchased for them by the Lord Jesus, by the shaking

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292 Luke iii. 15.

and translating all opposing heights and heavens, be not fully in their expectations. Only, the time is in the hand of God, and the rule of our actings with him is his revealed will.

(*Athly.*) Whether *the fears of his adversaries* have not their lines meeting in the same point, themselves can best determine. The whole world was more or less dreaded at the coming of Christ in the flesh. When, also, the signs of his vengeance did first appear to the Pagan world, in calling to an account for the blood of his saints, the kings and captains presently cry out, “The great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” [Rev. vi. 17.](#)

I am not of counsel to any of the adherents to the man of sin, or any of those who have given their power unto the beast, — I have not a key to the bosoms of the enemies of Christ, — I am neither their interpreter nor do they allow me to speak in their behalf; yet truly, upon very many probable grounds, I am fully persuaded that, were the thoughts of their hearts disclosed, notwithstanding all their glittering shows, dreadful words, threatening expressions, you shall see them tremble, and dread this very thing, that the whole world as now established will be wrapped up in darkness, at least until that cursed interest which is set up against the Lord Jesus be fully and wholly shaken out from the heavens and earth of the nations.

And thus, without leading you about by chronologies and computations (which yet have their use, well to count a number being wisdom indeed), I have a little discovered unto you some rules whereby you may come to be acquainted with the work of God in the days wherein we live, and also what that work is; which is our first use. The next shall be for direction to guide you what you ought to do, when you know what is the work of your generation.

*Use 2.* Be exhorted to prepare to meet the Lord, to make his way straight: and this I would press distinctly, — (1.) As to your persons; (2.) As to your employments.

(1.) As to *your persons*. Give the Lord Jesus a throne in your hearts, or it will not at all be to your advantage that he hath a throne and kingdom in the world. Perhaps you will see the plenty of it, but not taste one morsel. Take first that which comes not by observation, — that which is within you, which is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Take it in its power, and you will be the better enabled to observe it coming in its glory. “Seek first this kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Oh, that it were the will of God to put an end to all that pretended holiness, hypocritical humiliation, self-interested religion, that have been among us, whereby we have flattered God with our lips, whilst our hearts have been far from him! Oh, that it might be the glory of this assembly, above all the assemblies of the world, that every ruler in it might be a sincere subject in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus! Oh, that it might suffice that we have had in our parliament, and among our ministers, so much of the form and so little of the power of godliness; that we have called the world Christ, and lusts Christ, and self Christ,





working indeed for them, when we pretended all for Christ! Oh, that I could nourish this one contention in your honourable assembly, that you might strive who should excel in setting up the Lord Jesus in your hearts!

You may be apt to think, that if you can carry on and compass your purposes, then all your enemies will be assuredly disappointed. Do but embrace the Lord Jesus in his kingly power in your bosoms, and “*ipso facto*” all your enemies are everlastingly disappointed. You are the grains which, in the sifting of the nation, have been kept from falling to the ground. Are you not the residue of all the chariots of England? Oh, that in you might appear the reality of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which hath been so long pretended by others! — that sound righteousness, not a pharisaical, rigid, supercilious affectation, not a careless belief and comportment, the issue of novel fancies, might be found upon your spirits! — that you may be thought meet to rejoice with the Lord in his kingdom! Otherwise this day of the Lord which we have described, however desired and longed after, will be “darkness to you, and not light.”

(2.) In reference to your *great employments*, whereunto the Lord hath called you. And here I shall briefly hold out unto you one or two things.

[1.] That you would seriously consider why it is that the Lord shakes the heavens and the earth of the nations, — to what end this tendeth, and what is the cause thereof. Is it not from hence, that he may revenge their opposition to the kingdom of his dear Son? — that he may shake out of the midst of them all that antichristian mortar wherewith, from their first chaos, they have been cemented, that so the kingdoms of the earth may become the kingdoms of the Lord Jesus? Is not the controversy of Zion pleaded with them Are not they called to an account for the transgression of that charge given to all potentates, “Touch not mine anointed?” And what is the aim of the Lord Jesus herein, whose mighty voice shakes them? Is it not to frame and form them for the interest of his own kingdom? — that he may fulfil the word he hath spoken to Zion, “I will make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness?”

Consider, then, I pray, what you have in hand. Wait upon your King, the Lord Christ, to know his mind. If you lay any stone in the whole building that advanceth itself against his sceptre, he will shake all again. Dig you never so deep, build you never so high, it shall be shaken. Nay, that there be no opposition will not suffice:— he hath given light enough to have all things framed for his own advantage. The time is come, yea, the full time is come, that it should be so; and he expects it from you. Say not, in the first place, this or that suits the interest of England; but look what suits the interest of Christ, and assure yourselves that the true interest of any nation is wrapped up therein. More of this in the treatise annexed to my sermon of January 31.<sup>293</sup>

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293 *Vide Discourse concerning Toleration, etc.*

[2.] Be encouraged under all those perplexities and troubles which you are or may be wrapped in. Lift up the hands that hang down, and let the feeble knees be strengthened: "It is but yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." The more you are for Christ, the more enemies you shall be sure to have; but the Lamb shall overcome. He is come to revenge the blood of his slain upon this generation, and to free the residue from the jaws of the terrible. He is our rock, and his work is perfect. What he hath begun, faster or slower, he will surely accomplish. It is a thing of the utmost imaginable indifferency whether any of our particular persons behold these things here below or not. If otherwise, we shall for the present have "rest with him, and stand in our lot at the end of the days;" but for the work itself, "the decree is gone forth," and it shall not be recalled. Receive strength and refreshment in the Lord.

*Use 3.* Wonder not, when the heaven is shaken, if you see the stars fall to the ground. We had some who pretended to be church stars, that were merely fixed, to all men's view and by their own confession, in the political heavens. The first shaking of this nation shook them utterly to the ground. If others also tremble like an aspen leaf, and know not which wind to yield unto, or sail backwards and forwards by the same gale, wonder not at that neither. When men lay any other foundation than the immovable corner-stone, at one time or other, sooner or later, assuredly they will be shaken.

*Use 4.* Let the professing people that are amongst us look well to themselves: "The day is coming that will burn like an oven." Dross will not endure this day: we have many a hypocrite as yet to be uncased. Take heed, you that act high, if a false heart, a defiled heart be amongst you, there shall be no place for it in the mountain of the Lord's house. "The inhabitants of Zion shall be all righteous," [Isa. lx. 21](#). Many that make a great show now upon the stage, shall be turned off with shame enough. Try and search your hearts; force not the Lord to lay you open to all. The spirit of judgment and burning will try you. Tremble, I pray; for you are entering the most purging, trying furnace that ever the Lord set up on the earth.

*Use 5.* Be loose from all shaken things:— you see the clouds return after the rain, — one storm in the neck of another. Thus it must be, until Christ hath finished his whole work. "Seeing that all these things must be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all manner of holy conversation?" Let your eyes be upwards, and your hearts be upwards, and your hands be upwards, that you be not moved at the passing away of shaken things. I could here encourage you by the glorious issue of all these shakings, whose foretaste might be as marrow to your bones, though they should be appointed to consumption before the accomplishment of it; but I must close.

*Use 6.* See the vanity, folly, madness of such as labour to oppose the bringing in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. Canst thou hinder the *rain* from descending upon the earth when it is falling? Canst thou stop the *sun* from rising at its appointed hour? Will the *conception* for thee dwell quietly in the womb beyond its month? Surely thou mayest with far



more ease turn and stop the current and course of nature than obstruct the bringing in of the kingdom of Christ in righteousness and peace. Whence comes it to pass that so many nations are wasted, destroyed, spoiled, in the days wherein we live? — that God hath taken quietness and peace from the earth? Doubtless from hence, that they will smite themselves against the “stone cut out of the mountain without hands.” Shall not “the decree bring forth?” Is it not in vain to fight against the Lord? Some are angry, some troubled, some in the dark, some full of revenge; but the truth is, whether they will hear or forbear, Babylon shall fall, and all the glory of the earth be stained, and the kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Sermon VI.

The

branch of the Lord the beauty of Zion;

or,

the glory of the church in its relation unto Christ.

Opened in two sermons;

one preached at Berwick, the other at Edinburgh.



## **Prefatory note.**

All the information which can be given respecting these sermons on [Isa. lvi. 7](#), will be found in the "Life," vol. i. p. 45, and the dedication to Cromwell which is prefixed to them. The first sermon was preached at Berwick, July 21, 1650. The date of the dedication is November 26, 1650. There is no record of Owen's proceedings in Scotland. The decisive battle of Dunbar, September 3, 1650, placed Edinburgh in the hands of Cromwell. The castle for a time held out against him; and as the Presbyterian ministers who had retired to it refused to issue from it on the Sabbath to fill the pulpits in the town, there is every likelihood that Owen found constant employment in preaching the gospel. A celebrated correspondence took place between those ministers, as represented by Dundas, the commandant of the fortress, and Oliver Cromwell. The latter offered them liberty to preach in their respective churches. Not much to their credit, they declined to avail themselves of this permission, on the ground of "the personal persecution" of which they were afraid if they ventured to quit the castle. Cromwell replies with insinuations that they wished "worldly power," and made "worldly mixtures to accomplish the same," and advises them to "trust to the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God;" alleging, at the same time, that though they had not listened to his public appeals, "the Lord hath heard us," in the victory of Dunbar. The ministers, in their reply, and in allusion to the practices of Cromwell's officers, "regret that men of mere civil place and employment should usurp the calling and employment of the ministry, particularly in Scotland, contrary to the government and discipline therein established, — to the maintenance whereof you are bound by the Solemn League and Covenant;" and state that they "have not so learned Christ as to hang the equity of their cause upon events." Cromwell, in a long answer, with a postscript of four queries, betraying some temper at the smart rejoinder of the clergy, complains that they make themselves "infallible expositors of the Covenant;" and winds up a reproof to them for calling such successes as that achieved at Dunbar "bare events," with the characteristic words, "The Lord pity you." In one of the postscript queries he has very manifestly the advantage, when he twits the ministers with their inconsistency in "crying down Malignants, and yet 'setting up the head of them,' Charles Stuart." It has been thought that the hand of Owen can be traced in the letters of Cromwell; and Hume speaks of them "as the best of Cromwell's wretched compositions." The improvement in the composition may be ascribed to the greater leisure which Cromwell possessed at this time, while waiting the reduction of the castle. The letters are deeply impregnated with all the strongly-marked peculiarities of Cromwell's style of thought, — the perpetual emphasis of a resolute will, expressed in sentences "lumbering," indeed, but, like his own sword, sharp as well as heavy. Owen, we cannot but think, would have been more successful in reply to some of the statements of the ministers, and especially to the charge which they preferred against Cromwell, of suspending the equity of his cause upon his



outward success. See Owen's answer to such an accusation in the prefatory note to the third sermon in this volume. — Ed.

**To his excellency, the Lord General Cromwell, etc.**

My Lord,

It was with thoughts of peace that I embraced my call to this place in time of war. As all peace that is from God is precious to my spirit, so incomparably that between the Father and his elect, which is established and carried on in the blood and grace of Jesus Christ. The ministerial dispensation of this peace being through free grace committed even unto me also, I desire that in every place my whole may be, to declare it to the men of God's good pleasure. That this was my chief design, in answer to the call of God upon me, even to pour out a savour of the gospel upon the sons of peace in this place, I hope is manifest to the consciences of all with whom (since my coming hither) in the work of the ministry I have had to do. The enmity between God and us began on our part; — the peace which he hath made begins and ends with himself. This is the way of God with sinners: when he might justly continue their enemy, and fight against them to their eternal ruin, he draws forth love, and beseeches them to be reconciled who have done the wrong, and them to accept of peace who cannot abide the battle. Certainly the bearing forth of this message, which is so “worthy of all acceptation,” and ought to be so welcome, cannot but have sweetness enough to season all the pressures and temptations wherewith it is sometimes attended. This it hath been my desire to pursue, and that with the weapons which are not carnal. And though some may be so seasoned with the leaven of contention about carnal things, or at best the tithing of mint and cummin, as to disrelish the weightier things of the gospel, yet the great Owner of the vineyard hath not left me without a comfortable assurance that even this labour in the Lord hath not been in vain.

The following sermons, which I desire to present unto your excellency, were preached, one at Berwick, upon your first advance into Scotland, the other at Edinburgh. My willingness to serve the inheritance of Christ here, even in my absence, caused me to close with the desires that were held out to this purpose. And I do present them to your excellency, not only because the rise of my call to this service, under God, was from you; but also, because in the carrying of it on I have received from you, in the weaknesses and temptations wherewith I am encompassed, that daily spiritual refreshment and support by inquiry into, and discovery of, the deep and hidden dispensations of God towards his secret ones — which my spirit is taught to value. The carrying on of the interest of the Lord Jesus amongst his saints, in all his ways, which are truth and righteousness — the matter pointed at in this discourse — being the aim of your spirit in your great undertakings, it bears another respect unto you. I am not unacquainted with its meanness, yea, its coming short, in respect of use and fruit, of what the Lord hath since and by others drawn forth; but such as it is, having by Providence stepped first into the world, I wholly commend it to him for an incense who graciously “supplied the seed to the sower;” — beseeching him that we may have joy unspeakable and glorious

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in the acceptance of that peace which he gives us in the Son of his love, whilst the peace whose desire in the midst of war you continually bear forth to him and to others, is by them rejected to their hurt.

Your Excellency's  
Most humble Servant in our dearest Lord,

J. Owen.

Edinburgh, *Nov.* 26, 1650.



## Sermon VI. The branch of the Lord the beauty of Zion: or, the glory of the church in its relation unto Christ.

“For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” [Isa. lvi. 7.](#)

From [verse 3 of this chapter to verse 8](#), you have promises and predictions of calling in Gentiles and strangers to the church of God, notwithstanding any objections or hindrances laid in their way by ceremonial and typical constitutions, — they being all to be removed in the cross of Christ, [Eph. ii. 13–16](#); [Col. ii. 14](#); — making way for the accomplishment of that signal promise which is given in [the 2d chapter of this prophecy, verses 2, 3](#), “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it: and many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up,” etc.

The words of [verse 7](#) are a recapitulation of the whole, holding out summarily the calling of the Gentiles to the holy mount, or spiritual church of Christ; where also you have a description of the services performed by them upon their coming: “Their burnt-offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar;” — answerable to that eminent prediction of the solemn worship of the called Gentiles, [Mal. i. 11](#), “For from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.” The spiritual services of the saints of the Gentiles are in each place set forth by those ceremonial ordinances of incense, altar, and sacrifice, as were then most acceptable, from the Lord’s own appointment.

Now, this whole promise is once again strengthened, without loss of life or beauty, and comprised in the words of the text. That which before he termed “sacrifice and burnt-offerings,” here he calleth “prayer;” and those who before were “the sons of the stranger,” are here “all people,” — some, many of all sorts, the whole world, all men, without distinction, the partition wall being broken down.

The thing here spoken of is God’s house, described, — First, By its appropriation unto him; it is his peculiar, — “My house.” Secondly, By its extent of receipt in respect of others; it is “for all people.” Thirdly, By the employment of its inhabitants; that is, prayer, — it “shall be called an house of prayer.”

“House” here may be taken two ways.

1. *Properly*, as it was in the type for the material temple at Jerusalem; whereunto these words are applied by our Saviour, [Matt. xxi](#). But that is no farther concerned herein, but as the spiritual holiness of the antitype could not be represented without a ceremonial holiness of the type.



2. *Spiritually*, for the church of Christ to be gathered to him out of all nations; the house wherein “*juge sacrificium*,” a continual spiritual sacrifice, is to be offered to him: this is peculiarly intended.

So, then, observe, — I. *Christ’s church of saints, of believers, is God’s house*. II. *The church of Christ under the gospel is to be gathered out of all nations*. III. *There are established ordinances and appointed worship for the church of Christ under the gospel*. It is the first that I shall speak unto.

Christ’s church of saints, of believers, is God’s house.

That his church is of saints and believers will appear in the issue.

By the church of Christ I understand, *primarily*, the whole multitude of them who antecedently are chosen of his Father, and given unto him; consequently, are redeemed, called, and justified in his blood; — the church which he loved, and gave himself for, “that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish,” [Eph. v. 26, 27](#). And, *secondarily*, also every holy assembly of mount Zion, whereunto the Lord Christ is made beauty and glory, — every particular church of his saints, inasmuch as they partake of the nature of the whole, being purchased by his blood, [Acts xx. 28](#).

That this church belongs unto God, I shall only leave evidenced under the claim whereby he here appropriates it to himself; he calls it his: “*My house*.”

That it is his *house*, I shall farther demonstrate. Three things are required to the making of a house:— first, *A foundation*; secondly, *Materials for a superstruction*; thirdly, *An orderly framing of both into a useful building*; — and all these concur to the church of Christ.

First. It hath a foundation. “I have laid the foundation,” saith Paul, [1 Cor. iii. 10](#); and, “Other foundation can no man lay, save that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” [verse 11](#). That which Paul laid *ministerially*, God himself laid *primarily* and *efficiently*. “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation,” [Isa. xxviii. 16](#). Now, this foundation is no other but the rock upon which the church is built, [Matt. xvi. 18](#), which makes it impregnable to the gates of hell, communicating strength and permanency continually to every part of the building.

Secondly. A foundation only will not *make* a house, — there must also be materials for a superstruction. Those you have, [1 Pet. ii. 5](#). “Ye are,” saith he, “lively stones.” All God’s elect are stones, in due time to be hewed and fitted for this building.

Thirdly. Materials themselves will not serve: they must be fitly framed, and wisely disposed, or they will be a heap, not a house. This, then, is not wanting. Yet “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit,” [Eph. ii.](#)

20–22. There is much spiritual and heavenly architecture in these three verses. I shall only touch on some particulars.

1. The foundation of this house, this temple, is laid; and that is Jesus Christ: “Other foundation can no man lay.” He is here called “The chief corner-stone,” and, “The foundation of the apostles and prophets.” It is not, which they were, but which they laid. It is “genitivus efficientis,” not “materiæ,” that expression holds out, — the persons *working*, not the thing *wrought*.

2. The materials of this building, — elect, believers; said in [the former verse](#) to be “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” They alone are built on Christ, and thereby have union with him: not one dead, rotten stone in all this building, as shall be declared.

3. The architects or builders are of two sorts.

(1.) Principal: “The Spirit;” — we are “framed for an habitation of God by the Spirit;” he is the principal workman in this fabric, — without him is not one stone laid therein.

(2.) Secondary and instrumental: “The apostles and prophets.” And this they were two ways.

[1.] Personally, in their several generations; — this was their work, their labour, to lay the foundation and carry on the building of this house.

[2.] Doctrinally; so they labour in it to this very day; — their doctrine in the Scripture holds out the only foundation, and the only way of building thereon.

4. The manner of the building: it is “fitly framed together,” συναρμοσθούμενη, closely jointed and knit in together, sweetly closed together with Christ, “the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God,” [Col. ii. 19](#).

5. What kind of a house it is. It receiveth here a twofold title, “An holy temple,” and “An habitation,” or tabernacle; because of its allusion to both those holy places of the worship of God, fulfilling the types of them both. Hence it is most evident that this church of Christ is a house, and being appropriated unto God, God’s house. To make this the more evident, I shall do these two things:—

(1.) Show you what are the chief properties of this house. (2.) Declare what is the relation wherein Jesus Christ stands to this house, having called it all along the church of Christ. (1.) For the properties, or chief qualities of this house, they are three:— [1.] It is a living house; [2.] It is strong; [3.] It is glorious.

[1.] It is a *living* house: “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,” [1 Pet. ii. 4, 5](#). Christ, the foundation, is a living stone, and they that are built upon him are living stones. Hence they are said to grow together into a house. Growth is a sign of life, growing from an inward principle. Such as the growth of any thing is, such is its life. The growth of this house is spiritual, so therefore also is its life; —



it lives with a spiritual life, a life whose fulness is in its foundation. He hath “life in himself,” [John v. 26](#), and they from him: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live,” [Gal. ii. 20](#); yea, it is himself in them, — “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” It is true, those stones are dead in the rock as well as others; “by nature children of wrath as well as they,” [Eph. ii. 3](#); being “dead in trespasses and sins,” [verse 1](#). He who hews them out gives them life; — he quickens them when dead in trespasses and sins. There is not one rotten, dead stone in all this building. However some such may, by the advantage of their outward appearance, crowd in, yet they are not of the house itself.

[2.] It is a *strong* house: “The gates of hell cannot prevail against it,” [Matt. xvi. 18](#). Though the rain descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow upon this house, yet it will not fall, because it is founded on a rock, [Matt. vii. 25](#). We were all once a house built upon Adam; and when the wind came, and beat upon us, we fell; and the fall of that house was very great. He in his best estate was found to be but sand; now we are built upon a rock that will abide all trials:— the waves may make a noise, and dash themselves against him, but it will be to their own ruin.

But you will say, May not weak and inconsistent materials be built upon a rock, which yet may have never the more strength for their foundation?

It is not so here, for the whole building is framed together in the foundation, [Eph. ii. 22](#); not only on it, but also in it, and so not to be prevailed against, unless the rock itself be overthrown. And it is a living rock that this house is built on, — a rock continually communicating strength unto every stone in the building, that it may be enabled to abide in him. I should proceed too far, should I go to declare the mighty defence and fortification of this house; — what hath been spoken from the foundation is enough to demonstrate it to be a strong house.

[3.] It is a *glorious* house, and that in a threefold respect.

*1st.* It is glorious in respect of inward glory, brought unto it of God in the face of Jesus Christ, being beautiful through the comeliness that he puts upon it. Hence Christ speaking of it says, “How fair art thou, O love, for delights!” [Cant. vii. 6](#); and, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee,” [chap. iv. 7](#). And how, I pray, comes that about? Why, Christ washeth it in his own blood, that it might be wholly “a glorious church,” [Eph. v. 26, 27](#). And farther, he being “The branch of the Lord and fruit of the earth,” is made beauty and glory, excellency and comeliness, thereunto, [Isa. iv. 2](#).

It hath the beauty and glory of justification, which doth not only take away all filthy garments, causing iniquity to pass away, but also gives fair “change of raiment,” [Zech. iii. 4, 5](#), even the “garments of salvation,” and the “robe of righteousness,” [Isa. lxi. 10](#). And then it hath the glory and beauty of sanctification; whence “the King’s daughter is all glorious within,” [Ps. xlv. 13](#). The comeliness and beauty that is in a sanctified soul is above all the glory of the world. This house is all overlaid with gold within; Christ is unto it “a head of



gold," [Cant. v. 11](#). His house is not like Nebuchadnezzar's image, that the head should be of gold, and the members some of them of clay; — they all partake of his nature, and are very glorious therein.

*2dly.* In respect of its outward structure, which it eminently hath in all the peculiar assemblies thereof: "O thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires. I will make thy windows of agates and carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones," [Isa. liv. 11, 12](#). So, also, where it is called the new Jerusalem, — a city, from its laws and polity, this "city" is said to be of "pure gold," — not dross and mire, — "the building of the wall of jasper, and the foundations of the wall garnished with all manner of precious stones," [Rev. xxi. 18, 19](#). This is that which the psalmist calls. "The beauty of holiness," [Ps. cx. 3](#). The glory of the ordinances of the gospel is their vigour and purity. There is nothing so glorious as our King on his throne, Christ in his court, this house reigning in the administration of his ordinances:— the "all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made him glad. Kings' daughters are among his honourable women: upon his right hand doth stand the queen in gold of Ophir," [Ps. xlv. 8, 9](#). His goings are seen, the goings of our God and King in the sanctuary, [Ps. lxxviii. 24, 25](#), etc. The apostle exalteth the glory of gospel administrations exceedingly above the old tabernacle and temple worship, — which yet was exceeding pompous and glorious. "If," saith he, "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious," [2 Cor. iii. 7–11](#). Let men think as meanly as they please of the spiritual service of God amongst his people, all glory that ever yet appeared in the world was but a bubble to it, — all that God ever instituted before came exceeding short of it. He delights in it who beholds the proud afar off.

*3dly.* It is glorious in respect of the exaltation it hath above and the triumph over all its opposers. To see a house, a palace, hung round about with ensigns, spoils, and banners taken from the enemies that have come against it, is a glorious thing:— thus is this house of God decked: "Kings of armies did flee apace, and she that tarried at home divided the spoil," [Ps. lxxviii. 12](#). "She that tarries at home," the mother of the family, the church of God, she "hath all the spoils." The Lord hath affirmed, that not only every one that opposeth, but all that do not serve this house, shall be utterly destroyed, [Isa. lx. 12](#). There you have the spoil of Pharaoh, and all his host, gathered on the shore of the Red sea, and dedicated in this house, [Exod. xv](#). There you have the robes of Nebuchadnezzar, reserved when himself was turned

into a beast, [Dan. iv. 1](#). There you have the imperial ornaments of Diocletian and his companion, casting aside their dominion for very madness that they could not prevail against this house. There is the blood of Julian, kept for a monument of vengeance against apostates. There you have the rochets of the prelates of this land, hung up of late, with other garments of their adherents, rolled in blood. There is a place reserved for the remaining spoils of the great whore, when she shall be burned, and made naked, and desolate, [Rev. xi](#). Never any rose, or shall arise, against this house, and go forth unto final prosperity. Let the men of the world take heed how they burden themselves with the foundation-stone of this house; — it will assuredly break them all in pieces.

Thus have I given you a glimpse of this house, with the chief properties of it, which as God assumes as his own, so also peculiarly it belongs unto the Lord Christ; yea, what relation it stands in unto him, or rather he unto it, is the main thing I intend.

(2.) Jesus Christ stands in a twofold relation unto this house:— [1.] In respect of its fabric and building; [2.] In respect of its state and condition.

[1.] In the first regard, Christ relates to this house in a fourfold respect; — as, *1st.* Its foundation; *2dly.* Its ark; *3dly.* Its altar; *4thly.* Its candlestick.

I shall pass through these, God assisting, in order, and begin with what was first laid down, — his relation to this house, as, —

*1st.* The *foundation* of it. This was in part declared before. He is the stone which the builders rejected, but made of the Lord the head of the corner, [Ps. cxviii. 22](#). He is the lowest in the bottom, to bear up the weight of the building; and the highest in the corner, to couple the whole together. “Other foundation can no man lay but that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” [1 Cor. iii. 11](#). He is the rock on which he builds his church, [Matt. xvi. 18](#).

Now there are three things required to a foundation, all which are eminently seen in the Lord Christ, in reference to this house.

(*1st.*) That it be *first* laid in the building. It were a course exceeding preposterous, first to build a house, and then to lay the foundation. Jesus Christ is the first that is laid in this holy fabric, and that in a fourfold respect.

[*1st.*] He is the first in respect of God’s eternal purpose. The Lord purposed that “he should have the pre-eminence” in this as well as in all other things, [Col. i. 18](#). He is in that respect “the first-born among many brethren,” [Rom. viii. 29](#), the residue of this house being predestinated to be made conformable unto him. “He is before all things: by him all things” — that is, all spiritual things, all the things of this house — “consist: he is the head of the body, the church.” This I mean, God purposed that Christ should be the bottom and foundation of this whole building, — that it should be all laid on him. I do not mean that God first intended Christ for a foundation, and then his elect for building (the order of in-



tention and execution is, as to first and last, inverted by all agents); but this I say, God purposing to build his elect into a holy temple, purposed that Jesus Christ should be the foundation.

[2dly.] In respect of outward manifestation. God first manifests and declares him, before he laid one stone in this building. [Gen. iii. 15](#), The seed, saith he, of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:— in that was laid the first stone of this building. Then was the “Lamb slain,” ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, [Rev. xiii. 8](#), presently “after the foundation of the world:” and thence is grace in him said to be given to the elect, πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων, [Tit. i. 2](#), “many ages ago.”

[3dly.] Because, in order of nature, Christ must be first laid in the heart of every individual stone before they are laid up in this building. If Christ be not in men, they are ἀδόκιμοι, [2 Cor. xiii. 7](#), — altogether useless for this building. Try them never so often, they must at last be rejected and laid aside.

[4thly.] In respect of every particular assembly and little sanctuary of mount Zion. If he be not first laid in the midst of such assemblies, they will prove to be pinnacles of Babel, not towers of Zion. This, therefore, was the way of the saints of old, first to give up themselves to the Lord Christ, and then to one another, by the will of God, [2 Cor. viii. 5](#).

In these respects Christ the foundation is first laid in this spiritual building, — which is the first property of a foundation.

(2dly.) A foundation must be hidden and out of sight unto all those that outwardly look upon the house. They cannot perceive it, though every part of the house doth rest upon it. And this hath occasioned many mistakes in the world. An unwise man coming to a great house, seeing the antics and pictures [figures?] stand crouching under the windows and sides of the house, may haply think that they bear up the weight of the house, when indeed they are for the most part pargeted posts. They bear not the house, — the house bears them. By their bowing, and outward appearance, the man thinks the burden is on them, and supposes that it would be an easy thing, at any time, by taking them away, to demolish the house itself. But when he sets himself to work, he finds these things of no value; there is a foundation in the bottom, which bears up the whole, that he thought not of:— against that he may waste himself, until he be broken in pieces. Men looking upon the church, do find that it is a fair fabric indeed, but cannot imagine how it should stand. A few supporters it seemeth to have in the world, like crouching antics under the windows, that make some show of underpropping it:— here you have a magistrate, there an army, or so. Think the men of the world, “Can we but remove these props, the whole would quickly topple to the ground.” Yea, so foolish have I been myself, and so void of understanding before the Lord, as to take a view



of some goodly appearing props of this building, and to think, How shall the house be preserved if these should be removed? — they looked unto me like the mariners in Paul's ship, without whose abode therein they could not be saved, — when, lo! suddenly some have been manifested to be pargeted posts, and the very best to be held up by the house, and not to hold it up. On this account the men of the world think it no great matter to demolish the spiritual church of Christ to the ground:— they encourage one another to the work, never thinking of the foundation that lies hidden, against which they dash themselves all to pieces. I say, then, Christ, as the foundation of this house, is hidden to the men of the world, — they see it not, they believe it not. There is nothing more remote from their apprehension than that Christ should be at the bottom of them and their ways, whom they so much despise.

(3dly.) The foundation is that which bears up the whole weight of the building. What part of the house soever is not directly poised upon it hath no strength at all. Take a goodly stone, hew it, square it, make it every way fit for your fabric, so that it may seem to be the best of all your materials; yet if you do not lay it upon the foundation, answerable to that which may give it a solid basis, and bear up the weight and poise thereof, it will be useless, cumbersome, and quickly fall to the ground.

Let a man be hewed and squared by the word and ordinances into outward conformity never so exactly, that he seems one of the most beautiful saints in the world; yet if he be not laid rightly by faith upon the foundation, to derive from thence strength, supportment, and vigour, he will quickly fall to the ground. What, then, will become of their building who heap up all sorts of rubbish to make a house for the, Lord?

2dly. Christ is the ark of this house. The ark in the tabernacle, and afterward in the temple, was the most holy thing in the most holy place. There was nothing in it but the two tables of stone written with the finger of God; — before it was Aaron's rod that budded, with a pot full of manna; — over it was the propitiatory, or mercy-seat, being a plate of gold as long and as broad as the ark, covering it, being shadowed with the cherubims of glory. Now all this glorious fabric did signify, that unless the law with its condemning power were hid in the ark, and covered with the mercy-seat, no person could stand before the Lord. Besides, the law was the old covenant of works, and being renewed unto them chiefly to be subservient to the gospel, and partly, with its appurtenances mad carnal administration, to be the tenure of the Israelites' holding the land of Canaan, and this being in the ark, it was said to contain the covenant, and is frequently called "The ark of the covenant." Jesus Christ is the ark of this spiritual house. When the temple was opened in heaven, there was seen in the temple the ark of God's testament, [Rev. xi. 19](#), — Jesus Christ, made conspicuous to all, who lay much hid under the old testament, [Rom. iii. 25](#). God is said to set forth Christ to be ἰλαστήριον, "a propitiation," or mercy-seat; for by that very term is the mercy-seat expressed, [Heb. ix. 5](#). He is, then, the ark and the mercy-seat covering it. He, then, doth these two things:—



(1st.) In behalf of this house, and every stone thereof, he hides the law with its condemning power, that nothing from thence shall be laid to their charge. If a man have a suit to be tried in any court, and a powerful friend engage himself that the only evidence which is against him shall not be produced, will it not give him encouragement to proceed? In that great and tremendous trial which is to be above, there is but one principal evidence against us, which gives life to all others; which if it be removed all the rest must fail:— this is the law. Christ, as the ark and mercy-seat, hides this law; — it shall not (I speak in respect to this house) be produced at the day of trial. Will not this be a great encouragement to them to appear at the throne of God? Christ hides the law, as being “the end” of it, [Rom. x. 4](#), “that the righteousness thereof might be fulfilled in us,” [Rom. viii. 4](#). He hath so far answered all that the law required, that none from thence can “lay anything to the charge of God’s elect,” [Rom. viii. 33, 34](#). Let not poor sinners fear, it will not be with them as with Uzzah:— he touched the ark and died; touch this ark, and live forever. And, —

(2dly.) He is the ark of this house, as containing in himself the new covenant; it is made with him originally, established in him irreversibly, — made out through him in all the grace of it faithfully.

3dly. He is the *altar* of this house. There were two altars in the old tabernacle and temple, — an altar for sacrifice and an altar for incense, [Exod. xxvii. 1, xxx. 1](#). The first was the great brazen altar that stood without the holy place, whereon the burnt-offerings and all sacrifices of blood for remission were offered. The other less, made of shittim-wood, all overlaid with pure gold, and a crown of beaten gold upon it, on which they were to burn pure incense unto the Lord always. And they were both most holy, sanctifying the gifts with legal sanctification that were offered on them, [Matt. xxiii. 19](#). Now, both these doth our Saviour supply in this house. He is the great altar of sacrifice, the altar of offerings for expiation and atonement: “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle,” [Heb. xiii. 10](#); that is, even He who sanctified the people with his own blood, and suffered without the gate, [verse 11](#). The good-will and soul of Christ offering up himself, through the eternal Spirit, a pure oblation and sacrifice, by one offering to perfect for ever them that are sanctified, is all our altar. He is also the golden altar of incense. Incense is prayer, [Ps. cxli. 2](#), “Let my prayer come before thee as incense.” Jesus Christ is the golden altar whereon that incense is offered, [Rev. viii. 3, 4](#), even that altar which is always before God, [Rev. ix. 13](#). As by being the former he makes our persons accepted, so by the latter he makes our duties accepted. And all the living stones of this house are priests to offer sacrifice on these altars. By him, as priests, they have approximation to the holy place; — there they have a share and participation in all the sacrifices that are offered upon or by him.

4th. He is the candlestick of this house. The making, fashioning, and use of the candlestick in the holy place of the tabernacle, you have, [Exod. xxv. 31](#), etc. It was one of the most glorious utensils of that frame, made of pure and beaten gold, with much variety of works,



— knops, flowers, and lamps. The use of it was, to bear out light for all the worship of God in that most holy place. The tabernacle was made close, without any window. It was not to receive light from without; it had all its own light from within. It is true, this candlestick, with its seven lamps, did secondarily represent the churches of Christ, which hold out his light among themselves and unto others, [Rev. i. 20](#), “The seven candlesticks thou sawest are the seven churches.” Therefore Solomon made “ten candlesticks of pure gold,” [1 Kings vii. 49](#), to set out yet farther the increase and multiplying of the churches of God. Upon this account, also, the two witnesses are said to be “two candlesticks,” [Rev. xi. 4](#), and “the two anointed ones that stand before the God of the whole earth,” [Zech. iv. 3](#), whence that in the Revelation is taken. There is mention, indeed, of two anointed ones, but of one candlestick; — the Holy Ghost plainly intimating, that though the churches and witnesses of Christ are also candlesticks in a second sense, yet there is one eminent candlestick, which hath light originally in itself, which also it communicates unto all others. And this is that which is mentioned in [Zech iv.](#), which hath the “two olive-trees,” or the two anointed churches of Jews and Gentiles, standing by it, receiving light from it to communicate to others: they empty the golden oil out of themselves which they receive from the candlestick. For this candlestick hath “seven lamps,” [verse 2](#); which lamps, that burn before the throne, are the “seven Spirits of God,” [Rev. iv. 5](#), — seven Spirits, that is, the perfection and completeness of the Spirit of God in all his graces and operations. Now, who hath these seven Spirits? Even he who received not the Spirit “by measure,” [John iii. 34](#), being the “stone” upon which are the “seven eyes,” [Zech. iii. 9](#). He alone, then, is this candlestick, and all the light which this house hath it is from him.

There are two ways whereby Jesus Christ make., out light to this house:— (*1st.*) By way of doctrinal revelation; (*2dly.*) Of real communication.

(*1st.*) He alone discovers light to all the stones of this building: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” [John i. 18](#). No saving discovery of God, of his nature, his will, his love, but what is by Christ. The moon and stars give light; but it is only what they receive from the sun. The prophets and apostles held out light; but it was all received from him. They spake by the Spirit of Christ that was in them. “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,” [1 Cor. xi. 23](#). The same apostle curses every one that shall bring in any other light into this house, be they angels or men, [Gal. i. 8, 9](#). Christ alone fully knows the mind of God, as being always “in the bosom of the Father,” [John i. 18](#); yea, he knows it to the uttermost, being one with his Father, [John x. 30](#). And he is willing to reveal it; for even “for this end came he into the world, that he might bear witness to the truth.” And he had ability enough to do it, for “in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” [Col. ii. 3](#). He alone is the author of all light to this his holy habitation. Many attempts have been to set up light in this house, and not from Christ. Some would kindle their traditions, for the doctrine of



this house; some their prudentials, for the government of it; some their ceremonials, for the worship of it; — all candles in the sun. Shall men think to compass themselves with sparks, and walk in the light of the fire which themselves have kindled, in the face of the Sun of righteousness? Shall not such men lie down in sorrow? Beloved, *take heed of such “ignes fatui,”* — foolish, misguiding fires.

(*2dly.*) By way of real communication. He is” the true Light, which lighteth every man,” [John i. 9](#). Every one that hath any spiritual light really communicated to him hath it from Christ. It is part of his work to “recover sight to the blind,” [Luke iv. 18](#). And therefore he adviseth the church of Laodicea to come to him for eye-salve, that she might see, [Rev. iii. 18](#). At his coming, Zion shines forth, [Isa. lx. 1](#); because his light ariseth upon her, [verse 2](#). The former doctrinal teaching of itself will not suffice: that light may shine in darkness, and the darkness not comprehend it, [John i. 5](#). All the light the sun can give will not make a blind man see: there must be a visive faculty within as well as light without. The stones of this building are by nature all blind, — yea, darkened, — yea, darkness itself. If the Lord Christ do not, by the mighty efficacy of his Spirit, create a visive power within them, as well as reveal the will of his Father to them, they will never spiritually discern the things of God. The natural man discerneth not the things of God, nor indeed can do, [1 Cor. ii. 14](#). It is true, men, by the help of common gifts, with the use of the former doctrinal revelation, may attain to such a knowledge of the mind of God as may, in a sense, be called illumination, [Heb. vi. 4](#). Far may they go, much may they do, by this light:— they may teach others, and be cast away themselves; — they may dispute for truth, yea, die for truth, and all this while have but the first, common anointing, — see nothing clearly, but men walking like trees. A spiritual insight into the mind of God is not to be obtained without an almighty act of the Spirit of Christ, creating a new power of life and light upon the soul. Some, indeed, think that they have this seeing power in themselves. Do but show them outwardly what is to be seen, and let them alone for the discerning of it. Well, then, let them alone; if ever they are stones of this living house, I am deceived. Thou that art so, know whence is all thy light; and if thou art any thing in the dark, draw nigh to the candlestick from whence all light is. Thence must thy light come, yea, and thence it shall come; the secrets of the Lord shall make their abode with thee.

And this is the fourfold relation wherein the Lord Christ stands unto this house, as it is a spiritual building.

[2.] In respect of state and condition, Jesus Christ stands in a fivefold relation to this house, — viz., *1st*, As the owner; *2dly*, The builder; *3dly*, The watchman or keeper; *4thly*, The inhabiter; *5thly*, The avenger: *each* of which I shall unfold in order.

*1st*. He is the owner of it. He calls it his: “Upon this rock will I build my church,” [Matt. xvi. 18](#). “Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant; but Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house are *we*,” [Heb. iii. 5, 6](#). And that you may see that he doth not own

it as his without good right and title, know that in the great economy of grace Jesus Christ hath a threefold right and title to this house.

(1st.) Of *inheritance*. He is by his Father “appointed heir of all things,” [Heb. i. 3](#). By inheritance he obtains this excellent name, to be Lord of this house. God sends him to the vineyard as the heir, after his servants were refused. And he hath an engagement from his Father, that he shall enjoy his whole inheritance upon demand, [Ps. ii. 8](#). For the Father appointed, “in the fulness of times, to gather together all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him,” [Eph. i. 10](#). So that as Christ is “the first-begotten” of the Father, [Heb. i. 6](#), and “the first-born of every creature,” [Col. i. 15](#), the right of heirship is his. But this will not do; for, —

(2dly.) When he should come to take possession of this house, he finds that it is *mortgaged*, and that a great debt lies upon it; which he must *pay* to the uttermost farthing, if he ever intend to have it. To the former title there must also be added a right of purchase. He must purchase this house, and pay a great price for it. And what is this price? what is required of him? No less than his dearest blood, [Acts xx. 28](#). Yea, he must make his soul an offering for sin, and charge himself with the whole debt; — all the curse and punishment which this house had in part actually contracted upon itself, and wholly deserved. He must put his shoulders under the burden due to it, and his back to the stripes prepared for it. A hard task! But Jesus Christ being the heir, the right of redemption belonged unto him. It was not for his honour that it should lie unredeemed. Full well he knew that if he did it not, the whole creation was too beggarly to make this purchase. It is true, that nature of ours — which he assumed to pay that by, which he never took — was startled for a while, and would have deprecated this grievous *price*, crying out, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” but he recollects himself, and says, “I am content to do thy will, O God:” and so, through the eternal Spirit, he offered himself up unto God for a ransom. He likes the house, and will have it to dwell in, whatever it cost him. “Here,” saith he, “shall be my habitation, and my dwelling for ever,” [Ps. cxxxii. 1](#). “Know ye not,” saith the apostle, “that ye are the temple of the Spirit of Christ?” Well, and how come we so to be? “Ye are bought with a price,” [1 Cor. vi. 19](#). They who affirm that he also purchased the unclean sties of the devil, wot not what they say.

(3dly.) Unto *purchase* he must also add *conquest*. An unjust usurper had taken possession of this house, and kept it in bondage; — Satan had seized on it, and brought it, through the wrath of God, under his power. He, then, must be conquered, that the Lord Christ may have complete possession of his own house. “For this purpose,” then, “was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil,” [1 John iii. 8](#). And how doth he do it? He overpowers him and destroys him, in that “through death he destroyed him that had the power of death; that is, the devil,” [Heb. ii. 14](#). And he spoiled him, having overcome him. He bound the strong man, and then spoiled his goods, [Matt. xii. 29](#). All that darkness,



unbelief, sin, and hardness, that he had stuffed this house withal, Christ spoils and scatters them all away. And to make his conquest complete, he triumphs over his enemy, and, like a mighty conqueror, makes an open show of him, to his everlasting shame, Col. ii. 15, “Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross;” and by this means strengthens his title to his inheritance.

I might also farther insist on the donation of his Father, and the actual possession he takes of it by his Spirit; but these are sufficient to prove this house to be Christ’s. I shall take some observations hence.

*Observation 1.* <sup>294</sup>Is this the *house* of Christ? is he the *owner* of it? — Let men take heed how they spoil it for themselves. The psalmist makes this a great argument in his pleading against opposers, that they came into the Lord’s “inheritance,” Ps. lxxix. 1. The title of Christ’s *purchase* was not then so clearly known as that of his *inheritance*; and therefore they of old pleaded chiefly by that title. Now he hath proclaimed to all, his other titles also, — the whole right he has to this house, — to his saint, Who, then, shall meddle with it, and go free? Amongst men, every one with all his might will defend his own possession; and shall we think that the Lord Christ will suffer his to be spoiled at an easy rate? Shall not men pay dear for their encroachment? How hath he in our days frustrated all attempts for the persecution of his! “Touch not,” saith he, “mine anointed.” Men may upon various pretences claim this privilege to such a land, nation, or faction; it will in the end appear to be theirs, and only theirs, who are living stones of this house. Dogs may scramble for their bread, but shall not enjoy it. It is Christ in this house that will make every stone of it a burdensome stone. He hath done it that men may learn μή ζεομαχεῖν. Do not think it will excuse thee to say thou wast mistaken.

*Observation 2.* Is Christ the *owner* of this house? — Let the *order* and disposal of it be left to himself. Men are apt to be tampering with his house and household. They will be so kind and careful as to lay out their wisdom and prudence about it; — Thus and thus shall it be; these are parts and members of it. Christ is exceeding jealous of his honour in this particular. He cannot bear it, that men pretending to his glory should think him so wanting in love or wisdom towards his own, as not exactly to dispose of all things that concern the regimen thereof. Men would not be so dealt withal in their own houses as they deal with Christ in his. We have all wisdom enough (as we suppose) to order our own houses; — only the wisdom and love of the Father leaves his to the discretion of others, These thoughts are not from above.

*Observation 3.* Hath Christ taken *his own house* to himself upon so many *titles*? — Let not men put those building on him for his which are not so, which he holds not by these

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294 The second of the two sermons under the present text, and latterly printed as one, began at this point, according to a statement in an old edition. — Ed.

titles. Go to a man that dwells in a stately palace of his own, show him a hog-sty, tell him, "This is your house; here you dwell; this is yours:" — can you put a greater indignity on him? "No," says the man; "that is not mine; I dwell in yonder sumptuous palace." And shall we deal thus with the Lord Jesus? He hath bought and adorned his own house:— a glorious house it is. If now men shall hold out to him a sty of swine, a den of unclean beasts, a ruinous heap, whereof the far greatest part are dead stones, and tell him, this is his church, his house, — will it not exceedingly provoke him? will he bear such a reproach? Nay, he will reject such tenders to their ruin.



*2dly.* Jesus Christ is the *builder* of this house: "This man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house," [Heb. iii. 3.](#) — "I," saith he, "will build my church," [Matt. xvi. 18.](#) This is not a fabric for any workman but Christ. It is true, there are others employed under him; and some so excellent that they may be said to be "wise master-builders," [1 Cor. iii. 10;](#) but yet all the efficacy of their labour in this building is not from themselves, but merely from him by whom they are employed. Except the Lord build this house, they labour in vain that go about to build it.

Now this house receives a twofold building:— (*1st.*) Spiritual, of all the stones thereof into one mystical house. Of this I chiefly treat. (*2dly.*) *Ecclesiastical*, of some particular stones into several tabernacles, — which are useful partitions in the great mystical house, — called assemblies and dwelling-places of mount Zion. Both these it hath from Christ alone.

(*1st.*) For the first; — if all the most skilful workmen in the world should go to the pit of nature, by their own strength to hew out stones for this building, they will never, with all their skill and diligence, lay one stone upon it. There is life required to those stones, which none can give but Christ. The Father hath given into his hand alone to give life eternal to whom he will, [John xvii. 2.](#) He alone can turn stones into children of Abraham. To him is committed all dispensation of quickening power. He brings us from the dust of death, and no man hath quickened his own soul. With spiritual power, all spiritual life is vested in Christ. If dead stones live, it must be by hearing the voice of the Son of God. Christ's building of his mystical house is his giving life unto dead stones; or rather, being life unto them. Of those who will attempt to build themselves, and draw a principle of spiritual life from the broken cisterns of nature, I shall speak afterward.

(*2dly.*) For the second, or the communion of living stones one with another, and all with Christ, in the order and worship appointed by the gospel, so becoming assemblies and dwelling-places of mount Zion; — this also is of him. This is for his outward solemn worship; and he would never allow that the will of any creature should be the measure of his honour, lie sets up the candlesticks; and holds the stars in his hand. Look to the institution of this building, — it is from Christ; — look for directions about this building, — it is wholly from



him. From him, his word, his Spirit, is the institution, direction, and perfection of it. From hence, now, take some observations.

*Observation 1.* Is Christ the *builder* of this house? can he alone fit us for this building? can he alone, and that by his almighty power, put life into dead stones, that they may grow up to be a holy and living habitation unto him? — What, then, becomes of that famous workman, free-will, and a power of believing in ourselves? do not they work effectually in this temple? As it was in Solomon’s temple, “there was neither axe, nor hammer, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building,” [1 Kings vi. 7](#); so in this spiritual house, that iron tool of free-will is not once heard; it comes not nigh the work, — Christ doth all alone. He gives life to whom he pleases. Shall a dead will be thought to have a quickening, life-giving power in it? Shall a spirit of life be spun out of the bowels of nature? Is it the will of man, or the will of God, that draws men unto Christ? and is it his Spirit, or flesh, that unites us to him? Where, then, is this workman employed, that makes all this noise in the world? Even there, where men cry, “Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven,” [Gen. xi. 4](#), — amongst those who would build a Babel, a tower of their own to get to heaven by. The Lord comes down and scatters all their undertakings. This workman never placed stone in the house of Christ. Nay, it is like the foolish woman, that pulls down her house with both her hands. What free grace sets up, that free will strives to demolish.

*Observation 2.* See hence a great mistake of many poor creatures, who would fain be stones in this house. What course take they? They hew and square themselves, — strive to cut off this and that rubbish, which (as they suppose) alone hinders them from being fitted to this building; they pare themselves with vows, promises, resolutions, and engagements, — beautify themselves with duties and services; and then, with many perplexing fears, present themselves to the building, never knowing whether they are admitted or no. All this while the great Master-builder stands by, scarcely dealt withal. What, now, is the issue of such attempts? What they build one day, falls down in another. When they have oftentimes in their own thoughts brought the building to such a pass as that they are ready to think it will be well with them, now surely they shall have a share and interest in this living and glorious house; all on a sudden they fall again to the ground, their hopes wither, and they suppose themselves in the world’s rubbish again. There is no end of this alternation. Would, now, this poor soul see where its great defect lies? It hath not applied itself aright to the only Builder. Wouldst thou be a stone in this fabric? Lay thyself before the Lord Jesus; say to him that thou art in thyself altogether unfit for the great building he hath in hand; — that thou hast often attempted to put thyself upon it, but all in vain:— “Now, Lord Jesus, do thou take me into thine own hand. If thou castest me away, I cannot complain, — I must justify thee in all thy ways; but thou callest things that are not as though they were, — thou turnest

dead stones into children of Abraham: oh, turn my dead into a living stone!" Fear not; he will in no wise cast thee out.

The vanity of men, attempting to mix their power and wisdom in the heaping up tabernacles for Christ, might be hence discovered; but I forbear.

3dly. Jesus Christ is the great *watchman*, or keeper of this house. There are, indeed, other watchmen, and that of God's own appointment, for the use of this house: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman," [Ezek. iii. 17](#); "I have set watchmen upon thy walls," [Isa. lxiii. 6, 7](#); which in a special manner are the pastors of the churches. "They watch," [Heb. xiii. 17](#), as the priests and Levites heretofore kept the watch of the Lord. It cannot be denied but that many who have taken upon them to be these watchmen have watched only for their own advantage, have been very dogs, — yea, dumb dogs, the very worst of dogs, [Isa. lvi. 10](#), — yea, they have been, and oftentimes are, under various pretences, great "smiters and wounders of the spouse of Christ," [Cant. v. 7](#). But yet, were they never so good and true to their trusts, they were never able all to watch and keep this house, had it not another watchman: "Except the Lord keep the city, these watchmen watch in vain," [Ps. cxxvii. 1](#). He that keepeth Israel, who doth neither slumber nor sleep, must keep this house, or it will be destroyed. Christ, then, is that holy one, and that watcher, that came down from heaven, and commanded to cut down the tree and the branches, [Dan. iv. 13, 14](#), — Nebuchadnezzar and his great power, — for meddling with this house. Now, Christ watcheth his house for two ends.

(1st.) To see what it wants. [2 Chron. xvi. 9](#), "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in its behalf." He looks down from heaven to behold them that fear him, [Ps. xiv](#). He is that stone upon which are "seven eyes," [Zech. iii. 9](#), — a sufficiency, in perfection of wisdom, inspection, and government, for the good of his house. And those seven eyes of his "run to and fro through the whole earth" for this very purpose, [Zech. iv. 10](#). He takes notice of the state and condition of his people, to eye them in their distresses, and to give them timely and suitable deliverance. They may call every spring of their refreshment, Beerlahai-roi [The well of Him that liveth and seeth me].

(2dly.) To see that the son of violence draw not nigh unto it; and if he do, to require it at his hands; to make him eat his own flesh, and drink his own blood, that he may learn to devour no more. Observe, then, —

*Observation* 1. Whence it is that this house, which seems so often to be nigh to destruction, is yet preserved from ruin. Ofttimes it is brought into a condition that all that look on say, Now it is gone for ever. But still it recovers, and gets up again. The Lord Christ looks on all the while: he knows how far things may proceed for trial. When it comes to that pass that, if pressures and troubles should continue, the house will be overborne indeed, then he puts in, rebukes the winds and waves, and makes all things still again. Like a father who looks upon his child in a difficult and dangerous business, — knows that he can relieve him



when he pleases, but would willingly see him try his strength and cunning, — lets him alone until perhaps the child thinks himself quite lost, and wonders his father doth not help him; but when the condition comes to be such that, without help, he will be lost indeed, instantly the father puts in his hand and saves him. So deals the Lord Jesus with his house, — inlets it oftentimes strive and wrestle with great oppositions, to draw out and exercise all the graces thereof; but yet all this while he looketh on, and when danger is nigh indeed, he is not far off.

*Observation 2.* Let all the enemies of the church know, that there is one who hath an eye over them in all their counsels and undertakings. Whilst they are digging deep, he looks on and laughs them to scorn. How perplexed was the king of Syria when he found that the prophet was acquainted with all his designs, and made them known to the king of Israel! It cannot but be a matter of perplexity to the enemies of this house, when they shall find that the great Friend and Protector thereof is continually present in all their advisees. Let them not wonder at their birthless undertakings; the eye of Christ is still upon them.

*Observation 3.* Let the saints see their *privilege*; — *whoever* they are, in what condition soever, the eye of Christ is upon them. He watches over them for good, and knows their souls in adversity. When no eye sees them, he looks on them; they cannot be cast out of his care, nor hid from his sight. There are many poor souls who go heavily all the day long, — that mourn in their spirits unknown, unregarded, unpitied; — the eye of Christ is on them for good continually; they cannot be thrown out of his watchful care.

*4thly.* Christ is the *indweller* of this house. He hath not *built* it *and framed* it for no use. It is for a habitation for himself. He hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. “This is my rest,” saith he; “here will I dwell,” [Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14](#). This house is built up to be an habitation unto him, [Eph. ii. 22](#). He is the “King of saints,” and this house is his court. It is true, for his human nature, “the heaven must receive him, until the time of the restitution of all things,” [Acts iii. 21](#); but yet, he dwelleth in this house three ways:—

(1st.) By his Spirit. Christ dwells in this house, and every stone of it, by his Spirit, “Know ye not that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” [2 Cor. xiii. 5](#). — “Christ in you;” that is, the Spirit of Christ, Christ by his Spirit. So the Holy Ghost expounds it, [Rom. viii. 9](#), “If the Spirit of God dwell in you:” which, [verse 10](#), is, “If Christ be in you.” Christ and his Spirit, as to indwelling, are all one; for he dwells in us by his Spirit. “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that is given unto us,” [Rom. v. 5](#). There is not only the “love of God,” a grace of the Spirit, “shed abroad” in us, but there is also the “Holy Spirit given unto us.” This is fully asserted, [Rom. viii. 11](#), “The Spirit of him that raised up Jesus, dwells in you;” as also, [2 Tim. i. 14](#), “Keep the good thing committed to thee by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.” Hence the saints are said to be “temples of the Holy Ghost.” Jesus Christ doth not build temples merely for graces, created graces; he dwells in them himself, — he dwells in them by his Spirit. And this is a glorious privilege of this house,

that Jesus Christ in a mystical and wonderful manner should dwell in it, and every stone of it. Hereby all believers come to be not one personal, but one mystical Christ, [1 Cor. xii. 12](#). However we are distanced in respect of his human nature, yet mystically we are one, — one body, one mystical Christ, — because we have one Spirit dwelling in us and him. If a man were never so tall, so that his head should reach the stars, and his feet stand upon the ground, yet, having but one soul, he is but one man still. Though Christ in his human nature be exceedingly distanced from us, yet there being one and the same Spirit in him and us, we are one mystical Christ. Yet observe, —

*Observation 1.* Though Christ be united unto the persons of the saints by the indwelling of the Spirit, yet the saints have not that which is called *personal* union with him, nor with the Spirit. Personal union is by a person of the Deity assuming the nature of man into one personality with itself, that having of its own no personal subsistence. Things are here clean otherwise: Christ doth not assume the saints into a personal subsistence with himself, but dwells in their persons by his Spirit.

*Observation 2.* That the operations of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and all his manifestations, are *voluntary*. He worketh as he will, and revealeth what he will, even where he dwells. He doth not work in us naturally, but voluntarily, unto what proportion he pleaseth; therefore, though he dwell equally in all saints in respect of truth and reality, yet he doth not in respect of working and efficacy.

(*2dly.*) *By his graces.* Christ dwelleth in this house, and in all the stones thereof, by his graces. He “dwells in our hearts by faith,” [Eph. iii. 17](#). He dwells in us by his word “in all wisdom,” [Col. iii. 16](#). All the graces we are made partakers of, we receive from his fulness, and by them he inhabits in us. They are indeed the ornaments of the living stones of this house, to make them meet and fit for such an indweller as the Lord Christ. Christ will not dwell in a soul whose mind is darkness, his will stubbornness, and his affections carnal and sensual. He puts light, and life, and love upon the soul, that it may be meet for him to dwell in. Christ dwells in all the world by his power and presence, but he dwells only in his saints by his Spirit and grace.

(*3dly.*) *By his ordinances.* Where two or three of his are assembled together, there is he in the midst of them. The ordinances of Christ are the Meat ornaments of his kingly court; by them he is glorious in all the assemblies of mount Zion. Some would fain cast out this indwelling of Christ from among his saints; — in due time he will thoroughly rebuke them. Some, again, would thrust him out into the world; but he will make men know that his ordinances are given unto his. It is true, the benefit of some of them extends to the world; but the right and enjoyment of them is the privilege of his saints. Thus Christ dwells in his house. Hence, observe, —

*Observation 1.* The intimacy of the Lord Jesus with his saints, and the delight he takes in them. He dwelleth with them, he dwelleth in them, — he takes them to the nearest union



with himself possible: he in them, they in him, that they may be one. He hath made many an admirable change with us. He took our sin, and gives us his righteousness; he took our nature, and gives us his Spirit. Neither is it a bare indwelling, — he thereby holds with us all acts of the choicest communion. “If,” saith he, “any man hear my voice, and open to me, I will come in to him.” And what then? “I will sup with him, and he with me,” [Rev. iii. 20.](#)

(1.) “*I will sup with him;*” — I will delight and satisfy myself with him. Jesus Christ takes abundance of delight and contentment in the hearts of his saints. When they are faithful, when they are fruitful, he is marvellously refreshed with it. Hence is that prayer of the spouse, “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits,” [Cant. iv. 16.](#) She would have the spices, the graces she hath received, breathed on by a fresh gale of the Spirit, that they might yield a sweet savour. And why so? That her Beloved may have something for his entertainment, — that he may come and sup, and eat of his pleasant fruits. A poor soul, that hath received Christ, hath not any desire so fervent as that it may have something for the entertainment of him; that he who filled it when it was hungry may not (as it were) be sent away empty. And the Lord Jesus is exceedingly taken with those refreshments. “The King is held in the galleries,” [Cant. vii. 5.](#) He is detained, yea, bound with delight; — he knows not how to pass away. Therefore “he rests in his love,” [Zeph. iii. 17.](#) He is exceedingly satiated in the delight he takes in his mints. Neither is this all, that when Christ comes he will sup with us, (though this be a great deal; for what are we, that we should entertain our Lord?) but also, —

(2.) *The saints sup with him:* he provides choice refreshments for them also. When Christ comes in unto us, he will entertain a soul bounteously. He provides love for us. When the Spirit of Christ is bestowed on us, he sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts, [Rom. v. 5.](#) He sheds it abroad, — pours it out abundantly. Friends, love is a choice dainty:— he that knows it not is a stranger to all spiritual banquets:— it is a choice dish in the feast of fat things that Christ prepareth. He provides “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” for us *That* [is] his kingdom, [Rom. xiv. 17;](#) and this kingdom of his is *within us.* Of such precious things as these doth Christ provide a supper for them with whom he dwells. If Christ be in you, more or less, you shall not want this entertainment. We are, indeed, sometimes like mad guests, that when meat is set on the table, cast it all down, without tasting a morsel. When Christ hath prepared sweet and precious dainties for us, we cast them on the ground; we throw away our peace, our joy, by folly and unbelief: but this makes not the truth of God of none effect.

*Observation 2.* Doth Christ dwell in us by his Spirit? — should we not be careful lest we grieve that Spirit of his? The Spirit of Christ is very tender. Did the saints continually consider this, that Christ dwells in them, — that he is grieved and troubled at all their unbelief, unruly passions, worldly desires, foolish imaginations, — surely they could not but be much more

watchful over themselves than generally they are. He is refreshed when we walk with him, and hold fellowship with him. To turn aside from him, to hold fellowship with the world or flesh, — this grieves him and burdens him. Oh, “grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption.” And let me tell you, if you do, though he will not utterly depart from you, nor take his kindness away for evermore, yet he will do that which shall make your heart ache, your joints tremble, and break all your bones in pieces. For, —

(1.) He will depart from you as to all *sense of his presence*, that you shall have neither joy, nor comfort, nor peace. He will hide his face, and make you believe (as we say) that he is gone utterly from you. And this he will do, not for a day, or a night, or so, but for a great while together. You shall go to seek him, and you shall not find him; yea, beg and cry, and have no answer. Now all the world for one smile from Christ, for one impression of his presence upon my heart, — and all in vain. When the Spirit of Christ was thus departed from David, upon his miscarriage, as to the sense and joy of it, how cloth he cry out, “Make me to hear the voice of joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice!” [Ps. li. 8](#). If thou valuest the presence of Christ at no greater rate but to jeopard it upon every occasion, thou mayest haply go without the comfort of it all thy days. Examine yourselves, — is it not so with some of you? Have you not lost the sense of the presence of Christ by your folly and uneven walking? Perhaps you value it not much, but go on as Samson with his hair cut, and think to do as at other times; but if the Philistines set upon thee, it will be sorrow and trouble; in every assault thou wilt find thyself a lost man; — sooner or later it will be bitterness to thee.

(2.) He will depart as to the *efficacy of his working in thee*, and leave thee so weak that thou shalt not be able to walk with God. His Spirit is “a Spirit of grace and supplications.” He will so withdraw it that thou shalt find thy heart in a poor condition, as to those things. To be cold in prayer, dead in hearing, estranged from meditation, slight in all duties, — this shall be thy portion; — a frame that a tender soul would tremble to think of. Ah, how many poor creatures are come to this state in these days, by their neglect and contempt of Christ dwelling in them! They have lost their first love, their first life; their graces are ready to die, and their whole soul is asleep, in a heartless, lifeless, zealless frame. They shall be saved, but “yet as through fire.”

(3.) He will depart *as to assurance of what is to come*, as well as to a sense of what is present. It is the indwelling Spirit of Christ that gives assurance: hereby are we “sealed to the day of redemption.” He “beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” Upon our grieving him, he will withdraw as to this also. We shall be bewildered, and in the dark, not knowing what will become of our souls to eternity. For if Christ by his Spirit do not speak peace, who shall?

*Observation 3.* Doth he dwell in us by his grace?

(1.) Let us *first know whence all graces are*, that in a want or weakness of them we may know whither to go for a supply. “Of his fulness we receive, and grace for grace.” All supplies of graces are from Christ. “Lord, increase our faith,” say the apostles. Not only faith originally is from him, but all increases of it also. “I believe; help thou my unbelief,” says the poor man. We wrestle and struggle with a little grace, a little faith, a little love, a little joy; and are contented if we can keep our heads above water, that we be not quite sunk and lost. How sweet would it be with us, if, upon a serious consideration from whence all these graces flow, we would apply ourselves to draw out farther degrees and heightenings of them, whereby he might dwell more plentifully in us, and we might always converse with him in his gracious train of attendants! How this may be done in particular, is not my business now to show.

(2.) Learn to *tender* [make much of] *the graces of Christ*, as those which hold out his presence to us. Let us tender them in our own hearts, and prize them in whomsoever they are. They are pledges of the indwelling of Christ. Certainly, if men valued Christ, they would more value his graces. Many pretend to love him, to honour him, yea, with Peter, to be ready to die with him, or for him; but what evil surmises have they of the graces of Christ appearing in others! how do they call them hypocrisy, humour, folly, pride, singularity, with other terms of a later invention! I cannot so easily believe that any one can love the Lord Jesus and hate the appearances of him in others. Where is any thing of Christ, there is also Christ.

*5thly. Jesus Christ is the great avenger of this house*, and of all the injuries or wrongs that are done unto it. “All,” saith he, “that devour Israel shall offend,” [Jer. ii. 3](#). He will not hold him guiltless that rises up against it. See [Isa. lix. 15–18](#). He takes upon him the avenging of his house, as his own proper work: “Shall he not avenge his elect? He will do it speedily.” See also [Isa. lxiii. 2–6](#). How dreadful is he in the execution of his revenging judgments against the enemies thereof! So also is he described, [Rev. xix. 13–15](#). He hath promised to make the stones of this house heavy stones; they shall burden all that touch them, [Zech. xii. 3](#). He comes forth of “the myrtle-trees in the bottom” (his lowly people in a low condition) with the “red horse” following him, [Zech. i. 8](#). Upon this account he fearfully broke the old Roman-pagan empire, [Rev. vi. 12–17](#); and will as fearfully destroy the antichristian Roman power, with all its adherents, [Rev. xvii. to xix](#). Sooner or later he will call to an account every instrument of persecution in the world. Hence he is said to be a lion in the behalf of this house, that treads down all before him, [Mic. v. 8](#). Jacob says of him in Judah, “He is a lion, as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?” [Gen. xlix. 9](#). Suppose any do rouse him up: how then? “He will not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain,” [Num. xxiii. 24](#). Many poor creatures have, by their opposition to his house, roused up this lion: and what hath been the issue? What attempts have been to cause him to lie down again! — All in vain. If he be once roused up, he will not couch down until he eat and drink the blood of the slain. But suppose great opposition be made unto him, — will he not give over? Not at all. He will be as a lion that cometh upon his prey, if a multitude of shepherds be called forth

against him, he will not be afraid at their voice, nor abase himself at their noise, [Isa. xxxi. 4.](#) In brief, sooner or later, temporally or eternally, he will avenge all the injuries and destroy all the enemies of his holy dwelling, [2 Thess. i. 6–10.](#)

And these are some of the relations wherein the Lord Christ stands unto this house of God, being made thereby unto it beauty and glory, comeliness and excellency. The carrying on of this building, by the union of all the stones thereof to the foundation, and their cementing one to another by faith, love, and order, I shall not now treat of, nor of the following points of the text.

The general uses of what hath been said are three; the heads whereof I shall name.

*Use 1.* See the eminent privilege of them which are indeed stones of this house, which is living, strong, and glorious, — which is so nearly related to the Lord Christ. There is more of duty, dignity, and safety, in this thing, than can easily be expressed. To do service unto Christ as his, to have the honour of being his, and to be safeguarded as his, are great privileges. Let them who have any sense of these things farther draw out these particulars, from what hath been spoken.

*Use 2.* Learn hence the vanity of resting upon outward church privileges, if we are not withal interested in this spiritual estate. Where men are living stones indeed, they lie in beauty and order in the assemblies; — where they are otherwise, where assemblies are made up of dead rubbish, and yet cry, “The house of the Lord, the house of the Lord,” — the Lord Jesus abhors those assemblies; he stands not in these relations unto them.

*Use 3.* See hence the ruin of persecution that hath appeared in the world in various forms. It hath put on all manner of colours and pretences, and prevailed with all sorts of persons at one time or other to close with it. What hath been the issue? what is like to be? The house, indeed, hath been battered sometimes; but they who have come against it have been broken all to pieces. Shall the residue of men who, under new pretences or old ones new painted, drive on the same design, — shall they prosper? Thou, O Lord Jesus, in thine anger wilt cut them off. The Lord open the eyes of the sons of men, that they may not hope any more to separate between Christ and his saints, between whom there are so many everlasting relations!

Μόνω σοφῶ Θεῶ, διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

Sermon VII.

The

advantage of the kingdom of Christ

in the

shaking of the kingdoms of the world;

or,

providential alterations in their subserviency to Christ's exaltation.



### **Prefatory note.**

The battle of Worcester, “the crowning mercy,” as Cromwell termed it, which effectually reduced Britain under his control, was fought on the 3d of September 1651, the anniversary of his victory at Dunbar. On the 24th of October following, a day of thanksgiving was observed for this success, and “sundry other mercies.” On this occasion Owen, by this time Dean of Christ Church College, Oxford, preached before the House of Commons the following sermon. “It contains,” says Mr Orme, “many free and eloquent passages, especially on the danger of human governments interfering with the principles and rights of the kingdom of Christ; and on the abomination and extent of the antichristian apostasy.” He refers, in illustration, to the passage which occurs on page 322. — Ed.





*Tuesday, October 28, 1651.*

Ordered by the Parliament, That the thanks of this House be given to Mr Owen, Dean of Christ Church in Oxford, for his great pains taken in his sermon preached before the Parliament, at Margaret's, Westminster, on Friday the 24th of October (being a day set apart for public thanksgiving); and that he be desired to print his sermon; and that he have the like privilege in printing the same as others in like case have usually had; and that the Lord-General do give him the thanks of this House, and desire him to print his sermon accordingly.

Hen. Scobell, *Cler. Parl.*

## To the supreme authority of the nation, the Commons assembled in Parliament.

Right Honourable,

Of all the times which the Holy One of Israel hath caused to pass over the nations of the world, there hath not any from the days of old been so filled with eminent discoveries of his presence, power, and providence, in disposing of all affairs here below according to the counsel of his own will, as the season wherein he hath made you a spectacle unto men and angels, being the instrument in his hand to perform all his pleasure. Neither in this season hath he, upon any opportunity, so gloriously laid hold upon his own strength and goodness, to manifest the *firedness of his eye* on those who are as the *apple* of it, as in that mighty deliverance the high praises whereof, according to his good hand upon you, you lately tendered unto him.

The more beauty and desirableness any design against the Lord Christ is clothed withal, the more power and subtlety it is supported with, the greater is the brightness of his coming for its wasting and desolation. With what deceivableness of unrighteousness and lies in hypocrisy the late grand attempt of those in Scotland, with their adherents (which also was of the former, and is gone into destruction), was carried on, is in some measure now made naked, to the loathing of its abominations. In digging deep to lay a foundation for blood and revenge, — in covering private and sordid ends with a pretence of things public and glorious, — in limning a face of religion upon a worldly stock, — in concealing distant aims and bloody animosities to compass one common end, that a theatre might be provided to act several parts upon, — in pleading a necessity from an oath of God unto most desperate undertakings against God, and such like things as these, perhaps it gives not place to any which former ages have been acquainted withal. Now, to reject all the claims of the authors and abettors thereof to any commission from above, to divest them of all pretences to religion and zeal thereof, to disappoint them in their expected associations, and to make all their strength to become as tow that hath smelt the fire, hath been His work alone who takes to himself his great power to carry on the interest of his kingdom against all opposers. Under the shadow of this mercy — composed of as many branches of wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness, as any outward dispensation hath brought forth since the name of Christian was known — do you now sit in council, and the residue of the nation in peace. What obligations from the Lord, what cords of love are upon us! The returnal and improvement of all his dealings with us, which he requireth and expecteth from us, I have pointed you unto in the following sermon. For the present I shall only add, that as whatever there hath been of beauty, glory, or advantage unto the people of God, in the late transactions, hath been eminently of undeserved grace; so the dreadful vengeance which the Lord hath executed against the men of his enmity and warfare hath been most righteously procured, by their clothing

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cursed designs of revenge, persecution, bondage in soul and body, spoil and rapine, with the most glorious pretences of zeal, covenant, reformation, and such like things, — which never came into their hearts. Therefore, that the God of all our mercies and deliverances would for ever keep alive in your hearts a faithful acknowledgment of his grace, and a practical detestation of those ways which are such a provocation to the eyes of his glory, shall be the constant prayer of

Your most humble Servant  
In our dearest Lord,

J. Owen.

From my Study, Ch. Ch., Oxon.,  
Nov. 7.

## Sermon VII. The advantage of the kingdom of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of the world.

“And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken, and have done [Ezek. xvii. 24.](#)”

Although all the works of God’s providence — which are great, and sought out of all that have pleasure in them, [Ps. cxi. 2](#) — have such a stamp and impress of his own image on them, his wisdom, goodness, power, love, that they declare their author, and reveal from heaven his kindness and wrath towards the children of men;<sup>295</sup> yet such are the prejudices, lusts, inordinacy of affections, and interest of many, that it hath always been a long and difficult task to convince them of his presence in them, when it hath been most uncontrollably evident. The Egyptians will wrestle with many a plague, by thinking the “magicians” can do so;<sup>296</sup> and the Philistines will try to the utmost whether it be his hand, or a chance that happened to them.<sup>297</sup> “Lord,” saith the prophet, “when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see,” [Isa. xxvi. 11](#). Yea, oftentimes (especially when judicial blindness is gone forth upon them),<sup>298</sup> though they cannot but see his arm awaked as of old, and made bare, they will not rest in his sovereign disposal of things, but rise up against the works of his revenge and holiness; like wild beasts that are pursued, when all ways of escape and turning are shut up, they fly in the face of him that follows them. They repent not of their evil deeds, but bite their tongues for anger, and blaspheme the God of heaven, [Rev. xvi. 10, 11](#). Yea, such is the power of deceivable lusts, that many will admire at the blindness of others in former generations who considered not the works of God (as the Jews in ‘the wilderness), when themselves are under actual contempt of no less glorious dispensations; like the Pharisees, who bewailed the folly of their fathers in persecuting the prophets, when themselves were endeavouring to kill the Son of God, [Matt. xxiii. 29, 30](#). To bring, then, upon the spirits of men a conviction of the works of God, and his righteousness therein, so as to prevail with them to rest in his determination of things, is a task meet only for him who knows all their hearts within them, and can carry on the issues of his providence until to a man they shall say, “Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God who judgeth in the earth,” [Ps. lviii. 11](#). And this is that which the Lord here undertakes to accomplish, “And,” saith he, “all the trees,” etc.

295 [Ps. xix. 1, 2](#); [Rom. i. 20](#); [Acts xiv. 16, 17](#).

296 [Exod. vii. 11, 12](#).

297 [1 Sam. vi. 9](#).

298 [Isa. vi. 9, 10](#).

In the preaching and prophesying of Ezekiel, this one thing among others is eminent, that he was “*artifex parabolarum*,” — a wonderful “framer of similitudes and parables;”<sup>299</sup> a way of teaching attended with much evidence, clearness, and power.

In particular, he frequently compares the world to a field, or a forest, and the inhabitants of it to the trees therein; — an allusion exceedingly proper, considering the great variety and difference of condition both of the one and the other. The trees of the field are some high, some low; some green, some dry; some strong, some weak; some lofty, some contemptible; some fruitful, some barren; some useful, some altogether useless: so that you have all sorts of persons, high and low, of what condition, relation, or interest soever, clearly represented by the trees of the field; and these are the trees in my text.

This chapter, unto verse 22, is taken up in a riddle, a parable, with the exposition of it.<sup>300</sup> The time being come that God would destroy the outward, visible monarchy of the Jews, for their false worship, tyranny, persecution, and oppression, he employs the king of Babylon in that work,<sup>301</sup> who subdues the nation, takes away two kings, one after another, and appoints Zedekiah a titular governor under him.<sup>302</sup> But the wrath of God being to come upon them to the uttermost, he also closes with Egypt, rebels against him<sup>303</sup> by whose appointment alone he had any right to be a ruler, verse 16; so way is made, by his ruin, to put an end to the kingly reign of the house of David in Jerusalem, Jer. xxix. 16, 17. The Lord had of old erected a kingly government in the house of David, 1 Sam. xvi. 1; 2 Sam. xii. 7; — not for any eminency in the government itself, or for the civil advantage of that people, — for he had long before chosen and established another, consisting of “seventy elders of the people,” Num. xi. 24, to whom he added prophets and judges, extraordinarily raised up in several generations, according to his promise, Deut. xviii. 18, (which when the people rejected, he said they rejected him, or his institution, 1 Sam. viii. 7), — but that it might be a type of the spiritual dominion of their Messiah;<sup>304</sup> and so was a part of their pedagogy and bondage, as were the residue of their types, every one of them; — yea, the most glorious enjoyments whatsoever which were granted them (which did yet represent something that was afterward to be brought in), was part of that servile estate wherein God kept that people, that without us they should not be made perfect. But now this carnal people, beholding the outward beauty, lustre, and glory of the type, began to rest in it, to the neglect of the spiritual kingdom of Christ represented thereby.<sup>305</sup> And thus did they with the rest of their types,

299 Ezek. xx. 49.

300 xvii. 2.

301 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17.

302 2 Kings xxiv. 1–3.

303 Jer. xxxvii. 1; 2 Kings xxiv. 17; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10.

304 Ps. xlv. 6; Hos. iii. 5; Isa. ix. 7, xvi. 5, xxii. 22; Jer. xxviii. 5; Amos ix. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, xxxvii. 24, 25.

305 1 Cor. x. 11; Acts xv. 10; Gal. iii. 4.

until the Lord destroyed all their outward pomp and glory, [Isa. i. 11, 12](#); [Jer. vii. 4, 14, 15](#). So, in particular, dealt he with their kingly government, when once they began to account their bondage their glory, and to embrace the shadow instead of the substance. And this did he, to recall them to a serious consideration of the tendency of all typical institutions, and the design he was carrying on concerning the kingdom of Christ.

Hence, [verse 22 of this chapter](#), he calls them from their thoughtfulness about the destructions, desolations, and contentions that were amongst them in reference to their civil rule, to the consideration of that design which he was secretly and silently carrying on under all these dispensations. “I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.” As if the Lord should say, There is a great noise in the world about setting up and plucking down of kings, in this their carnal rule; and many of you see nothing else, — you will look no farther: but I also have my work in hand; my design is not bounded within these limits and outward appearances; I am setting up a King that shall have another manner of dominion and rule than these worms of the earth. He shall stand; — as [Mic. v. 4](#).

The setting up, then, of this kingdom of Christ, who is “the highest branch of the high cedar,” and planting it in the church, the “mountain of Israel,” with the prosperity thereof, and safety of him that shall dwell therein, is the subject of [verses 22, 23](#). This being that to the consideration whereof God here calls his people at such a season, I shall name one or two observations from this connection of the words.

Observation 1. *In the midst of all the tumults and embroilments of the nations, that which the Lord takes peculiarly as his own design, into his own management, is the carrying on of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.*

You are about your work, saith the Lord, — I also am about mine; you have your branches and cedars, — I also have one to plant, that shall flourish. [Dan. ii. 44](#), “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed,” etc. Were not those kings and kingdoms also of his setting up, that it is said, In their days he shall set up one of his own? Yea, doubtless; “He changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings,” [chap. ii. 21](#). He “ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will,” [chap. iv. 25](#). There is not a persecuting Pharaoh, but he raises him up for his own purpose, [Exod. ix. 16](#). But yet, in respect of the kingdom of his Son, he speaks of them as if he had nothing to do with them: In their days I will do my own work, — advance the kingdom of the Lord Christ.

There are great and mighty works in hand in this nation; tyrants are punished, — the jaws of oppressors are broken, — bloody, revengeful persecutors disappointed, — and, we

hope, governors set up that may be “just, ruling in the fear of God, that they may be as the light of the morning,” etc., [2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4](#). The hand of the Lord hath been wonderfully exalted in all these things; but yet, should we rest in them, — should they not be brought into an immediate subserviency to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, — the Lord will quickly distinguish between them and his own peculiar design, and say, In the days of these changes I will do so and so; — speak of them as if he had nothing to do with them. The carrying on of the interest of Christ is his peculiar aim; he, of his goodness, make it ours also!

Observation 2. *Among all the designs that are on foot in the world, there is none that hath either stability, fixedness, or final success, but only the design of God concerning the kingdom of Christ.*

Other branches may be set, but the branch of the Lord only prospers.<sup>306</sup> The likeliest appearances of other undertakings are but as the glorious rising of the sun in the morning, — quickly clouded. The interest of Christ is like Joseph, [Gen. xlix. 23, 24](#). Ofttimes the archers shoot at it, and grieve it; but in the close the bow thereof abides in strength; and therefore this is the issue of all these dispensations, that the kingdoms and nations are at length to be possessed by the Lord Christ,<sup>307</sup> his sheaf standing up, and all others bowing thereunto.

And unto the consideration of these things, in the midst of all the tumults in the world, doth God effectually recall his people, and withal tells them how he will carry it on, in the words of my text, “And all the trees,” etc.

In the words three things are to be observed, — First, *The work that God ascribes to himself*. And that he sets down under a twofold similitude: of pulling down the “high tree,” and setting up the “low tree;” and of drying up the “green tree,” and making the “dry tree” to flourish; and both these similitudes are coincident, serving only in this redoubling for the clearer illustration of that which they shadow out. Secondly, *There is the issue that God will carry this out unto in respect of others*: “All the trees of the field shall know.” Thirdly, *A particular assurance that the Lord gives for the accomplishment of all this, from the engagement of his name*: “I the Lord,” etc.

First, For the first, the expression of the work of the Lord may be taken two ways: 1. *Strictly and properly*; 2. *Largely*, and by the way of analogy and proportion.

1. In the first way you may consider, —

(1.) The tree that is to be cast down and withered, and that is the “high tree,” and the “green tree,” — a tree that in their eyes had both beauty and vigour, high and green; this

306 [Hag. ii. 6, 7](#); [Heb. xii. 26, 27](#); [Isa. viii. 9, 10](#), [ix. 7, xlvi. 10](#), [liii. 10](#); [Ps. xxxiii. 11](#); [Prov. xix. 21](#), [xxi. 30](#); [Job xxiii. 13](#).

307 [Isa. ix. 12, 13](#); [Rev. xi. 15](#).

was the Judaical kingdom, admired and delighted in by the Jews. This, says God, I will reject; as also he will many a tall Eliab, that even some Samuels may think to be his anointed.

(2.) The tree that is to be exalted and made to flourish, and that is the “low tree,” the “dry tree,” contemptible for growth; — it is low, useless for fruit, it is dry. And this is the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, contemned, despised. This, says God, I will exalt, carry on, and make glorious; for though the interest of Christ and the gospel may seem low and dry for a season, in comparison of the glory of other flourishing interests, yet, in the issue, it shall be exalted above them all.

2. As taken more *largely*, and by the way of analogy; and so, —

(1.) The high and the green tree are the things of the most glorious appearance in the world, — persons and states that seem to be exceedingly suited for the work that God hath to do, that are in the greatest probability to be eminently instrumental in his hand: but, alas! says God, These will I pull down, and cause to wither. Perhaps you will think it strange, that a mighty monarchy, a triumphing prelacy, a thriving conformity, should all be brought down; but so it shall be, “Every mountain shall be made a plain.”

(2.) The “low tree,” and the “dry tree,” are things, persons, assemblies, outwardly weak and contemptible, — such as wise men do verily believe that God will never use; they will not understand that such Moseses shall be deliverers, but cry, Who made them judges and rulers?<sup>308</sup> But even these will God exalt and cause to flourish: “Every valley shall be exalted.”

Two observations flow from hence, which I shall insist upon:—

I. *In the carrying on of the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations.*

II. *The actings of God’s providence in carrying on the interest of Christ, shall be exceedingly unsuited to the reasonings and expectations of the most of the sons of men.*

Some trees must be plucked down, and some raised up; yea, high trees thrown down, and the low caused to flourish. There is the issue of God’s thus dealing in respect of others, “All the trees of the field,” etc. By the “trees of the field” are meant men of all sorts that are concerned in these transactions.

And herein you may observe two things:— something *intimated*; and that is, an unwillingness in men to own these dispensations of God; hence the Lord undertakes himself to set on a conviction upon them, as a thing of great difficulty; — and *something expressed*; which is the conviction itself that shall in the issue fall upon them, notwithstanding all their reluctancy. Hence also are these two observations:—

Observation 1. *Men are exceeding unwilling to see and own the hand of God in those works of his providence which answer not their reasonings, interests, and expectations.*

308 [Exod. ii. 14](#); [Acts vii. 27](#).





Observation 2. *The Lord will not cease walking contrary to the carnal reasonings of men, in his mighty works for the carrying on the interest of the Lord Jesus, until his hand be seen, owned, and confessed.*

For what remains concerning the *assurance* of the accomplishment of all this from the engagement of his name, I shall only add, that *the power and faithfulness of God are engaged in the carrying on the things of the kingdom of Christ, to the conviction of the most stubborn opposers.*

I begin with the first, —

I. *In the carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel, God will work wonderful providential alterations, — alterations among the trees of the field, nations, states, and men on earth.*

When the beginning of the saints' departure from under the dominion of Antichrist was followed with wars, tumults, and destructions, it was objected to Luther, that that doctrine could not be of God which was attended with such desolations: he replied, according to the vigour of his spirit, "Ego nisi tumultus istos viderem, Christum in mundo esse non crederem;" — "Did he not see those tumults, he would not believe that Christ was come forth into the world." The Lord tells you how he will bring on his kingdom, [Hag. ii. 6, 7](#), "I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come," etc. The "Desire of the nations," is to be brought in by the "shaking of the nations." They are to be civilly moved, that they may be spiritually established. Neither are they only to be shaken, but also to undergo great alterations in their shakings, [Heb. xii. 27](#), "This word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain." They must have a removal as well as a shaking; — μεταίθεσιν, "a change," a translation. Most nations in their civil constitution lie out of order for the bringing in of the interest of Christ; — they must be shaken up and new disposed of, that all obstacles may be taken away. The day of the gospel is not only terrible in its discovering light, and as it is a trying furnace, [Mal. iii. 2](#), but also in its devouring fury, as it is a consuming oven, [chap. iv. 1](#).

There are three principal seasons of the Lord's eminent appearance to carry on the kingdom of Christ and the gospel, and all attended with dreadful providential alterations: and unto one of these heads may all particular actings be reduced.

1. The first is, the promulgation of the gospel among the Jews by the Lord Christ himself and his apostles. What this was attended withal is graphically described, [Matt. xxiv. 6, 7](#), "And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars; for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places." And the close of it you have, [verse 29](#), "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken." The Judaical state, in all



the height and glory of it, was utterly consumed; so that all flesh, all the Jews, were in danger of utter destruction, [verse 22](#); their own historian, himself a Jew, affirming, that from the foundation of the world never was there such destruction and desolation brought upon any nation: Which words of his are a comment on that prediction of our Saviour, [Matt. xxiv. 21](#). And the reason of this eminent desolation you have, [Isa. ix. 5, 6](#).

2. The second is, in the farther carrying on of the gospel, after the destruction of Jerusalem, throughout the world of the Gentiles, subject then in a great proportion to the Roman empire. And what is the issue hereof? The opening of the six seals immediately follows thereon, [Rev. vi.](#); which, after manifold and various alterations, end in that dreadful dissolution of the Pagan empire which you have described from [verse 14 to the end](#).

3. The most signal is the coming of the Lord Christ to recover his people from antichristian idolatry and oppression: which, of all others, is, and shall be, attended with the most astonishing alterations and desolations, — pulling down of high trees, and exalting them that are low. Thence is that war described [Rev. xvii. 14](#), and that mighty vengeance poured out by the Lord Christ on the nations, their kings and captains, [chap. xix. 11 to the end](#); which the Holy Ghost describes by a collection of all the most dreadful expressions which are any where used to set out great devastations in the Old Testament.

And this is the head whereunto the present actings of Providence in this nation are to be referred; they all tend to the accomplishment of his main design therein. He that thinks Babylon is confined to Rome and its open idolatry, knows nothing of Babylon, nor of the new Jerusalem. The depth of subtle mystery doth not lie in gross, visible folly. It hath been insinuating itself into all the nations for sixteen hundred years, and to most of them is now become as the marrow in their bones. Before it be wholly shaken out, these heavens must be dissolved, and the earth shaken; their tall trees hewed down, and set a howling, [Rev. xviii.](#), and the residue of them transplanted from one end of the earth to another. This, I say, then, is the work that the Lord hath now in hand; and this is a day of thankfulness in reference to what he hath done for us in this nation. I know no better way of praising God for any work, than the finding out of his design therein, and closing with him in it. God hath gone with you, I hope, now to the end of your work; leave him not until he comes to the end of his. He hath compelled you “to go with him one mile” for your own good, — go with him two for his glory. The two tribes and a half sat not down in their own possessions until the whole work of the Lord was done. I speak not with respect to any engagements of war with foreign nations; — what have I to do with things that are above me? You will find work enough for your zeal to the kingdom of Christ at home; and this is the work of thankfulness which you are called unto.

Now, the reasons of this are, —

(1.) Because amongst all men, where the kingdom of Christ is to be set up, there is something or other possessed that he alone must and will have; and, therefore, the Lord



giving Jesus Christ but his own inheritance, it must needs be attended with great alterations. I dare say, until of late (whatever now is) there was not any state or nation in the world, where the name of Christ is known, but that there was an intrenchment upon that which is the pure portion and inheritance of the Lord Christ, and that detained with falsehood and force. Yea, such is the folly and blindness of the most of men, that they think their greatest interest lies in holding that fast which Christ will take from them; — Pharaoh-like, that thought it the great advantage of his kingdom not to let the people go, when it proved the ruin of him and his land. This, I dare say, will, in the issue, be the ruin of all or most of the tall trees of Europe; they have grasped much of the power of Christ, and endeavour to impose on the consciences of his in the worship of God, or otherwise oppress them in what he hath purchased for them: and, by a dreadful mistake, they suppose their own interest lies therein; which makes them hold fast until Christ hath shaken them all to pieces, and taken away even that also which was their own. The late king had learned a saying from his predecessor, “No bishop, no king.” Hence he supposes his main interest to lie in holding fast Prelacy; whatever he seems to part withal, that he will not let go, — that is his main interest. And what is this Prelacy? A mere antichristian encroachment upon the inheritance of Christ, Christ coming to take his own, shakes the other to pieces. Those who would have been our oppressors in Scotland, but that God hath crushed the cockatrice in the shell, and filled the pit with their dead bodies which they had digged for us, — they also had prepared a Procrustes’ bed, a heavy yoke, a beast that, had it grown to perfection, would have had horns and hoofs; and in maintaining this they think their great interest to lie. And in holding this fast, are they, after all their associations, broken in pieces. And this is one cause.

(2.) The works that God hath to do in such a season require it. God hath three great works to do, in the day of his carrying on the interest of Christ and the gospel:— [1.] *He hath great revenges to take*; [2.] *He hath great deliverances to work*; [3.] *He hath great discoveries to make*. I shall but touch on each.

[1.] *He hath great revenges to take*, and that on three sorts of persons.

1st. *On oppressing Babylonians*, — false worshippers and persecutors. Whilst the bride is preparing for the Lord Christ, he goes forth, with the armies of heaven following him, to take vengeance on these his enemies, [Rev. xix. 11](#). These are the Absaloms, the usurpers of his throne, — the Hamans, the forcers of his spouse, the chiefest adversaries of his kingdom?<sup>309</sup> “He shall fill the places with dead bodies” of these; and upon this account “wound the heads over many countries,” [Ps. cx. 6](#). The axe is laid to the root of many a tall tree on this score, even in this nation, where he is reckoning for blood and imposition of yokes; and he hath found out men inheriting this spirit from one generation to another.

309 [Isa. xliii. 14](#); [Jer. xxv. 12](#), li. 35; [Rev. xvi. 19](#).

2dly. *Scoffing Edomites*. — There is a twofold quarrel that God hath with that generation of men; their rejoicing at Zion's distress, and desiring its increase, [Ps. cxxxvii. 7](#); and their endeavour to destroy the residue, when at any time straitened, [Obad. 14](#). How many in the late trial rejoiced in the straits of Zion, that sat expecting our destruction, that they might have risen to stand in the cross ways to have cut off them that escaped! Wherewith should they have reconciled themselves to their master, but with the heads of the servants of Christ? God hath vengeance in such a day as this for Edom also.

3dly. *Lukewarm Laodiceans*, — neutralists, that “drink wine in bowls,” and are no way moved at the “suffering of Joseph,” — Gallios, that care for none of these things. There is not a generation in the world with whom the Lord is more provoked than with this Meroz generation. When God is jealous for Zion, he is displeased with them that are at ease, [Zech. i. 14, 15](#). Now, consider how many persons of all these sorts are fixed in the nation, and you will see that vengeance cannot be taken on them without great alterations.

[2.] He *hath deliverances to work*. It is the time of “visiting the prisoners of hope:” the prey must be taken out of the jaws of the terrible, — every “staff of the oppressor broken in pieces;” yea, he delivers his saints, not only from all that they have suffered, but from all that was in the contrivance of their enemies to bring upon them, — which is greater than they can execute; and this will cost something, before the Pharaohs of the nation will let his people go.

[3.] *He hath great trials to make; — 1st. Of his own, that they may be purged; 2dly. Of hypocrites, that they way be discovered.*

1st. The day of carrying on the interest of Christ is a day of purifying and purging, [Dan. xii. 10](#), “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried;” that is, a day like a furnace, [Mal. iii. 3](#), that will consume dross and tin. The remainder of the people must be brought through the fire, [Zech. xiii. 9](#). Joshua's garments are defiled by dwelling in Babylon;<sup>310</sup> many of Christ's own have contracted rust and soil, have got carnal interests and engagements, that must be scoured from them.

2dly. Of the discovery of hypocrites. It is emphatically said of the saints, that they “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”<sup>311</sup> All sorts of professors will follow him in some paths; in such as are consistent with their power, dominion, and advantages, they are even ready to run before him: but he hath some paths that are unpleasing to flesh and blood, — paths that he gives no loaves in; here men that say they are Jews, and are not, but lie, give quite out from him. Now, upon all these several accounts, must that day of the gospel of necessity be attended with great providential alteration.

310 [Zech. iii. 3](#).

311 [Rev. xiv. 4](#); [John vi. 26](#).

*Use 1.* To discover where dwells that spirit that actuates all the great alterations that have been in these nations. Such things have been brought to pass as have filled the world with amazement; — a monarchy of some hundred years' continuance, always affecting and at length wholly degenerated into tyranny, destroyed, pulled down, swallowed up; — a great and mighty potentate, that had caused "terror in the land of the living," and laid his sword under his head, brought to punishment for blood; — hypocrites and selfish men abundantly discovered, wise men made fools, and the strong as water; — a nation (that of Scotland) engaging for and against the same cause, backward and forward twice or thrice, always seeking where to find their own gain and interest in it, at length totally broken, in opposition to that cause wherewith at first they closed; — multitudes of professors, one year praying, fasting, mightily rejoicing upon the least success, bearing it out as a sign of the presence of God; another year, whilst the same work is carried on, cursing, repining, slighting the marvellous appearance of God in answer unto prayers and most solemn appeals, being very angry at the deliverances of Zion:— on the other side, all the mighty successes that God hath followed poor despised ones withal, being with them as with those in days of old, [Heb. xi. 33](#), "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." He, I say, that shall consider all this, may well inquire after that principle which, being regularly carried on, yet meeting with the corruption and lusts of men, should so wheel them about, and work so many mighty alterations. Now, what is this but the most effectual design of the Lord to carry on the interest of Christ and the gospel, whatever stands in the way? This bears down all before it, — wraps up some in blood, some in hardness, and is most eminently straight and holy in all these transactions. [Isa. xiv. 32](#), "What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it."

*Use 2.* To magnify the goodness of God, who unto us hath sweetened and seasoned all his dreadful dispensations, and all the alterations in those nations, with this his gracious design running through them all: this is that which puts all their beauty and lustre on them, being outwardly dreadful and horrible. The carrying on of this (which is hidden from the men of the world, who have therefore no joy) is the only thing we have to rejoice at in this day; our victories have no glory but what they receive from hence, [Isa. iv. 2](#). That blood which is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord is the blood of the enemies of this design of his; the vengeance that is to be delighted in is the vengeance of the temple; heaven, and all that is in it, is called to rejoice, when Babylon "is destroyed with violence and fury," [Rev. xviii. 21](#), — when those who would not have the King of saints reign are brought forth and slain before his face: and in this God makes distinguishing work, and calls to rejoicing, [Isa. lxxv. 13, 14](#), "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be

hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit.”

Thus the saints are called to sing “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,” [Rev. xv. 3](#). The deliverance by Moses was a temporal deliverance from outward yokes and bondage; — the deliverance of the Lamb was a spiritual deliverance from spiritual bondage: the deliverance that God will give his saints from this oppression shall be mixed; as their bondage partakes of both, so shall their deliverance be; and therefore they shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. If ever any persons in the world had cause to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, we have this day. The bondage prepared for us was both in spirituals and temporals; — about a tyrant full of revenge, and a discipline full of persecution, hath been our contest: whether the yoke of the one and the other should by the sword and violence be put upon our necks and consciences, is our controversy. There was both Egypt and Babel in the bondage prepared, — and both these enraged. Pharaoh doubled the task of the Israelites when they did speak of liberty; what would he have done had he recovered them under his hand after they were escaped? What would the thoughts of that man of blood have been, and his ways, had he prevailed, after so many provocations? “*Cræde ac sanguine, quisquis ab exilio.*” And what would their ways have been who thought to sit on his right hand and his left in his kingdom? But of this afterward. Now, God having broken both the one snare and the other, surely we have cause to sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb this day, when others are in the condition mentioned [Isa. viii. 21, 22](#).

It is true, all things are not clear to all perhaps that serve the Lord. Some cannot rejoice in the works of our God; but they are not the first on whom that sin hath been charged. Nothing more frequent in the Scripture than the laying this sin at the door of professors, that they set not their hearts to the work of the Lord. If they are of the armies in heaven, they will at length learn to follow the Lamb; and for the present, music with some discords may make melody for the Lord. The song of Deborah is full of complaint,<sup>312</sup> — divisions of Reuben, — Gilead, Dan, and Asher, slow in their helps, — Meroz wholly neutral:— though we have of all these sorts, yet may we make a song to the Lord, that in Jesus Christ may be acceptable this day. And the Lord, I hope, will open the eyes of them amongst us, and give them to cry for mercy when his righteous judgments have driven them from all their holds. When the mighty army was destroyed in the north about three years ago, many would see nothing in it, but that they had not the blessing of the church. Hence they began to think of it as Balak did of Balaam; — “whom he blessed, they were blessed; and whom he cursed, they were cursed.”<sup>313</sup> God could not bear the robbing him of his glory, and giving it unto



312 [Isa. xliii. 18](#); [Ps. lxxviii. 42–44](#); [Judges v. 15, 17, 23](#).

313 [Num. xii. 6](#); [1 Kings xviii. 26](#).

selfish men. They shall bless, and bless again, and be no more heard than the Baalists' cry:— even to the Lord shall they cry, but he will not regard them: the Lord, I say, will drive them from such holds as these, that they may acknowledge his hand. Let, then, the great work of the Lord be owned, be rejoiced in, for it will certainly bear down all that stand in the way of it: neither is there the least true consolation in any of these alterations, but what arises from a closing with it.

Come we to the second observation.

II. *The actings of God's providence, in carrying on the interest of Christ, are and shall be exceedingly unsuited to the reasonings and expectations of the most of men.*

He hath a glorious work here to be accomplished. Of whom should he now make use? Surely the "high tree," the "green tree" will be employed. If one be to be anointed in the family of Jesse, will it not be goodly Eliab? if the king will honour any, who should it be but I, says Haman? But all on the contrary, the low, dry tree is taken; — David from the flock, and Mordecai from the gate. The thoughts of God are not as our thoughts, neither doth he look on outward appearances.

To give some instances in his most signal actings in this kind.

The Jews knew that God had a great work to do in giving of a Messiah, the Saviour of the world. They are raised up to expectation of it; upon every considerable appearance, they cry, Is this he? And what withal did they expect? — *Outward glory*, beauty, deliverance, carnal power and dominion. God at length comes to do his work, and bringeth forth a poor man, that had not where to lay his head, followed by a few fishermen and simple women, that had "neither form nor comeliness that he should be desired;" persecuted, despised, crucified from the beginning to the end; — quite another thing than what they looked for.<sup>314</sup> Thus lays he the foundation of the gospel in the person of his Son, by frustrating the expectations of the most of men: "The stone which the builders refused," etc. Again, seeing salvation is of the Jews, the rod of Christ's strength being to be sent out of Zion, and that living waters were to flow forth from Jerusalem, — the gospel being from thence to be published through the world, — whom should the Lord choose to do it? Surely the great, the wise, the learned of that nation; the high priests, learned scribes, devout Pharisees, that might have won their message some repute and credit in the world.<sup>315</sup> But, contrary to all the wisdom of the flesh, he takes a few ignorant, weak, unlearned fishermen, despised upon all accounts, and commits this great work unto them; and accordingly out they go, friendless, helpless, harbourless, unto their great employment. The like instruments, for the most part, did he employ to make an entrance upon the great work of casting down false worship and idolatry. Moreover,



314 Luke iii. 15; John i. 19, 20; Acts i. 6; Matt. xx. 21, 22, xiii. 55, viii. 19; John iv. 28, 29; Isa. liii. 2, 3; Phil. ii. 7, 8, etc.

315 John iv. 22; Ps. cx. 2; Ezek. xlvi. 1; Zech. xiv. 8; Acts iv. 13; 1 Cor. i. 20, 26–28.

in that great work for the Lord Christ which is to be accomplished in the ruin and destruction of Babel, when it must be done with might, power, and strength, with armies and blood, will not now the Lord use the “high and green tree?” Many kings and potentates having in profession embraced the doctrine of the gospel, nobles and great ones having given up their names in appearance unto Christ, — who but they shall now be used in this work of the Lord? But yet plainly the Lord tells them the contrary, [Rev. xviii. 9](#); — all these persons bewail the judgments of God that are executed on Babel, which shall be done by low, dry trees.

To give one instance in the mighty works which God hath lately wrought in these nations:— A work of reformation and carrying on the interest of Christ is here undertaken. What, upon this, are the thoughts of the most of men? whither were their eyes turned? Tall trees, green trees are pitched on. This and that great lord, popular with the multitude, Eliabs in their eyes, they must do it; — the Scots shall certainly effect it; — the king shall be taken from his evil counsel, he shall be active in it. A church government shall be set up, and no man suffered to live in the nation that will not submit unto it. Some, like the sons of Zebedee, shall sit on the right and left hand of Christ, in the kingdom they were setting up for him; — these and those, sound good men, shall be next the king; then all will be great and glorious indeed. What now, I pray? Do all things indeed suit and answer these expectations and reasonings of men? doth God accomplish the thoughts of their hearts? Alas! the high trees rested on proved, for the most part, broken reeds, that ran into our hands, and let out our blood in abundance to no purpose; — the top bough, hoped for, fallen as an abominable branch; — the Scots shaken and broken with unparalleled destruction, in the maintenance of the interest and cause which at first they prosperously opposed; — the iron yoke, pretended to be that of Christ (though it be fleshly, carnal, and cruel, suited to the wisdom of a man, and his rule be spiritual, meek, and gentle), cast off and thrown away:— low trees, dry trees, despised ones, contemned ones, without form or comeliness, exalted, used, employed, and the hand of the Lord evidently lifted up in all these transactions.

Some reasons of this may be given, and, —

1. The first is taken from the *corruptions of the hearts* of men squaring the works of God to their fleshly reasonings, corrupt interests and principles. They are bold with the wisdom of God, and conclude thus and thus things ought to be, — ordering their thoughts for the most part according to their corrupt and carnal advantages. I shall instance both as to carnal advantages and principles.

(1.) *Carnal power and glory* seem excellent to the Jews: hence think they, When God gives us our Messiah, all this must be accomplished. Their affections are disordered by corrupt lusts and desires, and that enslaves their minds to strange apprehensions:— God comes in his own way, and how cross do things run to their expectations. What was the corrupt design of many in Scotland? That they might set up a son of Tabeal in England, and themselves be great under him; that they and their partakers might impose on the residue





of the nation, especially in the things of God. Their great desire that things should be thus, corrupts their minds to think that it ought to be so, and shall be so. Hence ambition to rule and to have all under their power, even in conscience, is quickly mistaken for zeal to the kingdom of Christ, — re-enthroning of tyranny is loyalty; and all according to covenant. As if men had sworn to be good to themselves, and to be true to their own interests all their days; which surely few need to be sworn to. Thus men's minds and judgments are dis-tempered by their lusts and interests, which makes them frame a way for God to proceed in; which, when he doth not, how are they surprised!

(2.) *For principles.* Men take up principles that they will adhere unto:— wise principles, forsooth, yea, and very righteous too! All things whatever that fall out must be squared unto their principles. They expect that nothing must be done but what suits unto them; and if any thing contrary be wrought, even of God himself, how deceived, how disappointed are they! The most tremendous judgment of God in this world is the hardening of the hearts of men; — this seals them up for the most part to destruction:— a thing it is often mentioned in the Scripture, and many subtle disputes there are, how it should come forth from Him who is most holy, seeing it is the greatest sin of the creature.

I shall give you my thoughts, in a most eminent instance or two, as to one particular of it. Look on Pharaoh, of whom it is most signally spoken, that God “hardened his heart.” How did the Lord accomplish this? Pharaoh settles himself upon as righteous principles as ever any of the sons of men could do: one is, “That it belongs to the chief ruler of a nation to see to the profit and glory of the nation.” What more righteous principle is there in the world? You that talk of your principles, give me one more righteous than this. Hence he concludes, that if it be incumbent on him to see that the realm receive no detriment, he must not let the people go by whom they received so many great advantages. God confirms his heart in these principles, *which are good in themselves*, but abominable when taken up against the mind and providence of God. Hence he and his perished in their principles, acting against the appearance of God. It is also said of Sihon, the king of the Amorites, that “his heart was hardened that he would not let the people go through his land.” How, I pray? Even by adhering to that wise principle, “That it is not meet to let a potent enemy into the bowels of a people.” And this made way for his ruin.

Thus is it with many; they fix on principles, good in general, and in their season. Old bounds must not be broken up; — order must not be disturbed:— let God appear never so eminently, so mightily, they will keep to their principles. What is this but judicial hardness? And this, I say, is one reason why the actings of God in such a day as this are so unsuited to the expectations of men; — they square his work to the interests and principles which it will not answer.

2. God chooseth thus to do things above and beside the expectations of men, that his *presence* and the *presence* of the Lord Christ may be the more conspicuous in the world.



Did the Lord always walk in paths that men had rationally — that is, foolishly (for such is our wisdom in the ways of God) allotted to him, the appearances of his glory would be exceedingly eclipsed. It is hard for men to have a clear and naked view of the power of God<sup>316</sup> in effecting any thing, when there is great help of means to do it; but it is much harder to discern the wisdom of God in an affair, when men's own wisdom and designing is all accomplished. But now, when the way of God is "like the way of an eagle in the air," — when "his paths are in the deep, and his footsteps are not known," — then is he glorious in his goings. Men think all things would be very glorious, if they might be done according to their mind: perhaps, indeed, they would; — but with their glory, not the glory of God.

3. God will do it for the hardening of many false, empty professors and others in the world, that the judgments appointed may come upon them to the uttermost.<sup>317</sup> The hardening of men to their destruction, being a close and inward work, is one of the most eminent acts of the providence of God in governing the world:— by this he accomplisheth most of the judgments that he hath threatened. Now, there is not any dispensation of God towards man but he can, and doth sometimes, cause it to be so managed and ordered, that it shall be a way and means of hardening such as he hath appointed thereunto:— some are hardened by the word, some by mercies, some by judgments. Amongst other ways that he useth for this purpose, this is one, — the disposal of the works of his providence contrary to the reasonings of men, — doing things unlikely and unfitly in the eyes of flesh and blood, that so they may despise those ways of his, and be broken in opposition unto them. Take an instance in Pharaoh's last hardening for destruction: When he brought the people out of Egypt, he did not lead them the direct way to Canaan, but carries them into the wilderness, and shuts them up between the mountains and the sea. Pharaoh justly concludes that they are entangled beyond escape, and that he shall surely overtake them and destroy them. This draws him out to his ruin. Had God led them in the straight path, probably he had not pursued after them; but the Lord lays this as a plot for his destruction. God will harden Jeroboam, and therefore a lion shall slay the prophet that preached against his idolatry. So was it with the Jews. They expect all glory to attend the coming of the Messiah; and after the coming of him indeed, God follows them with judgments to a total desolation; which being so unsuited unto the dispensation they expected, hardness thereby is come upon them to the uttermost. Tertullian says, he dares say that "the Scriptures were on purpose framed in many thing to give occasion to proud and curious unhumbled wits to stumble and fall." And I dare say that the Lord doth order many of his works in the world in "ways past finding out," on purpose to give occasion to many to stumble and fall. God fulfilleth many mighty works, that could not otherwise be brought about, by hardening the hearts of men. The



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316 [Judges vii. 4.](#)

317 [Rom. ix. 18](#); [Deut. ii. 30](#); [Ps. lxxxi. 12, lxix. 22](#); [Josh. xi. 20](#); [Isa. vi. 9–12](#); [John xii. 40–43](#); [Deut. xxxii. 15.](#)

hardening of the late king's heart was an engine whereby he wrought mighty thing and alterations. Had not God laid obdurateness and stubbornness upon his spirit, we had long since, in all probability, been ruined. To accomplish this end, then, God will so order the works of his providence, that men shall reason themselves into unreasonable and brutish hardness and stupidity. Thus God hath done in the days wherein we live. His mighty acts that he hath wrought, both for the matter of the things done and the manner of their doing, have been so contrary to men's principles, interest, expectations, and reasons, that they have slighted them to such a degree of hardening that they seem to have no reason left at all; — and when it comes to that, God will fall judicially upon the very faculties of their souls; he will blind their eyes, deprive them of their judgment and insight into things, that they shall be as incapable of [understanding] God's mind as fools; and give them up to vile affections, to do the things that are not seemly; — as it hath fallen out with too many amongst us.

Let us now make some use of this point.

*Use.* It serves, then, to discover the vanity of those men who, because the works of God have not been carried on in ways *suitable to their reasonings and expectations*, do utterly reject them, disown them, and oppose him in them. Can these men give any one instance of any one eminent work of God that he hath brought about by such ways and means as men would rationally allot thereunto, especially in things that are in immediate subserviency to the kingdom of the Lord Christ? Can they instance that they have been so managed? nay, hath not this been a means to harden multitudes to their destruction that have limited the Holy One, and chalked out paths for him to walk in? I cannot but fear that it was a great provocation of the eyes of God's glory, that at the beginning, and in the carrying on of the great alterations that have been wrought by his providence among us, we did speak of confirming and continuing, under any condition whatsoever, any things or persons which it was in his design to evert:— we must be promising to keep up the high tree, and to keep down the low tree; which was not at all in his thoughts, neither ever came it into his heart. I hope he hath taught us (though with thorns) to follow him sometimes, like Abraham, not knowing whither we go. Now, the Lord convince them who are yet under this darkness; — that think the ways of God not equal, because not measured by their line; — that bring their crooked rules unto that which is really straight, and cast it away as abominable. The children of Israel had got a proverb against the ways of God;<sup>318</sup> it was so taken for granted that the ways of his providence were not right and straight, that it was grown into a common byword. A little discovery of the pride and hypocrisy of their own hearts undeceived them at last.



I shall not say to our brethren that they have showed this day, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had been slain, it would have been well-pleasing to them; but this I shall say, that it is a sad sign that our ways please not God, when his ways please not us at all.

There being not space for handling the two remaining propositions contained in the text, I shall go forth to one general use, and so conclude.

Use. Now, this I shall take from that of the prophet [Amos iv. 12](#); — the generality of the people being exercised with various judgments, the residue of them are said to be saved “as a firebrand out of the burning;” that is, powerfully, effectually, from a very terrible and a very near destruction. After all the Lord’s great dispensation of providence, in carrying on his own design, this being the condition of the people of this nation, many being destroyed by foregoing judgments, and the residue now saved like a firebrand out of the burning, God having given us this issue of his mighty works in pulling down the high tree, and exalting the low tree, it cannot but be our wisdom to close with the counsel which God gives in such a condition; and that you have, I say, [Amos iv. 12](#), “Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” Seeing that all this is done, prepare to meet thy God, O England: prepare to meet thy God, O parliament: prepare to meet thy God, O army.

To lead you a little towards the performance of this duty, it being that, and that alone, which is incumbent on you, I shall show you these two things:— 1. *What it is wherein we are to meet our God.* 2. *How we must meet him therein.*

1. For the first, there are three ways wherein we must meet the Lord, if we desire to answer his mind in any of these dispensations:— (1.) *In the way of his providence;* (2.) *In the way of his worship;* (3.) *In the way of his holiness.*

(1.) *The eminent ways of the providence of God in these days may be referred unto three heads.*

[1.] *His general design, to pull down all those high oppositions to the kingdom of his Son which I have mentioned.*

[2.] *His peculiar aim, to stain the glory of all flesh, to pull down high trees, that no flesh may glory.*

[3.] *His shaking of all endearments and enjoyments here below, that the hearts of his may be fixed only on the things that cannot be shaken.*

And these, upon all accounts and considerations whatever, appear to be the main tendencies of the actings of providence in these our days.

(2.) There is the *way of his worship*; wherein also he will be met. It is most remote from my thoughts to enter into contests concerning that peculiar way of gospel worship which Christ hath appointed. It sufficeth me, that seeing God hath promised that in these days he will have his tabernacle with men, and that barrenness and drought shall be on every soul that comes not up to his feast of tabernacles, it is bottom sufficient to press men to meet him in that way, according as he shall graciously make out light unto them.

(3.) *There is the way of his holiness.* As he is holy, so are all his ways holy, — so he will be met and walked with in all ways of holiness and obedience to Jesus Christ. And these are the ways wherein God will be met by his remnant, his delivered remnant.

2. What, then, is it *to meet* the Lord in any of these ways? what is it to meet him in the way of his providence, his worship, his holiness? To meet one in any thing, is to close with him in that thing:— we say, Herein I meet you, when we are of one mind. To meet the Lord in these things, is to close with the will and mind of God in them. This is that which I would exhort you unto, yea, lay the charge of God upon you this day, even on you and your companions, who are as a brand snatched out of the burning, —

(1.) To meet God in the way of his providence.

[1.] Meet him in his general design of casting down all combined opposition to the kingdom of his Son; that God in his appointed time will bring forth the kingdom of the Lord Christ unto more glory and power than in former days, I presume you are persuaded. Whatever will be more, these six things are clearly promised:—

*1st. Fulness of peace* unto the gospel and the professors thereof, [Isa. xi. 6, 7, liv. 13, xxxiii. 20, 21; Rev. xxi. 25.](#)

*2dly. Purity and beauty of ordinances* and gospel worship, [Rev. xi. 2, xxi. 3.](#) The tabernacle was wholly made by appointment, [Mal. iii. 3, 4; Zech. xiv. 16; Rev. xxi. 27; Zech. xiv. 20; Isa. xxxv. 8.](#)

*3dly. Multitudes of converts*, many persons, yea, nations, [Isa. ix. 7, 8, lxvi. 8, xlix. 18–22; Rev. vii. 9.](#)

*4thly. The full casting out and rejecting of all will-worship, and their attendant abominations*, [Rev. xi. 2.](#)

*5thly. Professed subjection of the nations* throughout the whole world unto the Lord Christ, [Dan. ii. 44, vii. 26, 27; Isa. lx. 6–9;](#) — the kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, [[Rev. xi. 15,](#)] amongst whom his appearance shall be so glorious, that David himself shall be said to reign.

*6thly. A most glorious and dreadful breaking of all that rise in opposition unto him*, [Isa. lx. 12,](#) — never such desolations, [Rev. xvi. 17–19.](#)

Now, in order to the bringing in of this his rule and kingdom, with its attendances, the Lord Christ goes forth, in the first place, to cast down the things that stand in his way, dashing his enemies “in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” This is a part of the design of Providence, wherein we are to meet him in these days.

I shall speak a word, — (1st.) Unto them who are enabled to look through the clouds and darkness whereby his paths are encompassed; (2dly.) Unto them who cannot.

(1st.) For the former, be you persuaded to meet the Lord in this his design, — yet to continue steadfast in helping him against the mighty. I speak not only to you who are in authority, nor unto you to whom the sword is girded, but unto all that wish well to Zion.



We have every one our mite that we may cast into this treasury: we may be all princes in this case, all Israels, — prevailers with God and men. There be three things whereby even you, who are but as the number, the common soldiers of Christ, may meet the Lord in this design.

[1st.] *By faith.* Believe the promises, close with them, act faith upon them, and you will believe the beast unto destruction, antichrist into the pit, and Magog to ruin. Believe that (Ps. cx. 1, 4, ii. 7, 8; Mic. v. 3, 4; Isa. lx. 12) the enemies of Christ shall be made his footstool, that the nations shall be his inheritance, that he shall reign gloriously in beauty, that he shall smite in pieces the heads over divers nations; — live in the faith of these things, and as it will give you the sweetness of them before they come, so it will hasten their coming beyond the endeavours of thousands, yea, millions of armed men.

[2dly.] *Meet him with your supplications.* Cry unto him, as Ps. xlv. 3–5, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.” This will make you be the armies of heaven, that follow him in his great undertakings, Rev. xix. 14. It is his praying people that are his conquering armies that follow him. Now you find it coming, leave not pulling with all your strength, lest it roll back again. Shoot not two or three arrows, and so give over; but never leave shooting until the enemies of the Lord be all destroyed. Seeing it is his gospel whose advancement the Lord Jesus aimeth at in all these dispensations, and whose quarrel alone he revengeth (whatever men may do), help on to the advancement of that gospel of his; which, as formerly it was oppressed by the height and tyranny of the tower of Babel, so for the present is exceedingly defiled and cumbered by the rubbish of it being in some measure cast down.

[3dly.] Whereas in these dispensations it is most eminently and frequently, in the praise of Christ, said that he is just and righteous in all his ways, — as you may see in all the acclamations of the saints upon the execution of his judgments on his enemies (“Just and righteous art thou”); which is signally done on this account, because the ways whereby he doth it are counted most unrighteous in the world, — in this, then, also is he to be met, *even in the administration of justice and judgment*: you will otherwise certainly be found in a cross path unto him, and be borne down before him. This is that wisdom which he calls for among the judges of the earth, when he is set to reign on his holy hill, Ps. ii. 10, 11.

(2dly.) I shall add one word or two unto them who, either from the darkness of the things themselves, or from the prejudices and temptations of their own spirits, are not able to discern the righteousness of the ways of God, but rather lift up themselves against him.

*First*, then, Consider the constant *appearing of God against* every party that, under any colour or pretence whatever, have lifted up themselves for the reinforcement of things as in former days: — what colour or pretence soever they have put on, or which way soever

they have turned themselves, God hath still appeared against them. Can you not discern his leavening their counsels with folly and madness, weakening their hearts and hands, — making the strong become as tow, and the successful a reproach? Though they have gone from mountain to mountain to seek for divination, and changed their pretences as olden as Laban did Jacob's wages, yet they find neither fraud nor enchantment that will prevail: and doth not this proclaim that the design which God had in hand is as yet marvellously above you?

*Secondly*, Consider the constant *answer of prayers* which those which have waited on God in these dispensations, to their unspeakable consolation, have received, — finding God to be nigh unto them in all that they call upon him for. If in this thing they regarded iniquity in their hearts, surely God would not have heard them. Others also cry, even to the Lord do they cry; but he will not bear witness to the abomination of their hearts. Oh, that upon these and the like considerations you would at last take the counsel of the psalmist, [Ps. xlvi. 10](#), Be still, and know that he is God. Be silent before him, for he is risen out of his holy habitation. Say, God hath done great things for these; who hath hardened himself against him and prospered? And this is the first particular.

[2.] The second design of Providence in these dispensations, is evidently *to stain the glory of all flesh*; so [Isa. xxiii. 9](#). Never did the Lord any work more eminently. What sort of men is there amongst us whose glory God hath not stained? I had rather leave this unto a silent thought, than give you particular instances of it; otherwise, it were very easy to make it as clear as the sun, that God hath left neither self-honour nor glory to any of the sons of men. Meet him, then, in this also:—

*1st*, Cease putting *confidence* in man; say, He is a worm, and the son of man is but a worm; his breath is in his nostrils, and wherein is he to be accounted of? This use doth the church make of mercies, [Ps. xx. 6, 7](#), “Some trust in horses, and some in chariots; but we will remember the name of the Lord:” we will not trust in parliaments or armies. “All flesh is grass,” [Isa. xl. 1](#); let it have its withering time, and away. See no wisdom, but the wisdom of God, — no strength, but the strength of God, — no glory but his.

*2dly*, Have any of us any glory, any *crowns*, any gifts, any graces, any wisdom or valour, any useful endowments? let us cast them all down at the feet of Jesus Christ. If we look on them, if we keep them as our own, God withers all their beauty and their glory. Thus do the elders who worship the Lamb forever, [Rev. iv. 10, 11](#), say to him, Lord Jesus, thine is the glory, — thine are all the mighty works which have been wrought in our days; — thine are all the means whereby they have been accomplished:— we are nothing, we can do nothing; thou art all, and in all. And this is the second.

[3.] He aims at the *shaking* of all these things here below. He is taking down the rate and price of all things here below; on that which was worth a thousand pounds, he takes his bill and writes down scarce the thousandth part. He hath laid his hand upon the nests of

the nation, and hath fitted wings unto all their treasures, and so eminently written vanity and uncertainty on them all as must needs lessen their esteem, were not men blinded by the god of this world. In this also are we to meet the Lord, —

1st. By getting a *low esteem* of the things that God is thus shaking, and that upon this account, that he shakes them for this very end and purpose, that we should find neither rest nor peace in them. Perhaps thou hast had a desire to be somebody in the world; — thou seest thyself come short of what thou aimest at; say now, with Mephibosheth upon the return of David, Not only half, but let all go, seeing that the Lord Jesus shall reign with glory. A man may sometimes beat a servant for the instruction of his son; God hath shaken the enjoyments of his enemies to lead his friends to disesteem them. God forbid the quite contrary should be found upon any of us.

2dly. By labouring to find all riches and treasures in the Lord Christ. The earth staggers like a drunken man; — the princes of it are reduced to a morsel of bread; — all that is seen is of no value: doth not God direct us to the hidden paths, — to the treasures that cannot be destroyed? Many say, “Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.”

(2.) We are to meet the Lord in the *way of his ordinances*, — in the way of gospel worship. The exalting of the Lord Christ herein is the issue of all the mighty works of God: this is given in as the end of all, [Rev. xxi. 3](#), “The tabernacle of God,” etc. After great shakings, the promise still is of a new heaven and earth, [Isa. lxxv. 17](#); [Rev. xxi. 1](#); and this is that the people of God put themselves upon in the days wherein Babylon is to be destroyed, [Jer. i. 4–8](#); that is the work they then take in hand. The end of all is the building of the temple, [Ezek. xlvi. 1](#); and this is the conclusion that the people of God do make, [Isa. ii. 3, 4](#); and if this be neglected, the Lord will say of us, as David of Nabal, “Surely in vain have I kept these men, and all that they have.” To meet the Lord in this also, —

[1.] *Inquire diligently into his mind and will*, that you may know his paths, and be acquainted with his statutes. I dare say, no temptation in the world presses with more colour and violence upon men under mercies, than that [temptation] to a neglect of walking and holding communion with God in his ordinances. The devil thinks thus to revenge himself of the Lord Jesus; — his own yoke being broken, he thinks to prevail to the casting away of his. Christ hath a yoke, though it be gentle and easy.

[2.] You that do *enjoy holy ordinances*, labour to have holy hearts answerable thereunto. You have heavenly institutions, labour to have heavenly conversations. If we be like the world in our *walking*, it is no great *matter* if we be like the world in our *worship*. It is sad, walking contrary to God in his own paths. Show out the power and efficacy of all gospel institutions in a frame of spirit, course of life, and equability of spiritual temper, all your days.



[3.] Keep up the power of *private worship*, both personal and family. I have seen many good laws for the Sabbath, and hope I shall see some good examples! Look what the roots are in the family; such will the fruit be in the church and commonwealth. If your spirits are not well manured there, you will be utterly barren elsewhere. That is done most clearly to God which is done within doors.

(3.) *Meet him in the way of his holiness.* In the cry of the saints unto the Lord for the execution of his judgments and vengeance, they in an especial manner invoke his holiness, [Rev. vi. 10](#), “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” And in their rendering praises to him, they still make mention of his holiness and righteousness in all his ways. Though the ways of God are commonly traduced as unequal and unholy ways, yet in the close there is no property of his that he will more vindicate in all his works than that of his holiness; in this, then, we are also to meet the Lord in this day of our deliverance, — the day wherein he hath wrought such great and wonderful alterations.

This use the Holy Ghost maketh upon such like dispensations, [2 Pet. iii. 11](#), “Seeing that all these things,” etc.; and so also, [Heb. xii. 27, 28](#), “And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” All things opposing removed, a freedom established, — therefore let us have grace. God is the thrice holy one, — holy in his nature, holy in his word, and holy in all his works; and he requires that his people be a holy people. To this he still urged his ancient people, from the argument of his presence amongst them. Oh, that the Spirit of the Lord would bring forth this one fruit of all his dealing with us, that we might be a holy people! If we put God’s pure and dean mercies into impure and unclean vessels, they will to us be defiled. Let us take heed of prostituting the mighty works of God to the service of our lusts. Should we now make such conclusions to ourselves as the rich fool in the gospel, and say, Well, we have now peace and prosperity laid up for some years; — soul, take try ease, eat, drink, and be merry; grow rich and great; follow after vanity, pride, folly, uncleanness; enjoy with delight the things which we have, and heap up thereto:— why, as this is to labour to draw the Lord God into a partnership with our abominations, mad to enforce his mighty works to bear witness to our lusts, so certainly it is such a frame as he will surely and speedily revenge. The end why God delivers us from all our enemies is, not that we may serve our lusts and ourselves without fear; but that we may serve him without fear, in righteousness and holiness, all the days of our lives. Let, then, this be the issue upon our hearts of all the victories, and successes, and returns of prayers that we have received, that we give up ourselves to the Lord in all manner of holiness: this is that which the Lord’s voice calls us unto. Let not now him that is filthy be filthy still; let not him that is worldly be worldly still; let not him that is loose,

and hath east off the yoke of Christ, be so still; let not him that hath sought himself do so still; let not him who hath contemned the institutions of Christ do so still; let not him that hath been lifted up above his brethren be so still; — but let every one forsake his evil way, and the iniquity that is in his hand, that we who were not a people at all may be a people to the praise of the God of all; that you who rule over men may be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord, that you may be as the light of the morning when the sun is risen, even as a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain; — that we who are under rule may sit under our vines and fig-trees, speaking well of the name of God, and labouring to carry on the kingdom of the Prince of Peace, even every one as we are called, and abiding therein with God; — that as, when you sought this mercy of God which we rejoice in, in solemn humbling of yourselves before the Lord, I made it appear unto you that it was the remnant of Jacob, God's secret and holy ones, lying in the bowels of the nation, that must be the rise of all our deliverances, so we would now every one strive to be of that number, — for they alone enjoy the sweetness of this and every mercy.

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Sermon VIII.

The labouring saint's dimission to rest:  
a sermon preached at  
the funeral of the Right Hon. Henry Ireton,  
Lord-deputy of Ireland,



## Prefatory note.

This sermon on the death of Ireton, though printed, as we are told in the dedication, from the first notes which the author took, contains some beautiful and interesting thoughts, and is pervaded by a strain of peculiar tenderness and solemnity. Henry Ireton was the eldest son of German Ireton of Attenton, Nottinghamshire. He was born in 1610; entered Trinity College, Oxford, in 1626; and having graduated as bachelor of arts, devoted himself to the study of law at the Middle Temple. He entered the parliamentary army when the civil war commenced, and gave proof of singular courage and capacity. In 1646 he married Bridget, the eldest daughter of Cromwell; and by the powerful interest which he thus secured, as well as his own abilities, he obtained rapid promotion in the army. At the battle of Naseby he commanded the left wing of the parliamentary army, and was defeated by the impetuous charge of Prince Rupert. Led in the ardour of the struggle beyond his own rank, he was himself wounded and taken prisoner, but contrived soon afterwards to make his escape. It was at his suggestion that the secret council of officers was held, to consider what course should be taken in disposing of the king's person. He was one of the judges on the king's trial, and signed the warrant for his execution. In 1649 he was second in command to Cromwell in Ireland, was made president of Munster, and afterwards was left as lord deputy when Cromwell returned to England. In the midst of a successful career, he was seized, after having taken Limerick, with an inflammatory fever, on the 16th of November, and died on the 26th, 1651. His memory was honoured by a public funeral, and his remains were interred in Henry the Seventh's Chapel in Westminster Abbey. His widow and his children, consisting of one son (Henry) and four daughters, had a grant of £2000 settled on them by Parliament out of the confiscated estates of the Duke of Buckingham. After the Restoration, his body was disinterred, gibbeted along with that of Cromwell, and buried at Tyburn.

Various testimonies might be adduced in proof of the high esteem in which he was held by his party. Burner affirms, that "he had the principles and temper of a Cassius;" — Hume, that "he was a memorable personage, much celebrated for his vigilance and capacity;" — Noble (*Memoir of the Cromwell Family*, vol. ii. p. 298), that "he was the most artful, dark, deliberate man of all the Republicans, by whom he was much beloved;" — Heath (*Flagellum*, p. 124), that "he was absolutely the best prayer-maker and preacher in the army; for which he may thank his education at Oxford;" — Ludlow (*Memoir*, vol. i. p. 33), that "he erected for himself a more glorious monument in the hearts of good men, by his affection to his country, his abilities of mind, his impartial justice, his diligence in the public service, and his other virtues; which were a far greater honour to his memory than a dormitory among the ashes of kings;" — and Carlyle (*Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, vol. i. p. 167) thus closes a reference to his death, — "One brave and subtle-working brain has ended; to the regret of all the brave. A man, able with his pen and his sword; very stiff in his ways." — Ed.

**To the honourable and my very worthy friend, Colonel Henry Cromwell.**

Sir,

The ensuing sermon was preached upon as sad an occasion as on any particular account hath been given to this nation in this our generation. It is now published, as at the desire of very many who love the savour of that perfume which is diffused with the memory of the noble person peculiarly mentioned therein, so also upon the requests of such others as enables me justly to entitle the doing of it, *obedience*. Being come abroad, it was in my thoughts to have directed it immediately, in the first place, to her who, of *any individual person*, was most nearly concerned in him. But having observed how near she hath been to be swallowed up of sorrow, and what slow progress *He* who took care to seal up instruction to her soul by all dispensations, hath given her hitherto towards a conquest thereof, I was not willing to offer directly a new occasion unto the multitude of her perplexed thoughts about this thing. No doubt, her loss being as great as it could be, upon the account of one subject to the law of mortality, as many grains of grief and sorrow are to be allowed her in the balance of the sanctuary as God doth permit to be laid out and dispended about any of the sons of men. He who is able to make sweet the bitterest waters, and to give a gracious issue to the most grievous trial, will certainly, in due time, eminently bring forth that good upon her spirit which he is causing all these things to work together for. In the meantime, sir, these lines are to you: your near relation to that rare example of righteousness, faith, holiness, zeal, courage, self-denial, love to his country, wisdom, and industry, mentioned in the ensuing sermon; — the mutual tender affection between you whilst he was living; — your presence with him in his last trial and conflict; — the deserved regard you bear to his worth and memory; — your design of looking into and following after his steps and purpose in the work of God in his generation, as such an accomplished pattern as few ages have produced the like, — with many other reasons of the like nature, did easily induce me hereunto. That which is here printed is but the notes which I first took, not having had leisure since to give them a serious perusal; and upon that account must beg a candid interpretation unto any thing that may appear not so well digested therein as might be expected. I have not any thing to express concerning yourself, but only my desire that your heart may be fixed to the Lord God of your fathers; and that, in the midst of all your temptations and oppositions wherewith your pilgrimage will be attended, you may be carried on and established in your inward subjection unto, and outward contending for, the kingdom of the Dearly Beloved of our souls, not fainting or waxing weary until you receive your dismissal to rest for your lot in the end of the days.

Sir,

Your most humble and affectionate Servant,

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J. Owen.

Oxon, Chr. Ch., *April 2.*

## Sermon VIII. The labouring saint's dismissal to rest.

“But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” — [Dan. xii. 13.](#)

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The words of my text having no dependence (as to their sense and meaning, but only as to the occasion of them) on the verses foregoing, I shall not at all look backward into the chapter, but fall immediately upon them, that I be not hindered from my principal intentment; — being unwilling to detain you long, though willing to speak a word from the Lord to such a congregation, gathered together by such an eminent act of the providence of God.

The words are the Lord's dismissal given to a most eminent servant, from a most eminent employment, wherein these four things are observable:—

First, The *dismission* itself in the first words: “Go thou thy ways.”

Secondly, The *term* allotted for his continuance under that dismissal: “Until the end be.”

Thirdly, His *state* and condition under that dismissal: “For thou shalt rest.”

Fourthly, The utmost *issue* of all this dispensation, both as to his foregoing labour, his dismissal, and rest following: “Stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

I. In the first I shall consider two things:— 1. The *person dismissed*: “Thou;” 2. The *dismission* itself: “Go thou thy ways.”

1. The person dismissed is Daniel, the writer of this prophecy, who received all the great visions of God mentioned therein; and I desire to observe concerning him, as to our purpose in hand, two things:— (1.) His *qualifications*; (2.) His *employment*.

(1.) For the first, I shall only name some of them that were most eminent in him, and they are three:— [1.] Wisdom; [2.] Love to his people; [3.] Uprightness and righteousness in the discharge of that high place whereunto he was advanced.

[1.] For the first, the Holy Ghost beareth ample testimony thereunto, [Dan. i. 17, 20](#), “As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” In all matters of wisdom and understanding, none in the whole Babylonian empire, full of wise men and artists, were to be compared unto Daniel and his companions; and Ezekiel [chap. xxviii. 3](#), rebuking the pride and arrogance of Tyrus, with a bitter scorn he says, “Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel,” or thou thinkest thyself so, — intimating that none in wisdom was to be compared unto him.

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[2.] *Love to his people*. On this account was his most diligent inquiry into the time of their deliverance, and his earnest contending with God, upon the discovery of the season when it was to be accomplished, [chap. ix. 1–4](#). Hence he is reckoned amongst them who in

their generation stood in the gap in the behalf of others, — “Noah, Daniel, and Job.” Hence God calls the people of the Jews, his people, chap. ix. 24, “Seventy weeks are determined on thy people;” — the people of thy affections and desires, the people of whom thou art, and who are so dear unto thee.

[3.] For his *righteousness* in discharging of his trust and office, you have the joint testimony of God and man:— his high place and preferment you have, chap. vi. 2. He was the first of the three presidents who were set over the hundred and twenty other princes of the provinces; and the Holy Ghost tells you, that, in the discharge of this high trust and great employment, he was faithful to the utmost, verse 4, “Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.” Which also his enemies confessed, verse 5, “Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

These qualifications, I say, amongst others, were most eminent in this person who here received his dismissal from his employment.

(2.) There is his *employment* itself, from which he is dismissed; and herein I shall observe these two things:— [1.] The *nature* of the employment itself; [2.] *Some considerable circumstances* of it.

[1.] For the first, it consisted in receiving from God, and holding out to others, clear and express visions concerning God’s wonderful providential alterations in kingdoms and nations, which were to be accomplished from the days wherein he lived to the end of the world. All the prophets together had not so many clear discoveries as this one Daniel concerning these things.

[2.] For the latter, this is observable, that all his visions still close with some eminent exaltation of the kingdom of Christ; — that is the centre where all the lines of his visions do meet, as is to be seen in the close almost of every chapter; and this was the great intendment of the Spirit in all those glorious revelations unto Daniel, to manifest the subserviency of all civil revolutions unto the interest of the kingdom of the Lord Christ.

This, then, is the person concerning whom these words were used, and this was his employment.

2. There is his dismissal itself: “Go thou thy ways.” Now this may be considered two ways:— (1.) Singly, relating to his employment only; (2.) In reference to his life also.

(1.) In the first sense, the Lord dischargeth Daniel from his farther attendance on him, in this way of receiving visions and revelations concerning things that were shortly to come to pass, although haply his portion might yet be continued in the land of the living: as if the Lord should say, Thou art an inquiring man; thou art still seeking for farther acquaintance with my mind in these things; — but content thyself, thou shalt receive no more visions; I





will now employ Haggai, Zechariah, and others; thou shalt receive no more. But I cannot close with this sense, for, —

[1.] This is not the manner of God, to lay aside those whom he hath found faithful in his service. *Men, indeed, do so*; but God changeth not: whom he hath begun to honour with any employment, he continueth them in it whilst they are faithful to him.

[2.] Daniel was now above a hundred years old, as may be easily demonstrated by comparing the time of his captivity, which was in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim [chap. i. 1](#), with the time of his writing this prophecy, which is expressly said to be in the reign of Cyrus, the king of Persia, [chap. x. 1](#); and, therefore, probably his end was very nigh. And after this you hear of him no more; who, had he lived many days, it had been his sin not to have gone up to Jerusalem, the decree of Cyrus, giving liberty for a return, being passed.

(2.) It is not, then, God's laying him aside from his office simply, but also his intimation that he must shortly lay down his mortality, and so come, into the condition wherein he was to "rest" until the end. This, then, is his dismissal. He died in his work; — life and employment go together. "Go thou thy ways."

Observation I. *There is an appointed season, wherein, the saints of the most eminent abilities, in the most useful employments, must receive their dismissal:*— be their work of never so great importance, be their abilities never so choice and eminent, they must in their season receive their dismissal.

Before I handle this proposition, or proceed to open the following words, I shall crave leave to bring the work of God and the word of God a little close together, and lay the parallel between the persons dismissed, — the one in our text, the other in a present providence, which is very near, only that the one lived not out half the days of the other.

1. Three personal qualifications we observed in Daniel, all which were very eminent in the person of our desires.

(1.) *Wisdom*. There is a manifold wisdom which God imparteth to the sons of men. There is *spiritual* wisdom, that, by the way of eminency, is said to be "from above," [James iii. 17](#); which is nothing but the gracious acquaintance of the soul with the hidden wisdom of God in Christ, [1 Cor. ii. 7](#). And there is a *civil* wisdom, or a sound ability of mind for the management of the affairs of men, in subordination to the providence and righteousness of God. Though both these were in Daniel, yet it is in respect of the latter that his wisdom is so peculiarly extolled. And though I am very far from assuming to myself the skill of judging of the abilities of men, and would be far from holding forth things of mere common report; yet, upon assured grounds, I suppose this gift of God, — ability of mind, and dexterous industry for the management of human affairs, — may be ascribed to our departed friend.



There are sundry things that distinguish this wisdom from that policy which God abhors; which is “carnal, sensual, and devilish,” James iii. 15, though it be the great darling of the men of the world. I shall name one or two of them.

[1.] A gracious discerning of the mind of God, according to his appearance in the affairs wherein men are employed, Mic. vi. 9, “The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see try name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” It is *the wisdom of a man*, to see the name of God, to be acquainted with his will, his mind, his aim in things, when his providential voice crieth to the city. All the works of God have their voice, — have their instruction; — those of signal providences speak aloud; they cry to the city, Here is the wisdom of a man: he is a man of substance,<sup>319</sup> a substantial man, that can see his name in such dispensations. This carnal policy inquires not into, but is wholly swallowed up in the concatenation of things among themselves; applying secondary causes unto events, without once looking to the name of God, — like swine following acorns under the tree, not at all looking up to the tree from whence they fall.

[2.] Such acquaintance with the seasons of providence as to know the duty of the people of God in them, 1 Chron. xii. 32, “The children of Issachar, men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” This it is indeed to be a man of understanding, — to know in any season the duty of Israel, that they may walk up to acceptation with God in the performance thereof; — a thing which is neither prescribed in the rules nor followed in the practice of men wise only with that cursed policy which God abhors. To have a mind suited unto all seasons and tempers, so as to compass their own selfish ends, is the utmost of their aim.

Now, in both these did this gift of God shine in this deceased saint.

1st, He ever counted it *his wisdom* to look after the name of God, and the testification of his will, in every dispensation of providence wherein he was called to serve. For *this* were his wakings, watchings, inquires. When that was made out, he counted not his business half done, but even accomplished, and that the issue was ready at the door: not, What saith this man? or, What saith that man? — rebut, What saith the Lord? that being evident. He consulted not with flesh and blood, and the wisdom of it; whereof, perhaps, would he have leaned to it, he was as little destitute as any in his generation, — I mean, the whole wisdom of a man. The name of God was as land in every storm; — in the discovery whereof he had as happy all eye, at the greatest seeming distance, when the clouds were blackest and the waves highest, as any.

319 The Hebrew word translated “wisdom” stands alone in the text, without “man;” חָכְמָה, derived from חָכַם or חָכָה; Sanscrit, *as*; Pers., *ess*; Latin, *esse, essentia, opes*, — substance. See Fürst’s Concordance. — Ed.

2d, Neither did he rest here. “What Israel ought to do” in every season, was also his inquiry. Some men have a wisdom to know things, but not seasons, in any measure. Surely a thing in season is no less beautiful than a word in season; — “as apples of gold in pictures of silver.” There are few things that belong to civil affairs but are alterable upon the incomprehensible variety of circumstances. These alter and change the very nature of them, and make them good or bad; that is, useful or destructive. He that will have the garment that was made for him one year serve and fit him the next, must be sure that he neither increase nor wane. Importune insisting on the most useful things, without respect to alterations of seasons, is a sad sign of a narrow heart. He of whom we speak was wise to “discern the seasons,” and performed things when both themselves and the ways of carrying them on were excellently suited unto all coincidences of their season. And, indeed, what is most wisely proposed in one season may be most foolishly pursued in another. It had been wisdom in Joshua not to have made any compact, but to have slain all the Gibeonites; but it was a folly sorely revenged in Saul, who attempted to do the same. He who thinks the most righteous and suitable proposals or principles that ever were in the world (setting aside general rules of unchangeable righteousness and equity, compassing all times, places, ways, and forms of government), must be performed, as desirable, because once they were so, is certainly a stranger to the affairs of human kind.

Some things are universally unchangeable and indispensable amongst men, supposing them to live answerable to the general principles of their kind:— as, that a government must be; without which every one is the enemy of every one, and all tend to mutual destruction, which are appointed of God for mutual preservation; — that in government some do rule, and some be in subjection; — that all rule be for the good of them that are ruled; and the like principles, that flow necessarily from the very nature of political society.

Some things, again, are alterable and dispensable merely upon the account of preserving the former principles, or the like. If any of them are out of course, it is a *vacuum in nature politic*, for which all particular elements instantly dislodge and transpose themselves to supply. And such are all forms of governments amongst men; which, if either they so degenerate of themselves that they become directly opposite, or are so shattered by providential revolutions as to become useless, to their proper end, may and ought to be changed, and not upon other accounts. But now for other things in government, — as the particular way whereby persons shall be designed unto it, — the continuance of the same persons in it for a less or greater proportion of time, — the exercise of more or less power by some sorts, or the whole body of them that are ruled, — the uniting of men for some particular end by bonds and engagements, and the like occasional emergencies, — the universal disposal of them is rolled on prudence to act according to present circumstances.

(2.) *Love to his people.* This was the *second qualification* wherein Daniel was so eminent. And our deceased friend — not to enter into comparison with them that went before —



had clearly such a proportion as we may heartily desire that those who follow after may drink but equal draughts of the same cup. That his pains, labour, travail, jeopards of his life and all that was dear to him, relinquishment of relations and contentments, had sweetness and life from this motive, even intensesness of affection to his people, the people of whom he was, and whose prosperity he did desire, needs no farther demonstration than the great neglect of self and all self-concernments which dwelt upon him in all his tremendous undertakings. “*Vicit amor patriæ,*” or certainly he who had upon his breast and all his undertakings self-contempt so eminently engraven, could not have persisted wrestling with so many difficulties to the end of his days. It was Jerusalem and the prosperity thereof which was preferred to his chief joy. Neither, —

(3.) Did he come short in *righteousness* in the administration of that high place whereto he was called; nay, than this there was not a more eminent stone in that diadem which he had on the earth. If he lay not at the bottom, yet at least he had a signal concurrence in such acts of justice as antiquity hath not known, and posterity will admire. Neither was it this or that particular act that did in this bespeak his praise, but a constant will and purpose of rendering to every one his due.

I shall not insist upon particulars: in these and sundry other personal qualifications, between the persons mentioned a parallel may lie.

2. As to employment, that of Daniel was mentioned before: it was the receiving and holding out from God visions of providential alterations, disposing and transposing of states, nations, kingdoms, and dominions. What he had in *speculation* was this man’s part to follow in *action*. He was an eminent instrument in the hand of God in as tremendous providential alterations as such a spot of the world hath at any time received, since Daniel foresaw in general them all: and this, not as many have been, carried along with the stream, or led by outward motives and considerations far above their own principles and desires, but seemingly and knowingly he closed with the mind of God, with full purpose of heart to serve the will of the Lord in his generation. And on this account did he see every mountain made a plain beforehand by the Spirit of the Lord, and “staggered not at the greatest difficulties through unbelief; but being steadfast in faith, he gave glory to God.” And to complete the parallel, — as Daniel’s visions were still terminated in the kingdom of Christ, so all his actions had the same aim and intendment. This was that which gave life and sweetness to all the most dismal and black engagements that at any time he was called out unto. All made way to the coming in of the promised glory. It was all the “vengeance of the Lord and his temple,” — a Davidical preparation of his paths in blood, that He might for ever reign in righteousness and peace. But be he so or so, the truth of our proposition is confirmed towards him, *That there is as appointed season, when the saints of the most eminent abilities, in the most useful employments, shall receive their dismissal, etc.*



I shall briefly open the rest of the words, and so take up the proposition again which was first laid down.

II. Then, there is the term allotted to him in this state of his dismissal: "Until the end be."

Three things may be here intended in this word, "end."

1. *The end of his life*: "Go thou thy ways to the end of thy life and days." But this we before disallowed, not consenting that Daniel received a dismissal from his employment before the end of his life and pilgrimage.

2. *The end of the world*: "Go thy ways to the end of the world: till then thou shalt rest in thy grave." But neither yet doth this seem to be particularly intended in these words. The words in the close of the text do expressly mention that, calling it "the end of days;" and in so few words, the same thing is not needlessly repeated: besides, had this expression held out the whole time of his abode in the state of rest here signified, it must have been, "Go thou thy ways, for thou shalt rest until the end be." So that, —

3. The "end" here is to be accommodated unto the things whereof the Holy Ghost is peculiarly dealing with Daniel; and that is, the accomplishment of the great visions which he had received, in breaking the kingdoms of the world, and setting up the kingdom of the Holy One of God. Daniel is dismissed from farther attendance in this service; he shall not see the actual accomplishment of the things mentioned, but is dismissed, and laid aside unto the end of them. The word "until," in the Scripture, is not such a limitation of time as to assert the contrary to what is excepted, upon its accomplishment "Until the end," doth not signify that he should not rest after the end of the things intimated; no more than it is affirmed that Michal had children after her death, because it is said that until her death she had none, [2 Sam. vi. 23](#). This, then, is that end that he is dismissed *unto*, — *The appointed season for the accomplishment of those glorious things which he had foreshown*.

Observation II. *God oftentimes suffers not his choicest servants to see the issue and accomplishment of those glorious things wherein themselves have been most eminently engaged.*

III. The third thing (that we may make haste) is his state and condition during the time which he lies under this dismissal, in these words, "For thou shalt rest."

There is nothing of difficulty in these words, but what will naturally fall under consideration in the opening of the proposition which they hold out: which is, —

Observation III. *The condition of a dismissed saint is a condition of rest*: "Thou shalt rest until the end be."

What this rest is, and from what, with wherein it consists, shall be afterward explained.

IV. The last thing in the text is the utmost issue of all these dispensations, both as to his *foregoing labour* and his *present dismissal*, and *following rest*: "Thou shalt stand in thy lot," etc.

Here are two things considerable in these words.



1. *The season of the accomplishment of what is here foretold and promised unto Daniel;* and that is, “in the end of the days;” that is, when time shall be no more, when a period shall be put to the days of the world:— called “the last day, the great day, the day of judgment;” that is, the season of the accomplishment of this promise, “The day wherein God will judge the world by the man whom he hath ordained.”

Observation IV. *There is an appointed, determinate season, wherein all things and persons, according to the will of God, will run into their utmost issue and everlasting condition.*

2. The thing foretold and promised; that is, that he should “stand in his lot.”

Observation V. *There is an appointed lot for every one to stand in, and measured portion, which in the end they shall receive.*

Observation VI. *There is an eminent lot hereafter, for men of eminent employment for God here.*

I shall not be able to handle all these several truths which lie in the words; those only which are of most importance, and most suitable, may briefly be handled unto you. And the first is, —

Observation I. *There is an appointed season wherein the saints of the most eminent abilities, in the most useful employments, must receive their dismissal.*

*Zech. i. 5*, “Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?” Fathers and prophets have but their season, and they are not: they have their dismissal. So old Simeon professeth, “Nunc Dimittis,” *Luke ii. 29*; — Now, thou givest me a dismissal. They are placed of God in their station, as a sentinel in his watch-tower; and they have their appointed season, and are then dismissed from their watch. The great Captain of their salvation comes, and saith, Go thou thy ways: thou hast faithfully discharged thy duty; go now unto thy rest. Some have harder service, — some have harder duty than others. Some keep guard in the winter, — a time of storms and temptations, trials and great pressures; others in the sunshine, the summer of a more flourishing estate and condition. Yet duty they all do; — all attend in the service, — all endure some hardship, and have their appointed season for their dismissal: and be they never so excellent at the discharging of their duty, they shall not abide one moment beyond the bounds which he hath set them, who saith to all his creatures, Thus far shall you go, and no farther. Oftentimes this dismissal is in the midst of their work for which they seem to be most eminently qualified.

The three most eminent works of God, in and about his children, in the days of old, were his giving his people the law, and settling them in the land of Canaan; — his recovering them from the Babylonish captivity; — and his promulgation of the gospel unto them. In these three works he employed three most eminent persons; — Moses in the first, Daniel in the second, and John Baptist in the third; and none of them saw the work accomplished



wherein they were so eminently employed. Moses died the year before the people entered Canaan: Daniel, some few years before the foundation of the temple; and John Baptist in the first year of the baptism of our Saviour, when the gospel which he began to preach was to be published in its beauty and glory. They had all but their appointed seasons. Though their abilities were eminent, — who like unto them! and their employment excellent, — what like it in the earth! yet, at their seasons, they must go their ways to rest, and lie down, till they stand in their lot at the end of the days. The reasons of which are, —

1. The general condition of their mortality doth require that it should be so: “It is appointed to all men once to die,” [Heb. ix. 27](#). There is a stable law fixed concerning the sons of men, that is not upon the account of any usefulness here to be dispensed withal. The number of our months is with God; he hath fixed our bounds, which we shall not pass. Our days are as the days of an hireling, that have a certain, prefixed, and determinate end. Their strength is not the strength of stones, neither is their flesh of brass, that they should endure for ever. See [Job xiv. 10–12](#). This, I say, requires that there should be an appointed season for their employment, for it is so for their lives. And yet there is more in it than this; for in the course of five thousand years, God hath exempted two persons by his sovereignty from the condition of mortality, who walked with him in their generations: so that the bounds fixed to them were not upon the account of their lives, but merely of the work they had in hand.

2. God doth it, that he may be the more *eminently seen* in the carrying on his own works, which in their season he commits to them. Should he leave his work always on one hand, it would seem at length to be the work of the instrument only. Though the people opposed Moses at the first, yet it is thought they would have worshipped him at the last: and therefore God buried him where his body could not be found. Yet, indeed, he had but the lot of most who faithfully serve God in their generations; — despised whilst they are present, — idolized when they are gone. I do not know of any great work that the Lord carried out the same persons to be the beginners and enders of. He gave them all their seasons, that his power and wisdom might the more evidently appear in carrying it from one hand to another.

3. God makes room, as it were, in his vineyard for the budding, flourishing, and fruit-bearing of other plants which he hath planted. Great employments call for great exercise of graces. Even in employments in and about providential things, there is the exercise of spiritual grace; — as much faith and prayer, as much communion with God, walking before him, and wrestling with him, may be used in casting down of armies, as in setting up of churches. God exerciseth all the graces of his in the work he calleth them out unto. He principles them by faith and fellowship with himself for their employment; and therefore he gives each individual but his appointed season, that others, in whose hearts he hath lodged the same spirit wherewith they are endued, may come forth and show the fruits thereof. Daniel lieth down in the dust in rest and peace. And why so? The spirit of prophecy is poured

out on Haggai and Zechariah, etc.; they must also carry on this work, and bear my name before my people. Consider the use of this.

*Use 1.* Of exhortation unto all that are employed in the work of God, especially such as with *eminent abilities* are engaged in eminent employments. You have but your allotted season for your work; — your day hath its close, its evening; your night cometh, wherein none can work. The grave cannot praise the Lord; death cannot celebrate him: it is the living, the living that are fitted for that work, [Isa. xxxviii. 18, 19](#). It is true, men may allot you your season, and all in vain; but your times are in the hand of God, — that which he hath appointed out unto you shall stand. Be you never so excellent, never so useful, yet the days of your service “are as the days of an hireling,” that will expire at the appointed season. Be wise, then, to improve the time that is in your hands. This is the praise of a man, the only praise whereof in this world he is partaker, that he doth the will of God before he fall asleep; that he faithfully serves his generation, until he be no more. For a dying man to wrestle with the rebukes of God and the complaints of his own conscience, for meeting with the *end* of his *days* before he hath attained the *midst* of his *duty*, is a sad condition. You have your *season*, and you have *but* your season; neither can you lie down in peace, until you have some persuasion that your *work* as well as your *life* is at an end. Whatever, then, you find to do, do it with all your strength; for there is neither wisdom nor power in the grave, whither you are going, [Eccles. ix. 10](#).

Some particular rules may direct you herein.

(1.) Compare yourselves with the saints of God, who were faithful in their generations, and are now fallen asleep. What a deal of work did Josiah do in a short season! what a light did John set up in a few years! with what unwearied pains and industry did our deceased friend serve his generation! It is said of Cæsar, that he was ashamed of his own sloth, when he found that Alexander had conquered the eastern world at the age wherein he had done nothing. Behold here one receiving his dismissal about the age of forty years; and what a world of work for God and the interest of the Lord Christ did he in that season! and how well, in the close, hath he parted with a *temporal* life for Him who, by his death, procured for him an eternal life! And now rest is sweet unto this labouring man. Provoke one another by examples.

(2.) Be diligent to *pass through your work*, and let it not too long hang upon your hands; your appointed season may come before you bring it to the close; — yea, search out work for God. You that are intrusted in power, trifle not away your season. Is there no oppressed person that with diligence you might relieve? is there no poor distressed widow or orphan whose righteous requests you might expedite and despatch? — are there no stout offenders against God and man that might be chastised? — are there no slack and slow counties and cities in the execution of justice, that might be quickened by your example? — no places destitute of the gospel that might be furnished and supplied by your industry and wisdom?





Can you not find out something of this or the like nature to be despatched with vigour and diligence? nay, do not innumerable particulars in each kind lie upon your hands? and is not your non-performance of them such a sacrifice as wherewith God is not well pleased? Your time is limited and appointed; you know not how soon you may be overtaken with it; and would it not be desirable unto you, that you had done these things? will it be bitterness in the end, that you so laid out your endeavours?

*Use 2.* All men have but their seasons in any work; only God abideth in it for ever: in every undertaking let your eye still be on him, with whom is the fulness and the residue of the Spirit. Jeremiah's great bewailing of Josiah's death was doubtless made upon the account of his discerning that none would come after him to carry on the work which he had begun, but the wickedness of that people was to come to its height; — else God can raise up yet more Josiahs. Let him be eyed as the principal and only abiding agent in any great undertaking.

In the residue of the observations I shall be very brief. The next is, —

Observation II. *God oftentimes suffers not the choicest of his servants to see the accomplishment of those glorious things wherein themselves have been most eminently engaged.*

The case of Moses is most eminently known. He had a large share in suffering the persecutions which were allotted to the people:— forty years' banishment he endured in the wilderness, under the reproach of Christ; — forty years more spent in wrestling with innumerable difficulties, dangerous perils, mutinies, wars, and contentions. At the close, when he comes to look upon the land, — when the end of all that dispensation was to be wound up, and the rest and reward of all his toil and labour to be had, which formerly he had undergone for twice forty years, — “Go thou thy ways,” saith the Lord; “thou shalt rest;” — take thy dismissal; thou shalt not enter into the good land; lie down here in the wilderness in peace.

John Baptist goes and preaches the drawing nigh of the kingdom of God, but lived only to point out Christ with his finger; cries, “Behold the Lamb of God; I must decrease,” — and is cut off. David makes the great preparation for the temple; but he shall not see so much as the foundation laid. Men must take their appointed lot. God will send by the hand of him whom he will send. Daniel must rest until the end be. It is said of some, they began to deliver Israel. The case of Zerubbabel was very rare, who saw the foundation and also the top-stone of the temple laid; and yet the work of Jerusalem was not half finished in his days, as you may see, [Zech. i.](#) And this because, —

1. God oftentimes receives secret provocations from the choicest of his servants, which move him to take them short of their desires. Those of his own whom he employs in great works, have great and close communion with him. God usually exercises their spirits in near acts of fellowship with himself: they receive much from him, and are constrained to unburden themselves frequently upon him. Now, when men are brought into an intimacy



with God, and have received great engagements from him, the Lord takes notice of every working and acting of their souls in an especial manner, and is oftentimes grieved and provoked with that in them which others can take no notice of. Let a man read the story of that action of Moses upon which the Lord told him directly he should not see the finishing of the work he had in hand, nor enter into Canaan, [Num. xx. 7, 8, 11](#). It will be a hard matter to find out wherein the failing was. He smote the rock with the rod, with some words of impatience, when he should only have spoken to it, — and this with some secret unbelief as to the thing he had in hand. God deals with others visibly, according to their outward actions; but in his own he takes notice of all their unbelief, fears, withdrawals, as proceeding from a frame in no measure answering those gracious discoveries of himself which he hath made unto them; and on this account it is that some are taken off in the midst of their work.

2. To manifest that he hath better things in store for his saints than the *best* and *utmost* of what they can desire or aim at here below, he had a heaven for Moses; and therefore might in love and mercy deny him Canaan. He employeth some eminently; — their work is great, — their end glorious: at the very last step almost of their journey he takes off one and another, — lets them not see the things aimed at. This may be thought hard measure, strict severity, exact justice, — yea, as Job complains, “taking advantages against them;” but see what he calls them to, in calling them off from their greatest glories and excellencies on the earth, and all this will appear to be love, tenderness, and favour in the highest. Whilst you are labouring for a handful of *first-fruits*, he gives you the *full harvest*; whilst you are labouring for the *figure* here below, he gives you the *substance above*. Should you see the greatest work wherein any of you were ever engaged brought to perfection, yet all were but a few drops, compared with that fulness which he hath prepared for you. The Lord, then, doth it to witness to the children of men that the things which are seen — the best of them — are not to be compared with the things that are not seen, yea, the least of them; inasmuch as he takes them whom he will honour from the very door of the one, to bear them into the other. The meanest enjoyment in heaven is to be preferred before the richest on earth, even then when the kingdom of Christ shall come in most beauty and glory.

*Use 1.* You that are engaged in the work of God, seek for a reward of your service in the service itself. Few of you may live to see that beauty and glory which perhaps you aim at as the end of all your great undertakings for God whereunto you have been engaged. God will proceed at his own pace, and calls on us to go along with him; and in the meantime, until the determinate end come, to wait in faith, and not make haste. Those whose minds are so fixed on, and swallowed up with, some end (though good) which they have proposed to themselves, do seldom see good days and serene in their own souls. They have bitterness, wrath, and trouble all their days, — are still pressing to the end proposed, and commonly are dismissed from their station before it be attained. There is a sweetness, there is wages to be found in the work of God itself. Men who have learned to hold communion with God

in every work he calls them out unto, though they never see the main harvest they aim at in general, yet such will rest satisfied, and submit to the Lord's limitation of their time:— they bear their own sheaves in their bosoms. Seeing God oftentimes dismisses his choicest servants before they see or taste of the main fruits of their endeavours, I see not upon what account consolation can be had in following the Lord in difficult dispensations, but only in that reward which every duty bringeth along with it, by communion with God in its performance. Make, then, this your aim, that in sincerity of heart you do the work of God in your generation. Find his presence with you, his Spirit guiding you, his love accepting you in the Lord Christ; and, whenever you receive your dismissal, it will be rest and peace, — in the meantime, you will not make haste.

*Use 2.* See a bottom and ground of consolation when such eminent instruments as this departed worthy are called off from their station, when ready to enter upon the harvest of all their labours, watchings, toilings, and expense of blood. God hath better things for them in store, abiding things, that they shall not enjoy for a day or two, — which is the best of what they could hope for here, had they lived to see all their desires accomplished, but such as in the fulness whereof they may lie down in peace to eternity. Why do we complain? — for our own loss? is not the residue and fulness of the Spirit with Him who gave him his dismissal? — for his loss? he lived not to see Ireland in peace, but enjoys the glory of that eternal kingdom that was prepared for him before the foundation of the world; which is the condition held out in the third observation.

Observation III. The *condition of a dismissed saint is a condition of rest*: “Go thy way until the end be; for thou shalt rest.”

The apostle gives it in as the issue of a discourse from a passage in the Psalms, “There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God,” [Heb. iv. 9](#); — it remains and is reserved for them; this the Lord hath solemnly proclaimed from heaven, [Rev. xiv. 13](#), “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” They go into a blessed condition of rest. There is not any notion under which the state of a dismissed saint is so frequently described as this of “rest,” — which, indeed, is the proper end and tendency of all things. Their happiness is their rest; their rest is all the happiness they can be partakers of: “Fecisti nos ad te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec veniat ad te.”<sup>320</sup>

Now, “rest” holds out two things unto us:— A freedom from what is opposite thereunto, wherein those that are at rest have been exercised, in reference whereunto they are said to be at rest; and something which suits them and satisfies their nature in the condition wherein they are; and, therefore, they are at rest: which they could not be were it not so with them; for nothing can rest but in the full fruition and enjoyment of that which satiates the whole

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320 [August. Confes., lib. i. c. 1.]

nature of it in all its extent and capacity. We must briefly inquire, — 1. What it is that the saints are at rest from; and, 2. What it is that they are at rest in. Which I shall do very speedily.

1. The many particulars which they are at rest from may be referred unto two general heads:— (1.) Sin; (2.) Labour and travail.

(1.) Sin. This, on all considerations whatever, is the main disquietness of the soul. Temptations to it, actings in it, troubles for it, — they are the very Egypt of the soul, its house and place of bondage and vexation; — either the power of it indwelling, or the guilt of it pressing, are here still disquieting the soul. For the first, how doth Paul complain, lament, yea, cry out concerning it, [Rom. vii. 24](#), “O wretched man that I am!” and what a sad, restless, and tumultuating condition upon this account doth he describe in the verses foregoing! *The best, the wisest, the holiest* of the saints on this account are in a restless condition. Suppose a man a *conqueror in every battle*, in every combat that he is engaged in; yet whilst he hath any fighting, though he be never foiled, he hath not peace. Though the saints should have success in every engagement against sin, yet because it will still be rebelling, still be fighting, it will disturb their peace. So also doth the guilt of it; — our Saviour testifieth, that a sense of it will make a man to be “weary and heavy laden,” [Matt. xi. 28](#). This oftentimes makes the inhabitants of Zion say they are sick; for though an end be made of sin, as to the guilt of it, in the blood of Christ, yet, by reason of our darkness, folly, and unbelief, and the hiding of the countenance of God, the conscience is oftentimes pressed with it, no less than if it lay indeed under the whole weight and burden of it.

I shall not instance in more particulars concerning this cause of want of rest and disquietness; — the perplexity of temptations, buffetings and winnowings of Satan, allurements and affrightments of the world, darkness and sorrows of unbelief, and the like, do all set in against us upon this account.

This, in general, is the first thing that the dismissed saints are at rest from: They sin no more, they wound the Lord Jesus no more, they trouble their own souls no more, they grieve the Spirit no more, they dishonour the gospel no more, — they are troubled no more with Satan’s temptations without, no more with their own corruption within; but lie down in a constant enjoyment of one everlasting victory over sin, with all its attendants: saith the Spirit, “They rest from their labours,” [Rev. xiv. 1](#), — those labours which make them faint and weary, their contending with sin to the uttermost. They are no more cold in communion; they have not one thought that wanders off from God to eternity. They lose him no more, but always lie down in his bosom, without the least possibility of disturbance. Even the very remembrance of sin is sweet unto them, when they see God infinitely exalted and admired in the pardon thereof. They are free from trouble, and that both as to doing and suffering. Few of the saints but are called out, in one kind or another, to both these. Every one is either *doing* for God or *suffering* for God; — some both do and suffer great things for him. In either of them there is pain, weariness, travail, labour, trouble, sorrow, and anxiety of spirit; neither



is there any eminent doing or working for God but is carried on with much suffering to the outward man.

What a life of labour and trouble did our deceased friend lead for many years in the flesh! how were his days consumed in travail! God calling him to his foot, and exercising him to understand the sweetness of that promise, that they that die in him shall have rest. Many spend their days deliciously, — with so much contentment to the flesh that it is impossible they should have any foretaste and sweet relish of their rest that is to come.

The apostle tells us that “there remaineth a rest for the people of God;” and yet withal, that they who believe are entered into that rest; — those who in their labours, in their travails, do take in the sweetness of that promise of rest, do even in their labour make an entrance thereinto.

(2.) They rest from all trouble and anxiety that attend them in their pilgrimage, either in doing or suffering for God, [Heb. iv. 10](#). They enter into rest, and cease from their works. God wipes all tears from their eyes. There is no more watching, no more fasting, no more wrestling, no more fighting, no more blood, no more sorrow; the ransomed of the Lord do return with everlasting joy on their heads, and sorrow and sighing flee away. There, tyrants pretend no more title to their kingdom; rebels lie not in wait for their blood; they are no more awakened by the sound of the trumpet, nor the noise of the instruments of death: — they fear not for their relations, they weep not for their friends; the Lamb is their temple, and God is all in all unto them. Yet, —

2. This will not complete their rest; something farther is required thereto, — even something to satisfy, everlastingly content, and fill them in the state and condition wherein they are. Free them in your thoughts from what you please, without this they are not at rest. This, then, you have in the second place, God is the rest of their souls, [Ps. cxvi. 1](#), “Return to thy rest, O my soul.” Dismissed saints rest in the bosom of God, because in the fruition and enjoyment of him they are everlastingly satisfied, as having attained the utmost end whereto they were created, all the blessedness whereof they are capable. I could almost beg for liberty a little to expatiate in this meditation of the sweet, gracious, glorious, satisfied condition of a dismissed saint. But the time is spent, and therefore, — without holding out one drop of water to quench the feigned fire of purgatory; or drawing forth anything to discover the vanity of their assertion who affirm the soul to sleep, or to be nothing until the resurrection; or theirs who, assigning to them a state of subsistence and perception, do yet exclude them from the fruition of God, without which there is no rest, until the end of all; with such other by-persuasions as would disquiet the condition or abridge the glory of those blessed souls; which yet were a facile undertaking, — I shall draw towards a close.

There are three points yet remaining. I shall speak only to the first of them, and that as an use of the doctrine last proposed, and I have done.



Observation IV. *There is an appointed determinate season, wherein all things and persons, according to the will of God, shall run into their utmost issue and everlasting condition.*

Thou art going, whoever thou art, into an abiding condition and there is a lot appointed for thee, wherein lies an estate everlastingly unchangeable. It is the utmost end whereunto thou art designed, and when once thou art entered into that lot, thou art everlastingly engaged: no more change, no more alteration; if it be well with thee, it will abide; if otherwise, expect not any relief. In our few days we live for eternity; in our mutable estate we deal for an unchangeable condition. It is not thus only in respect of particulars, but God hath "appointed a day, wherein he will judge all the world by the man whom he hath ordained." An end is coming unto all that whole dispensation under which we are; — to you who, by the riches of free grace, have obtained union and communion with the Lord Jesus, rest and peace, when God shall everlastingly rain snares, fire and brimstone, upon the workers of iniquity. Some mock, indeed, and say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" But we know "the Lord is not slack, as some men count slackness," but exerciseth patience until the appointed season for the bringing about of his own glorious ends, which he hath determined concerning his creatures. Why should we, then, complain, when any one, perhaps before our expectation, but yet according to God's determination, makes an entrance into the end of all? All things work to that season. This state of things is not for continuance. That which is incumbent is in this uncertain space of time allotted to us, to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, as also to serve the Lord faithfully in our generations, wherein we cannot be surprised. We have an example in him who is gone before. It is true, the Lord Jesus is our primitive pattern and example; but those also who have followed him, wherein they have followed him, are to be eyed and marked as provocations to the same labour of faith and love wherein they were exercised. And, that this use may be made by this assembly, I shall add one word concerning him from whom is the occasion thereof.

Every man stands in a threefold capacity, — natural, civil, religious. And there are distinct qualifications that are suited unto these several capacities.

1. To the first, as the ornaments and perfections of nature, are suited some seeds of those *heroical* virtues, as courage, permanency in business, etc.; which being in themselves morally indifferent, have their foundations eminently laid in the natures of some persons, which yet hinders not but that their good improvement is of grace.

2. To the second, or man's civil capacity, there are many eminencies relating as peculiar endowments, which may be referred unto the three heads of *ability, faithfulness, and industry*; that through them neither by weakness, treachery, nor sloth, the works and employments incumbent on men in their civil state and condition may suffer.

3. Men's peculiar ornament and improvement, in their *religious capacity*, lies in those fruits of the Spirit which we call Christian graces. Of these, in respect of usefulness, there are three most eminent, viz., *faith, love, and self-denial*. I speak of them upon another account



than the apostle doth, where he placeth hope amongst the *first three* of Christian graces. Now, all these, in their several kinds, were as eminent in the person deceased, in his several capacities, perhaps is usually found in any one in a generation. My business is not to make a funeral oration, only I suppose that without offence I may desire, that in courage and permanency in business (which I name in opposition to that unsettled, pragmatical, shuffling disposition which is in some men), — in ability for wisdom and counsel, — in faithfulness to his trust and in his trust, — in indefatigable industry in the pursuit of the work committed to him, — in faith on the promises of God, and acquaintance with his mind in his mighty works of providence, — in love to the Lord Jesus and all his saints, in a tender regard to their interest, delight in their society, contempt of himself and all his for the gospel's sake, with eminent self-denial in all his concernments, — in impartiality and sincerity in the execution of justice, that in these and the like things we may have many raised up in the power and spirit wherein he walked before the Lord and the inhabitants of this nation. This (I say) I hope I may speak without offence here upon such an occasion as this. My business being occasionally to preach the word, not to carry on a part of a funeral ceremony, I shall add no more, but commit you to Him who is able to prepare you for your eternal condition.

Sermon IX.  
Christ's kingdom  
and the  
magistrate's power.





### **Prefatory note.**

The complete title of the earlier editions of the following sermon indicates the design of the author, — “Concerning the Kingdom of Christ, and the Power of the Civil Magistrate *about the things of the Worship of God.*” It was preached to the Parliament on October 13, 1652, “a day of solemn humiliation.” It was the time of the naval war with the Dutch. The bill for a New Representative, or, in other words, the question whether the Long Parliament should now be dissolved, was keenly agitated. The weightier question, as to the settlement of the Constitution, burdened and perplexed the nation. During the month in which the sermon was preached, numerous private conferences on the former point took place between the leaders of the Parliament and the officers of the Army. These circumstances may account for the appointment of a day of humiliation. What determined Owen to make choice of the delicate and important subject of which he treats in this sermon, might be the prevalence of a desire in many quarters for a proper adjustment of ecclesiastical affairs. A petition from the Army (see “*Whitelocke’s Memorials,*” p. 516) had been presented to the Parliament on the 13th of August 1652, “reciting that they had often sought the Lord, and desire these particulars to be considered.” Then follows a list of twelve “particulars;” the first of which is, “That speedy and effectual means be used for promoting the gospel, profane and scandalous ministers be ousted, good preachers encouraged, maintenance for them provided, and tithes taken away.”

The sermon breathes a spirit weary of the lengthened confusion which had distracted the land. The principles contained in it raise questions as important in themselves, and as fresh in interest now, as in the days when Owen lived and preached. Whatever may be thought of his views on the relation of the magistrate to the church, this sermon, in which his judgment is declared on this topic of paramount and engrossing moment, has evidently been prepared with unusual care. — Ed.



## Sermon IX. Christ's kingdom and the magistrate's power.

"I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things." — Dan. vii. 15, 16.

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What there is of concernment for the right understanding of these words in that part of the chapter which goes before, may be considered in the opening of the words themselves; and therefore I shall immediately attend thereunto.

There are in them four things considerable:— I. The state and condition which Daniel, the penman of this prophecy, expresseth himself to be in, wherein he hath companions in the days wherein we live: "He was grieved in his spirit in the midst of his body." II. The cause and means whereby he was brought into this perplexed frame of spirit: "The visions of his head troubled him." III. The remedy he used for his delivery from that entangled condition of spirit wherein he was: "He went nigh to one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this." IV. The issue of that application he made to that one that stood by for redress: "He told him, and made him know the interpretation of the things." — All these I shall briefly open unto you, that I may lay a foundation for the truth which the Lord hath furnished me with to hold out unto you this day.

I. In the first, the person spoken of is Daniel himself: "I Daniel." He bears this testimony concerning himself, and his condition was, — "He was grieved in his spirit."

The person himself was a man highly favoured of God above all in his generation; so richly furnished with gifts and graces that he is once and again brought forth as an example, and instanced in by God himself upon the account of eminence in *wisdom* and *piety*. Yet all this preserves him not from falling into this perplexed condition, Dan. i. 17–20; Ezek. xiv. 14, xxviii. 3. Now, as the principal work of all the holy prophets, which have been since the world began, Luke i. 70; 1 Pet. i. 10–12, was to preach, set forth, and declare the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who was for to come; so some especial concernments of his person, righteousness, and kingdom, were in especial manner committed unto them respectively; — his passion and righteousness to Isaiah; the covenant of grace in him to Jeremiah; and to this Daniel, most eminently, the great works of the providence of God in the shaking and overturning of kingdoms and nations in a subserviency to his kingdom. With the revelation hereof, for the consolation of the church in all ages, did the Lord honour him of whom we speak.

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For the present he describes himself in a somewhat perplexed condition. His spirit (mind and soul) was grieved, sick, troubled, or disquieted in the midst of his body; that is, deeply, nearly, closely:— it sets out the greatness of his trouble, the anxiety of his thoughts within him. Like David, when he expostulated with his soul about it, — "Why art thou so

sad, my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me?" [Ps. xliii. 5](#), — he knew not what to say, what to do, nor wherewith to relieve himself. He was filled with sad thoughts, sad apprehensions of what was to come to pass, and what might be the issue of the things that had been discovered unto him. This, I say, is the frame and temper he describes himself to be in, — a man under sad apprehensions of the issues and events of things and the dispensations of God (as many are at this day); and upon that account closely and nearly perplexed.

II. The cause of this perturbation of mind and spirit was from the visions of his head: "The visions of his head troubled him."

He calls them "visions of the head," because that is the seat of the internal senses and fantasy, whereby visions are received. So he calls them "a dream," [verse 1](#), "and visions of his head upon his bed." Yet such visions, such a dream it was, as, being immediately from God, and containing a no less certain discovery of his will and mind than if the things mentioned in them had been spoken face to face, he writes them by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, [verse 2](#), for the use of the church.

I shall not take the advantage of going forth unto any discourse of dreams, visions, oracles, and those other divers ways and manners ([Heb. i. 1](#)) of revealing his mind and will, which God was pleased to use with his prophets of old, [Num. xii. 6–8](#). My aim lies another way: — it sufficeth only to take notice, that God gave him in his sleep a representation of the things here expressed, which he was to give over for the use of the church in following ages. The matter of these visions, which did so much trouble him, falls more directly under our consideration. Now, —

1. The subject of these perplexing visions is a representation of the four great empires of the world, which had, and were to have, dominion in and over the places of the church's greatest concernments, and were all to receive their period and destruction by the Lord Christ and his revenging hand.

And these three things he mentions of them therein:— (1.) *Their rise*; (2.) *Nature*; (3.) *Destruction*.

(1.) In [verse 2](#) he describes their rise and original: it was "from the strivings of the four winds of the heavens upon the great sea;" he compares them to the most violent, uncontrollable, and tumultuating things in the whole creation. Winds and seas! — what waves, what horrible storms, what mixing of heaven and earth, what confusion and destruction must needs ensue the fierce contest of all contrary winds upon the great sea! Such are the springs of empires and governments for the most part amongst men, — such their entrances and advancements. In particular, such were the beginnings of the four empires here spoken of. Wars, tumults, confusions, blood, destruction, desolation, were the seeds of their greatness: "Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem adpellant," Galgac. apud Tacit. [*Agr.*, 30.] Seas and great waters do, in the Scripture, represent people and nations, [Rev. xvii. 15](#), "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

As “waters,” they are unstable, fierce, restless, tumultuating; and when God mingleth his judgments amongst them, they are as “a sea of glass mingled with fire,” — brittle, uncertain, devouring, and implacable. It is a demonstration of the sovereignty of God, that he is above them, [Ps. xciii. 3, 4](#), “The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.” Now, from these, tossed with the winds of commotions, seditions, oppressions, passions, do flow the governments of the world, the Spirit of God moving upon the face of those waters, to bring forth those forms and frames of rule which he will make use of.

(2.) [Unto verse 9](#) he describes them *in order as to their nature and kind*; — one of them being then ready to be destroyed, and the other to succeed, until the utter desolation of them all, and all power rising in their spirit and principle.

I shall not pass through their particular description, nor stay to prove that the *fourth beast*, without name or special form, is the Roman empire; which I have elsewhere<sup>321</sup> demonstrated, and it is something else which at this time I aim at. This is that which troubles and grieves the spirit of Daniel in the midst of his body. He saw what worldly powers should arise, — by what horrible tumults, shakings, confusions, and violence they should spring up, — with what fierceness, cruelty, and persecution, they should rule in the world, and stamp all under their feet.

(3.) *Their end and destruction* is revealed unto him, from [verse 10 unto verses 12, 13](#); and this by the appearance of “the Ancient of days” (the eternal God) in judgment against them; which he sets out with that solemnity and glory, as if it were the great judgment of the last day; — God, indeed, thereby giving a pledge unto the world of that universal judgment he will one day exercise towards all, “by the man whom he hath ordained,” [Acts xvii. 31](#). And this increaseth the terror of the vision, to have such a representation of the glory of God as no creature is able to bear. God also manifests hereby his immediate actings in the setting up and pulling down the powers of this world; which he doth as fully and effectually as if he sat upon a throne of judgment, calling them all by name to appear in his presence, and, upon the evidence of their ways, cruelties, and oppression, pronouncing sentence against them. “Be wise, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling,” [Ps. ii. 11, 12](#). “He changeth the times and seasons,” [Dan. ii. 21](#). “He ruleth in the kingdom of men, and setteth over it whom he pleaseth,” [chap. v. 21](#).

And this is the first thing in this vision at which the prophet was perplexed.

2. There is the approach of the Lord Christ unto the Father, with his entrance into his kingdom and dominion, which is everlasting, and passeth not away, [verse 14](#).

321 Sermon on [Heb. xii. 27](#).

This being the end of the vision, I must a little insist upon it; not that I intend purposely to handle the kingdom of Christ as mediator, but only a little to consider it as it lies here in the vision, and is needful for the right bottoming of the truth in our intendment.

Various have been the thoughts of men about the kingdom of Christ in all ages. That the Messiah was to be a King, a Prince, a Ruler, — that he was to have a kingdom, and that the government was to be on his shoulder, — is evident from the Old Testament; that all this was and is accomplished in Jesus of Nazareth, whom God exalted, made a Prince and a Saviour, is no less evident in the New; — but about the nature of this kingdom, its rise and manner of government, have been, and are, the contests of men.

The Jews to this very day expect it as a thing carnal and temporal, visible, outwardly glorious, wherein, in all manner of pleasure, they shall bear rule over the nations at their will; — such another thing, of all the world, as the popedom, which the Gentile or idolatrous worshippers of Christ set up for his kingdom: and of some such thing it may be supposed the apostles themselves were not without thoughts, until they had conversed with the Lord after the resurrection, [Luke ix. 46](#); [Acts i. 6](#). Neither are all amongst us free from them at this day.

Those who with any simplicity profess the name of Christ, do generally agree that there are three parts of it.

(1.) First, and principally, in that which is *internal and spiritual*, in and over the souls of men, over spirits both good and bad, in reference unto the ends which he hath to accomplish upon them. Of that which is direct and immediate upon the hearts and souls of men, there are two parts.

[1.] That which he exerciseth towards his elect, who are given unto him of his Father, *converting, ruling, preserving* them, under and through great variety of dispensations, internal and external, until he brings them unto himself: “He stands and feeds them in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God,” [Mic. v. 4](#); — even he who is the “Ruler in Israel,” [verse 2](#). He is exalted and made “a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins,” [Acts v. 31](#). He makes his people “a willing people in the day of his power,” [Ps. cx. 3](#), — sending out his Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, and making his word and ordinances “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds” in their hearts, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of himself,” [2 Cor. x. 4, 5](#). He takes possession of their hearts by his power, dwelling in them by his Spirit, making them kings in his kingdom, and bringing them infallibly into glory. Oh, that this rule, this kingdom of his, might be carried on in our hearts! We busy ourselves about many things; we shall find at length this one thing necessary. This is that part of the kingdom of Christ which we are principally to aim at in the preaching of the gospel: “We preach Christ Jesus the Lord,” [2 Cor. iv. 5](#), — him to be Lord and King, though others have



had dominion over us. They are the grains of Israel which the Lord seeks for in his sifting the nations by his word, as well as by his providence: and we are, in the work of the gospel, to “endure all things for the elect’s sakes,” [2 Tim. ii. 10](#).

[2.] In the power which he exerciseth towards others, to whom the word of the gospel doth come, *calling, convincing, enlightening, hardening* many, whom yet, being not his sheep, nor of his fold, he will never take to himself; but leaves to themselves, under aggravations of condemnation, which they pull upon themselves by the contempt of the gospel, [2 Cor. ii. 16](#); [Heb. x. 29](#). He sends his Spirit to convince even the perishing “world of sin, righteousness, and judgment,” [John xvi. 8](#). He sendeth sharp arrows into the very hearts of his enemies, [Ps. xlv. 5](#), — making them stoop, bow, and fall under him; so bounding their rage, overbearing their lusts, leaving them without excuse in themselves, and his people oftentimes not without profit from them:— with some dealing even in this life more severely; causing the witnesses of the gospel to torment them by the preaching of the word, [Rev. xi. 10](#), yet giving them up to “strong delusions, that they may believe lies, and be damned,” [2 Thess. ii. 11, 12](#), etc.

[3.] In carrying on of this work towards the one and the other, he puts forth the power, rule, and dominion, which he hath of his Father *over spirits*, both good and bad.

*1st.* Being made head of principalities and powers, and exalted far above every name in heaven or earth, being made the “first-born of every creature,” and all the angels of God being commanded to worship him, [Heb. i. 6](#), and put in subjection under his feet; — he sends them forth, and uses them as ministering spirits for them who shall be heirs of salvation, [verse 14](#), — appointing them to behold the face of his Father, ready for his commands on their behalf, [Matt. xviii. 10](#), — attending in their assemblies, [1 Cor. xi. 10](#), and to give them their assistance in the time of danger and trouble, [Acts xii. 9](#), destroying their adversaries, [verse 23](#), with innumerable other advantageous administrations, which he hath not thought good to acquaint us withal in particular, that our dependence might be on our King himself, and not on any of our fellow-servants, though never so glorious and excellent, [Rev. xxii. 9](#).

*2dly.* For Satan, as he came to bind the strong man armed, and to spoil his goods, [Matt. xii. 29](#), — to destroy him that had the power of death, [Heb. ii. 14](#); and being made manifest to this end, that he might destroy his works ([1 John iii. 8](#)) in the souls of men in this world, [2 Cor. x. 4, 5](#); so, having in his own person conquered these principalities and powers of darkness, making an open show of them in his cross, and triumphing over them, [Col. ii. 15](#), he continues overruling and judging him and them, in their opposition to his church, and will do so until he bring them to a full conquest and subjection, that they shall be judged and sentenced by the poor creatures whom in this world they continually pursue with all manner of enmity, [1 Cor. vi. 3](#).

And this looketh to the inward substance of the kingdom of Christ, which is given him of his Father, and is not of this world, though he exercise it in the world to the last day; —



a kingdom which can never be shaken nor removed. “The government of it is upon his shoulder, and of the increase of it there shall be no end.”

(2.) That *rule* or *government* which in his word he hath appointed and ordained for all his saints and chosen ones to walk in, to testify their inward subjection to him, and to be fitted for usefulness one to another. Now, of this part the administration is wrapped up in the laws, ordinances, institutions, and appointments of the gospel, — and it is frequently called “The kingdom of God.” That Jesus Christ doth not rule in these things, and is not to be obeyed as a king in them, is but a late darkness, which, though it should spread as a cloud over the face of the heavens, and pour forth some showers and tempests, yet it would be as a cloud still, which will speedily scatter and vanish into nothing.

And this is that whose propagation, as the means of carrying on the former spiritual ends of Christ, you desire strength and direction for this day. Men may gather together unto Christ, and say, with heads full of hopes, poor souls, and eyes fixed on the right hand and left, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Take you his answer, and be contented with it, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power,” [Acts i. 6, 7](#), — but do your work faithfully. I know in this thing, it is far easier to complain of you for not doing, than to direct you what to do. The Lord be your guide, and give you straw wherever bricks are required of you!

(3.) In the *universal judgment*, which the Father hath committed to him over all, which he will most eminently exercise at the last day; — rewarding, crowning, receiving some to himself; judging, condemning, casting others into utter darkness, [John v. 22–27](#); [Acts ii. 36](#); [Rom. xiv. 9](#); [Acts xvii. 31](#). And of this universal, righteous judgment he giveth many warnings unto the world, by pouring forth sundry vials of his wrath upon great Nimrods and oppressors, [Ps. cx. 6](#); [Mic. iv. 3](#); [Rev. xix. 11–13](#). And in the holding forth these three parts of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus doth the Scripture abound.

But now, whether over and beyond all these the Lord Christ shall not bear an outward, visible, glorious rule, setting up a kingdom like those of the world, to be ruled by strength and power; and if so, when or how it shall be brought in, — into whose hands the administration of it shall be committed, and upon what account, — whether he will personally walk therein or no, — whether it shall be clearly distinct from the rule he now bears in the world, or only differenced by more glorious degrees and manifestations of his power, — endless and irreconcilable are the contests of those that profess his name. This we find, by woful experience, that all who, from the spirituality of the rule of Christ, and delight therein, have degenerated into carnal apprehensions of the beauty and glory of it, have, for the most part, been given up to carnal actings, suited to such apprehensions; and have been so dazzled with gazing after temporal glory, that the kingdom which comes not by observation hath been vile in their eyes.



3. Now, because it is here fallen in my way, and is part of the vision at which the prophet was so much troubled, I shall give you some brief observations of what is clear and certain from Scripture relating hereunto, and so pass on. It is, then, certain, —

(1.) That the interest of particular men, as to this kingdom of Christ, is to look wherein the universal concernment of all saints, in all ages, doth lie. This, undoubtedly, they may attain, and it doth belong to them. Now, certainly, this is in that part of it which comes not by observation, [Luke xvii. 20](#), but is within us, which “is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,” [Rom. xiv. 17](#). This may be possessed in a dungeon as well as on a throne. What outward glory soever may be brought in, it is but a shadow of this; — this is the kingdom that cannot be moved, which requires grace in us to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear,” [Heb. xii. 28](#). Many have failed in grasping after outward appearances: never any failed of blessedness who made this their portion. Oh, that this were more pursued and followed after! Let not any think to set up the kingdom of Christ in the world, while they pull it down in their own hearts by sin and folly. In this let the lines fall to me, and let my inheritance be among those that are sanctified. Yet, —

(2.) This is certain, that all nations whatever, which in their present state and government have given their power to the dragon and the beast to oppose the Lord Christ withal, shall be shaken, broken, translated, and turned off their old foundations and constitutions, into which the antichristian interest hath been woven for a long season. God will shake the heavens and the earth of the nations round about, until all the Babylonish rubbish, all their original engagements to the man of sin, be taken away.

This I have fully demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>322</sup> All those great wars which you have foretold, wherein the saints of God shall be eminently engaged, are upon this account.

(3.) That the civil powers of the world, after fearful shaking and desolations, shall be disposed of into a useful subserviency to the interest, power, and kingdom of Jesus Christ. Hence they are said to be his kingdoms, [Rev. xi. 15](#); that is, to be disposed of for the behoof of his interest, rule, and dominion. Of this you have plentiful promises, [Isa. lx.](#), and elsewhere. When the nations are broken in opposition to Zion, their gain must be consecrated to the Lord, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth, [Mic. iv. 13](#). Even judges and rulers, as such, must kiss the Son, and own his sceptre, and advance his ways. Some think, if you were well settled, you ought not in any thing, as rulers of the nations, to put forth your power for the interest of Christ: the good Lord keep your hearts from that apprehension! Have you ever in your affairs received any encouragement from the promises of God? have you in times of greatest distress been refreshed with the testimony of a good conscience, that in godly simplicity you have sought the advancement of the Lord Christ? do you believe that he ever owned the cause as the head of his church? Do not now profess you have nothing

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322 Sermon on [Heb. xii. 27](#).



to do with him:— had he so professed of you and your affairs, what had been your portion long since!

(4.) Look, what *kingdom* soever the Lord Christ will advance in the world, and exercise amongst his holy ones, the beginning of it must be with the Jews; they are to be “caput imperii.” The head and seat of this empire must be amongst them; these are the “saints of the Most High,” mentioned by Daniel: and, therefore, in that part of his prophecy which he wrote in the Chaldean tongue, — then commonly known and spoken in the east, being the language of the Babylonish empire, — he speaketh of them obscurely, and under borrowed expressions; but coming to those visions which he wrote in Hebrew, for the sole use of the church, he is much more express concerning the people of whom he spake. The rod of Christ’s strength goes out of Zion, and thence he proceeds to rule those that were his enemies, [Ps. cx. 2](#). All the promises of the glorious kingdom of Christ are to be accomplished in the gathering of the Gentiles, with the glory of the Jews. The Redeemer comes to Zion, and to them that turn from transgression (that great transgression of unbelief) in Jacob, [Isa. lix. 20](#). Then shall the Lord rise upon them, and his glory shall be seen upon them. The Gentiles shall come to their light, and kings to the brightness of their rising, [Isa. lx. 2, 3](#). I dare say there is not any promise anywhere of raising up a kingdom unto the Lord Christ in this world, but it is either expressed or clearly intimated that the beginning of it must be with the Jews, and that in contradistinction to the nations: so eminently in that glorious description of it, [Mic. iv. 7, 8](#), “I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.” When the great hunter, Nimrod, set up a kingdom, the beginning of it was Babel, [Gen. x. 10](#); and when the great Shepherd sets up his kingdom, the beginning of it shall be Zion: so farther it is at large expressed, [Mic. v. 7, 8](#). Nothing is more clear to any, who, being not carried away with weak, carnal apprehensions of things present, have once seriously weighed the promises of God to this purpose. What the Lord Christ will do with them, and by them, is not so clear; this is certain, that their return shall be marvellous, glorious, — as life from the dead. When, then, Euphrates shall be dried up, Turkish power and Popish idolatry be taken out of the world, and these “kings of the east” are come, — when the seed of Abraham, being multiplied like the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea-shore, shall possess the gates of their enemies, and shall have peace in their borders, — we may lift up our heads towards the fulness of our redemption; but whilst these things are, or may be, for any thing we know, afar off, to dream of setting up an outward, glorious, visible kingdom of Christ, which he must bear rule in, and over the world, be it in Germany or in England, is but an ungrounded presumption. The Jews not called, Antichrist not destroyed, the nations of the world generally wrapped up in idolatry and false worship, little dreaming of their deliverance,



— will the Lord Christ leave the world in this state, and set up his kingdom here on a molehill?

(5.) This is a perpetual *antithesis* and opposition that is put between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of Christ, — that they rise out of the strivings of the winds upon the sea; he comes with the clouds of heaven; — they are brought in by commotions, tumults, wars, desolations (and so shall all the shakings of the nations be, to punish them for their old opposition, and to translate them into a subserviency to his interest); the coming in of the kingdom of Christ shall not be by the arm of flesh, nor shall it be the product of the strifes and contests of men which are in the world, — it is not to be done by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, [Zech. iv. 6](#). Great wars, desolations, alterations, shall precede it; but it is not the sons of men that, by outward force, shall build the new Jerusalem:— that comes down from heaven adorned as a bride for Christ, fitted and prepared by himself. Certainly the strivings of men about this business shall have no influence into it. It shall be by the glorious manifestation of his own power, and that by his Spirit subduing the souls of men unto it; — not by the sword of man setting up a few to rule over others. Hence, it is everywhere called a creating of “new heavens, and a new earth,” [Isa. lxv. 17](#), — a work, doubtless, too difficult for the worms of the earth to undertake. There is nothing more opposite to the spirit of the gospel, than to suppose that Jesus Christ will take to himself a kingdom by the carnal sword and bow of the sons of men. The raising of the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down, and the setting up the decayed places of it, [Acts xv. 16](#), is done by his visiting the people with his Spirit and word, [verse 14](#). It is by the pouring out of his Spirit in a covenant of mercy, [Isa. lix. 21](#). Thus the Lord sets up one shepherd of his people, “and he shall feed them, even,” saith he, “my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them,” [Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24](#). He brings in the kingdom of his Son by making the children of Israel “seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and to fear the Lord and his goodness,” [Hos. iii. 5](#). Who, now, can fathom the counsels of the Almighty? — who hath searched his bosom, and can by computation tell us when he shall pour out his Spirit for the accomplishment of these things?

This, then, is the last thing in this vision, whose consideration brought the prophet into so great perplexity and distress of spirit.

III. There is the means that Daniel used for redress in that sad condition whereunto he was brought by the consideration of this vision: “He drew near to one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this.”

This also was done in vision. There is no mention of his waking before his making this address; but the vision continuing, he draws nigh in the same manner to one of them that stood by, — one of those angels, or holy ones, that stood ministering before the throne of God, who was commissioned to acquaint him with the mind and will of God in the things



represented to them. This, then, is the remedy he applies himself unto; — he labours to know the mind and will of God in the things that were to be done. This, it seems, he pitched on as the only way for quieting his grieved and troubled spirit; and hereupon, —

IV. He is told and made to know the interpretation of the things, so far, at least, as might quiet his spirit in the will of God. Not that he is clearly instructed in every particular; for he tells them, in the close of the chapter, that he had troublesome thoughts about the whole; — “his cogitations troubled him, and his countenance changed,” [verse 28](#); but having received what light God was willing to communicate to him, he inquires no farther, but addresses himself to his own duty.

Take, then, from the words thus opened in these propositions (some whereof I shall do little more than name unto you), —

Observation I. *In the consideration of God’s marvellous actings in the world, in order to the carrying on of the gospel and the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ, the hearts of his saints are oftentimes filled with perplexity and trouble.*

They know not what will be the issue, nor sometimes what well to do. Daniel receives a vision of the things which in part we live under: and if they fill his heart with astonishment, is it any wonder if they come close to us, and fill us with anxious, perplexing thoughts, upon whom the things themselves are fallen?

Observation II. *The only way to deliver and extricate our spirits from under such perplexities and entanglements, is to draw nigh to God in Christ, for discovery of his will.*

So did Daniel here; he went to one of them that ministered before the Lord, to be acquainted with his will. Otherwise thoughts and contrivances will but farther perplex you. Like men in the mire, whilst they pluck one leg out, the other sticketh faster in, — whilst you relieve yourselves in one thing, you will be more hampered in another. Yea, he that increaseth wisdom, increaseth sorrow; — the larger the visions are, the greater will be their troubles; until, being consumed in your own fears, cares, and contrivances, you grow useless in your generation. Those who see only the outside of your affairs sleep securely; those who come nigher, to look into the spirits of men, rest is taken from them; and many are not quiet, because they will not. The great healing of all is in God.

Observation III. *When God makes known the interpretations of things, it will quiet your spirits, in your walking before him, and actings with him.*

This was that which brought the spirit of Daniel into a settlement. How God reveals his mind in these things, — by what means, — how it may be known by individual persons, for their quiet and settlement, — how all God’s revelations are quieting, and tend to the calming of men’s spirits, not making them foam like the waves of the sea, — should be handled on this observation.

But I begin with the first observation.

Observation I. *In the consideration of God's marvellous actings in the world, in order to the carrying on of the gospel, the hearts of his saints are oftentimes filled with perplexity and trouble.*

When John received his book of visions in reference to the great things that were to be done, and the alterations that were to be brought about, though it were sweet in his mouth, and he rejoiced in his employment, yet it made his "belly bitter," [Rev. x. 9, 10](#). It filled him with perplexity, as our prophet speaks, in the midst of his body. He saw blood and confusion, strife and violence; it made his very belly bitter.

Poor Jeremiah, upon the same account, is so oppressed, that it makes him break out of all bounds of faith and patience, to curse the day of his birth, to wax quite weary of his employment, [chap. xv](#).

Our Saviour, describing such a season, [Luke xxi. 26](#), tells us, that "men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth." They will be thinking what will become of them, and what will be the issue of God's dispensations; fearing that the whole frame of things will be wrapped up in darkness and confusion. Hence our Saviour bids his disciples not be troubled when they hear of these things, [Matt. xxiv. 6](#), intimating that they will be very apt so to be.

Now, the causes and occasions (which are the reasons of the point) arise, —

1. From the greatness and astonishableness of the things themselves which God will do; even great and terrible things, which men looked not for, [Isa. lxiv. 2, 3](#). When he comes to make his name known to the nations, that his adversaries may tremble at his presence, and doth terrible things, quite above and beyond the expectation of men, which they never once looked for, — no wonder if their hearts be surprised with amazement. It hath of late been so with this nation. All professors at the beginning of these days joined earnestly in that prayer, [Isa. lxiii. 17–19, lxiv. 1](#). God, in answer hereunto, comes down and rends the heavens, and the mountains flow down at his presence, according to the desire of their souls; yet withal he doth terrible things, — things that we looked not for. How many poor creatures are turned back with astonishment, and know not how to abide with him! When our Saviour Christ came in the flesh, who had been the desire of all nations for four thousand years, and most importunately sought after by the men of that generation wherein he came, yet doing great and unexpected things at his coming, who was able to abide it? This, says Simeon, will be the issue of it, "He shall be for the fall and rise of many; and the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed," [Luke ii. 34, 35](#). Hence is that exclamation, [Mal. iii. 2](#), "Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" His coming is desired indeed, but few can bear it. His day will "burn as an oven," as a furnace, [chap. iv. 1](#): some are overheated by it, some consume in it; — blessed are they that abide. This is one cause of the perplexing of the spirits of men; — the consideration of the things themselves that are done, being above and beyond their expectations; and this even many of the saints of God are



borne down under at this day. They little looked for the blood and banishment of kings, change of government, alteration of nations, such shakings of heaven and earth as have ensued; not considering that he who doth these things weighs all the nations in a balance, and the rulers of them are as the dust thereof before him.

2. From the manner whereby God will do these things. Many perplexing, killing circumstances attend his dispensations. I shall instance only in one, — and that is, darkness and obscurity, whereby he holds the minds of men in uncertainty and suspense, for his own glorious ends. Such, he tells us, shall his day and the works thereof be: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening-time it shall be light,” [Zech. xiv. 6, 7](#). Men shall not know what to make of it, nor what to judge. He brings not forth his work all at once, but by degrees; and sometimes sets it backward, and leads it up and down, as he did his people of old in the wilderness, that none might know where they should fall or settle; and he that believeth will not make haste. When God is doing great things, he delights to wrap them up in the clouds; to keep the minds of men in uncertainties, that he may set on work all that is in them; and try them to the utmost, whether they can live upon his care and wisdom, when they see their own care and wisdom will do no good. Men would fain come to some certainty; and commonly, by the thoughts and ways whereby they press unto it, they put all things into more uncertainty than ever, and so promote the design of God, which they so studiously endeavour to decline. Hence is that description of the presence of the Lord in his mighty works, [Ps. xviii. 9, 11](#), “Darkness was under his feet;” men could not see his paths, etc. He hath ends of surprisal, hardening, and destruction towards some, for which they must be left unto their own spirits, and led into many snares and by-paths, for their trial, and the exercise of others; which could not be accomplished did he not come in the clouds, and were not darkness his pavilion and his secret place. On this account is that cry of men of profane and hardened spirits, [Isa. v. 19](#), “Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!” They know not what to make of what they see, — of all that is yet done or accomplished. They would have the whole work out, that they might once see the end of it, and so know what to judge; they would be at a point with him, and not always kept at those perplexing uncertainties. And this is another cause of the trouble of men’s spirits, in consideration of the dispensations of God. God still keeps a cloud hanging over, and they know not when it will fall, nor what will be done in the issue of things. This makes some weary of waiting on him, and, with the profane king of Israel, to cry, This evil is of the Lord; there is no end; confusion will be the issue of all; — why should I abide any longer?

3. The *lusts of men* do commonly, under such dispensations, fearfully and desperately tumultuate, to the disturbance of the most settled and weighed spirits. Satan takes advantage



to draw them out in such a season to the utmost, both in spirituals and civils. What will be the constant deportment of men of corrupt minds in such a time our Saviour sets forth, [Matt. xxiv. 5](#). They shall come in the name of Christ to deceive; and shall deceive many, and cause iniquity to abound. In such a day Edom will appear an enemy,<sup>323</sup> and Ephraim with the son of Remaliah will join with Syria for the vexing of Judah: hence are perplexities, and swords piercing through the very souls of men. Take an instance in the days wherein we live. From the beginning of the contests in this nation, when God had caused your spirits to resolve that the liberties, privileges, and rights of this nation, wherewith you were intrusted, should not, by his assistance, be wrested out of your hands by violence, oppression, and injustice; this he also put upon your hearts, to vindicate and assert the gospel of Jesus Christ, his ways, and his ordinances, against all opposition, though you were but inquiring the way to Zion, with your faces thitherward. God secretly entwining the interest of Christ with yours, wrapped up with you the whole generation of them that seek his face, and prospered your affairs on that account: so that, whereas causes of as clear a righteousness among the sons of men as yours have come to nothing, yet your undertaking hath been like the sheaf of Joseph in the midst of the nations, which hath stood up when all the others have bowed to the ground. Being, then, convinced that your affairs have fallen under his promises, and have come up to an acceptance before him, solely upon the account of their subserviency to the interest of Christ, God hath put it into your hearts to seek the propagation of his gospel. What now, by the lusts of men, is the state of things? Say some, There is no gospel at all; say others, If there be, you have nothing to do with it; — some say, Lo, here is Christ; others, Lo, there:— some make religion a colour for one thing; some for another; — say some, The magistrate must not support the gospel; say others, The gospel must subvert the magistrate; — say some, Your rule is only for men as men, you have nothing to do with the interest of Christ and the church; say others, You have nothing to do to rule men but upon the account of being saints. If you will have the gospel, say some, down with the ministers of it, chemarims,<sup>324</sup> locusts, etc.; and if you will have light, take care that you may have ignorance and darkness:— things being carried on as if it were the care of men that there might be no trouble in the world but what the name of religion might lie in the bottom of. Now, those that ponder these things, their spirits are grieved in the midst of their bodies; — the visions of their heads trouble them. They looked for other things from them that professed Christ; but the summer is ended, and the harvest is past, and we are not refreshed. Again, God had so stated your affairs, that you were the mark of the antichristian world to shoot at in the beginning, and their terror in the close: and when you thought only to have



323 [Obad. 12, 13](#); [Isa. vii. 1](#).

324 כְּמַרְיִם a contemptuous appellation of idolatrous priests. It occurs [2 Kings xxiii. 5](#); [Hos. x. 5](#); [Zeph. i. 4](#); and is derived from a Syriac word, *blackness*; in the concrete, *one in black attire, an ascetic, a priest*. — Ed.

pursued Sheba the son of Bichri, the man of your first warfare, behold one Abel after another undertakes the quarrel against you; yea, such Abels as Scotland and Holland, of whom we said in old times, We will inquire of them, and so ended the matter: and there is not a wise man or woman amongst them that can dissuade them. Strange! that Ephraim should join with Syria to vex Judah their brother, — that the Netherlands, whose being is founded merely upon the interest you have undertaken, should join with the great antichristian interest, which cannot possibly be set up again without their inevitable ruin. Hence also are deep thoughts of heart; men are perplexed, disquieted, and know not what to do.

I could mention other lusts, and tumultuatings of the spirits of men, that have an influence into the disturbance of the hearts of the most precious in this nation, but I forbear.

4. Men's own lusts disquiet their spirits in such a season as this. I could instance in many; I shall name only four:— (1.) *Unstableness of mind*; (2.) *Carnal fears*; (3.) *Love of the world*; (4.) *Desire of pre-eminence*.

(1.) *Unstableness of mind*, which makes men like the waves of the sea, that *cannot rest*. The Scripture calls it ἀκαταστασίαν, “tumultuatingness” of spirit. There is something of that which Jude speaks of, in better persons than those he describes, — “raging like waves of the sea, and foaming out their own shame,” [verse 13](#). If God give men up to a *restless* spirit, no condition imaginable can quiet them; still they think they see something beyond it that is desirable. Hannibal said of Marcellus, that he could never be quiet, — conqueror nor conquered. Some men's desires are so enlarged, that nothing can satiate them. Wise men, that look upon sundry godly persons in this nation, and beholding how every yoke of the oppressor is broken from off their necks, that no man makes them afraid, that they are looked on as the head, not as the tail, — enjoying the ordinances of God according to the light of their minds and desires of their hearts, no man forbidding them, — are ready to wonder (I speak of private persons) what they can find to do in their several places and callings, but to serve the Lord in righteousness and holiness, being without fear, all the days of their lives. But, alas! when poor creatures are given up to the power of an unquiet and unstable mind, they think scarce any thing vile, but being wise unto sobriety, — nothing desirable, but what is without their proper bounds, and what leads to that confusion which themselves, in the issue, are least able of many to undergo. It is impossible but that men's hearts should be pierced with disquietness and trouble, that are given up to this frame.

(2.) *Carnal fears*. — These even devour and eat up the hearts of men. What shall we do? what shall become of us? Ephraim is confederate with Syria, and the hearts of men are shaken as the trees of the wood that are moved with the wind. What! new troubles still! new unsettlements! This storm will not be avoided; this will be worse than all that hath befallen us



from the youth of our undertakings. God hath not yet won upon men's spirits to trust him in shakings, perplexities, alterations; they remember not the manifestations of his wisdom, power, and goodness in former days, and how tender hitherto he hath been of the interest of Christ, that their hearts might be established. Could we but do our duty, and trust the Lord with the performance of his promises, what quietness, what sweetness might we have!

I shall not instance in the other two particulars. It is too manifest that many of our piercing and perplexing thoughts are from the tumultuating and disorder of our own lusts. So that what remains of the time allotted to me I shall spend only in the use of this point, and proceed no farther.

*Use. Of instruction*, to direct you into ways and means of quietness, in reference unto all these causes and occasions of piercing, dividing thoughts in such a season as this. The good Lord seal up instruction to your souls, that you may know the things that belong to your peace, and what Israel ought to do at this, even at this time. For my brethren's and companions' sake, I wish you prosperity. Though my own portion should be in the dust, for the *true, spiritual*, not *imaginary, carnal* interest of the church of God in this nation, and the nations about, I wish you prosperity.

(1.) First, then, in reference to *the things that God is doing*, both as to their *greatness and their manner of doing*; whose consideration fills men with thoughts that grieve their spirits in the midst of their bodies. Would you have your hearts quieted in this respect? — take my second *observation* for your direction; — The only way to extricate and deliver our spirits from under such perplexities and entanglements, is to draw nigh to God in Christ for the discovery of his will. So did Daniel here in my text. I fear this is too much neglected. You take counsel with your own hearts, you advise with one another, — hearken unto men under a repute of wisdom; and all this doth but increase your trouble, — you do but more and more entangle and disquiet your own spirits. God stands by and says, "I am wise also;" and little notice is taken of him. We think we are grown wise ourselves, and do not remember we never prospered but only when we went unto God, and told him plainly we knew not what to do. Public fastings are neglected, despised, spoken against; and when appointed, practised according as men's hearts are principled to such a duty, — coldly, deadly, unacceptably. Life, heat, warmth is gone; and shall not blood and all go after? The Lord prevent it! Private meetings are used to show ourselves wise in the debate of things, with a form of godly words; sometimes for strife, tumult, division, disorder. And shall we think there is much closet inquiring after God, when all other actings of that principle which should carry out thereunto are opposed and slighted? When we do sometimes wait upon God, do not many seem to ask amiss, to spend it on their lusts; — not waiting on him poor, hungry, empty, to know his will, to receive direction from him; but rather going full, fixed, resolved, settled on thoughts, perhaps prejudices, of our own, — almost taking upon us to prescribe unto the Almighty, and to impose our poor, low, carnal thoughts upon his wisdom and care



of his church? Oh, where is that holy and that humble frame wherewith at first we followed our God into the wilderness, where we have been fed and clothed, preserved and protected for so many years? Hence is it that the works of God are become strange, and terrible, and dark unto us; and of necessity some of us, many of us, must shut up all with disappointment and sorrow. We fill our souls boldly, confidently, with cross and contrary apprehensions of the intendments of God, and of the mediums whereby he will accomplish his ends; and do not consider that this is not a frame of men who had given up themselves to the *all-sufficiency* of God. Some, perhaps, will say, this belongs not unto them; they have waited upon God, and they do know his mind, and what are the things he will do, and are not blind also, nor in the dark, as other men. But if it be so, “what means this bleating of sheep and oxen in mine ears?” yea, what means that roaring and foaming of unquiet waves which we hear and see; — hard speeches, passionate reproaches, sharp revilings of their brethren, in boundless confidence, endless enmity, causing evil surmises, biting, tearing, devouring terms and expressions, casting out the names of men upright in their generations, saying, The Lord be praised? When the Lord discovers his mind and will, it settleth the heart, composeth the mind, fills the soul with reverence and godly fear, conforms the heart unto itself, — fills it with peace, love, meekness, gentleness. And shall we be thought to have received the mind, the will of God, when our hearts, words, ways, are full of contrary qualities? Let it be called what it will, I shall not desire to share in that which would bring my heart into such a frame. Well, then, beloved, take this for your first direction: Be more abundant with God in faith and prayer, deal with him in public and private, take counsel of him, bend your hearts through his grace to your old frame, when it was your joy to meet in this place, — which now, I fear, to many is their burden. Seek the Lord and his face, “seek him while he may be found.” And hereby, —

[1.] You will empty your hearts of many perplexing contrivances of your own, and you will find faith in this communion with God, by little and little, working out, killing, slaying these prejudices and presumptions which you may be strong in, that are not according to the will of God; so you be sure to come not to have your own lusts and carnal conceptions answered, but to have the will of God fulfilled. When men come unto the Lord to have their own *visions fulfilled*, it is righteous with God to answer them according to those visions, and confirm them in them, to their own disturbance, and the disturbance of others.

[2.] You shall certainly *have peace in your own hearts in the all-sufficiency of God*. This he will give in upon your spirits, that whatever he doth, all his ways shall be to you mercy, truth, faithfulness, and peace; — yea, the discoveries which you shall have of his own fulness, sweetness, suitableness, and the excellency of things which are not seen, will work your hearts to such a frame, that you shall attend to the things here below, merely upon the account of duty, with the greatest calmness and quietness of mind imaginable.

[3.] You shall surely know your own particular paths, wherein you ought to walk in serving God in your generation. Those that wait upon him, he will guide in judgment; he will not leave them in the dark, nor to distracted, divided, piercing thoughts. But whatever others do, you shall be guided into ways of peace. This you shall have when the lusts of men will neither let themselves nor others be at quiet. Oh, then, return to your rest; look to Him from whom you have gone astray. Take no more disturbing counsel with yourselves, or others; renew your old frame of humble dependence on God, and earnest seeking his face. You have certainly backslidden in this thing. Is the Lord not the God of counsel and wisdom, as well as the God of force and power, that you run to him when in a strait in your actions, but when your counsels seem sometimes to be mixed with a spirit of difficulty and trouble, he is neglected? Only come with humble, depending hearts; — not every one to bring the devices, imaginations, opinions, prejudices, and lusts of their own hearts, before him.

(2.) For the troubles that arise from the *lusts of other men*, and that about the *gospel* and the *propagation thereof* (the tumultuating of the lusts of men in reference whereunto I gave you an account of formerly), there are many piercing thoughts of heart. What *extremes*, I had almost said *extravagances*, men have in this matter run out into, I shall now not insist upon; only I shall give you a few directions for your own practice.

If once it comes to that, that you shall say you have nothing to do with *religion as rulers of the nation*, God will quickly manifest that he hath nothing to do with you as rulers of the nation. The great promise of Christ is, that in these latter days of the world he will lay the nations in a subserviency to him, — the kingdoms of the world shall become his; that is, act as kingdoms and governments no longer against him, but for him. Surely those promises will scarcely be accomplished in bringing commonwealths of men professing his name to be of Gallio's frame, — to take care for none of those things: or as the Turk, — in an absolute indifferency what any profess; I mean, that are not his own, for in respect of them he changes not his God. Not that I would you should go and set up forms of government to compel men to come under the line of them, or to thrust in your sword to cut the lesser differences of brethren; not that I think truth ever the more the truth, or to have any thing the more of authority upon the conscience, for having the stamp of your authority annexed to it, for its allowance to pass in these nations. Nor do I speak a word of what is, may, or may not be incumbent on you in respect of the most profligate opposers of the truths of the gospel, but only this, that, not being such as are always learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth, but being fully persuaded in your own minds, certainly it is incumbent on you to take care that the faith which you have received, which was once delivered to the saints, in all the necessary concernments of it, may be protected, preserved, propagated to and among the people which God hath set you over. If a father, as a father, is bound to do what answers this in his family unto his children; a master, as a master, to his servants; if you will justify yourselves as fathers or rulers of your country, you will find in your account this to be in-

cumbent on you. Take heed of them that would temper clay and iron, things that will not mingle, — that would compound carnal and fleshly things with heavenly things and spiritual, that they may not entangle your spirits. *The great design of grasping temporal power upon a spiritual account, will prove at last to be the greatest badge of Antichrist.* Hitherto God hath appeared against it; and will, no doubt, to the end. If either you, by the authority God hath given you in the world, shall take upon you to rule the house of God, as formally such, as his house, though you rule the persons whereof it is made up; or those who are, or pretend to be, of that house, to rule the world on that account, — your day and theirs will be nigh at hand.

Now, because you wait on God for direction in reference to the propagation of the gospel, and the preventing that which is contrary to sound doctrine and godliness, I shall, — [1.] Show you very briefly what God has promised concerning magistrates to this end; [2.] Give you some principles whereon you may rest in your actings; and, [3.] Lay down some rules for your direction: and so draw to a close.

[1.] Take, in the first place, what God hath *promised* concerning magistrates, kings, rulers, judges, and nations, and their subserviency to the church. What God hath promised they shall do, that is their duty to do; he hath not measured out an inheritance for his people out of the sins of other men. Let us a little view some of these promises, and then consider their application to the truth we have in hand, and what is cleared out unto us by them. There are many; I shall instance in the most obvious and eminent. “I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning,” [Isa. i. 26](#). It is to Zion redeemed, purged, washed in the blood of Christ, that this promise is made. [Isa. xlix. 7](#), “Kings shall see and arise, and princes shall bow down themselves.” [Hebrew] The Jews being, for the greatest part of them, rejected upon the coming of Christ, this promise is made unto him upon his pouring out of the Spirit for the bringing in of the Gentiles; as it is farther enlarged, [verses 22, 23](#), “Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their queens thy nursing-mothers.” [Isa. lx.](#) looks wholly this way. Taste of the nature and intendment of the whole: “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness,” [verses 3, 11, 16, 17](#). To which add the accomplishment of all those promises mentioned, [Rev. xi. 15, xxi. 24](#).

You see here are glorious promises, in the literal expression, looking directly to what we assert concerning the subserviency of rulers to the gospel, and the duty of magistrates in supporting the interest of the church. Let us, concerning them, observe these three things;



as, — 1st, *To whom they are made*; 2dly, *On what occasion they are given*; 3dly, *What is the subject or matter of them in general*.

1st, Then, they are all given and made to the church of Christ after his coming in the flesh, and his putting an end to all *ceremonial, typical, carnal* institutions. For, —

(1st.) They are every way attended with the circumstances of *calling the Gentiles*, and their flowing into the church; which were not accomplished till after the destruction of the Jewish church. So is the case in that which you have, [Isa. xlix. 20](#), “The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell.”

It shall be when the church shall have received the new children of the Gentiles, having lost the other of the Jews; which he expresseth more at large, [verse 22](#), “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.” So also are the rest. When God gives the nations to be the inheritance of Christ, the Holy Ghost cautions rulers and judges to kiss the Son, and pay the homage due to him in his kingdom, [Ps. ii. 10, 11](#).

(2dly.) Because these promises are pointed unto as accomplished to the Christian Church in that place of the Revelation before mentioned: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever,” [chap. xi. 15](#). “And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it,” [chap. xxi. 24](#). So that there are plainly promises of kings and princes, judges and rulers, to be given to the church, and to be made useful thereunto; and kingdoms and nations, people in their rules and governments, to be instrumental in the good thereof: so that these promises belong directly to us and our rulers, if, under any notion, we belong to the Church of Christ.

2dly. For the *occasion* of these promises; — it is well known what a trust, by God’s own appointment, there was invested in the rulers, judges, kings, and magistrates, of the judicial state and church under the Old Testament, in reference unto the ways and worship of God, — the prosecution and the execution of the laws of God concerning his house and service being committed to them. Farther, when they faithfully discharged their trust, — promoting the worship of God according to his institutions, — encouraging, supporting, directing, re-proving others, to whom the immediate and peculiar administration of things sacred was committed, — destroying, removing whatever was an abomination unto the Lord, — it was well with the whole people and church; they flourished in peace, and the Lord delighted in them, and rejoiced over them to do them good. And, on the other side, their neglect in the discharge of their duty was then commonly attended with the *apostasy of the church*, and great breakings forth of the indignation of the Lord. This the church found in those days,



and bewailed. To hold out, therefore, the happy state of his people that he would bring in, he promises them such rulers and judges as he gave at first, who faithfully discharged the trust committed to them:— not that I suppose them bound to the Mosaical rules of penalties in reference to transgressions and offences against gospel institutions, but only that a duty in general is incumbent on them, in reference to the church and truth of God, which they should faithfully discharge; — of which afterward.

This, then, being the occasion of those promises, and their accomplishment being, as before, in a peculiar manner pointed at, upon the shaking, calling, and new-moulding of the kingdoms and nations of the world which had given their power to the beast, and thereupon framed anew into a due subserviency to the interest of Christ, there is not the least shadow or colour left for the turning off and rejecting the sweetness of all these promises, upon account of their being merely metaphorical, and shadowing out spiritual glories:— neither their beginning nor ending, neither their rise nor fall, will bear any such gloss or corrupting interpretation.

3dly. As to the *matter* of these promises, I shall only assert this in general, — that the Lord engageth that judges, rulers, magistrates, and such like, shall put forth their power, and act clearly for the good, welfare, and prosperity of the church. This is plainly held out in every one of them. Hence kingdoms are said to serve the church; that is, all kingdoms. They must do so, or be broken in pieces, and cease to be kingdoms. And how can a kingdom, as a kingdom (for it is taken formally, and not materially, merely for the individuals of it, as appears by the threatening of its being broken in pieces) serve the church, but by putting forth its power and strength in her behalf [Isa. lx. 12](#). And therefore, upon the accomplishment of that promise, they are said to become the kingdoms of the Lord Christ, [Rev. xi. 15](#), because, as kingdoms, they serve him with their power and authority; having before, as such, and by their power, opposed him to the utmost. They must nurse the church, not with dry breasts, nor feed it with stones and scorpions, but with the good things committed to them. Their power and substance, in protection and supportment, are to be engaged in the behalf thereof: hence God is said to give these judges, rulers, princes, kings, queens to the church; not setting them in the church, as officers thereof, but ordering their state in the world ([Rev. xi. 15](#)) to its behoof. In sum, there is not any one of the promises recited but holds forth the utmost of what I intend to assert from them all; viz., that the Lord hath promised that the magistrates whom he will give, own, and bless, shall put forth their power, and act in that capacity wherein he hath placed them in the world, for the good, furtherance, and prosperity of the truth and church of Christ. They shall protect them with their power, feed them with their substance, adorn them with their favour and the privileges wherewith they are intrusted; they shall break their forcibly oppressing adversaries, and take care that those who walk in the truth of the Lord may lead a peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. If, then, you are such magistrates as God hath promised, (as woe be unto you if you are not!) know that he



hath undertaken for you, that you shall perform this part of your duty; and I pray that you may rule with him therein, and be found faithful.

[2.] *The second ground* that I would point unto, as a bottom of your actings in this thing, ariseth from sundry undoubted principles, which I shall briefly mention. And the first is,

—  
 1st. *That the gospel of Jesus Christ hath a right to be preached and propagated in every nation, and to every creature under heaven.* Jesus Christ is the “Lord of lords, and King of kings,” [Rev. xvii. 14](#). The nations are given to be his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth to be his possession, [Ps. ii. 8, 9](#). He is appointed the “heir of all things,” [Heb. i. 2](#). God hath set him over the works of his hands, and put all things in subjection under his feet, [Ps. viii. 6](#). And upon this account he gives commission to his messengers to preach the gospel to all nations, [Matt. xxviii. 19](#), or, to every creature under heaven, [Mark xvi. 15](#). The nations of the world being of the Father given to him, he may deal with them as he pleaseth, and either bruise them with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces as a potter’s vessel, [Ps. ii. 9](#), — he may fill the places of the earth with their dead bodies, and strike in pieces the heads of the countries, [Ps. cx. 6](#), — or, he may make them his own, and bring them into subjection unto himself; — which towards some of them he will effect, [Rev. xi. 15](#). Now, the gospel being the rod of his power, and the sceptre of his kingdom, the grand instrument whereby he accomplisheth all his designs in the world, whether they be for life or for death, [2 Cor. ii. 16](#), — he hath given *that* a right to take possession, in his name and authority, of all that he will own in any nation under heaven. And, indeed, he hath in all of them some that are his peculiar purchase, [Rev. v. 9](#); whom, in despite of all the world, he will bring in unto himself. To have free passage into all nations is the undoubted right of the gospel; and the persons of Christ’s good-will have such a right to it and interest in it, that, look, from whomsoever they may claim protection in reference unto any other of their most undoubted concernments amongst men, of them may they claim protection in respect of their quiet enjoyment and possession of the gospel.

2dly. *That wherever the gospel is by any nation owned, received, embraced, it is the blessing, benefit, prosperity, and advantage of that nation.* They that love Zion shall prosper, [Ps. cxxii. 6](#). Godliness hath the promise of this life, and is profitable unto all things, [1 Tim. iv. 8](#). The reception of the word of truth, and subjection to Christ therein, causing a people to become willing in the day of his power, entitle that people to all the promises that ever God made to his church. They shall be established in righteousness; they shall be far from oppression; and for fear and terror, they shall not draw nigh unto them: whosoever contends against such a people, shall fall thereby. No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment, they shall condemn. For this is the inheritance of the servants of the Lord, [Isa. liv. 14, 15, 17](#).

To the prosperity of a nation two things are required:— (1st.) That they be freed from oppression, injustice, cruelty, disorder, confusion, in themselves, from their rulers, or others; (2dly.) That they be protected from the sword and violence of them that seek their ruin from without. And both these do a people receive by receiving the gospel.

(1st.) For the first, they have the promise of God that they shall have “judges as at the first,” [Isa. i. 26](#), — such injustice and judgment shall bear rule over them and among them, as the first judges whom he stirred up and gave to his ancient people; their officers shall be peace, and their exactors righteousness, [Isa. lx. 17](#). Even the very gospel which they do receive is only able to instruct them to be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord; for that only effectually teacheth the sons of men to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, [Tit. ii. 12](#).

(2dly.) And for the second, innumerable are the promises that are given to such a people; whence the psalmist concludes, upon the consideration of the mercies they do and shall enjoy, “Happy is the people whose God is the Lord,” [Ps. cxliv. 15](#). The glorious Lord will be to them a place of broad rivers and waters, in which no galley with oars, nor gallant ship shall pass by; the Lord will be their redeemer, lawgiver, king, and saviour, [Isa. xxxiii. 21](#). It will interest any people in all the promises that are made for the using of the church to thrash, break, destroy, burden, fire, consume, and slay the enemies thereof; — so far shall a people be from suffering under the hands of oppressors, that the Lord will use them for the breaking and destruction of the Nimrods of the earth: and this blessing of the nations do they receive by the faith of Abraham.

*3dly. The rejection of the gospel by any people or nation to whom it is tendered, is always attended with the certain and inevitable destruction of that people or nation; which, sooner or later, shall, without any help or deliverance, be brought upon them by the revenging hand of Christ.*

When the word of grace was rejected and despised by the Jews, the messengers of it professedly turning to the Gentiles, [Acts xiii. 46](#), [xxviii. 28](#), — God removing it from them, unto a nation that would bring forth fruit, [Matt. xxi. 43](#), as it did in all the world, or among all nations, for a season, [Col. i. 6](#), — with what a fearful and tremendous desolation he quickly wasted that people, is known to all; — he quickly slew and destroyed those husbandmen that spoiled his vineyard, and let it forth unto others, that might bring him his fruit in due season. Hence, when Christ is tendered in the gospel, the judges and rulers of the nations are exhorted to obedience to him, upon pain of being destroyed upon the refusal thereof, [Ps. ii. 12](#). And we have the experience of all ages, ever since the day that the gospel began to be propagated in the world. The quarrel of it was revenged on the Jews by the Romans, — upon the Romans by the Goths, Vandals, and innumerable barbarous nations; and the vengeance due to the anti-Christian world is at hand, even at the door. The Lord will certainly

make good his promise to the utmost, that the kingdom and nations which will not serve the church, even that kingdom and those nations shall utterly perish, [Isa. lx. 12](#).

*Athly.* That it is the duty of magistrates to seek the good, peace, and prosperity of the people committed to their charge, and to prevent, obviate, remove, take away every thing that will bring confusion, destruction, desolation upon them; as Mordecai procured good things for his people, and prosperity to his kindred, [Esth. x. 3](#). And David describes himself with all earnestness pursuing the same design, [Ps. ci. 1](#). Magistrates are the ministers of God for the good, universal good, of them to whom they are given, [Rom. xiii. 1–4](#); and they are to watch and apply themselves to this very thing, [verse 6](#). And the reason the apostle gives to stir up the saints of God to pray, amongst all sorts of men, in special for kings and those that are in authority, — to wit, that they may, in general, come to the knowledge of the faith, and be saved; and, in particular, discharge the duty and trust committed to them (for on that account are they to pray for them as kings and men in authority), — is, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty,” [1 Tim. ii. 1–4](#). It being incumbent on them to act even as kings and men in authority, that we may so do; they are to feed the people committed to their charge with all their might, unto universal peace and welfare.

Now, the things that are opposite to the good of any nation or people are of two sorts:— (1st.) Such as are really, directly, and immediately opposed to that state and condition wherein they close together, and find prosperity. In general, seditions, tumults, disorders; in particular, violent or fraudulent breakings in upon the respective designed bounds, privileges, and enjoyments of singular persons, without any consideration of Him who ruleth all things, are of this kind. If nations and rulers might be supposed to be Atheists, yet such evils as these, tending to their dissolution and not-being, they would, with all their strength, labour to prevent, either by watching against their commission, or inflicting vengeance on them that commit them, that others may hear, and fear, and do so no more. (2dly.) Such as are morally and meritoriously opposed to their good and welfare; in that they will certainly pluck down the judgments and wrath of God upon that nation or people where they are practised and allowed. There are sins for which the wrath of God will be assuredly revealed from heaven against the children of disobedience. Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as examples of his righteous judgment in this kind. And shall he be thought a magistrate, to bear out the name, authority, and presence of God to men, that so he and his people have present peace, [who,] like a herd of swine, cares not though such things as will certainly first eat and devour their strength, and then utterly consume them, do pass for current? Seeing that they that tale over men must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord, the sole reason why they sheathe the sword of justice in the bowels of thieves, murderers, adulterers, is, not because their outward peace is actually disturbed by them, — and therefore they must give example of terror to others, who being like minded, are not yet actually given up to the practice of the like abomination, — but also, yea, principally, because He in whose stead



they stand and minister to the world is provoked by such wickedness to destroy both the one and the other. And if there be the same reason to be evidenced concerning other things, they also call for the same procedure.

To gather up, now, what hath been spoken:— considering the gospel’s right and title to be propagated, with all its concernments, in every nation under heaven; the blessing, peace, prosperity, and protection wherewith it is attended when and where received; and the certain destruction and desolation which accompanies the rejection and contempt thereof; — considering the duty that, by God’s appointment, is incumbent on them that rule over men, — that in the fear of the Lord they ought to seek the good, peace, and welfare and prosperity of them committed to their charge; to prevent, obviate, remove, revenge, that which tends to their hurt, perturbation, dissolution, destruction, immediate from heaven, or from the hand of men; and in the whole administration to take care that the worshippers of God in Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty; — let any one, who hath the least sense upon his spirit, of the account which he must one day make to the great King and Judge of all the world, of the authority and power wherewith he was intrusted, determine whether it be not incumbent on him — by all the *protection* he can afford, by all the *privileges* he can indulge, the *supportment* that he can grant, by all that *encouragement* which, upon the highest account imaginable, he is required or allowed to give to any person whatsoever — to further the propagation of the gospel; which upon the matter is the only thing of concernment, as well unto this life as that which is to come. And if any thing be allowed in a nation, which in God’s esteem may amount to a contempt and despising thereof, men may be taught by sad experience what will be the issue of such allowance.

5thly. I shall only propose one thing more to your consideration. *Although the institutions and examples of the Old Testament, of the duty of magistrates in the things and about the worship of God, are not, in their whole latitude and extent, to be drawn into rules that should be obligatory to all magistrates now, under the administration of the gospel, — and that because the magistrate then was “custos, vindex, et administrator legis judicialis, et politiae Mosaicæ,”* from which, as most think, we are freed; — yet, doubtless, there is something moral in those institutions, which, being unclothed of their Judaical form, is still binding to all in the like kind, as to some analogy and proportion. Subduct from those administrations what was proper to, and lies upon the account of, the church and nation of the Jews, and what remains upon the general notion of a church and nation must be everlastingly binding. And this amounts thus far, at least, that judges, rulers, and magistrates, which are promised under the New Testament to be given in mercy, and to be of singular usefulness, as the judges were under the Old, are to take care that the gospel church may, in its concernment as such, be supported and promoted, and the truth propagated wherewith they are intrusted; as the others took care that it might be well with the Judaical church as such. And on these,



and such like principles as these are, may you safely bottom yourselves in that undertaking wherein you seek for direction from God this day.

[3.] For the rules which I intimated, I shall but name them, having some years since delivered my thoughts to the world at large on this subject;<sup>325</sup> and I see no cause as yet to recede from any thing then so delivered. Take, then, only, for the present, these brief directions following:—

*1st.* Labour to be fully persuaded in your own minds, that you be not carried up and down with every wind of doctrine, and be tempted to hearken after every spirit, as though you had received no truth as it is in Jesus. It is a sad condition, when men have no zeal for truth, nor against that which is opposite to it, whatever they seem to profess; because, indeed, having not taken in any truth in the power and principle of it, they are upon sad thoughts, wholly at a loss whether there be any truth or no. This is an unhappy frame indeed; — the proper condition of them whom God will spew out of his mouth.

*2dly.* Know that error and falsehood have no fight or title, either from God or man, unto any privilege, protection, advantage, liberty, or any good thing you are intrusted withal. To dispose that unto a lie, which is the fight of and due to truth, is to deal treacherously with Him by whom you are employed. All the tenderness and forbearance unto such persons as are infected with such abominations is solely upon a civil account, and that plea which they have for tranquility whilst neither directly nor morally they are a disturbance unto others.

*3dly.* Know that in things of practice, so of persuasion, that are impious and wicked, either in themselves or in their natural and unconstrained consequences, the plea of *conscience* is an aggravation of the crime. If men's consciences are seared, and themselves given up to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient, there is no doubt but they ought to suffer such things as to such practices are assigned and appointed.

Should I now descend unto particulars in all the things mentioned, and insist on them, time would wholly fail me, — neither is it a work for a single sermon; and, therefore, in one word I shall wind up the whole matter, and end.

Know them, then, that are faithful and quiet in the land; regard the truth of the gospel; remember the days of old, — what hath done you good, quieted your heart in distress, crowned your undertakings with sweetness; lose not your first love; draw not out your own thoughts for the counsel of God; seek not great things for yourselves; be not moved at the lusts of men; keep peace what in you lieth with all that fear the Lord; let the glory of Christ be the end of all your undertakings, etc.

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325 *Discourse on Toleration.*

Sermon X.  
God's work in founding Zion,  
and  
his people's duty thereupon.



### **Prefatory note.**

An English Parliament was summoned by Cromwell, as Lord Protector, to meet at Westminster on the 17th September 1656. At this time Admiral Blake was pursuing his victorious career, and combating on the ocean the inveterate enemy of England and English Protestantism, — Spain. In order to obtain the supplies requisite for the maintenance of the war, the Parliament was convened, and Dr Owen preached on the occasion. The Parliament agreed to support the Protector in the war, and voted him for the purpose £400,000. The sermon of Owen is remarkable for the tone of cheerful gratitude pervading it, for the peace and freedom which the nation now enjoyed. While contrasting present advantages with the evils from which the country had been delivered, he warns his audience against any course that might expose them, under the judgment of God, to the loss of privileges so dearly won, and against indulging in the strife and animosities which would “turn judgment into wormwood, and truth into hemlock.” — Ed.



*Wednesday, 17th of September 1656.*

Ordered by the Parliament, That Mr Maidstone and the Lieutenant of the Tower do give the hearty thanks of the House to Dr Owen, Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, for his great pains taken in his sermon preached this day in the Abbey Church at Westminster, before his Highness the Lord Protector and the members elected to sit this present Parliament; and that he be desired to print his sermon; and that no man presume to print it without his leave.

Hen. Scobell, *Clerk of the Parliament.*

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**To his highness, the Lord Protector, and to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, etc.**

Although I need plead no other reason for the publishing of the ensuing discourse but your order and command for my so doing; yet, because I know that your peculiar interest, as governors of this commonwealth, in the several stations wherein you are placed of God, is truly stated therein, — in the pursuit whereof your peace and the peace of these nations will be found to lie, — I crave leave to add that consideration also. Being fully acquainted in and with what weakness it was composed and delivered, I cannot but conclude that it was merely for the truth's sake therein contained, which is of God, and its suitableness, through his wise providence, to the present state of things in these nations, that it found acceptance and entertainment with you; which also makes me willing to be therein your remembrancer a second time. From the day wherein I received a command and call unto the service of preaching unto you, unto this issue of it, wherein it is clothed anew with obedience to your order, I found mercy with God to have that caution of the great apostle abiding in my heart and thoughts, "If I yet please men, I am not a servant of God." Hence I can with boldness profess, that, influenced in some measure with the power of that direction, I studiously avoided whatever might be suggested with the least unsuitableness thereunto, with respect either to myself or others.

It was for Zion's sake that I was willing to undertake this duty and service, rejoicing that I had once more an opportunity to give public testimony to the great concernment of the great God and our dear Lord Jesus Christ in all the concussions of the nations in the world, and peculiarly in his wonderful providential dispensations in these wherein we live. And here, as the sum of all, to use plainness and liberty of speech, I say, if there be any thing, in any person whatever in these nations, that cannot stand with, that can stand without, the general interest of the people of God pleaded for, let it fall, and rise no more; and the Lord, I know, will send his blessing out of Zion on whatever, in singleness of heart, is done in a tendency to the establishment thereof.

Farther, I shall not need to suggest any thing of the ensuing discourse:— they who take themselves to be concerned therein will acquaint themselves with it by its perusal. I shall only add, if the general principles asserted therein be in your hearts; if, in pursuit thereof, you endeavour that in no corner of the nation it may be said, This is Zion, that no man careth for; but that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and are, by faith and obedience, separated from the perishing world, following the Lamb, according to the light which he is graciously pleased to impart unto them, and engaged, by the providence of God, in that work which he hath undertaken to accomplish amongst us, be not overborne by a spirit of profaneness and contempt of the power of godliness raging in the earth; that they may be preserved and secured from the return of a hand of violence, and encouraged in the



testimony they have to bear to the kingdom of Christ, in opposition to the world, and all the ways which the men thereof have received by tradition from their fathers, that are not according to his mind; — you will, undoubtedly, in your several conditions, receive blessing from God. Which also that you may, in all your concernments, is the daily prayer of

Your humble Servant

In the work of our dear Lord Jesus,

John Owen.

## Sermon X. God's work in founding Zion, and his people's duty thereupon.

“What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.” — [Isa. xiv. 32.](#)



The head of the prophecy whereof these words are the close, lies in [verse 28](#), “In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden;” which gives us the season and just time of its revelation and delivery. The kingdom of Judah was at that season low and broken; — foreign invasions and intestine divisions had made it so. An account hereof is given us, [2 Chron. xxviii. throughout](#), as it is especially summed up, [verse 19 of that chapter](#), “For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord.” Amongst their oppressing neighbours that took advantage of their low and divided condition, their old enemies the Philistines, the posterity of Ham in Canaan, had no small share, as [verse 18 of that chapter](#), “The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Bethshemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there.”

In this state of things, God takes notice of the joy and triumphing of the whole land of Palestina, — that is, the country of the Philistines, and that the rod of him that smote them was broken; that is, the power of the kings and kingdom of Judah, which, for many generations, had prevailed against them, — especially in the days of David, [2 Sam. v. 1](#), and of Uzziah, [2 Chron. xxvi. 6](#), — and kept them under, was made weak and insufficient for that purpose, [verse 29](#), “Rejoice not thou, whole land of Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken.”

It is no wonder if Palestina, that was to be smitten and broken by the rod of God among his people, rejoice at their perplexities and distresses when we have seen men so to do who pretend to dwell in Judah.

To take them off from their pride and boasting, their triumph and rejoicing, the Lord lets them know that, from the people whom they despised, and that broken rod they trampled upon, their desolation was at hand, though they seem to be perplexed and forsaken for a season, [verses 29–31](#), “Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety; and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.” That it is Hezekiah who is principally intended in these lofty allegorical expressions, that was then rising up from the broken rod





of Judah, is evident. He is termed a “cockatrice,” and a “fiery flying serpent,” not from his own nature, which was tender, meek, and gentle, wherein the comparison doth not at all lie nor hold; but in respect of the mischief that he should do unto, the irrecoverable destruction that he should bring on, the land of Palestina: which, accordingly, he performed, [2 Kings xviii. 8](#), “He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city;” that is, he wasted and destroyed the whole land, from one end even to the other.

It is, it seems, no *new* thing, that the season of the enemies’ *rejoicing*, built upon the *outward appearance* and state of things among the people of God, is the *beginning* of their disappointment and desolation. The Lord make it so in this day of England’s expectation, that the rod of it may be strengthened again, yet to smite the whole land of Palestina!

The words of my text are the result of things upon God’s dealings and dispensations before mentioned. Uncertain it is, whether they ought to be restrained to the immediate prophecy before-going concerning Palestina, or whether they relate not also to that in the beginning of the chapter, concerning the destruction of the Assyrian, which is summed up, [verses 24, 25](#), “The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall big yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.” It is the ruining of Sennacherib and his army in the days of Hezekiah that is foretold. Yea, and this seems to claim a peculiar share and influence into this, or triumphant close; because, eminently and signally, not long after, messengers were thus sent from Babylon to inquire of the health and congratulate the good success of Hezekiah. And well had it been for him and his posterity had he given those messengers the return to their inquiry which was here prepared for him some years before. His mistake herein was the fatal ruin of Judah’s prosperity. Let not, then, that consideration be excluded, though the other insisted on be principally intended.

The words, you see, have in them an inquiry, and a resolution thereof. I shall open them briefly as they lie in the text.

First, There is an inquiry.

1. “*What shall one;*” — *what* shall, or *what* ought, — *what* is it their duty to do, or to say? or, *what* shall they, upon the evidence of the things done, so do or say? Either their *duty* or the *event* is denoted, or *both; as*, in such predictions, it often falls out.

2. “*What shall one;*” — that is, any one, or every one. The answer spoken of is either the duty of every one to give, or it will be so evident, that any one shall be able to give it. The word *one*, I confess, is not expressly in the original, but is evidently included in the verb

וַיִּבְרַח־יְעַנֶּה, — *what* shall be answered? that is, by any one whatever. There is no more in the *translation* than is eminently infolded in the *original expression* of this thing.

3. “*What shall one then;*” — that is, in the season when God hath disappointed the hopes and expectations of the enemies of his people, and hath strengthened their rod to bruise them again more than ever. That is a *season* wherein great inquiry will be made about those things. “What shall one then answer?” This word also is included in the interrogation; and much of the emphasis of it consists therein.

4. “*Answer the messengers;*” — that is, men coming on set purpose to make inquiry after the state of affairs among God’s people, — ambassadors, agents, spies, messengers, — inquirers of any sort; or the word may be taken more largely, for any stranger that came to Jerusalem. The Septuagint render these words, βασιλεῖς ἐθνῶν, “the kings of the nations.” What shall they say in this case? Τί ἀποκριθήσονται; “what shall they answer,” or “say?” — So that word is sometimes used. Some think that for מַלְאָכִים, which they should have rendered ἄγγελοι, or “messengers,” they read מְלָכִים or “kings,” by an evident mistake; but all things are clear in the original.

5. “*Of the nations;*” — that is, of this or that nation, of any nation that shall send to make inquiry: גוֹי, “of the heathen,” say some. Those commonly so called, or “the nations estranged from God,” are usually denoted by this word in the plural number; yet not always under that consideration: so that there may be an enallagy of number, the nation for the nations; which is usual.

“What shall one answer” them? They come to make inquiry after the work of God among his people, and it is fit that an answer be given to them.

Two things are observable in this interrogation:—

I. *The nations about will be diligently inquiring after God’s dispensations among his people.*

Besides what reports they receive at home, they will have messengers, agents, or spies, to make inquiry.

II. *The issues of God’s dispensations amongst his people shall be so evident and glorious, that every one, any one, though never so weak, if not blinded by prejudice, shall be able to give a convincing answer concerning them to the inquiries of men.*

Something shall be spoken to these propositions in the process of our discourse.

Secondly, There is the resolution given of the inquiry made in this interrogation. Hereof are two parts:— 1. *What God hath done.* 2. *What his people shall or ought to do.*

Wrap up at any time the work of God and the duty of his people together, and they will be a sufficient answer to any man’s inquiry after the state of things among them. As to our wisdom in reference unto providential dispensations, this is the whole of man.

1. The first thing in the answer to be given in is the *work* of God. “*The Lord hath founded Zion;*” — Zion, that is, his *church*, his people, his chosen ones, called Zion from the place of their solemn worship in the days of David, the figure and type of the gospel church, Heb.

xii. 22, “Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” It is generally used, not for the whole body of that people, unless as they were typically considered, in which respect they were all holy; but for the secret covenanted ones of that people, — as is evident from all the promises made thereunto, — yet with special regard to the ordinances of worship.

This God “*hath founded;*” — founded, or established, strengthened, that it shall not be removed. Ps. lxxxvii. 1 is a comment on these words. He “*hath founded*” it; that is, in faithful promises and powerful performances, sufficient for its preservation and establishment.

Now this expression, “The Lord hath founded Zion,” as it is an *answer* to the inquiries of “the messengers of the nation,” may be taken two ways.

(1.) As giving an account of the *work itself done*, or what it is that God hath done in and amongst his people. What is the work that is so famed abroad, and spoken of throughout the world, that, being attempted in many places, and proving abortive, is here accomplished? This is it, shall one say: God hath established his people and their interest. It is no such thing as you suppose, — that some are set up, and some pulled down; that new fabrics of government or ruling are erected for their own sakes, or their sakes who are interested in them. But this is the thing that God hath done, he “hath founded Zion;” — established his people and their interest, in despite of all opposition.

(2.) As giving a *reason* of the work done. Whence is it that the Lord hath wrought so mightily for you, amongst you, in your behalf, — preserved you, recovered you, supported you, given you success and victory, — when all nations conspired your ruin? Why, this is the reason of it, “God hath founded Zion;” — he bore it good-will, hath taken care of the interest of his church and people.

The words may be taken in *either* sense; the issue of their intendment, as to our instruction, will be the same. This is the answer to be given to “the messengers of the nation,” who perhaps expected to have heard of their strength and policy, of their counsellors and armies, of their wealth and their riches, of their triumphs and enjoyments. No: “God hath founded Zion.” And well had it been for Hezekiah had he given his answer, prepared for him so long before, to the messengers of Babylon.

III. *The great design of God, in his mighty works, and dispensations in the world, is the establishment of his people, and their proper interest, in their several generations.*

Give me leave to say, it is not for this or that form of *government*, or civil administration of human affairs, — it is not for these or those *governors*, — much less for the advantage of one or other sort of men, for the enthroning of any one or other persuasion, gainful or helpful to some, few or more, that God hath wrought his mighty works amongst us; but it is *that Zion may be founded*, and the general interest of all the sons and daughters of Zion be preserved; — and so far as any thing lies in a subserviency thereunto, so far, and no



farther, is it with him accepted. And whatever, on what account soever, sets up against it, shall be broken in pieces.

What answer, then, should we give to inquirers? “That the Lord hath founded Zion.” This is that, and that alone, which we should insist upon, and take notice of, as the *peculiar* work of God amongst us. Let the reports of other nations be what they will, — let them acquaint the messengers of one another with their glory, triumphs, enlarging of their empires and dominions, — when it is inquired what he hath done in England, let us say, “He hath founded Zion.” And he will not leave until every man concerned in the work shall be able to say, We have busied ourselves about things of no moment, and consumed our days and strength in setting up sheaves that must bow hereunto. This is the main of God’s intendment; and whilst it is safe, he hath the glory and end of his dispensations.

2. The other part of the answer relates to the people: “The poor of his people shall trust in it.”

The words contain either their *duty*, — they *ought* to do so; or the *event*, — they *shall* do so; or both jointly.

(1.) “The poor of his people,” [verse 30](#), they are called, “The firstborn of the poor and needy;” that is, those who are very poor. Now, this expression may denote either the people in general, who had been poor and afflicted, — and so “the poor of his people” is as much as “his poor people,” — or some in particular, that, partly upon the account of their low outward condition, partly on the account of their lowliness of mind, are called “The poor of his people;” and so the words are excellently paraphrased, [Zeph. iii. 12, 13](#), “I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; ... and none shall make them afraid.” We may take the words in a sense comprising both these; namely, for the poor preserved remnant, carried through the fiery trial, and preserved to see some comfortable issue of God’s dealing with them, though yet wrestling with difficulties and perplexities.

(2.) What shall they do? They “shall trust in it;” וַיִּבְרָךְ יְהוָה, “and in it they shall trust;” — that is, being “in it, they shall trust,” confide, acquiesce, namely, in the Lord, who hath wrought this work; or, “in it,” that is, either in the work of God, or in Zion so established by God.

The word here used for “*trusting*,” is sometimes taken for to “*repair*” or to retreat to any thing, and not properly to put trust, affiance, or confidence; and so it is rendered in the margin of your books, “They shall betake themselves to it.” So is the word used, [Judges ix. 15](#); [Ps. xxxvi. 7](#). So the intendment is, — that the poor, preserved people of God, seeing his design to found Zion, and to establish the interest of his chosen, shall leave off all other designs, alms, and contrivances, and wind up all on the same bottom:— they shall not, at least they ought not (for I told you the words might denote either their duty, what they

ought to do; or the event, what they shall do), set up designs and aims of their own, and contend about other things; but betake their hopes to that which is the main intendment of God, the establishment of the interest of his people, and cast all other things in a subserviency thereunto. The sum is, —

IV. *It is the duty of God's poor preserved remnant, laying aside all other aims and contrivances, to betake themselves to the work of God, founding Zion, and preserving the common interest of his people.*

Of the propositions thus drawn from the words, I shall treat severally, so far as they may be foundations of the inferences intended. And, —

I. *The nations about will be diligently inquiring concerning God's dispensations among his people; — their eyes are upon them, and they will be inquiring after them.*

In the handling of this, and all that follows, I humbly desire that you would consider in what capacity, as to the discharge of this work, I look upon myself and you. As you are hearers of the word of God (in which state alone at present, though with reference to your designed employment, I look upon you), you are not at all distinguished from others or among yourselves, but as you are believers or not, — regenerate persons, or coming short thereof. And on this account, as I shall not speak of my *rulers* without *reverence*, so I shall endeavour to speak to my *hearers* with *authority*.

I say, then, there are certain affections and principles, that are active in the nations, that will make them restless, and always put them upon this inquiry. The people of God, on one account or other, shall be, in all seasons, a separated people, [Num. xxiii. 9](#), “Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations;” yea, they are separated from them, whilst they are in their bowels, and dwell in the midst of them, [Mic. v. 7, 8](#). Whether they are amongst them as the spring of their mercies or the rise of their destruction (one of which they will always be), yet they are not of them. No sooner, then, is any people, or portion of them, thus dedicated to God, but all the nations about, and those amongst them not engaged in the same way with them, instantly look on them as utterly severed from them. Having other ways, ends, and interests than they, — being built up wholly on another account and foundation, — they reckon not of them as a people and a nation. The conclusion they make concerning them is that of Haman, [Esth. iii. 8](#), “There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people.” Not their moral and judicial laws, which were the sum of that perfection which all nations aimed at, — on which account they said of them, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people,” [Deut. iv. 6](#); and the keeping of those laws was their wisdom and understanding among all nations; — nor yet merely the laws of their religious worship; but the whole way, interest, design, profession of that people, is comprised in this expression, — they “are diverse from all people.” Looking



on them in this state, they have principles, as I said, that will carry them out to an inquiry into their state and condition.

1. They are full of *envy* against them: “They shall be ashamed for their envy at the people,” Isa. xxvi. 11. Looking on them as *wholly separated from them*, and standing on another account than they do, they are full of envy at them. *Envy* is a restless passion, full of inquiries and jealousies; the more it finds of *poison*, the more it swells and feeds. It will search into the bottom of that which its eye is fixed on. The transaction of the whole business between Nehemiah and Sanballat gives light to this consideration. See Neh. iv. 1–6. And ever the *nearer* any nation is to this people, the greater is their envy. It was Edom, and Moab, and Ammon, the nations round about, that were most filled with wrath and envy against Israel. Yea, when that people was divided among themselves, and the true worship of God remained with Judah, and they became the *separated* people, Ephraim was instantly filled with envy against them, Isa. xi. 13, “The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah; for there must be a desire of the same thing, or something answering it (which befalls in proximity of habitation), that a man is *envied* for in him that *envies* him. This is one fountain of the nations’ inquiry after your affairs.

Through the providence of God you dwell alone; that is, as to your main design and interest. You are not reckoned among the nations, as to the state of being the people of God. So far, and under that consideration, they count you not worthy to be reckoned or esteemed a nation. They envy to see the men of their contempt exalted, blessed. The same is the condition of Ephraim amongst us; men not engaged in the same cause and way with you, they are full of envy. Wherefore do they inquire of your welfare, — of your state and condition, — of your affairs? Is it that they love you, — that they desire your prosperity, — that they would have you an established nation? No; only their envy makes them restless. And, as it is in general, so no sooner doth any man, upon a *private account*, separate himself from the public interest of the people of God, but he is instantly filled with envy against the managers of it. And, notwithstanding all our animosities, if this hath not befallen us in our differences and divisions, I no way doubt a peaceable composure and blessed issue of the whole. If *envy* be not at work, we shall have *establishment*.

2. A second *principle* whereby they are put upon their inquiries, is *fear*. They fear them, and therefore will know how things stand with them, and what are the works of God amongst them, Heb. iii. 7, “I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction, and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.” “I saw” it: when God was doing the great work, described in that chapter with many lofty allegorical expressions, of bringing his people out of bondage, to settle them in a new state and condition, the nations round about, that looked on them, were filled with affliction, fear, and trembling. They were afraid whither these things would



grow. Ps. xlvi. 1–6, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. For fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail.” The close of all the considerations of these kings and their attendants is, that fear took hold upon them. Fear is solicitous and inquiring; it will leave nothing unsearched, unlooked into; it would find the inside and bottom of every thing wherein it is concerned. Though the more it finds, the more it is increased; yet the greater still are its inquiries, fearing more what it knows not, than what it knows, — what is behind, than what appears. This puts the nations upon their inquiry; they are afraid what these things will grow to. Ps. cxxxvi. 2, “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them;” — they are the words of men pondering their affairs, and filled with fear at the issue. If God do such things as these for them, what think you will be the issue? I dare say of the proudest adversaries of the people of God at this day, notwithstanding all their anger, they are more afraid than angry. The like also may be said concerning their wrath, revenge, and curiosity, — all pressing them to such inquiries.

This is the *issue* of this proposal: If we are not a separated people unto God; — if our portion be as the portion of the men of the world, and we are also as they, reckoned among the nations; — if we have had only national works, in the execution of wrath on men fitted thereunto amongst us; — woe unto us that we were ever engaged in the whole affair that for some years we have been interested in! It will be bitterness and disappointment in the latter end. If we be the Lord’s peculiar lot, separate unto him; the nations about, and many amongst ourselves, on the manifold accounts before mentioned, will be inquiring into our state and condition and the work of God amongst us. Let us consider what we shall answer them, — what we shall say unto them. What is the account we give of God’s dealings with us, and of his mighty works amongst us? — what is the profession we make If we seek ourselves, — if we are full of complaints and repinings one against another, — if every one hath his own aims, his own designs (for what we do, not what we say, is the answer we make), — if we measure the work of God by its suitableness to our private interests; — if this be the issue of all the dealings of God amongst us, we shall not have wherein to rejoice. But of these things afterward. The second proposition is, —

II. *The issue of God’s dealing with and dispensations among his people, shall be so perspicuous and glorious, that one, any one, every one, shall be able to give an answer to them that make inquiries about them.*

“What shall *one* then say?” Whether it be for judgment or mercy, all is one; — he will make the event to be evident and glorious. He “is our rock, and his work is perfect;” and he

will have his works so known as that they may all praise him. Be it in judgment, see what issue he will bring his work unto, [Deut. xxix. 24, 25](#), “Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them, when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt.” “Men shall say,” — ordinary men shall be able to give this sad account of the reason of the works of God, and his dealings with his people. So also as to his dispensations in mercy, [Isa. xxvi. 11](#), “Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.” He will not leave the work of his favour towards his people, until those who are willing to shut their eyes against it do see and acknowledge his hand and counsel therein.

I do not say this will hold in every dispensation of God, in all seasons, from the beginning to the ending of them. In many works of his power and righteousness he will have us bow our souls to the law of his providence, and his sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness therein, when his footsteps are in the deep, and his paths are not known; which is the reasonablest thing in the world. But this, generally, is the way of his proceedings, especially in the common concernments of his people, and in the disposal of their public interests:— his works, his will and counsels therein, shall be eminent and glorious. It is chiefly from ourselves and our own follies that we come short of such an acquaintance with the works of God as to be able to give an answer to every one that shall demand an account of them. When David was staggered at the works of God, he gives this reason of it, “I was foolish, and as a beast before him,” [Ps. lxxiii. 22](#). That thoughtfulness and *wisdom* which keeps us in darkness, is our *folly*.

There are sundry things that are apt to cloud our apprehensions as to the mind of God in his dealing with his people. As, —

1. *Self-fulness* of our own private apprehensions and designs. A private design and aim in the works of Providence, is like a private, by-opinion in matters of religion. You seldom see a man take up a by-opinion (if I may so speak), but he instantly lays more weight upon it than upon all religion besides. If that be not enthroned, be it a matter of never so small importance, he scarce cares what becomes of all other truths which he doth embrace. When men have fixed to themselves that this or that particular must be the product of God’s providential dispensations, that alone fills their aims and desires, and leaves no room for any other apprehension. Have we not seen persons, in the days wherein we live, so fixed on a reign, a kingdom, — I know not what, that they would scarce allow God himself to be wise if their minds were not satisfied? “Give me this child, or I die!” Now, is it probable, that, when men’s whole souls are possessed with a design and desire of their own, so fully that they are cast into the mould of it, are transformed into the image and likeness of it, — they can see, hear, think, talk, dream nothing else, — they shall be able to discern aright, and acquiesce in the general issue of God’s dispensations, or be able to “answer the messengers





of the nations,” making inquiry concerning them? Fear, hope, wrath, anger, discontentment, with a rabble of the like mind-darkening affections, are the attendants of such a frame. He who knows any thing of the power of prejudices in diverting the minds of men from passing a right judgment on things proposed to them, and the efficacy of disordered affections for the creating and confirming of such prejudices, will discern the power of this darkening disturbance.

2. Private *enmities*, private *disappointments*, private *prejudices*, are things of the same consideration. Let a man of a free and large heart and spirit abstract his thoughts from the differences that are among the people of God in this nation, and keep himself from an engagement into any particular design and desire; — it is almost impossible that he should wink so hard but that the issue and reason of God’s dealing with us will shine in upon his understanding, so that he shall be able to give an account of them to them that shall make inquiry. Will he not be able to “say to the messengers of the nations,” and all other observers of the providential alterations of the late times that have passed over us, The people of God in this nation were despised, but are now in esteem: they were under subjection to cruel task-masters, — some in prisons, some banished to the ends of the earth, merely on the account of the worship of their God; the consciences of all inthralled, and of many defiled and broken on the scandals laid before them; whilst iniquity and superstition were established by law; — but this is that which God hath now done and accomplished, — the *imprisoned* are set at liberty, the *banished* are recalled; they that have *lain among the pots* have got doves’ wings; conscience is no more inthralled; their sacrifices are not mixed with their blood, nor do they meet with trembling in the worship of God? O ye “messengers of the nations,” this is that which the Lord hath done! Who, I say, not entangled with one prejudicate engagement or other, may not see this with half an eye? But such is our state and condition, such our frame and temper, so full are we of our own desires, and so perplexed with our own disappointments, that we can see nothing, know nothing, nor are able to give any word of account that may tend to the glory of our God to them that inquire of us; but every one vents his own discontentments, his own fears, his own perplexities. The Lord look down in mercy, and let us not be found despisers of the work of his power and goodness! Ah! how many glorious appearances have I seen, of which I said, Under the shadow hereof shall we live among the heathen! but in a short space they have passed away. Shall we, therefore, choose us a *captain*, and go down again into Egypt? The third proposition ensues.

III. *The great design of God, in his mighty works and dispensations, is the establishment of his people, and their proper interest, in their several generations.*

To make this clear, some few things are previously to be considered; as, —

1. The proper *interest* of the people of God is to glorify him in their several places, stations, and generations: none of us are to live unto ourselves. It is for this end that God hath taken a peculiar people to himself in this world, that his name may be borne forth by them,

— that he might be glorified by them and upon them. This is the great end whereunto they are designed, and that which they ought to aim at only, even to glorify God. If this be not done, they fall off from, and are beside their proper interest. Besides innumerable testimonies to this purpose, I might give evidence to this assertion from God's eternal, electing love towards them, with his intendment therein; — from their redemption out of every kindred, tribe, and family under heaven, by the blood of Christ; — from their separation from the world, by their effectual calling, and the like considerations. But I have the consenting voice of them all in general, and of every individual in particular, crying out, This is our, this is my proper interest, that we may glorify God; fail we and come short in this, we come short and fail in the whole: so that I shall not need farther to confirm it.

2. God is the only proper and *infallible judge*, in what state and condition his people will best and most glorify his name in their several generations. I think I need not insist on the proof of this assertion. "Should it be according to thy mind," saith he, in [Job xxxiv. 33](#); or according to the mind of God? Should the disposal of things be according to his will, or ours? Whose end is to be obtained in the issue of all? is it not his glory? Who hath the most wisdom to order things aright, — he or we? Who hath the chiefest interest in, and right unto, the things contended about? Who sees what will be the event of all things, — he or we? Might men be judges, would they not universally practically conclude, that the condition wherein they might best glorify God would be, that they might have peace and rest from their enemies, union and a good understanding among themselves, — that they might dwell peaceably in the world, without control, and have the necks of their adversaries under their feet? This in general:— in particular, that this or that persuasion, that they are peculiarly engaged in, might be always enthroned; that their proper sheaf might stand upright, and all others bow thereunto; and that nothing is contrary to the glory of God but what disturbs this condition of affairs? I know not what may be accomplished before the end of the world; from the beginning of it hitherto, for the most part, the thoughts of God have not been as these thoughts of ours. He hath judged otherwise as to the condition wherein his people should glorify him. God is judge himself; let us, I pray you, leave the determination of this difference to him. And if it be so as to our general condition, much more is it so as to our peculiar designs and aims, wherein we are divided.

3. *Providential dispensations*, are discoveries of the wisdom of God in disposing of the condition of his people, so as they may best glorify him. To dispute against the condition wherein at any time we are cast by his providence, is to rise up against his wisdom in disposing of things to his own glory.

These things being premised, it is easy to give light and evidence to the assertion laid down.

I might go through the stories of God's dealings with the nations of the world, and his own people amongst them, and manifest in each particular that still his design was the es-

tablishment of his people's proper interest. But, instead of instances, take two or three testimonies that occur. [Deut. xxxii. 8](#), "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel." From the beginning, God hath so ordered all the nations of the world, that they may bear a *proportion* to what he hath to do with his people; that he may so order and dispose of them, as that his design towards his own may be accomplished. [Amos ix. 9](#), "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." All the stirs and commotions that are in the world, are but God's siftings of all the nations, that his chosen ones may be fitted for himself, and not lost in the chaff and rubbish. [Heb. xii. 26, 27](#), "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." All the shakings of the nations are, that the unshaken interest of the saints may be established. [Isa. li. 15, 16](#), "But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people." Heaven and earth, and all things therein, are disposed of, that Zion may be built and established. All God's works in this world lie in a subserviency to this end and purpose. Doth God at any time prosper an evil or a wicked nation? — an antichristian nation? Is it for their own sakes? Doth God take care for oxen? hath he delight in the prosperity of his enemies? No; it is only that they may be a rod in his hand for a little moment, and a staff for his indignation against the miscarriages of his people, [Isa. x. 5](#), "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation." This, in such a season, is their proper interest, — to glorify God in distress. Doth he break, ruin, and destroy them, as sooner or later he will leave them neither root nor branch? All that he doth to them is a recompense for the controversy of Zion, [Isa. xxxiv. 8](#), "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion."

We see not, perhaps, at this day, wherein the concernment of the remnant of God's people doth lie, in the great concussions of the nations in the world; we know not what design in reference to them may lie therein. Alas! we are poor, short-sighted creatures; we know nothing that is before us, — much less can we make a judgment of the work of God, in the midst of the darkness and confusion that is in the world, until he hath brought it to perfection. All lies open and naked to his eye, and the beauty of all his works will one day appear. The true and proper interest of his people, so as they may best glorify him in the world, is that which he is pursuing in all these dispensations.



The grounds, reasons, and foundations of this truth, in the counsel, from the love and attributes of God, the redemption in the blood of Jesus, I must not now pursue. This one thing I shall only offer:— The state of Zion, of the people of God, being much to depend upon the disposals of them whom God, by his providence, raiseth up to rule and government among the nations; though sometimes he sets up men whose hearts and minds are upright with himself, yet he will not trust his own to their mercy and the variableness of their wills in general; but will so dispose, alter, weaken and strengthen them, to set them up, and pull down, that it shall be their interest (to which they will always abide faithful) so to deal with his people as he will have them dealt with, that they may best glorify him in their generations.

If it be in the infinite, wise counsel of God, to give his mints in this nation peace and tranquillity, they shall not have it precariously upon the wills of men; for he will not leave moulding and disposing of the affairs of the nation, until it find that it is its proper interest to give and measure out unto them what is to the mind of God. All that hath been done amongst us, all that we are in expectation of, turns on this hinge alone. But lastly, —

IV. *It is the duty of God's preserved remnant, laying aside all other aims and contrivances, to betake themselves to the work of God, founding Zion, and preserving the common interest of his people.*

“God hath founded Zion, and the poor of the people shall trust therein,” or betake themselves unto it. We are apt to wander on hills and mountains, every one walking in the imagination of his own heart, forgetting our resting-place. When God was bringing the power of the Babylonian upon his people, the prophet Jeremiah could neither persuade the whole nation to submit to his government, nor many individuals among them to fall to him in particular. And when the time of their deliverance from that captivity was accomplished, how hardly were they persuaded to embrace the liberty tendered! Notwithstanding all encouragements and advantages, the greatest part of them abide in that place of their bondage to this day. So hardly are we brought to close with God's peculiar work, and our own proper interest, although his glory and our own safety lie therein. The reasons of this frame I have in part touched before; I shall add but two more.

1. *Discontentment* with our peculiar lot and portion in the work of the Lord and common interest of his people. It is with us, in our civil affairs, as the apostle saith it is not in the natural body, nor ought to be in the spiritual or church body. The foot doth not say, Because I am not the head, I am not of the body; no, it doth not, but is content with its own place and usefulness. It is so with the rest of the members, that are more noble, and yet are not the head neither. It is otherwise with us. I interpose not my thoughts as to your present constitution, and the order of things amongst us. I speak no more than I have sundry years since, sundry times complained of to a parliament of this commonwealth. Every one, if not personally, yet in association with them of some peculiar persuasion with himself, would be the head; and because they are not, they conclude they are not of the body, nor will care

for the body, but rather endeavour its ruin. Because their peculiar interest doth not reign, the common interest shall be despised. And this hath been the temper, or rather distemper, of the people of God in this nation now for sundry years; and what it may yet produce I know not. Only, for the present, the work of God in founding Zion, in pursuing his people's common interest, is despised, thought light of, and all the pleasant things thereof trodden under foot. Unless God end this frame, my expectations, I confess, of a happy issue of the great work of God amongst us will wither day by day.

2. The suffering of our *wills and judgments*, as to the products of providence, to run before the will of God. This the experience of these days hath taught us. Those who have a forwardness in prescribing to God what he should do, as to the "modus" or manner of the work which at any time he hath to accomplish, are stubbornly backward in closing with what he doth actually produce. These, and the like things, which might be in large *catalogues* reckoned up, one after another, detain the minds of men from acquiescing in the common interest of Zion, whose preservation is the whole peculiar design of the great work of God in any place or season. — These foundations being laid in the words of the text, let us now see what inferences from them may be made for our advantage and instruction.

*Use 1.* Let us, then, consider diligently what we shall "answer the messengers of the nations." Some think that by the "nation" is peculiarly intended the nation of the Jews themselves, whose messengers from all parts came to Jerusalem to inquire of the work of God, and to advise about the affairs of the whole. In this sense you are the messengers of this nation, to whom an answer is to be returned. And because the text saith, *one* shall do it, — that is, any one, — I shall make bold, before we close, to give an answer to your inquiries, and endeavour to satisfy your expectations. In the meantime, as the words seem more directly to respect the inquiries of other nations; so it is in a special manner incumbent on you, who will be especially inquired of, to return an answer to them. Be provided, then, I pray, in your own hearts, to give an answer in this business. And, oh, that you could do it with one heart and lip, — with one consent and judgment! On whom are the eyes of this nation, and of those round about? from whom are the expectations of men? to whom should we go to inquire what God hath done in this nation, what he is doing, what are the effects of his power, if not of you? Some of you have been engaged in this work with the Lord from the beginning. And I hope none of you have been engaged in heart or hand against it; and you speak still with living affections to the old and common cause. If you will be able to steer your course aright, if you would take one straight step, have in a readiness an acquaintance with the work of God, what it is that he aims at, by which you may be guided in all your undertakings. Suppose, now, a man, or men, should come and ask of you what God hath done in these nations, what he hath wrought and effected, what is brought forth? Have you an answer in readiness? Certainly God hath done so much, as that he expects you should be able to give an account of it. Take heed that every one of you be not ready to speak the disquietness of

your own spirits, and so cast contempt on the work of God. Something else is required of you. I have sometimes, in darkness and under temptations, myself begun to think, that what hath been, is the thing that is, and there is no new thing under the sun; — as it hath been among the heathen of old, so it hath been amongst us; or as it was with Israel, [1 Kings xvi. 21, 22](#), “Then were the people of Israel divided into two parts: half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath to make him king, and half followed Omri; but the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath: so Tibni died, and Omri reigned:” — that a *common* thing, and frequent in the world, had befallen us, wherein God had no hand but that of common providence, in dashing one sort of men against another. So foolish have I been, and as a beast, so ready to condemn the generation of the righteous, — so unbelieving and ready to cast away the faith and prayer of ten thousand saints, one of whose sighs shall not be lost. But such fearful effects, sometimes trouble, disquietment, disappointment, and carnal fear will produce. But certain it is, none of the many cries of the people of God shall be lost, nor their faith be disappointed. God hath a peculiar design in hand, and we are to find it out, that we may be able to answer them that make inquiries. If you lay not this foundation of your procedures, I shall not wonder if you err in your ways. It is your pole-star, and will be so, by which your whole course is to be steered; — your shield, which whilst it is safe, though you die, your glory abides.

But you will say, What, then, is this great design of God among his people? Let the Holy One of Israel bring nigh his work, that we may know it. What is that true and general interest of Zion that he hath founded? Let us know it, that we may be able to give an answer to them that inquire after it. Ask themselves, — those who have *prayed* for it, *waited* for it, *expected* it, are made *partakers* of it, do enjoy it, live upon it, — probably they will be able to give you an account what is their peculiar and only interest as to these providential dispensations; — surely they cannot but know that which they enjoy and live upon.

But you will say, Of all others this is the most unlikely and irrational course, — a way to perplex and entangle, not to inform us at all. Is it not clear that they are divided among themselves? Is not their language, is not their voice, like that of the Jews at the building of the second temple? Some shouted for joy, and some wept at the remembrance of the former temple? Are not their desires rather like that, and those of theirs who built Babel, than of those who cry Grace, grace, whilst God is founding Zion? Do not many of them utterly deny any work or design of God (I mean that is peculiar) in the affairs of this nation, and utterly fall away from the society of them who are otherwise persuaded? And is it likely that we can gather any resolution from them? Doth not the greatest danger of our own miscarriage lie in this, that we may be apt to attend to their peculiar desires, and so to divide amongst ourselves as they are divided?

And is this the return that indeed is to be made? Oh, that mine eyes might run down with water clay and night on this account, — that my heart might be moved within me, for

the folly of my people! “O foolish people and unwise, do ye thus requite the Lord?” It is true, many at all times have desired the day of the Lord, who, when it hath come, have not been able to abide it; — it hath consumed them, and all the principles whereon they have acted, and upon which they did desire it. But that those who have their share in it indeed, should be thus broken among themselves, should bite one another, devour one another, and scarce allow one another to be sharers in the common interest of the saints in that day, — this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation. But yet something may be farther pressed on them in this business. When one went to demand of the philosophers of the several sects which was the best of them, every one named his own sect and party in the first place; but all of them, in the second place, granted that of Plato to be the most eminent. The inquirer knew quickly what to conclude: setting aside prejudicate affections, self-love, and by-interests, he saw that the judgment of all ran on that of Plato, as the best and most eminent sect; and which thereupon he preferred before the rest.

May not some inquiry of the like nature be made of the people of God amongst us? Ask them, What is the common interest of Zion, that God takes care of, that he hath founded in the days wherein we live, in the great transactions of providence that have passed over us? Say some, That such a form of church worship and discipline be established, such a rule of doctrine confirmed, and all men whatever compelled to submit unto them; herein lies that kingdom of Christ which he takes care of, this is that which God will have founded and established: and what this form, what this rule is, we are to declare. — That that *discipline* be eradicated, the ministers’ *provision* destroyed, and the men of such a persuasion enthroned, to rule all the rest at their pleasure; seeing that, notwithstanding all their pretended reformation, they are yet antichristian, say others. — Say some, That a kingdom and rule be set up in our hands, to be exercised in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, taking away all law and magistracy already established, to bring forth the law of righteousness conceived in our minds, and therein to be preserved; — all uniting only in this, that a sovereignty as unto administration of the things of God is to be theirs. — Say others, lastly, That the *people* of God be delivered from the hands of their cruel enemies, that they may serve the Lord without fear all the days of their lives, in righteousness and holiness; — that, notwithstanding their present differences, they may live peaceably one with, or, at least, one by another, enjoying rule and promotion as they are fitted for employments, and as he gives promotion in whose hand it is; — that godliness and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ be preserved, protected, and secured, from a return of the hand of violence upon it. Herein, say some, lies the common interest of the people of God; this he hath wrought out for them, — herein he hath founded Zion. Ask, now, the people of God in this nation, I say, or any of them, one or more, at any time, what he or they look upon as the chief thing aimed at in the mighty dispensations of God amongst us. Will they not every one answer, in the first place, That is aimed at, that is to be *enthroned*, that so doing is the will of God, the end of his works among them, wherein

their or his particular engagement and interest lies? But ask them now again, in the second place, Which of the remaining persuasions, concerning the work of God and the common interest of his people, they would prefer next to their own? Will they not all unanimously fix on that mentioned in the last place, rather than any of the others? Is it not, then, evident, that, setting aside *prejudicate affections*, and such determinations as may reasonably be supposed to arise from them, — laying away all *private animosities*, and desire of rule and pre-eminence, with other worldly and selfish designs, — the universality of the people of God do answer to them that inquire, that in the last persuasion lies the aim and work of God in our generation? For my own part, on this and other considerations hereafter to be mentioned, I shall dare freely to give this answer to the messengers of this or any nation in the world who shall make inquisition after the work of God amongst us, and his design in reference to his people; and it is no other than my heart hath been fixed upon for many years, and which I have several times, on one account or other, intimated or pressed unto the parliament, which first undertook to manage, and successfully carried on, that cause in whose protection you are now engaged.

This, I say, then, “God hath founded Zion;” he hath taken care of the generation of the righteous, the children of Zion, however differenced among themselves; — hath broken the yoke of their oppressors, given them peace, ordered the affairs of this nation so, that they do or may all of them enjoy quietness, one not envying the other, nor they vexing them, but, serving God according to the light which he is graciously pleased to afford them, they wait for farther manifestation of the glorious gospel; and that God hath broken, and will break, every design that, either openly and professedly, or under specious pretences of crying, “Lo, here is Christ, or, Lo, there,” hath sought, or shall seek and endeavour, to subvert this his work, to the preservation whereof he will certainly mould the government and interest of this nation; ordering its affairs in a peculiar manner on that account only, and not that he delighteth in one way or form whereunto it hath been cast more than another. And whatever high-minded men, full of their own apprehensions and wisdom, may do, to this “work of God the poor of his people shall repair.” And for my insisting on this answer, and this only, I have these farther reasons to add for my justification:—

(1.) This is an *interest comprehensive of all the sons of Zion*, whose founding God intends; it excludes none that can claim a share in the city of the living God. God takes equal care of all the dwelling-places of Zion. Every dwelling-place of Zion hath its beauty, hath its glory, [Isa. iv. 5](#). The glory of one may be as the glory of the sun; of another, as the moon; of others, as the stars; and those differing from one another in glory; — yet each hath its glory; “*and upon it there shall be a defence,*” — a covering, a protection. This is the promise; this hath been the work of God.

(2.) This compriseth all them who have lived by faith, and abode in supplications in reference to God’s late dispensations amongst us. Who dare despise any one of those little





ones, and say, God hath heard me, not you; regarded me, not you; you have no share or portion in the returns of supplications which we enjoy?

(3.) This alone preserveth the dwellers of Zion from offering violence one to another, — from taking the work of Babylon out of its hands, and devoting one another. Let any other apprehension whatever of the work of God be embraced, and the first work that thereby men will be engaged in is the oppressing, persecuting, ruining of their brethren; which, whether it be the founding of Zion or no, the day of judgment shall determine.

(4.) This is that which the common enemy seeks to destroy. It is not this or that party that he would devour; it is not this or that persuasion he would cast down; his hatred is πρὸς τὸ γένος, “against the whole race” and kind. This is that which he would accomplish, that all the children of God, however differenced among themselves, might be ruined, destroyed, cast down, and rooted out forever, — that the name of Israel might no more be had in remembrance. This, then, is that which God, in their disappointment, aims to establish.

(5.) Because the founding of Zion doth not consist in this or that form of the civil administration of human affairs, there being nothing promised nor designed concerning them, but that they be laid in an orderly subserviency to the common interest of the saints; which, let men do what they will, yea, what they can, all governments shall at last be brought unto. And who is there amongst us that, in singleness of heart, dares make such an “*answer* to the messengers of the nations,” inquiring after the peculiar work of God amongst us, — namely, that it consists in the establishment of this or that form of civil administration, though much of the work of God lies therein, in relation to this general end? This, then, is the answer which I “shall give to the messengers of the nations;” and of it there are these three parts:—

[1.] God hath broken, destroyed, ruined them and their contrivances, who made it their business to overthrow Zion, and to root out the generation of the righteous, not under this or that way or form, whereby they are differenced among themselves, but as such, as the saints of the Holy One; and will continue so to do.

[2.] He hath given to them — to “the poor of his people” — peace, liberty, freedom, from impositions on their consciences, with much glorious light in several degrees in his worship and service.

[3.] He hath cast (as he hath promised) the power of the nation into a subserviency to this common interest of Christ and his people in this world; and hath made, or will make, them to understand, that as the peace of Zion lies in their peace, so their peace lies in the peace of Zion. And what to say more “to the messengers of the nations,” I know not.

*Use 2.* If this, then, be the work of God, let us *repair* to it. The poor of the people shall trust therein, or join themselves thereunto. That you may do this in judgment, be pleased to take these directions, which, with all humility, I offer to you, and I hope from the Lord:—

(1.) Engage in no *way*, no counsels, be the reasonings and pretences for them never so *specious*, which have an inconsistency with this *common interest* of Zion in this generation.



If, instead of repairing to the work of God, you should be found contending against it, and setting up your own wisdom in the place of the wisdom of God, it would not be to your advantage. I know many things will be suggested unto you; — *settling* of religion, establishing a *discipline* in the church, not to *tolerate errors*, and the like. From which discourses I know what conclusions some men are apt to draw, if no otherwise, yet from what they have been doing for many years. Do we, then, plead for errors and unsettlement! God forbid! God hath undertaken to found and establish Zion, to settle it, and he will do it; and I pray God you may be instrumental therein, according to his mind. He will also give his people one heart and one way; and I pray that you, by your example of union in love, and by all other good means, may be instrumental towards the accomplishment of that promise amongst us. It is only the liberty and protection of the people of God as such that is pleaded for; and he that shall set up any thing inconsistent therewith, as so set up, will lay the foundation of his building in the first-born of his peace, and set up the gate of it in the utmost and last of his welfare. In a word, the people of God may possibly, in this nation, devour one another, and wash their hands in the blood of one another, by widening the breaches that are among them, — and woe be to them that shall be instrumental therein! but if ever they come to a coalescency in love and truth, it must be by their mutual forbearance of one another, until the Spirit be poured down from on high, and the fruits of peace be brought forth thereby. And herein the Lord make you as the mountains that bring forth righteousness, and the little hills that bring forth peace unto his people!

There are some things that I am afraid of, that lie contrary to what I am exhorting you unto. I wish the event may manifest that I am afraid without cause. However, give me leave to caution you of them, because I cannot be faithful to my call if I do not.

[1.] Take heed lest that evil be still abiding upon any of our spirits, that we should *be crying out and calling for reformation without a due consideration of what it is, and how it is to be brought about*. I wish one of many of them who have prayed for it, and complained for want of it, had endeavoured to carry it on as they might. Would you have a reformation? Be you more humble, more holy, more zealous; delight more in the ways, worship, ordinances of God; reform your persons in your lives, relations, families, parishes, as to gospel obedience, and you will see a glorious reformation indeed. What mean you by a reformation? Is it the hurting of others, or doing good to ourselves? Is it a power over other men's persons, or our own lusts? God hath now, for sundry years, tried us, whether indeed we love reformation or no. Have any provoked us or compelled us to defile the worship of God with ceremonies or superstitions, and our own consciences therewithal? Have we been imposed on in the ways of God by men ignorant of them? Hath not God said to us, You that have prayed under persecution for reformation, — you that have fought in the high places of the field for reformation, — you that have covenanted and sworn for reformation, — go now, reform yourselves:— you ministers, preach as often as you will, as freely as you please, no man shall



control you; live as holily as you can, — pray as often, fast as often as you will, — be full of bounty and good works, giving examples to your flock, none shall trouble you; be instant in season, out of season, preach the whole counsel of God without control:— you people, be holy, serve God in holiness, — keep close to his worship and ordinances, love them, delight in them, bring forth such fruits as men may glorify God on your account; condemn the world, justify the cause of God by a gospel conversation, take seven years' peace and plenty, and see what you can do? — If, after all this, we still cry out, Give us a reformation, and complain not of our own negligence, folly, hatred of personal reformation, to be the only cause of that want, it is easy to judge what we would have, had we our desires.

[2.] Take heed lest any who have formerly desired the day of the Lord, considering the purity and holiness wherewith it will be attended, grow weary of it and its work, as not being able to abide it, and so lay aside all thoughts of growing up with it in the will of God; — lest any say, Is this the day of the Lord, that holiness, godliness, exact obedience, should be prized, exalted, esteemed; that profaneness, pride, selfishness, formality should be despised, consumed, devoured? — we will have none of this day.

[3.] Take heed that there rise not up a *generation that know not Joseph*; — that knew us not in the days of our distress and contending with those who would have destroyed us; who were not engaged with us in praying, fasting, fighting, in England, Scotland, and Ireland, but were unconcerned in all our affairs; who know nothing of the cries, tears, trembling, and fears, wherewith this cause hath been managed. Can we expect that they should be acted by the spirit of it, or have a due sense of what they must be engaged in? What know they of the communion we have had with God in this business all along, what answers he hath given us, what obligations he hath put upon us thereby? The whole business is to them as a story only of that which is past, wherein *they are not concerned*. There are such abiding impressions left on the souls of as many as have been engaged in the work of God in this nation, from the beginning to the end, as will never be blotted out. If a spirit not sensible of former ways should arise amongst us and prevail, it would be sad with the interest of Christ and his people in this nation. To return to my directions:—

(2.) Make this work of God your *pole-star*, that you may steer and guide your course by it. In all your consultations and actions, whatever is proposed, whatever is to be done, let this consideration attend it — *But how will it suit the design of God in establishing Zion?* Men speaking of a thing of manifest evidence, say that it is written with the beams of the sun. Give me leave to tell you of a thing that is written in the *prayers* of the saints, the *fears* of your enemies, the *condition* of this nation, the *counsels* of princes of the earth, the *affairs* of the nations abroad in the world, — all the issues of the providence of God in these days; all which concurring, I suppose, will give as good an evidence as any thing in the like kind is capable of. What is this, you will say? It is, in brief, Let the work of God as stated be your guide in all your consultations, and it will direct you to aim at these ends:—

[1.] To preserve *peace*, to compose differences, to make up breaches, to avoid all occasions of divisions at home.

[2.] To *make up, unite*, gather into one common interest, the Protestant nations abroad in the world, that we may stand or fall together, and not be devoured one after another. That these are the things which God calls you to mind, and do, if you will bear any regard to his present work is, I say, written with all the beams of Providence before mentioned. If the Lord should suffer you to be *regardless* either to the one or the other, know you not that it would be bitterness in the latter end? Ask your friends what they desire, your enemies what they fear, the nations abroad what they are doing, — consider Babylon, consider Zion; and if one and the same voice come from them all, not to attend unto it, would be not to attend to the voice of God. It is, indeed, an easy thing for you to gratify Satan, satiate the desire of your enemies, lay a foundation of troubles; — it is but attending to the clamours of men without, and the tumultuating of lusts and carnal wisdom within, and the whole work is done. But to carry on the work of God in the particulars mentioned, — this is not so easy a task; — self must be denied, many glorious pretences laid aside, contrary reasonings answered, men's weaknesses, miscarriages, failings borne withal, because they are men; and, which is more than all, our own particular darling desires, it may be, let go unsatisfied, though moulded into contrivances for many years. The truth is, the combinations of the antichristian party in the world are so evident, their successes so notorious, their designs so fixed, their advantages to carry them on so many, that to persuade with them who have power for that end and purpose to make it their business to keep union amongst ourselves, on all good and honest terms, and to endeavour the union of all that call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours, in the world, were to cast a reproach upon their wisdom, foresight, and zeal. So that it sufficeth me to have mentioned these things.

Use 3. Encourage all things that lie *in a tendency and subserviency* to the work of God, unfolded and insisted on. For instance, —

(1.) Wherever you see any work of *real reformation*, tending to the advancement of the gospel, discarding of old useless forms received by tradition from our fathers, separating the precious from the vile, according to the several measures of light which God, in his infinite wisdom, hath graciously imparted, let not needless objections and hinderances lie in the way, but give in all due encouragements to the men of such engagements. Perhaps the business of carrying on reformation is grievous to some, who, in their anger and wrath, revenge and disappointment, may make complaints of it to you, in private or in public. The Lord give you wisdom, that you may never weaken the hands or sadden the hearts of men who are willing to join hearts and hands with you to save a poor nation, and to keep life in the work of God in the midst thereof!

(2.) What you find established already in this *kind*, encourage, preserve, improve, that the work fail not.



(3.) Find out what is *wanting*, and pursue it as God gives you advantage and opportunity.

(4.) Where men, under pretence of religion, make it their business to defile themselves, or disturb the civil peace and quiet of others, let them know that the sword is not borne in vain. I can but name these things.

Honourable! — My heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may be the repairers of breaches, and the restorers of paths for men to walk in; that you may be the preservers of *the good old cause of England*, according to the growth it received in and under several providential dispensations. Many particulars lie in my heart to propose unto you; but, on very many considerations, I shall name none at present of them, but close all with some few general directions.

[1.] Secure your spirits, that in sincerity you seek the *public good* of the nations, and the prosperity of the good people therein, who have adhered to the good cause of liberty and religion. If this be in your eye as that which is principally intended, as you may pray in faith for the presence of God with you, and have a comfortable expectation of his protection and favour; so if, in the pursuit of it, through human frailty you should err, or mistake in the choice of means, paths, ways, tending to that end, God will guide you, and lead you, and not leave you until he hath made straight paths for your feet. But if at the bottom there lie secret animosities, self-will, desire of obtaining greatness or power, on the one hand or other, — if every such thing be not on all hands subdued unto public good, — prayers will be weakened, carnal wisdom increased, the counsel of God rejected, and you will wander in all your ways without success.

[2.] Keep alive this principle (which whether any will hear, or whether any will forbear, I know not; but this I am sure of, in the latter end it will be found to be true), according as you regard, cleave to, promote, protect, on the one side, or despise, contemn, and oppose, on the other, the common interest of Zion, the people of God, before laid down; so will your affairs either flourish, prosper, and succeed, on the one hand, or wither, decay, and be fruitless, on the other. In all other things that shall fall under your consideration, that relate to the civil government of the nations, prudence, conjecture, probability, consideration of circumstances, and the present posture of things, may take place; — this is capable of no framing to the one hand or other, upon any pretence whatever.

[3.] If it be possible, keep up a spirit of love and forbearance among yourselves; “love thinketh no evil.” Do not impose designs on one another, and then interpret every thing that is spoken, though in never so much sincerity and simplicity of spirit, in a proportion to that design; — this will *turn judgment into wormwood, and truth into hemlock*.



Sermon XI.

God's presence with a people the spring of their prosperity;  
with  
their special interest in abiding with him.



### **Prefatory note.**

Before the same Parliament to which the last discourse was delivered, Dr Owen made a similar appearance on October 30, 1656. The close of the sermon gives a vivid picture of the religious state of Wales. We have seen that, in the first sermon he ever preached before Parliament, he took the opportunity of urging the necessity of some measures for promoting education and religion in that part of Britain. The circumstance that he was descended from a Welsh family, may account for the special interest which he evinced in the religious welfare of Wales. Great religious destitution prevailed in it. The Welsh at this time had neither Bibles nor Catechisms, and had scarcely sermon four times in the year. In 1649 an act was passed for the better propagation of the gospel, and the ejection of scandalous clergymen, in Wales. From the report of the commissioners in 1652, one hundred and seventy-five ministers had been ejected since 1645. Through the exertions of Parliament, one hundred and fifty preachers were appointed to officiate in thirteen Welsh counties; whose zeal in their duties may be judged of from the fact, that most of them preached three or four days every week. A schoolmaster was appointed for every market-town; and two of superior qualifications, educated at the university, were supported in all the larger towns. In addition to all this agency, six itinerant preachers were appointed for each county, at an allowance of £100; these were aided by the services of thirty, two ministers; and as all these arrangements were insufficient to meet the necessities of the case, pious laymen travelled through the counties, and conducted public devotion in the presence of the people. The first sermon of Owen had, accordingly, borne ample fruit. Whitelocke tells us, that in 1649 every Friday was devoted by Parliament to the purpose of consulting in regard to the spread and maintenance of religion. These facts deserve to be known to their credit, as evincing a lively and zealous interest in the highest welfare of the people, whatever view may be taken of the duty or competency of the state to make such provision for the support of the gospel and the spiritual enlightenment of a nation. For full details on these points, the reader may be referred to Neal, *vol. iv. pp. 14 and 104*, and the publications of the Rev. Vavasor Powell, one of the commissioners, in defence of their proceedings. — Ed.



*Friday, the 31st October 1656.*

Ordered by the Parliament, That the thanks of this House be given unto Dr Owen, Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxon, for his great pains taken in his sermon before this House yesterday, in Margaret's Church, Westminster, being a day set apart for solemn fasting and humiliation; and that he be desired to print his sermon; and that he have the like privilege in printing thereof as hath been formerly allowed to others in like cases. And Major-General Kelsey is desired to give him the thanks of this House accordingly.

Hen. Scobell, *Clerk of the Parliament.*



**To the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, Ireland, and  
Scotland, with the dominions thereunto belonging.**



Sirs,

My hope that some impression may possibly remain upon your hearts and spirits of and from the things delivered unto you in the ensuing sermon, makes me willing unto the obedience of presenting it unto you, upon your command, in this manner. Were I not persuaded that your peace, interest, and concernment are expressed therein, and knew not with what simplicity of heart you were minded thereof, I should have chosen, on many accounts, to have waived this duty. But having now performed what is incumbent on me to render this service useful, recommending it yet farther to the grace of God, I humbly beg that it may not, in this return unto you, be looked on as a thing of course, and so laid aside; but be reviewed with that intension of spirit which is necessary in duties of this importance; whereby you may manifest that your command unto this service was grounded on a sense of some advantage to be made by that performance of it. Sundry things, I confess, that were spoken unto you are gone beyond my recovery, having had their rise from the present assistance which God was pleased to afford in the management of the work itself. The sum of what was provided beforehand, and no otherwise, without the least addition, is here presented unto you, with hearty desires that the vision of the truth herein considered may be to them that love you, and the accomplishment thereof be found in the midst of you. So prays

Your humblest Servant  
In our dear Lord Jesus,

John Owen.

*Nov. 17, 1656.*

## Sermon XI. God's presence with a people the spring of their prosperity.

“And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.”

— 2 Chron. xv. 2.

It will not, I am sure, seem strange to any, that I have taken a text to preach on, in a day of humiliation, out of a thanksgiving sermon, such as this discourse of Azariah seems to be; if they shall but consider the suitableness of the instruction given therein to any great and solemn *occasion*, whether of *humiliation* or *rejoicing*. The words, indeed, are the *sum* of all directions that in such cases can be given, — the *standard* of all rules and exhortations wherein any nation or people, in any condition, are or may be concerned; — so plainly measuring out our fate and *lot*, the event and *issue* of our affairs, with all the great undertakings of the people of God in this nation, that of themselves I hope they will make some passage to the hearts of them to whom the inferences from them shall this day be applied.

In [the foregoing chapter](#) we have an account of a great victory that Asa and the people of Judah, fighting in faith and with prayer, obtained against the huge host of the Ethiopians, with the abundant spoils which they took and carried away thereupon. In their triumphant return to Jerusalem the Spirit of God stirs up a prophet to go out and meet them, to give them an account of the rise and cause of their success, and direction for their future deportment under the enjoyment of such mercies and deliverances. The Lord knows how apt even the best of men are to forget *the spring of their mercies*, — how negligent in making suitable returns, by a due improvement of the advantages put into their hands, unto the Lord of all mercies; therefore are they in all seasons to be minded of their proper interest and duty.

This is done in my text to Asa and Judah by Obed; and I desire in my sermon that it may with the same spirit and the same success be done by me unto you. The words I intend principally to insist on, having the same thing for substance three times repeated in them, the opening of the first clause, with the general tendency of the whole, will suffice as to their exposition, and the grounding of that general proposition which I shall improve. Two things are, then, principally to be inquired into:—

First. What it is for God *to be with any people*.

Secondly. What it is for a people *to be or abide with God*.

And according to the analogy of these two, the following assertions, of seeking the Lord, and forsaking him, will be easily understood. For though the words differ in expression, yet they are all of the same way of assertion. They are three hypothetical propositions, or promissory assertions on supposition:— “If you abide with the Lord, he will be with you;” “If you seek the Lord, he will be found of you;” “If you forsake the Lord, he will forsake you.”



The same matter is trebled, for the fuller and surer confirmation of the thing asserted; — only, whereas the last proposition supposeth a thing possible, — namely, that they might forsake the Lord, — the first supposes a thing present; and therefore it is so expressed, — “whilst you are with him,” — because they had abode with God in their late war and trial.

Before I enter upon the opening of the words themselves, I cannot pass by the *earnest preface* of the prophet, “Hear ye me, O Asa,” He saw the people, upon their success, taken up with many thoughts, thinking of many businesses, full of many contrivances, — one imagining one thing, another another; all of them, it may be, how they should use and improve their peace and success to their advantage, interest, profit, or security. Or the princes and rulers, as it is probable and usual in such cases, might be considering how to carry on their victory, how to make the best advantage of it, in their dealing with neighbouring princes and nations, in making peace or war. In the midst of these thoughts the prophet meets them, and diverts them, with all earnestness, to things quite of another nature, and of unspeakably greater importance and concernment to them. “Hear ye me,” saith he; it is not your own counsel nor your own valour that hath brought about this great work, this mighty victory; the Lord himself hath done it, by his presence with you. It is not of any concernment unto you what other nations do, or may do; but the presence of God concerns you alone to look after.

Observation. The *great concernment of any people or nation is, to know that all their prosperity is from the presence of God amongst them, and to attend to that which will give continuance thereunto*. You may tire yourselves in the imaginations and contrivances of your own hearts, and lay out your thoughts and time about things that will not profit nor advantage you; — this is your interest, this is your concernment, “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin.” Of this proposition afterwards.

For the words *themselves*, the first thing proposed to be inquired into for their explanation is this, —

First, What is it for God to be with a people?

God may be said to be with men, or present with them, in sundry respects.

1. He may be said to be with them in respect of the *omnipresence* of his essence. So he is naturally and necessarily present with all creatures, — indistant from them, present with them. The ubiquity and immensity of his essence will not allow that he should be distant from any thing to which he hath given a being. “The heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him,” [1 Kings viii. 27](#). Doth he not fill heaven and earth? Is he a God at hand only, and not afar off, as to the ends of the earth? This presence of God with all things David *emphatically* declares, [Ps. cxxxix. 7–12](#). But it is not that that is here intended; that is universal, to all creatures, — natural and necessary; this, especial, to some, — voluntary, and of mercy; that, of nature and essence; this, of will and operation.



2. God may be said to be with one in respect of *personal union*. So he was with, and only with, the man Jesus Christ, Acts x. 38, Θεὸς ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ, "God was with him;" that is, in personal union, the human nature being taken into subsistence with the Son of God.

3. God is present or with any in respect of *the covenant of grace*. He is with them to be their God in covenant; — the tenor whereof is, that he will not leave them, nor shall they forsake him; he will be for them, and they shall be for him, and not for another. He is with them for all the ends of *mercy, love, kindness, pardon, salvation*, that are proposed and exhibited in it. But neither is this the presence of God here intended, though this be something that flows from it and does attend it. For, —

(1.) That presence of God with his people hath not such a *conditional* establishment as this here mentioned. It stands on other terms and better security than that here proposed; it hath received an eternal ratification in the blood of Christ, is founded in the *immutable purpose* of grace, and is not left to the *conditionality* here expressed, as we shall see afterward.

(2.) The presence here mentioned respects the whole *body* of the people, all Judah and Benjamin, in their *national state* and consideration, unto whom, as such, the effectual covenant of grace was never extended; for they were not all Israel who were of Israel.

(3.) The presence here promised respects immediately the peculiar end, of blessing the *whole people* with success in their wars and undertakings; — so the occasion of the words and the context, with regard to the following discourse, do undeniably evince. It is not, then, this presence of God only that is intended; though, as it will afterward appear, it is not to be separated from it.

4. There is a presence of God in respect of *providential dispensations*. And this is two-fold:—

(1.) *General*; — ordering, disposing, guiding, ruling all things, according to his own wisdom, by his own power, unto his own glory. Thus he is also present with all the world; he disposes of all the affairs of all the sons of men as he pleaseth; — sets up one, and pulls down another; changes times, seasons, kingdoms, bounds of nations, as seems good to him. The help that is given to any, he doth it himself. The shields of the earth belong unto God; he works deliverance in the earth, even among them that know him not. And the evils, desolations, and destruction, that the earth is full of, are but the effects of his wrath and indignation, revealing itself against the ungodliness of men. He is thus present with every person in the world; holds his breath and all his ways in his hand; disposes of his life, death, and all his concernments, as he pleaseth. He is present in all nations, to set them up, pluck them down, alter, turn, change, weaken, establish, strengthen, enlarge their bounds, as he sees good; and the day is coming when all his works will praise him. Neither is this here intended; — it is necessary, and belongs to God, as God, and cannot be promised to any; it is a branch of God's natural dominion, that every creature be ruled and disposed of, agreeably to its nature, unto the end whereunto it is appointed.



(2.) *Special*; — attended with peculiar love, favour, good-will, special care towards them with whom he is so present. So Abimelech observed that he was with Abraham, [Gen. xxi. 22](#), “God is with thee in all that thou doest,” — with thee to guide thee, bless thee, preserve thee, as we shall see afterward. So he promised to be with Joshua, “I will be with thee,” [chap. i. 5](#); and so he was with Gideon, “The Lord is with thee,” [Judges vi. 12](#), — to bless him in his great undertaking; and so with Jeremiah, “I am with thee,” [chap. xv. 20](#). This is fully expressed, [Isa. xliii. 1, 2](#), “I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”

And *this is the presence of God here intimated*, — his presence with the people as to special providential dispensations, as is manifest from the whole discourse of the prophet; and wherein this consists, shall be afterward at large declared.

Secondly, What is a people’s *abiding* with God?

There is a twofold abiding with God, —

1. In *personal obedience*, according to the tenor of the covenant. This is not here intended, but supposed. There is no abiding in any thing with God where there is not an abiding in this thing; yet this, as I said, is not here principally intended, but supposed; — something farther is intended; for, as hath been declared, it is *national work* and *national abiding* that is intended. So that, —

2. There is an abiding with God in *national administrations*; — this is a fruit of the other, in those who are called to them. And that this is principally here intended is evident from that use that Asa made of this information and exhortation of the prophet. He did not only look to his personal walking thereupon, but also immediately set upon the work of ordering the whole affairs of the kingdom so as God might be glorified thereby. How this may be effected, shall at large afterward be declared. What hath already been spoken may suffice for a foundation of that proposition which I shall this day insist upon; and it is this, —

Observation. *The presence of God with a people, in special providential dispensations for their good, depends on their obediential presence with him in national administrations to his glory: “The Lord is with you, while ye be with him.”*

For the explication of this proposition some few things are to be premised:—

1. The presence of God with his people as to *special grace* in the covenant, and his presence with them as to *special assistance* in providence, proceed on very different accounts.

(1.) They have a very different *rise*. The foundation and principal law of special grace, dispensed in the covenant, is this, — that some sinned, and another was punished, So it is laid down expressly, [Isa. liii. 6](#), “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all;” — [2 Cor. v. 21](#), “He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;” — [Gal.](#)



iii. 13, 14, “a curse for us,” that the blessing of faithful Abraham might come on them that believe. 1 Pet. ii. 24, This is the great and sovereign principle of the covenant of grace, that a commutation should be made of persons, as to punishments and rewards; that sinners should be provided of a substitute, — one that should undergo the punishment due to them, that they might go free, and procure a reward for them who could procure none for themselves.

Now, the supreme and sovereign law of providential dispensations is utterly diverse and alien from this of the covenant of grace. This you have asserted, Ezek. xviii. 1, xx. 1, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” one shall not bear the iniquity of another: “the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” Take this for a law of universal right, and indispensable, extend it to the covenant of grace, and it is absolutely exclusive of the substitution and satisfaction of Christ. But it is the ground, rule, and law of providential dispensations that God is there treating about, and vindicating his dealing with any people as to his presence with them and acting towards them therein; which is diverse, as you see, from the foundation of the covenant before mentioned.

(2.) As the foundations are diverse, so is the rule of their *continuance*. What is the rule and measure of God’s continuance with his people in the covenant of grace? Plainly this, — that he will never forsake them; and, on that account, will take care that they shall never forsake him, but abide with him forever. It is not whilst they do so and so, he will abide with them; and when they cease so to do, he will forsake them, as to his federal and covenant presence; — there is not such a sandy foundation left us of our abiding with God in Christ. See the tenor of the covenant, Jer. xxxi. 33, xxxii. 38–40. The sum is, that God will be with them, and take care that they always abide with him; and therefore hath he provided for all interviences imaginable, that nothing shall violate this union. God lays his unchangeableness as the foundation of the covenant, Mal. iii. 6, and he therein makes us unchangeable; — not absolutely so, for we change every moment; but with respect to the terms and bounds of the covenant, he hath undertaken that we shall never leave him. The law of God’s presence in respect of providential dispensations, and all special privileges attending it, is quite of another importance: it is purely conditional, as you may see in my text. The tenor of it is expressed to the height, 1 Sam. ii. 30, “I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me forever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” Here is no alteration of *counsel or purpose* in God; but merely an explanation of the rule, law, and tenor of *providential dispensations*; — no interpretation of the covenant of grace (Eli held not the priesthood by that covenant); but an explication of the tenor of a privilege given in special providence, Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33. Hence is that variety of God’s dealings with men mentioned in the Scripture; which yet are always righteous, according to one or other of



these rules and laws. [Isa. xliiii. 22–24](#), says God of his people, “Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.” — “Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.” What, then, shall be done with this people? — depart from them, destroy them, let them die? No, [verse 25](#), “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” So also, [chap. lvii. 17](#), “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart” Surely now God will utterly consume them, root and branch, as persons incorrigible and irrecoverable. No; the case is quite otherwise, [verses 18, 19](#), “I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him:” I will pity him, pardon him, save, sanctify him, and fill him with consolation. Go now to [Ezek. xxxiii. 18](#), “When the righteous turneth from his righteousness,” what then? God will heal him, and restore comforts unto him, as it was in the places before mentioned? No, no; “He shall die,” — he shall be cut off. What is the reason of this diversity? Why, in the first place, God speaks of his dealings unto their souls as to *his covenant of grace*, and all the mercies of it; — in this last, as to his dealings with their persons, and their *outward concernments* in the dispensations of his providence. And the not heeding hereof hath made some pronounce, inconsiderately, the covenant of grace to be merely conditional, because they find many mercies and privileges spoken of under such a notion; — not considering that all those proposals belong to the law of outward providence, and not to the nature of the covenant of promise established in the blood of Christ. And unless this be allowed, nothing can be more contrary to my text than that promise, and such as that which we have, [Isa. liv. 9](#), where provision is made for God’s abiding with his people, notwithstanding all their backslidings and provocations; which he will so far heal as that he may not forsake them. And this is first to be observed, that we do not, in the consideration of God’s presence and withdrawings as to providential dispensations, cast any reflection on the stability and unchangeableness of the covenant of grace. David hath fully stated this business, [2 Sam. xxiii. 5](#); saith he, “Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” David had a promise for the prosperity of his house; he had also an engagement of the sure mercies of the covenant. The different tenor of these engagements, as to their success and establishment, he gives us this account of:— the covenant is absolute and unchangeable; that is, ordered in all things, and sure; — the prosperity of his house depends on another law and rule, that is subject to alteration.



2. Observe the *nature* of this dependence of God's presence on our abiding with him. It doth not depend upon it, as the *effect* upon its proper *cause*, as though it were procured by it, *merited* by it; — we enjoy not the least morsel of bread on any such account, much less such eminent privileges as attend God's special providential presence. We deserve nothing at the hand of God; and, therefore, if he should take us in the midst of the choicest obedience, and fill us with the fiercest of miseries, he does us no wrong; — and, therefore, the Lord does so deal sometimes with his; and that not only with particular persons, as in the case of Job, but also with his people in general, as [Ps. xlv. 17–19](#), “All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.” Though he requires our *duty* at our hands, yet he is not tied to any such *present reward*. This is all, — it ordinarily depends upon it as a consequent upon an antecedent, which allows an interposition of grace and mercy; as [Neh. ix. 17](#). Nevertheless, thou being merciful, “forsookest them not.” So, elsewhere, that good man prays, “Remember me for good, and spare me, according to the multitude of thy mercies.” For the glory of his righteousness, and of his ways in the world, God hath ordered that his people shall walk with him, when he abides eminently and conspicuously in a special manner with them.

3. Observe, that our abiding with God, even in national administrations, is the proper *effect of his presence with us in covenant dispensations*; so that all, in the issue, is of mere mercy and grace: though the condition seems to be imposed on us, yet it is from him alone that we have strength for its performance. It is in this, and such like cases, as David said it was with them at their dedicating their silver and gold for the building of the temple: Τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, ἐκ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ, — “Of thine own, Lord, have we given unto thee.” We do but return him, his own, we give him but the fruits of his own grace; and without it we can make no return whatever.

These things being premised, I shall give the proposition some confirmation, and so descend to the due improvement of it.

I suppose I need not go for proof beyond the observation of the constant tenor of God's proceedings with his people of old. When did he not deal thus with them? What instance can be given of transgressing this rule? Is the whole story of the nation of the Jews any thing but the illustration of this proposition? Some ruled well, and sought the Lord; and the Lord was with them, and prospered them in all their ways; — some fell from him, and walked according to their own imaginations; and the Lord cut them short on that account; — yea, sometimes the same man, as Solomon, Asa, Uzziah, experienced both these states and conditions. Hath not the state of all nations, since they came into the power of men professing the knowledge of him, been the same? Look on the Roman empire; did it not flourish under the hand of men who ruled with God, and were faithful with the saints? Is not the present



distraction of it, under the fury and cruelty of Turk and Pope, the issue of the violence, unrighteousness, idolatry, luxury, and persecution of ill governors? Doth not the demonstration of all God's people in the world — the consideration whereof, in particular, might be insisted on as the ground and reason of the truth insisted on — require that it should be thus [Lev. xxvi.](#), and almost the whole book of Deuteronomy, are sermons on this text; and every verse, almost, in them would afford a new confirmation of the truth in hand. I shall need rather, then, to caution from mistakes, than farther to confirm the proposition. For this end, take these ensuing observations:—

1. All outward flourishing or *prosperity* of a people doth not always argue the special presence of God with them. There are sundry things required to make success and prosperity an evidence of the presence of God:—

(1.) That the people themselves prospered be *his people*, — his peculiar. How many wicked nations are there in the world, that for a long season have received blessings (as it were) and success in their undertakings! Is the Lord amongst them by his *special presence*? Not at all. He is using them, indeed, for his own end and purposes, — to break others, or fill up the measure of their own iniquities, that their destruction may be an evident demonstration of his vengeance and righteous judgment to all the world; but present with them in the sense contended about, he is not. The case is stated, [Hab. i., ii.](#), as you may see in those chapters at large. It is the same case with the Antichristian and Mohammedan nations in the world at this day. Their prosperity is no evidence of God's presence, because themselves are his enemies. Other bottoms, reasons, and grounds there are of their successes; — God's owning of them is none of them.

(2.) That the whole *work* be good, and have a tendency to *God's glory*, wherein they are engaged. David's counsel for the killing of Uriah prospered and took effect; yet was not God with him therein. The work engaged in must be according to his mind. And, —

(3.) Made useful and *subservient to his glory*. When the hearts of a people can secure themselves in these things, then may they rejoice in their prosperity, as a pledge of God's presence with them.

2. Even *great afflictions*, eminent distresses, long perplexities, may have a consistency with God's special presence. Though the *wheel* goes on, yet it may have a *cross wheel* in it, that may cause rubs and disturbances. The rule of God's acting in his presence, is his own wisdom, and our good in the issue, — not our partial, self-destroying desires. Had the best people in the world all their own desires, they would be every way ruined. When God is nigh to us, he knows what is best for us. Security from destroying evils, not [from] trying evils, he gives to *them* with whom he is.

And this is all that I shall offer for the explication, confirmation, and cautioning of the proposition insisted on; what remains farther to be opened will fall in under the uses of it, which now ensue.

Use 1. This special presence of God being, as you have heard, the great and only *concernment* of any people, — the tenure or condition thereof being our abiding with him, — let our first use be to instruct us particularly, — (1.) What this *special presence* of God is, and wherein it doth consist; (2.) What it *is for us* to abide with God, so as we may enjoy it.

(1.) For the full discovery of the first, I shall consider it in that eminent instance wherein of old he did grant his presence to his people. The bottom of that stupendous undertaking of the Israelites in leaving Egypt, and journeying through the wilderness into Canaan, lay in the promise of the presence of God with them, [Exod. iii. 10–12](#). On this one consideration their whole undertaking and affair turned; to this issue it is put by Moses, [Exod. xxxiii. 15](#), “If thy presence go not [with us,] carry us not up hence;” — they will not move one step without him; and with him they care not whither they go.

Now, this presence of God with them symbolically did consist in, or rather was represented by, two things:— [1.] The *pillar of the cloud and fire*, which was with them ordinarily; [2.] The *appearance of his glory*, which they enjoyed on extraordinary occasions.

[1.] The first, with the first use of it, is mentioned, [Exod. xiii. 21, 22](#), “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.” There is mention here as if it were of two pillars, one by day, and another by night; but it seems to have been the same pillar with several properties. For, [chap. xiv. 19, 20](#), the same pillar, at the same time, performs both these offices in respect of several persons; — to some it was, on the one side, a cloud and darkness; to others, bright and shining as fire: “The pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these.” After this, when the ark was made, and the tabernacle erected, this cloud, which until then went before the camp, came and covered the tabernacle night and day, as it stood in the midst of the camp, or the congregation; as a cloud it was by day, and as a pillar of fire by night, [Exod. xl. 34–38](#); and there it continued with the people all the while they were in the wilderness, [Neh. ix. 19](#). This being the first eminent pledge of the presence of God with that people, let us consider what was indulged or granted to them thereby.

1st. They had hereby *constant direction in* all their journeyings and undertakings: they were by this pillar directed in their way; so at large it is expressed, [Num. x. 33](#), as also [Exod. xl. 1](#). God, by this pledge of his presence, was the beginning of all their rest and motion, the guide and director of all their undertakings; so that they moved, acted, rested, proceeded, according to his will and counsel. He guided them by his eye, and led them by his counsel. Sometimes, perhaps, they would be forward, they would be up, acting, doing, their hearts are full of desires, and they are impatient of delay. If it be not according to his mind, he will cause a cloud to abide on their tabernacle, or their assemblies and meetings, — a cloud that



shall darken them, and distract them in their consultations, that they shall not be able to take one step forward. Though their desires be great, their intentions good, yet the cloud shall be upon them, and they shall not know their way. Sometimes, perhaps, they are heavy, fearful, slothful; — there is a lion in the way, — giants are in the land; difficulties and perplexities lie in the way before them in such and such undertakings, — they have no heart to them; the way is long and perilous, — better return than go forward. Would God now have them pass on and engage? the cloud shall break up and go before them, — they shall see so far on their way as to go forth with cheerfulness. Only, observe this, that when the cloud was taken up, they knew they were to go on in the way wherein they were, and journeyed accordingly; yet they knew not whither they should go, nor what would be the end of their journey. And therefore it is said, that when they journeyed the ark went before them, to seek out a resting-place for them, [Num. x. 33](#). It was carried on, to see where the pillar or cloud of direction would stay, and there they rested, wherever it was. When God gives a people so much direction as that they see it is their duty to go on, and to trust him in so doing, though they see not the end, nor know what their resting-place will be, yet it is a pledge of God's presence with them. I suppose in your assembly you have had the cloud taken off, as to your engagements in some undertakings, concerning which you are to trust that the Ark of God's presence, the Lord Jesus Christ, will find you out a resting-place, which as yet appears not unto you.

What a full experience have we had of this kind of proceeding among us! In the last assembly of parliament, how many had no less real intentions to be at work for God than now! God saw that it would not be for the advantage of the people that they should proceed; hence the cloud rested on that assembly, that they could not see how to take one step forward. He was still present with us; but it was by a darkening cloud, that we could not journey towards our rest. Nor is it the will or counsel of man, but of God, that is to be looked to in these things. We now hope the cloud is up, and we are journeying towards our rest. The great Angel of his presence will find a rest for us in the good providence of God. This, then, lies in God's special presence, — he is with us to give us direction in all our undertakings; — to take away darkness, perplexities, difficulties from our counsels; or to cause us to rest and cease from whatever may come into our hearts that is not according to his mind. The Lord give us evermore of this his presence!

I cannot stay to show you the several ways whereby God now communicates direction to a people; — how he inclines their hearts insensibly, yet powerfully; fixes the bent of their spirits effectually, their hearts being in his hand as the rivers of water, which he turns as he pleaseth; supplies them with reasonings and consultations beyond the verge of their own wisdom; proposes occasions, invitations, provocations; gives them spirit and courage beyond their natural frames and tempers; enlarges them in prayer, or shuts them up; makes walls on the one hand, and open paths on the other; with innumerable such ways and means as,



in his infinite wisdom, he is pleased to make effectual for their guidance. It suffices that, in the use of means, through patience and waiting upon him, they shall be directed to that which is pleasing to him. So is he with them.

2dly. The second use of this pillar was, to give them *protection and defence* in their ways; so [Exod. xiv. 19, 20, 24](#). This protected them from the Egyptians; — and from thence God troubled their enemies out of the pillar; that is, from his especial presence. This use of it is insisted on, [Isa. iv. 5, 6](#). The cloud, that was as smoke by day, and as fire by night, was also a shadow, a place of refuge, and a covert; in one word, a protection or a defence.

And this is a *second* thing which is in God's special presence, — he will protect or defend them with whom he is so present. He is their dwelling-place, [Ps. xc. 1](#), then, when in this world they have none; their refuge in the time of trouble: so [Isa. xxv. 4, xxvi. 1, xxxi. 4](#). Promises and instances to make this good abound; — they are known to all; the time would fail me to insist upon them. I might go over all the causes, means, and ways of the fears, dangers, ruin of such a people, and show you how a defence is provided against them all. Are their fears from themselves, because of their folly, weakness, and division? or from pretended friends, because of their envy and desertion? or from open enemies, because of their power, cruelty, malice, and revenge? A defence is provided on every account. Heat, rain, tempests, storms, adversity, prosperity, — all are provided against, where God is present, [Isa. xxxii. 1, 2](#).

And if any people in the world have experience of this truth, we have it this day. Had not the Lord been with us, who had not destroyed us? Enemies, friends, abroad, at home, our own follies, — all, any of them, had done the work, had not the Lord himself been with us.

Only observe, that the presence of God, as to these effects, may sometimes, in some particulars, be eclipsed, and the *effects* themselves for some season be entangled, though there be not an utter breach between him and his people. How often did the Israelites attempt things without his direction! how often did he break in upon them, to their woe and sorrow! yet, for the main, he forsook them not, until the great work intended by them was accomplished, [Neh. ix. 19](#). It is not every entanglement, every disappointment, every defeat, that argues God's departure, as to his special presence. It may be good for us sometimes to be in such a condition; and then that desertion that carries into it, is from the presence of God. We are now grown to that, that if every thing immediately surmount not our imagination, say some, *God is gone from them*; — *not* because it is so, but because they would have it so. But he is merciful with whom we have to do, and will not cast off his people forever.

[2.] The people with whom God was, had *the glory of Jehovah* as a pledge of his *presence* with them. This appeared only at extraordinary seasons; — so it did at the giving of the law, [Exod. xxiv. 16](#); so also at the setting up of the tabernacle. It differed from the cloud; for when the cloud was upon the tabernacle, the glory of the Lord filled it. It appeared again to all the



people, [Lev. ix. 23](#). I shall not now inquire what was this visible representation of the majesty of God; — it sufficeth, as to the purpose in hand, that when God gives his presence to a people at extraordinary seasons, he affords them extraordinary manifestations of his glory. So in Ezekiel's vision of those dreadful wheels of providence, the glory of the Lord is said to appear in the temple; and as his especial presence departed from the temple and the city, so the glory, by several degrees, departed also, [chap. x. 10, 18, 19, xi. 23](#).

Eminent and glorious appearances with and for a people in extraordinary seasons is, then, another thing that accompanies God's special providential presence with them. When they are at an utter loss in their counsels, at a stand in their motions, disappointed in their undertakings, deserted in their enterprises, pressed on every side above measure, or called to some extraordinary work, so that their ordinary direction and protection will not carry them on nor bear them up, — then will God relieve them by some especial appearance of his glory. "In the mount will the Lord be seen." This will give a relief when all is at a loss. And in this lies the most *discriminating evidence* of special providence. Glorious *appearances in great straits* are eminent testimonies of God's regard.

Could I now insist on some of the instances that might be given of this kind of dealing with us in England, in the pursuit of the cause we have in hand, it would make us ashamed of all our unworthiness, carnal fears, and unbelief.

This is the second evidence of God's presence:— he is with a people to direct them, to protect, to manifest his glory amongst them, — his glory in balancing the issues of providence one in respect of another, — so that all shall acknowledge that of a truth the Lord is amongst them. "Blessed is the people that is in such a case; yea, blessed is the people whose God is the Lord." What would you have more? Here is ease of all cares, a remedy for all sores, security in the midst of troubles, — rest, and peace, and assured dwelling-places, though the Assyrian should be in the land.

Thus you see what is this great *concernment* of any people.

(2.) Let us now consider the *tenure* of this blessedness, — on what account it is to be obtained or enjoyed. Now this is, *our abiding with God*. This, then, is next to *be* considered.: What it is for a people, — what it is for you and us, so to abide with God, as that we may in all our affairs enjoy his *presence* in the ways before described.

Now, something is hereunto previously required, — something it consists in.

[1.] That we may abide with God, this is indispensably required, — that we may have *peace with him in Jesus Christ*. If we are *never* with him, we cannot *abide* with him; no man can abide where he never *cornea* The acceptance of our *persons* lies at the bottom of the acceptance of our *duties*. As the special *presence* of God with any, is in and by Christ, and no otherwise, so is our abiding with God in and through him. "God with us" is the name of Christ: our being with God is in him who is our peace. Two cannot walk together, unless they be agreed, [Amos iii. 3](#).



Now, because this is not to be expected from all the individuals of a nation, yet this thing is to be endeavoured, — *that the rulers of it be such as have this interest*. I do not divest of a share in government, those who have no share in Christ, if lawfully called thereunto; but I say, when God gives governors whom he intends to make a blessing unto a people, they shall be such as are blessed of him in Christ. And if ever the government of this nation, in this present constitution, — suppose it the most exactly framed and balanced, in the several parts of it, for the furtherance of public good, — be devolved into the hands of men not interested in God by Christ, though the constitution may be absolutely good, yet the government will not be blessed, and the nation will be ruined; for God and his glory will depart, [Mic. v. 5, 6](#). It is Christ that is our peace, even in outward troubles. They are “seven shepherds under him,” and “eight principal men” accepted with him, that are to be our relief.

It is true, for some particular actions or works a wicked man may be anointed particularly, — as Jehu, and Jeroboam the son of Joash; but you have no instance that ever God was with a people, to bless them indeed in a course of special providence, when wicked men, by their own consent, were their rulers, — where the union and relation between them and the people is considerable. I confess unto you, I never think of the state of England, but my heart trembles at this thing, — namely, that those who have, and it is fit should have, so great a share in the government of this commonwealth, should have their rise from the body of the people, that is dark and profane, and full of enmity against the remnant. Did not God overrule men, contrary to their own inward principles and lusts, how soon would ruin and desolation break in upon that hand! And give me leave to say, that God, in his sovereign providence, having called so many at this time to the place of rule and authority, who indeed (as we believe) love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, it seems to me to look as your duty, to consider all ways and means, whereby the power of these nations may be, in succeeding seasons, devolved on men of the like spirit and condition.

I shall not interpose in that which by some is so much spoken of, — *the reign of the saints*. I am sure the means used and attempted by some, to set upon and to set up such a rule and dominion, have not become sober men, much less saints of Christ. Yet this I must say, and in the saying of it, I dare say, “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin,” If ever God cease to call saints — that is, men interested *personally in Christ* — to places of chief authority in this nation, or commit the power of it into other hands, — and when those called to power, cease to exert it in a subserviency to the kingdom of Christ, for the true spiritual advantage of his people, there will be an end of England’s glory and happiness. I say, Hear ye this, all ye people! This I have delivered long ago, and many times in this place; — this I say still, and in this persuasion hope to live and die. The Lord guide you in this thing; however, we shall live on the good providence of our God, who hath hitherto taken care for us.



This, then, I say, is pre-required, as a qualification of any person to the performance of this duty of abiding with God. It is the psalmist's advice, [Ps. ii. 11, 12](#). Let this principle be always owned amongst you; by it honour Christ in the world. Give him the pre-eminence; it is the Father's will he should have it in all things. Expect not the presence of God, but upon this account. Bear testimony herein against the world of profane men, who despise these things. Seeing, then, it cannot be expected to have this qualification diffused universally, as yet, through the body of the people, let the rulers take care that they be not the cause of God's departure from us.

[2.] What is it, now, for such persons to abide with God, so as they may expect comfortably the continuance of his presence with them? — which is their all that they need or desire. I shall name some few things that are signally required thereunto.

1st. That they *inquire* of God, ask counsel at his hand, — look to him for *direction* in all their affairs. He is present with them to give them direction:— not to seek for it at his hand, is exceedingly to despise him. It must arise from one of these two apprehensions; — either he cares not for us, or he knows not how to direct us. When he gave direction by the cloud on the tabernacle, the people being reprov'd for their carnal fears and unbelief upon the return of the spies, some of them would needs instantly into the mountain, and fight with the Canaanites; but, says the Holy Ghost, the “ark abode in the camp.” They went without God's direction, and prospered accordingly. With what contempt doth God speak of the wisdom and counsels of the sons of men, when they will adhere unto them! How does he make it his glory, to turn all their consultations into folly, and to make them err in their ways like a drunken man! How doth he bid them take counsel together, when he intends to destroy them! What instances may be given of all good and prosperous rulers of old, of their seeking direction from God! What promises of a success, and a blessed issue in so doing, are there! The words of my text will suffice as an instance in every kind.

But you will say, How shall we inquire of God?

The nations had their oracles, whereby they deluded themselves. The people of God had their Urim and Thummim, their prophets and oracle. “Bring hither the ephod, and inquire of God,” was the word with them. But, alas! what is all this to the advantage we have of seeking counsel of God, and taking direction from him? We have a High Priest always present with us, by whom we may inquire. Our high priest is the angel of God's presence, the mighty counsellor, the power and eternal wisdom of God himself. And where is he? He appears in the presence of God for us, in the holy place not made with hands, having made a new and living way for us to come within the vail, to inquire of the oracle. What would we have more? He is our captain, our leader, our high priest, urim and thummim, our oracle, our ark, on whom the cloud of direction rests and abides for ever. Would you, then, be with



God? Take direction from him by Christ in all your undertakings; so do in deed, and not in word or profession only.

I hope I need not stay to give you directions how this duty is to be performed. The “unction” will teach it you, and your “fellowship,” I hope, “is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Only now take these few words with you:—

(1st.) *Captivate* all your desires to his glory. Set your hearts on nothing, but with this express reserve, — If it is consistent with and expedient unto the glory of Christ and his kingdom. Be not sick of your own violent desires; but lay all your aims and designs at his feet always, becoming as weaned children before him.

(2dly.) Bear before him a *real sense* of your own weakness and folly, both severally and jointly, if not directed by him, that in his pity and compassion he may relieve you.

(3dly.) Keep your *hearts* in that integrity, that you may always press and urge him with his own concernment in all your affairs. This is a thing that none but upright hearts can do uprightly.

(4thly.) Actually inquire by *faith and prayer*, what is his will and mind; — do it severally and jointly; — do it privately, publicly; — do it every day, and in days set apart for that purpose. He will assuredly be found of you. You know how easy it were to exemplify all these things by testimonies and instances; but time will not permit.

If, instead of these things, you bear yourselves up on the wings of your own wisdom and contrivances, though you may seem for a season to have attained a fair pitch and flight, you will be entangled, and brought down in the midst of your course with shame and sorrow: for the Lord will not be with you.

2dly. Another thing wherein we are to be with God, is by trusting in him for *protection*. “O trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength. This man made the Lord his refuge. He that trusteth in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, that shall never be removed. Commit your ways to the Lord, roll your burden on him; stand still and see his salvation.” What glorious things are spoken of this trusting to the Lord for protection you all know. It were endless to insist on commands and promises to this purpose; and to single out one or two were but to weaken the cause in hand, seeing hereunto the whole Scriptures bear witness. I shall only show you what it is so to do, in some few particulars.

(1st.) It is to *strengthen and encourage* your hearts in difficult affairs, a comfortable issue whereof you cannot on visible causes conjecture, on the account of God’s engagement for your good. To omit the instances of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and many others, take that signal one of David in his great distress at Ziklag, [1 Sam. xxx. 1](#). You know the story:— his habitation was burnt and spoiled, his wives and children captived, his people consulting to stone him, so that he was greatly distressed; the enemy numerous and without his reach; — all means of relieving his condition, and bringing it to a comfortable issue, far removed. But what course did he now take? did he despond? did he give over? did he rest on his own counsel

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and strength? No, saith the Holy Ghost; “but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” Have you any affair that lies before you that is good and honest, but yet dreadful, difficult, entangled? Your hearts are ready to faint whenever you think of it; — it is almost beyond your imaginations to contrive a comfortable issue. In such a season, if you will be with God, he will be with you; — if you so trust him as to encourage your hearts on the account of his wisdom, goodness, power, that he can find out and bring about a comfortable, glorious end, — this is to trust him for protection. [Ps. xlvi. 1](#) is this doctrine delivered to the full.

(2dly.) To trust God for protection, is to wait under discouragements and disappointments for a desired issue of the affairs we commit to him. “He that believeth will not make haste,” [Isa. xxviii. 16](#). This the Lord pleads for, [Hab. ii. 3, 4](#). Men will have their desires precisely accomplished this year, this month, this week, or they will wait no longer. These, says God, are proud men; their hearts are lifted up in them; they trust not to me for protection. Men love to trust God (as they profess) for what they have in their hands, in possession, or what lies in an easy view; place their desires afar off, carry their accomplishment behind the clouds out of their sight, interpose difficulties and perplexities, — their hearts are instantly sick, — they cannot wait for God; they do not trust him, — nor ever did. Would you have the presence of God with you? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from him. Then, indeed, is he glorified, when he is trusted in a storm, when he is waited for under long perplexities and distresses. Want of this ruined the Israelites in the wilderness. Their work was long, their difficulties and entanglements many; — they would have had an immediate end of their troubles. What! more difficulties! more hardships! nay, then, let us choose a captain, and go down again into Egypt. We know the worst of that; where this will end we know not. This laid their carcasses in the wilderness, and deprived them of enjoying the good land.

(3dly.) It is to *commit your affairs* to the Lord with *submission* to his will, as to their issue and accomplishment. Trust respects protection, but it prescribes not as to particular events. It is to commit our affairs to God with thoughts of his infinite wisdom, sovereignty, and goodness, with resolutions thereupon that the product of his will is that which will be good, be best for us, though it should not at all fall in with our present desires. It is true, the Psalmist says, “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass,” [Ps. xxxvii. 5](#). And so he shall and will, in all such cases as that there particularly insisted on by the Psalmist, wherein his own glory is particularly engaged. But this prescribes not, as to all cases, that we should cry, “Give me this child, or I die.” The rule is known; abide in this frame, and we shall have that we desire, or that which is better for us. But I must not abide in these things. See [Ps. xxxvii. 3–5](#), [lxxiii. 23–26](#).

And these are some of those ways wherewith we abide with God, as to our trusting of him in reference to special protection.

3dly. A third thing I should fix upon is, *a people's universal owning of God's concernments in the world*. His presence with them is, his owning their concernments; and certainly he expects that they abide with him in the owning of big God's concernment in the world is his people, as invested with the privileges purchased for them by Christ. Deut. xxxii. 9, "The lord's portion is his people." This is that which the Lord has particularly kept to himself; the vineyard that he has chosen out of all the forests of the world; the handful that he hath taken to himself, — his sons and daughters, — his family. These he expects that you should abide by, if you would have him abide by you; yea, it is most certain, as your respect and regard shall be to them and their interest as his people, so will his respect and regard be to you and your interest as the people of this nation. But I have formerly spoken hereof unto you, and therefore, though it be a matter of the greatest importance, I shall not farther insist upon it.

And these are some of the conditions of God's special presence with you. Pleasant conditions! their performance is your glory, your rest, your blessedness; — not your bondage, not your burden. Not one duty doth God on this account require of you, but it is also your reward. O blessed terms of peace and agreement! Blessed be the great Peacemaker! cursed be the breakers of this blessed agreement! Is this all, indeed, that is required, that we may have the special presence of God with us forever? O how inexcusable shall we be if we neglect these terms! — how just will be our ruin! Behold, I have set before you life and death this day; the life or death of these nations. O choose life! seeing it may be had on such easy, such blessed terms; terms wherein, in doing good to others, you will also do good to your own souls; you will give peace to the nation, and have peace and rest in your own souls.

Use 2. Look on this presence of God as your *main concernment*. This is that which the prophet calls for in the words of the text. So the psalmist, "There are many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us," Ps. iv. 1. Let other men make what inquiries they please, — look for good, for rest, for peace in what they best fancy; acquiesce you in this, that the light of God's countenance, a pledge of his presence with you, is that alone which you are to inquire after. I remember, since the beginning of these last wonderful days, how often we have thought ourselves utterly ruined:— If such alterations come, we are undone; if such men die, fall off, oppose, there is little hope of carrying on the work wherein we are engaged; if such shakings, such divisions befall us, our ruin is at hand; if we break with such and such foreign nations, what hope remaineth? But, alas! we have found by experience, that our affairs have turned on none of these things; our prosperity hath been built on none of those principles. Such desertions as we feared, have happened; such alterations, such divisions have befallen us, — we have been sometimes almost reduced to Gideon's number; such breaches with foreign nations have ensued: one party that was with us hath gone off, and asked, What will ye now do? and then another party hath gone off, and asked us, What will ye do now? And no sooner do any fall off, but



instantly they expect, and foretell destruction to them that do abide; as though they were God, and not man; or as though God were bound to follow them with his presence in all their passions, in all their wanderings. It would, I confess, be more desirable unto me than life itself, to see all those at least, who stuck to the cause of God in its greatest difficulties and trials, and then when it ceased to be carried on in the ordinary paths of nations, united again in the same common interest, — to see their passions and prejudices cured, and their persons returned to their former usefulness. But this is that which is the result of all this discourse; — it is not this or that thing, or any thing whatever, but the presence of God alone with a people, that is their life, their preservation, their protection, and prosperity. If our strength had lain in any thing else in this world, our light had gone out long ago, and it had departed from us: but hence it is that we are not consumed. Now, if you are so careful not to lose these and those friends, this and that party of the nation, — not to provoke this or that people causelessly; oh, what weight ought it to have upon your hearts and souls, that you provoke not the Lord to depart from you! that you take care for the continuance of his presence with you! This is your life, your safety, your success, — your peace. Learn to prize it, value it.

*Use 3.* Whilst you have any pledge of the presence of God with you, be not greatly moved nor troubled by any *difficulties* that you may meet withal; be not moved with any terror, but sanctify the Lord of hosts in your hearts, and make him your dread and your fear, and he shall be a refuge and a hiding-place unto you.

Some pretend to *visions* of God, and they prophesy your ruin and destruction; yea, they have limited times thereof, to the shame of their prognostications. Some are *full of revenge*, and they threaten your ruin, and talk what a catholic interest is *complicating*, and rising up against you. Some are *troubled at your proceedings*, — that they are not in such equal paths as might be desired; as though that were a work and way of yesterday; as though we had not been turned and driven out of *old tracks* and paths above ten years ago; and as though the old paths were not so worn to the interest of a profane multitude, that it is yet impossible to keep the burden upright in them whose guidance you are intrusted with. Some say you will never be able to go through with the *charge* of your undertaking; as though God had never said, “The gold and silver are mine.” Should these things busy or distract you? Doth the issue of the business in hand depend on the thoughts of these men? Will the end be according to their contrivances? Have these things, indeed, any influence at all into the determination of this controversy? Will not this one consideration guide your hearts and spirits, when all these waves roll all together upon you? Yea, but the whole of this affair must be ordered, and will fall out, according as the presence of God is with us, or otherwise. “If God be with us, who can be against us?” How may you on this account triumph against all oppositions whatsoever!



Use 4. Fix, then, your thoughts on the things which lie in a tendency towards the *confirming* of God's special providential presence with you. You have heard of the tenure of it, the means whereby it is procured and retained: these things I have spoken to in general before. Besides your own dependence on God, and comportment with his providence, the things incumbent on you are such as respect either persons or things.

(1.) For *persons*, it is that which I have minded you of before, and which I shall do whilst I have life and opportunity to speak to you, or any concerned in the government of this nation, in public or private; because I know it is your life, your peace, your duty; — and that is, that the end and aim of all your consultations be the protection, encouragement, liberty of the seed of Jacob, the remnant, the hidden people, — those whom God hath owned, accepted, blessed, given his presence unto and amongst them. I plead not for their exaltation, promotion, preferment, — I know not what; but charge it as your duty, to take care that they be not trodden under foot, nor swallowed up, nor exposed to the rage and contempt of the men of the earth. It is not this or that party of them that I speak of, but the generation of them that seek the face of God; whose cause alone it is and not [that] of any other men, or frame of things, that is, through the mighty power of God, triumphant in these nations. They are to God as the apple of his eye; and let their safety be so also to you, and you will not fail of the presence of God.

(2.) For *things*, they are either, [1.] The things of God; or, [2.] Men: of each a word.

[1.] For the things of God, or the *public profession* of religion in the land, my time is too far spent for me to enter into a serious discourse on the subject. Some things have of late been done, which, when envy, and anger, and disappointment shall cease to operate, the whole people of God in this nation will have cause to rejoice in.

Let it not be thought amiss, if I mind you of one part of the nation in especial: the example of the saints allows us a special regard to those of our own nation, our kinsfolks in the flesh. It is for Wales I speak, where the unhappiness of almost all men running into extremes, hath disadvantaged the advancement of the gospel and the progress of it, when we had great ground for the expectation of better things. Some are still zealous of the traditions of their fathers; and nothing, almost, will satisfy them, but their old road of beggarly readers in every parish. Others, again, perhaps out of a good zeal, have hurried the people with violence beyond their principles, — and sometimes, it may be, beyond the truth; and, as Jacob said, over-driving the cattle and young ones has almost destroyed the whole flock. Between complaints on one side and the other, I fear between misguided zeal and formality — the whole work is almost cast to the ground; — the business of Zion, as such, is scarce by any cared for. The good Lord guide you to somewhat for its relief, that those who are godly may be encouraged, and those that need instruction may not be neglected.

[2.] The things of man, or righteous *administrations of justice* in things relating to this present pilgrimage. These wheels, also, are you to set going. Many particulars lie before you,



more will present themselves; — troublesome times have always produced good laws; — your wisdom will be, to provide for good execution, that not only the generations to come, but the present, may eat of the fruit of your labours and travail.

Sermon XII.

The glory and interest of nations professing the gospel.



## Prefatory note.

A great event has occurred since the last two sermons, comparatively cheerful and buoyant in their tone, were preached. Oliver Cromwell is dead. His son Richard is in his place; but cannot fill it. The Parliament has been convened on the 27th of January 1659; and on the 4th of February Dr Owen is called to preach before it. It is most interesting to gather the spirit of the day from the scope and character of this discourse. In the last discourses, complacency in the peace prevailing in the country, and jealousy lest unseemly contention should renew the distraction and turmoil from which the nation has made its escape, are predominant characteristics. In the discourse that follows, it is easy to mark a spirit of anxiety as to the future developments of Providence. One emphatic sentence lays bare the very heart of the nation, heaving and throbbing with painful uncertainty in regard to the issue of public events; — “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*.” The preacher, however, has not abated his confidence in God, — insists upon His presence and aid as the true source of hope to the nation, and of preservation from ruin, — shows that, from the multitude of the godly in the land, God’s presence is still with the nation, and rejoices in the belief that they will prove to it” as the ark in the house of Obed-edom, as Joseph in the house of Potiphar.” Whatever reasons might exist for the prevailing anxiety, Owen “encouraged himself in God;” and sought in this discourse to infuse into the minds of his hearers his own unshaken steadfastness of faith.

It appears, from the dedication, that some exception had been taken to certain views which he had expressed in the sermon about civil government. The only passage in it which bears on civil government will be found at the foot of p. 466; in which he mentions, that although he does not think a man may not be lawfully called to magistracy who is not a believer, yet he had “no great expectation from them whom God loves not.” In the dedication he affirms that he had advanced nothing which could “really interfere with any form of civil government, in the world, administered according to righteousness and equity.” — Ed.



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## 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

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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 XII. The glory and interest of nations professing the gospel.

“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, [verse 2](#), — they that are left, that remain, [verse 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 particulars. 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, [verse 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*, [verse 2](#); (2.) Of *holiness and purity*, [verses 3, 4](#); (3.) Of *preservation and safety*, [verses 5, 6](#).

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

Now, this promise of [verse 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 promise 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, confused 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 contribute 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 his 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 dependence of these promises; — the promise of holiness, [verse 4](#), lies in order before that of safety, [verse 5](#). Unless our filth and our blood be purged away by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning, 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 show 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*.

For the *first*, — the *ark* is oftentimes called the “glory” of God, [Ps. lxxviii. 61](#), “He delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand;” — where he speaks of the surprisal of the ark by the Philistines; which when it was accomplished, Phinehas’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.

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 replenished 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, “Up on 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 his thoughts of his people of old: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye 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,” [Ps. 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](#), etc. 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, 5. 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, [when] 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: "Hast thou considered 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? [Verse 4](#), "Thou art precious in my sight, thou art honourable, and I have loved thee." How doth God manifest his valuation of them? [Verse 3](#), Why, he will give all the world, — the greatest, mightiest, wealthiest nations, for them; [verse 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 [sullied] 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, [verse 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, [Ps. 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](#), “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 concernments! Sodom could not be destroyed until Lot was delivered. 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 *councils*, — *you* know how they have been divided, entangled, ensnared; 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, [Mic. v. 5](#).

2dly. Not only preservation, but prosperity is from hence also. [Mic. 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, nor waiteth 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 councils, 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 Petiphar, — all is blessed and prospered for their sakes. It is not the glorious battlements, the painted win-





dows, 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 councils, 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," [verse 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, etc., — 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 apostasy 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. Oh, 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 consideration:—

[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 ac-

knowledge, these clays 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!” O 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, 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; and 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 but death 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, [Mic. 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!

Sermon XIII.

How we may bring our hearts to bear reproofs.



## **Prefatory note to the three following discourses.**

In the year 1672, the government of Charles II. began to abate its severity against Dissent. Penal laws against the Nonconformists and Popish recusants were suspended. They were allowed to meet for public worship, on the condition of taking out from government a license to this effect. A large body of Nonconformists availed themselves of the license. Numerous congregations were formed; and, to illustrate the harmony between Presbyterians and Independents on the leading doctrines of the Christian system, a weekly lectureship was established, in which four Presbyterian and two Independent ministers officiated in rotation. The first lectures were Dr Bates, Dr Manton, Dr Owen, Mr Baxter, Mr Collins, and Mr Jenkyn. The lectures were delivered in Pinner's Hall, an ancient and curious building in Old Broad Street. This lectureship was supported by considerable sums, which were bequeathed for the purpose. A division among the lecturers took place in 1694, occasioned by disputes in regard to the soundness of some opinions of Dr Crisp, whose works had been reprinted in 1690. The one party held these opinions to be Antinomian; the other party, who were called Neonomians, vehemently resented a work by Dr Williams, in refutation of Crisp's views. In the end, Dr Bates, Mr Howe, Mr Alsop, and Dr Williams withdrew, and established a separate lecture at Salter's Hall.

These lectures at Pinner's Hall were only the revival of a similar course of public instruction which had been instituted several years previously, and dropped at the Restoration. Neal, in his *History of the Puritans*, gives the following account of its origin:— "Most of the citizens of London having some relative or friend in the army of the Earl of Essex, so many bills were sent up to the pulpit every Lord's day for their preservation, that the ministers had not time to notice them in prayer, or even to read them. It was therefore agreed to set apart an hour at seven o'clock every morning, half of it to be spent in prayer for the welfare of the public, as well as particular cases, and the other in exhortations to the people. Mr Case began it in his church in Milk Street, from whence it was removed to the other distant churches in rotation, — a month at each. A number of the most eminent ministers conducted this service in town, and it was attended by great crowds of people. After the heat of the war was over, it became what was called a Casuistical Lecture, and continued till the Restoration," According to Palmer's *Nonconformists' Memorial*, most of the lectures were delivered at Cripple Gate Church, and some at St Giles', whilst the lectures in the series against Popery were delivered at Southwark.

The lectures were published in successive volumes, and are very valuable. The first volume was edited by Case, who had been chiefly instrumental in the erection of the lectureship, — it is entitled, "*The Morning Exercise Methodized; or, certain chief heads and points of the Christian religion opened and improved, in divers sermons,*" etc. The volume bears date 1660. Other four volumes successively appeared in 1661, 1674, 1683, and 1690. To each



of the volumes there was a preface by Samuel Annesley, LL.D., who had also given one of the lectures in each course. In 1675, there was published, under the editorial superintendence of the Rev. Nathaniel Vincent, A.M., "*The Morning Exercise against Popery; or, the principal errors of the Church of Rome detected and confuted, in a morning lecture preached lately at Southwark.*"

It is not so generally known, that, besides the works enumerated above, there were volumes of the same character published at still earlier dates. The titles of them may be given:— "*The Morning Exercise at Giles-in-the-Fields, May 1655, printed for Richard Gibbs, in Chancery Lane, near Sergeants' Inn;*" and "*The Word of Faith, at Martin's-in-the-Fields, February 1655, printed for Fran. Tyton, at the Three Daggers, in Fleet Street.*"

Dr Owen contributed three sermons to these "Morning Exercises;" — one entitled, "How we may Bring our Hearts to Bear Reproofs," published in the Supplement to "*The Morning Exercise*" at Cripplegate, 1674; a second, "The Chamber of Imagery," etc., in "*The Morning Exercise*" in 1683; and a third, — which seems to have escaped the notice of Mr Orme, and is not included in Russell's edition of Owen's works, — entitled, "The Testimony of the Church is not the Only, nor the Chief Reason of our Believing the Scripture to be the Word of God," and published in "*The Morning Exercise against Popery,*" 1675. — Ed.

## Sermon XIII. How we may bring our hearts to bear reproofs.

Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.” — Ps. cxli. 5.

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It is generally agreed by expositors that this psalm, as that foregoing, with two of those that follow, was composed by David in the time of his banishment, or flight, from the court of Saul. The state wherein he describeth himself to have been, the matter of his pleas and prayers contained in them, with sundry express circumstances regarding that season, and his condition therein, do manifest that to have been the time of their composure.

That the psalmist was now in some distress, whereof he was deeply sensible, is evident from that vehemency of his spirit which he expresseth in the reiteration of his request or supplication, [verse 1](#); and by his desire that his prayer might come before the Lord as incense; and the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice, [verse 2](#). The Jewish expositors guess, not improbably, that in that allusion he had regard unto his present exclusion from the holy services of the tabernacle; which in other places he deeply complains of.

For the matter of his prayer, in this beginning of the psalm (for I shall not look beyond the text), it respecteth himself, and his deportment under his present condition; which he desireth may be harmless and holy, — becoming himself, and useful unto others. And whereas he was two ways liable to miscarry, — first, By too high an exasperation of spirit against his oppressors and persecutors; and, secondly, By a fraudulent and pusillanimous compliance with them in their wicked courses; which are the two extremes that men are apt sinfully to run into in such conditions, — he prays earnestly to be delivered from them both. The first he hath respect unto, [verse 3](#), “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips;” — namely, that he might not, under those great provocations which were given him, break forth into an unseemly intemperance of speech against his unjust oppressors; which sometimes fierce and unreasonable cruelties will wrest from very sedate and moderate spirits. But it was the desire of this holy psalmist, as, in like cases, it should be ours, that his heart might be always preserved in such a frame, under the conduct of the Spirit of God, as not to be surprised into an expression of distempered passion in any of his words or sayings. The other he regards in his earnest supplication to be delivered from it, [verse 4](#), “Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties.” There are two parts of his request unto the purpose intended. First, That, by the power of God’s grace influencing his mind and soul, his heart might not be inclined unto any communion or society with his wicked adversaries in their wickedness. Secondly, That he might be preserved from a liking of, or a longing after, those things which are the baits and allurements whereby men are apt to be drawn into societies and conspiracies with the workers of iniquity: “And let me not eat of their dainties.” See [Prov. i. 10–14](#). For

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he here describeth the condition of men prospering for a season in a course of wickedness; — they first jointly give up themselves unto the practice of iniquity, and then together solace themselves in those satisfactions of their lusts which their power and interest in the world do furnish them withal. These are the “dainties” of which an impotent longing and desire do betray the minds of unstable persons unto a compliance with ways of sin and folly; for I look on these “dainties” to comprise whatever “the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh,” or “the pride of life,” can afford. All these David prays to be delivered from any inclination unto, especially when they are made the allurements of a course of sin. In the enjoyment of these dainties, it is the common practice of wicked men to soothe up, approve of, and mutually encourage one another in the way and course wherein they are engaged. And this completes that goodly felicity which in this world so many aspire unto, and whereof alone they are capable. The whole of it is but a society in perishing sensual enjoyments, without control, and with mutual applauses from one another.

This the psalmist had a special regard unto; who, casting his eye towards another communion and society, which he longed after, [verse 5](#), that, in the first place, presents itself unto him, which is most opposite unto those mutual applauses and rejoicings in one another which are the salt and cement of all evil societies, — namely, rebukes and reproofs for the least miscarriages that shall be observed. Now, whereas the dainties, which some enjoy in a course of prosperous wickedness, are that alone which seems to have any thing in it amongst them that is desirable; and, on the other side, rebukes and reproofs are those alone which seem to have any sharpness, or matter of uneasiness and dislike, in the society of the godly; David balanceth that which seemeth to be sharpest in the one society against that which seems to be sweetest in the other, and, without respect unto other advantages, prefers the one above the other. Hence some read the beginning of the words, “Let the righteous rather smite me,” with respect unto this comparison and balance.

“Let the righteous smite me, *it shall be* a kindness; and let him reprove me, *it shall be* an excellent oil, *which* shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also *shall be* in their calamities.” The view of our translation will evidence the words to be elliptical in the original, by the various supplements which we make to fill up the sense of them, and render them coherent; and this hath put some difficulty on the interpretation of the text, and caused some variety of apprehensions in sober and learned expositors.

It is not unto my present purpose to engage into a discussion of all the difficulties of the text, seeing I design to found no other doctrine thereon, than what all will acknowledge to be contained in the words and their coherence. I shall only, therefore, briefly open them with respect unto our present purpose, and its concernment in them.

צַדִּיקִים — יְהַלְמֵנִי צַדִּיק חֶסֶד “the righteous,” is any one opposed to the workers of iniquity, [verse 4](#), — any righteous person whatever, — any one who is of the society and communion of the righteous ones: for all the world falls under this distribution, as it will



one day appear. “Let him smite me:” the word **אֶלֶם** is seldom used in the Scripture but to signify “a severe stroke,” which shakes the subject smitten, and causeth it to tremble. See [Prov. xxiii. 35](#); [1 Sam. xiv. 16](#); [Ps. lxxiv. 6](#). And it is used for “the stroke of the hammer on the anvil,” in fashioning of the iron, [Isa. xli. 7](#). Wherefore the word **אֶלֶם**, following may be taken adverbially, as a lenitive of that severity which this word importeth: “Let him smite me;” but “leniter, benignè, misericorditer,” — “gently, kindly, friendly, mercifully.” And so some translations read the words, “Let the righteous smite me friendly,” or kindly.

But there is no need to wrest the word to such an unusual sense; for the psalmist intends to show, that so he may be delivered from the society of ungodly men, and enjoy the communion of the righteous, he would not deprecate the greatest severities which, according to rule, might be exercised in rebuking or reproving him. And this he doth with so full a satisfaction of mind, — with such a high valuation of the advantage he should have thereby, — that he says not, he would bear it patiently and quietly, but **אֶלֶם**; it will be unto me “a benignity, a mercy, a kindness,” — as the word imports. And as it seems that some reproofs, at least, — some regular dealings of righteous persons with us, — may come as a stroke that makes us shake and tremble; so it is a good advance in spiritual wisdom, to find out kindness and mercy in those that are so grievous unto our natural spirits, — unto flesh and blood.

**אֶלֶם**, “And let him reprove me.” This manifests what he intends by smiting, in the foregoing words. It is reproofs that he intends; and these he calls smiting, in opposition unto the flattering compliance of wicked men with one another in the enjoyment of their dainties, and with respect unto that smart unto the mind and affections wherewith some of them are sometimes accompanied. But this word, directly expressing that subject-matter whereof I intend to treat, must be again spoken unto.

**אֶלֶם אֶלֶם**. These words have a double interpretation; for they may be either deprecatory of an evil implied, or declaratory of the psalmist’s sense of the good he desired. Kimchi on the place observes, that his father Joseph divided the words of the text, and began here a new sense, wherein the psalmist returns unto the close of the [fourth verse](#), “Let me not eat of their dainties,” and, “Let not their precious oil” — that is, their flatteries and soothings in sin” break my head;’ but let the reproofs of the righteous preserve me. And this sense is followed by the Vulgar Latin, “Oleum autem peccatorum non impingat caput meum;” but the other construction and sense of the words is more natural. **אֶלֶם**, “Oleum capitis,” the “oil of the head,” we render, an “excellent oil;” and countenance may be given unto that interpretation from [Exod. xxx. 23](#), where **אֶלֶם**, “spices



of the head,” is well rendered, “principal spices.” But I rather think that **שֶׁמֶן עַל רֹאשׁ**, “oil poured on the head” — which was the manner of all solemn unctions — is intended. This being a great privilege, and the token of the communication of great mercy, the psalmist compares the rebukes of the righteous thereunto; and therefore he adds, **אֶל-יָנִי**, **רֹאשִׁי**, “it shall not break my head.” Considering reproofs in their own nature, he calls them “smitings;” — some of them being very sharp, as it is needful they should be where we are obliged to rebuke **ἀποτόμως**, “in a piercing and cutting manner,” [2 Cor. xiii. 10](#); [Tit. i. 13](#). But with respect unto their use, benefit, and advantage, they are like unto that anointing oil which, being poured on the head, was both gentle and pleasant, and a pledge of the communication of spiritual privileges, whence no inconveniences would ensue.

The last clause of the words belonging not unto our present design, I shall not insist on their explication.

Some few things must be farther premised unto our principal intention concerning the nature of those reproofs, which are proposed as a matter of such advantage in the text. And,

1. The word **יָכַח**, here used, signifieth, “to argue, to dispute, to contend in judgment,” as well as “to reprove, rebuke, or reprehend.” Its first signification is “to argue,” or “to plead a cause with arguments.” Hence it is used as a common term between God and man, denoting the reasons, real, or pretended only, on the one side and the other. So God himself speaks unto his people, **לְכוּ-נָא וְנִכְחַח**, [Isa. i. 18](#), “Go to, now, and let us plead,” reason or argue, “together;” and Job calls his pleas or arguments in prayer unto God, **תּוֹכַחֹת**, [Prov. xxiii. 4](#), “I would fill my mouth with arguments.” Wherefore, that only hath the true nature of a reproof, which is accompanied with reasons and arguments for the evincing of what it tends unto. Rash, groundless, wrathful, precipitate censures and rebukes, are evil in themselves, and, in our present case, of no consideration. Nor, indeed, ought any one to engage in the management of reproofs, who is not furnished with rule and argument to evince their necessity, and render them effectual. Sometimes things may be so circumstanced, as that a reproof shall so carry its own reason and efficacious conviction along with it, that there will be no need of arguing or pleas to make it useful. So the look of our blessed Saviour on Peter, under the circumstances of his case, was a sufficient reproof, though he spake not one word in its confirmation. But ordinarily, cogent reasons are the best conveyances of reproofs to the minds of men, be they of what sort they will.

2. *Reproofs do always respect a fault, an evil, a miscarriage, or a sin, in them that are reproofed.* There may be mutual admonitions and exhortations among Christians, with respect unto sundry things in the course of their faith and obedience, without a regard unto any



evil or miscarriage. The general nature of a reproof is an admonition or exhortation; but it hath its special nature from its regard unto a fault in course, or particular fact. And hence the word signifies also “to chastise;” wherein is a correction for, and the means of a recovery from, a miscarriage, [2 Sam. vii. 14](#), “I will reprove him with the rod of men;” that is, chastise him. This, therefore, is that reproof which we intend, — a warning, admonition, or exhortation, given unto any, whereby they are rebuked for, and with respect unto, some moral evil or sin in their course, way, practice, or any particular miscarriage, such as may render them obnoxious unto divine displeasure or chastisement; for it is essential unto a regular reproof, that, in him who gives it, it may be accompanied with, or do proceed from, an apprehension that the person reprovèd is, by the matter of the reproof, rendered obnoxious unto the displeasure of God.

3. *It may also be considered, that reprovèd is not left arbitrarily unto the wills of men.* Whatever seems to be so, it loseth its nature if it be not a duty in him who reprovèd, and will come short of its efficacy. No wise man will reprove, but when it is his duty so to do, unless he design the just reproach of a busy-body for his reward. The command is general, with respect unto brother and neighbour, [Lev. xix. 17](#), “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.” But as to the particular discharge of this work as a duty, there must be either an especial office or an especial relation, or a concurrence of circumstances for its warranty. God hath, in his wisdom and care, given rules and bounds unto our engagement unto duties; without a regulation whereby we shall wander in them with endless dissatisfactions unto ourselves, and unnecessary provocations unto others. But the duty of reprovèd, with the love, wisdom, tenderness, and compassion required in the discharge of it, — its motives, ends, and circumstances, — its proper rules and limitations, — fall not under my present consideration; but these things in general were necessary to be premised unto what do so.

That which the text instructs us in may be comprised in this general observation:—

*Observation. Reproofs, though accompanied with some sharpness, if rightly received and duly improved, are a mercy and advantage incomparably above all the satisfactions which a joint consent with others in sin and pleasures can afford.*

The latter part of the proposition I have mentioned only to express the balance that is proposed by the psalmist between the best and most desirable advantages of wicked society on the one hand, and the sharpest or most displeasing severities that accompany the communion of the righteous or godly. But I shall not at all handle the comparison, as designing only *some directions how men should behave themselves under reproofs*, that they may be a kindness, and an excellent oil unto them; or how they may by them obtain spiritual benefit and advantage unto their own souls. And this, however at present the matter may be managed, is of itself of great importance. For as, in the state of weakness and imperfection, of mistakes and miscarriages, wherein we are, there is no outward help or aid of more use and



advantage unto us than seasonable reproofs; so in the right receiving and improving of them, as high a trial of the spirits of men, as to their interest in wisdom and folly, doth consist, as in any thing that doth befall them, or wherewith they may be exercised. For as scorers of reproofs, those that hear them unwillingly, that bear them haughtily and impatiently, with designs of revenge or disdainful retortions, have the characters of pride and folly indelibly fixed on them by the Holy Ghost; so their due admission and improvement is in the same infallible truth represented as an evident pledge of wisdom, and an effectual means of its increase. This is so much and so frequently insisted on in that great treasure of all wisdom, spiritual, natural, and political, — namely, the Book of Proverbs, that it is altogether needless to call over any particular testimonies unto that purpose.

Three things we are to inquire into, in compliance with our present design:— I. *How reproofs may be duly received.* II. *The reasons why they ought so to be.* III. *How they may be duly improved.*<sup>326</sup>

I. *That we may receive reproofs in a due manner*, three things are to be considered:— 1. *The general qualification of the reprover*; 2. *The nature of the reproof*; and, 3. *The matter of it.*

1. *The Psalmist here desires that his reprover may be a righteous man*: “Let the righteous smite me,” — “Let him reprove me.” To give and take reproofs, is a dictate of the law of nature, whereby every man is obliged to seek the good of others, and to promote it according to his ability and opportunity. The former is directed by that love which is due unto others; the latter, by that which is due unto ourselves: which two are the great rules, and give measure to the duties of all societies, whether civil or spiritual. Wherefore, it doth not evacuate a reproof, or discharge him who is reprov'd from the duty of attending unto it, that he by whom it is managed is not righteous, yea, is openly wicked; for the duty itself being an effect of the law of nature, it is the same, for the substance of it, by whomsoever it is performed. Yea, oftentimes such moral, or rather immoral, qualifications as render not only the reprover less considerable, but also the reproof itself, until thoroughly weighed and examined, obnoxious unto prejudicate conceptions, do occasion a greater and more signal exercise of grace and wisdom in him that is reprov'd than would have been stirred up had

326 This enunciation of the topics in the discourse differs slightly from what appears in “*The Morning Exercises*,” where the order of the second and third heads is reversed. We prefer the arrangement adopted above, because it is consistent with the actual order of the topics in the discourse itself, and because it is given in the folio volume of Owen’s Sermons published in 1721; for an account of which see the General Preface to this edition of his works. The editors of that volume state, “that, for the greater accuracy of the work, such original manuscripts as are yet remaining, even of those sermons which were formerly printed, have been consulted, which we chose rather to follow than the printed copies, where any thing had been altered and omitted; so that both the Sermons and other Tracts are free from those many gross faults that have hitherto sullied them.” — Ed.

all things concurred unto the exact regularity of the reproof. However, it is desirable, on many accounts, that he who reproves us be himself a righteous person, and be of us esteemed so to be. For, as such a one alone will or can have a due sense of the evil reproofed, with a right principle and end in the discharge of his own duty; so the minds of them that are reproofed are, by their sense of his integrity, excluded from those insinuations of evasions, which prejudices and suggestions of just causes of reflections on their reprover will offer unto them. Especially, without the exercise of singular wisdom and humility, will all the advantages of a just reproof be lost, where the allowed practice of greater sins and evils than that reproofed is daily chargeable on the reprover. Hence is that reflection of our Saviour on the useless, hypocritical diligence of men in pulling the mote out of their brother's eyes whilst they have beams in their own, [Matt. vii. 3–5](#). The rule in this case is:— *If the reprover be a righteous person, consider the reprover first, and then the reproof; if he be otherwise, consider the reproof, and the reprover not at all.*

2. *The nature of a reproof* is also to be considered. And this is threefold: for every reproof is either, (1.) *Authoritative*; or (2.) *Fraternal*; or (3.) *Merely friendly and occasional*.

(1.) *Authoritative* reproofs are either, [1.] *Ministerial*; or [2.] *Parental*; or [3.] *Despotic*.

[1.] There is an especial authority accompanying *ministerial reproofs*, which we ought especially to consider and improve. Now, I understand not hereby those doctrinal reproofs when, in the dispensation of that word of grace and truth which is “profitable for correction and reproof,” [2 Tim. iii. 16](#), they speak, and exhort, and “rebuke” the sins of men “with all authority,” [Tit. ii. 15](#); but the occasional application of the word unto individual persons, upon their unanswerableness in any thing unto the truth wherein they have been instructed. For every right reproof is but the orderly application of a rule of truth unto any person under his miscarriage, for his healing and recovery. Where, therefore, a minister of the gospel, in the preaching of the word, doth declare and teach the rule of holy obedience with ministerial authority, if any of the flock committed to his charge shall appear in any thing to walk contrary thereunto, or to have transgressed it in any offensive instance, as it is his duty, the discharge whereof will be required of him at the great day, particularly to apply the truth unto them in the way of private, personal reproof; so he is still therein accompanied with his ministerial authority: which makes his reproof to be of a peculiar nature, and as such to be accounted for. For as he is thus commanded, as a minister, to “exhort, rebuke, admonish,” and “reprove” every one of his charge, as occasion shall require; so, in doing of it, he doth discharge and exercise his ministerial office and power. And he that is wise will forego no considerations that may give efficacy unto a just and due reproof; especially not such a one as, if it be neglected, will not only be an aggravation of the evil for which he is reproofed, but will also accumulate his guilt with a contempt of the authority of Jesus Christ. Wherefore the rule here is, — *The more clear and evident the representation of the authority of Christ is in the reproof, the more diligent ought we to be in our attendance unto it and compliance*





*with it.* He is the great reprove of his church, [Rev. iii. 19](#). All the use, power, authority, and efficacy of *ecclesiastical* reproofs flow originally and are derived from him. In ministerial reproofs, there is the most express and immediate application of his authority made unto the minds of men; which, if it be carelessly slighted or proudly despised, or evacuated by perverse cavillings, as is the manner of some in such cases, it is an open evidence of a heart that never yet sincerely took upon it this law and yoke.

These things are spoken of the *personal* reproofs that are given by ministers, principally unto those of their respective flocks, as occasion doth require; wherein I shall pray that our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, would yet make us all more faithful and diligent, as the season wherein we live doth abundantly require it. But, moreover, church censures, in *admonition* and *excommunication*, have the nature and ends of ministerial reproofs. But the handling of their nature and use, with the duties of those persons who justly fall under them, and the benefit which they may reap thereby, is too long and large a subject to be here diverted unto.

[2.] Authoritative reproof is *parental*. Reproof is, indeed, one of the greatest and most principal duties of parents towards children, and without which all others, for the most part, do but pamper them unto slaughter and ruin. Neglect hereof is that which hath filled us with so many Hophnis, Phinehases, and Absaloms, — whose outrageous wickednesses are directly charged on the sinful lenity and neglect, in this matter, even of godly parents. And, indeed, whereas some parents are openly vicious and debauched, even in the sight of their children, in a sensual neglect and contempt of the light of nature, whereby they lose all their authority in reproofing, as well as all care about it; — and whereas the most have so little regard unto sin as sin, whilst things are tolerably well in outward concerns, that they neglect the reproof of it as such; and many, through a foolish, contemptible prevalency of fond affection, will take no notice of the sinful follies, extravagances, and miscarriages of their children, until all things grow desperate with them; but soothe up and applaud them in such effects of pride, vanity, and wantonness, as ought to be most severely reproofed in them; — the woful and dreadful degeneracy of the age wherein we live owes itself much unto the horrible neglect of parents in this duty. That parental reproof is a duty taught by the law of nature, confirmed in the Scripture, enjoined under severe threatenings and penalties, exemplified in instances of blessings and vengeance on its performance or neglect, rendered indispensably necessary by that depravation of our natures which works in children from the womb, and grows up in strength and efficacy together with them, — I should not need to prove, if it lay directly before me, it being a matter of universal acknowledgment. I shall only say, that whereas there is, on many accounts, an immediate impress of divine authority on parental reproofs, that which children ought to consider and know for themselves is, that a continuance in the neglect or contempt of them is a token that seldom fails of approaching temporal and eternal destruction, [Prov. xxx. 17](#).

[3.] Authoritative reproof is *despotic*; namely, that of governors, rulers, and masters of families. This also partakes of the nature of those foregoing, and being a duty founded in the law of nature, as well as enforced by positive divine commands, casts a peculiar obligation to obedience on them that are so reproofed. And where servants regard not sober and Christian reproofs, as the ordinance of God for their good, they lose the advantages of their condition, and may be looked upon as unsanctified sufferers in a state of bondage; which hath an especial character of the first curse upon it.

(2.) Reproof is *fraternal*, or such as is mutual between the members of the same church, by virtue of that especial relation wherein they stand, and the obligation thence arising unto mutual watchfulness over each other, with admonitions, exhortations, and reproofs. As this is peculiarly appointed by our Saviour, [Matt. xviii. 15](#), in confirmation of the ordinance in the church of the Jews to that purpose, [Lev. xix. 17](#), and confirmed by many precepts and directions in the New Testament, [Rom. xv. 14](#); [1 Thess. v. 14](#); [Heb. iii. 12, 13, xii. 15, 16](#); so the neglect of it is that which hath lost us not only the benefit, but also the very nature of church-societies. Wherefore, our improvement of rebukes in this kind, depends much on a due consideration of that duty and love from whence they do proceed: for this we are, by the royal law of charity, obliged unto the belief of, where there is not open evidence unto the contrary. And whereas, it may be, those things for which we may be thus reproofed are not of the greatest importance in themselves, who that is wise will, by the neglect of the reproof itself, contract the open guilt of contemning the wisdom, love, and care of Christ in the institution of this ordinance?

(3.) Lastly, Reproofs are *friendly* or *occasional*, such as may be administered and managed by any persons, as reasons and opportunities require, from the common principle of universal love unto mankind, especially towards them that are of the household of faith. These also, having in them the entire nature of reproofs, will fall under all the ensuing directions, which have a general respect thereunto.

If, then, we would duly make use of, and improve unto our advantage, the reproofs that may be given us, we are seriously to consider the nature of them, with respect unto those by whom they are managed; for all the things we have mentioned are suited to influence our minds unto a regard of them, and compliance with them.

3. *The matter of a reproof* is duly to be weighed by him who designs any benefit thereby. And the first consideration of it is, whether it be true or false. I shall not carry them unto a more minute distribution of the substance and circumstances of the matter intended, of the whole or part of it; but do suppose, that, from some principal consideration of it, every reproof, as to its matter, may be denominated and esteemed true or false.

And here our own consciences, with due application unto the rule, are the proper judge and umpire. Conscience, if any way enlightened from the word, will give an impartial sentence concerning the guilt or innocence of the person, with respect unto the matter of a re-

proof. And there can be no more infallible evidence of a miscarriage in such a condition, than when pride, or passion, or prejudice, or any corrupt affection, can either outbrave or stifle that compliance with a just reproof which conscience will assuredly tender, [Rom. ii. 14, 15.](#)

(1.) If a reproof, as to the matter of it, be *false* or unjust, and so judged in an unbiassed conscience, it may be considered in matter of *right* and of *fact*. In the first case, the matter may be true, and yet the reproof formally false and evil; in the latter, the matter may be false, and yet the reproof an acceptable duty.

[1.] *A reproof is false in matter of right, or formally, when we are reprov'd for that as evil which is indeed our duty to perform.* So David was fiercely reprov'd by his brother Eliab for coming unto the battle against the Philistines, ascribing it to his pride, and the naughtiness of his heart. Whereunto he only replied, "What have I done? Is there not a cause?" [1 Sam. xvii. 28, 29.](#) And Peter rebuked our Lord Jesus Christ himself for declaring the doctrine of the cross, [Mark viii. 32.](#) And so we may be reprov'd for the principal duties that God requireth of us. And if men were as free in reprov'ing as they are in reproach'ing, we should not escape from daily rebukes for whatever we do in the worship of God. Now, though such reproofs generally may be looked on as temptations, and so to be immediately rejected, as they were in the cases instanced in; yet may they sometimes, where they proceed from love, and are managed with moderation, be considered as necessary cautions to look heedfully unto the grounds and reasons we proceed upon in the duties opposed, at which others do take offence.

[2.] If the reproof be *false in matter of fact*, wherein that is charged on us, and reprov'd in us, whereof we are no ways guilty, three things are to be considered, that it may not be unuseful unto us:—

1st. *The circumstances* of the reprov'er; as, first, Whether he do proceed on *some probable mistake*; or, secondly, *Credulity and easiness in taking up reports*; or, thirdly, *On evil, groundless surmises of his own*; or, fourthly, *From a real godly jealousy, which hath been imposed on, as easily it will be, by some appearances of truth.* Without a due consideration of these things, we shall never know how to carry it aright, towards them by whom we are reprov'd for that whereof we are not guilty.

2dly. Consider aright the *difference between a reproof and a reproach*; for they may be both false alike, and that whereof we are reprov'd have no more truth in it than that wherewith we are reproach'd. Yea, we may be honestly reprov'd for that which is false, and wickedly reproach'd with that which is true. So Augustine calls the language of the maid unto her mother about drinking wine, "*durum convicium,*" though the matter of it were true enough. But a reproach is the acting of a mind designing of, and rejoicing in, evil. Unto a reproof it is essential that it spring from love. "Whom I love I rebuke," is the absolute rule of these things. Let a man rebuke another, though for that which indeed is false, if it be in



love, it is a *reproof*; but let him rebuke another, though for that which is true, if it be from a mind delighting in evil, it is a *reproach*; and if it be false, it is, moreover, a *calumny*.

3dly. Where a man, in such cases, is fully justified by the testimony of his own conscience, bearing witness unto his integrity and innocency; yet may he greatly miscarry under the occasion, if he attend not diligently unto his own spirit; which most men judge to be set at the utmost liberty under such injurious provocations, as they esteem them. Wherefore, to keep our minds *unto sedate, Christian moderation in such cases*, and that we may not lose the advantage of what is befallen us, we ought immediately to apply them unto such other duties as the present occasion doth require; as, —

First. *To search our own hearts and ways, whether we have not indeed upon us the guilt of some greater evils than that which is falsely charged on us, or for which we are reprov'd on mistake.* And if it appear so, upon examination, we shall quickly see what little reason we have to tumultuate, and rise up with indignation against the charge we suffer under. And may we not thence see much of the wisdom and goodness of God, who suffereth us to be exercised with what we can bear off with the impenetrable shield of a good conscience, whilst he graciously hides and covers those greater evils of our hearts, with respect whereunto we cannot but condemn ourselves?

Secondly. *To consider that it is not of ourselves that we are not guilty of the evil suspected and charged.* No man of sobriety can, on any mistake, reprove us for any thing, be it never so false, but that it is merely of sovereign grace that we have not indeed contracted the guilt of it; and humble thankfulness unto God on this occasion, for his real preserving grace, will abate the edge and take off the fierceness of our indignation against men for their supposed injurious dealings with us.

Thirdly. *Such reproofs, if there be not open malice and continued wickedness manifest in them, are to be looked on as gracious providential warnings, to take heed lest at any time we should be truly overtaken with that which at present we are falsely charged withal.* We little know the dangers that continually attend us, the temptations wherewith we may be surprised at unawares, nor how near on their account we may be unto any sin or evil which we judge ourselves most remote from, and least obnoxious unto. Neither, on the other hand, can we readily understand the ways and means whereby the holy, wise God issueth forth those hidden provisions of preventing grace which are continually administered for our preservation; and no wise man, who understands any thing of the deceitfulness of his own heart, with the numberless numbers of invisible occasions of sin wherewith he is encompassed continually, but will readily embrace such reproofs, as providential warnings unto watchfulness in those things whereof before he was not aware.

Fourthly. When the mind, by these considerations, is rendered sedate, and weighed unto Christian moderation, *then ought a man, in such cases, patiently and peaceably to undertake the defence of his innocency, and his own vindication.* And herein, also, there is need

of much wisdom and circumspection; it being a matter of no small difficulty for a man duly to manage self and innocency, both which are apt to influence us unto some more than ordinary vehemency of spirit. But the directions which might, and indeed ought to be given under all these particular heads, could by no means be confined unto the limits fixed to this discourse.

(2.) If *the matter of the reproof be true in fact*, then it is duly to be considered, whether the offence for which any one is reprov'd be *private* or *public*, attended with scandal.

[1.] If it be *private*, then it is to be weigh'd, whether it was known unto, and observed in and by, the person himself reprov'd or no, before he was reprov'd. If it were *not so known* (as we may justly be reprov'd for many things which, through ignorance or inadvertency, or compliance with the customs of the world, we may have taken no notice of), and if the reproof bring along light and conviction with it, the first especial improvement of such a peculiar reproof is thankfulness to God for it, as a means of deliverance from any way, or work, or path, that was unacceptable in his sight. And hence a great prospect may be taken of the following deportment of the mind under other reproofs. For, a readiness to take in light and conviction, with respect unto any evil that we are ignorant of, is an evidence of a readiness to submit to the authority of God in any other rebukes that have their convictions going before them: so the heart that is prone to fortify itself, by any pleas or *pretences*, *against convictions of sin in what it doth not yet own so to be, will be as prone unto obstinacy under reproofs in what it cannot but acknowledge to be evil*. If it were *known before* to the person reprov'd, but not supposed by him to be observed by others, — under the covert of which imagination sin often countenanceth itself, — that soul will never make a due improvement of a reproof, who is not first sensible of the care and kindness of God in driving him from that retreat and hold where the interest of sin had placed its chiefest reserve.

[2.] Sins so far *public as to give matter of offence or scandal*, are the ordinary subject of all orderly reproofs; and therefore need not in particular to be spoken unto.

Having showed the nature of reproofs in general, with such considerations of the matter of them as have afforded occasion unto sundry particular directions relating unto the duty under discussion, it remains that we explain and confirm the other two generals comprised in the observation deduced from the text; namely, II. *Why we ought to receive reproofs, orderly or regularly given unto us, esteeming of them as a singular privilege*; and, III. *How we may duly improve them unto their proper end*, the glory of God, and the spiritual advantage of our own souls.

II. As to the first of these, we may observe, —

1. *That mutual reproofs, for the curing of evil and preventing of danger in one another, are prime dictates of the law of nature, and [of] that obligation to seek the good of each other which our participation in the same being, offspring, original, and end, cloth lay upon us*. This God designed in our creation, and this the rational constitution of our natures directs us



unto. To seek and endeavour for each other, all that good whereof we are capable in time, or unto eternity, was indelibly implanted upon our natures, and indispensably necessary unto that society among ourselves, with the great end of our joint living unto God, for which we were made. All the mutual evils of mankind, whether of persons or of nations, designed or perpetrated against one another, are effects of our fatal prevarication from the law of our creation. Hence Cain, the first open violent transgressor of the rules and bounds of human society, thought to justify or excuse himself by a renunciation of that principle, which God in nature had made the foundation of a political or sociable life, with respect unto temporal and eternal ends. "Am I," saith he, "my brother's keeper?" [Gen. iv. 9](#). Yea, God hath made every man the keeper of his brother so far as that they should in all things, in their opportunities, and unto their power, seek their good, and deliverance from evil. In those things which are good unto us, those which are spiritual and eternal have the pre-eminence. These nothing can prejudice but sin and moral evils; whose prevention, therefore, in one another, so far as we are able, is a duty of the law of nature, and the prime effect of that love which we owe unto the whole offspring of that "one blood" whereof God hath made all nations. And one of the most effectual means for that end are the reproofs whereof we treat; and the obligation is the same on those that give them and those to whom they are given, with respect unto their several interests in this duty. Wherefore, to neglect, to despise, not thankfully to receive, such reproofs as are justly and regularly given unto us at any time, is to contemn the law of our creation, and to trample on the prime effect of fraternal love. Yea, to despise reproofs, and to discountenance the discharge of that duty, is to open a door unto that mutual hatred and dislike which, in the sight of God, is murder. See [Lev. xix. 17](#), with [1 John iii. 15](#). Let us, therefore, look to ourselves; for there is no greater sign of a degeneracy from the law and all the ends of our creation, than an unwillingness to receive reproofs, justly deserved and regularly administered, or not to esteem of them as a blessed effect of the wisdom and goodness of God towards us.

2. *Whereas the light of nature is variously obscured, and its directive power debilitated in us, God hath renewed on us an obligation unto this duty by particular institutions, both under the Old Testament and the New.* The truth is, the efficacy of the law of creation, as unto moral duties, being exceedingly impaired by the entrance of sin; and the exercise of original, native love towards mankind being impeded and obstructed by that confusion and disorder whereinto the whole state of mankind was cast by sin, — every one thereby being made the enemy of another, as the apostle declares, [Tit. iii. 3](#), — [and that disorder] not being cured by that coalescency into civil societies, which respects only *political* and temporal ends; the discharge of this duty was utterly lost, at least beyond that which was merely *parental*. Wherefore God, in the institution of his church, both under the Old Testament and the New, did mould men into such peculiar societies and relations, as wherein they might be made meet again for the exercise thereof. He hath so disposed of us, that every one may

know every one whom he is obliged to reprove, and every one may know every one whom he is obliged to hear. And as he hath hereby cured that confusion we were cast into, which was obstructive of the exercise of this duty; so, by the renovation of positive commands, attended with instructions, directions, promises, and threatenings, enforcing the giving and receiving of reproofs with respect unto moral and spiritual ends, he hath relieved us against that obscurity of natural light which we before laboured under. Should I go to express the commands, directions, exhortations, promises, and threatenings, which are given in the Scripture to this purpose, it would be a work as endless as I suppose it needless, to all that are conversant in the holy writings. It may suffice unto our present purpose that, — there being an express institution of God for the giving and taking of reproofs, and that an effect of infinite goodness, benignity, and love towards us, — not thankfully to receive reproofs, when it is our lot to deserve them and to have them, is to despise the authority of God over us, and his gracious care for us. When, therefore, it befalleth any to be justly and orderly reprov'd, let him call to mind the authority and love of God therein; which will quickly give him that sense of their worth and excellency as will make him thankful for them: which is the first step unto their due improvement.

3. *A due consideration of the use, benefit, and advantage of them, will give them a ready admission into our minds and affections.* Who knows how many souls, that are now at rest with God, have been prevented by reproofs, as the outward means, from going down into the pit! Unto how many have they been an occasion of conversion, and sincere turning unto God! How many have been recovered by them from a state of backsliding, and awakened from a secure sleep in sin! How many great and bloody sins hath the perpetration of been obviated by them! How many snares of temptations have they been the means to break and cancel! What revivings have they been to grace, what disappointments unto the snares of Satan, who can declare! The advantage which the souls of men do or might receive every day by them, is more to be valued than all earthly treasures whatever; and shall any of us, when it comes to be our concern, through a predominancy of pride, passion, and prejudice, or through cursed sloth and security, — the usual means of the defeatment of these advantages, — manifest ourselves to have no interest in, or valuation of, these things, by an unreadiness or unwillingness to receive reproofs, when tendered unto us in the way and according to the mind of God?

III. But now, suppose we are willing to receive them, it will be inquired, in the last place, What considerations may further us in their due improvement, and what directions may be given thereunto?

An answer to this inquiry shall shut up this discourse: and I shall say hereunto, —

1. *If there be not open evidence unto the contrary, it is our duty to judge that every reproof is given us in a way of duty.* This will take off offence with respect unto the reprover, which



unjustly taken, is an assured entrance into a way of losing all benefit and advantage by the reproof. The reason why any man doth regularly reprove another, is because God requireth him so to do, and by his command hath made it his duty towards him that is reproved. And do we judge it reasonable, that one should neglect his duty towards God and us, and in some degree or other make himself guilty of our sins, for no other cause but lest we should be displeased that we are not suffered to sin securely, and, it may be, to perish eternally? And if we are convinced that it is the duty of another to reprove us, we cannot but be convinced that it is our duty to hearken and attend thereunto; and this will fix the mind unto a due consideration of the present duty that lies before us, and what is our just concernment in the reproof. Besides, if it be done in a way of duty, it is done in love; for all orderly rebukes are effects of love. And if we are convinced of any one, that he doth reprove in a way of duty, we must be satisfied that what he doth proceedeth from love, without by-ends or dissimulation. For what doth not so, be it what it will, belongs not to rebuking in a way of duty. And this will remove all obstructing prejudices, in all who have the least gracious ingenuity. Ahab despised the warning of Micaiah, because he thought they mutually hated one another; he knew how it was with himself, and falsely so judged of the prophet, by his necessary sharpness towards him. But where there are such surmises, all advantages of reproofs will be assuredly lost. Where, therefore, our minds are satisfied that any reproof is an effect of love, and given in a way of duty, “*dimidium facti, [qui coepit, habet,]*” — we are half way in the discharge of the duty directed unto.

2. *Take heed of cherishing habitually such disorders, vices, and distempers of mind, as are contrary unto this duty and will frustrate the design of it.* Such are, — (1.) *Hastiness of spirit.* Some men’s minds do with such fury apply themselves unto their first apprehension of things, that they cast the whole soul into disorder, and render it incapable of farther rational consideration. There may be, it is possible, some failures and mistakes in useful and necessary reproofs, in matter, manner, circumstance, some way or other. This immediately is seized on by men of hasty spirits (a vice and folly sufficiently condemned in Scripture), turned unto a provocation, made a matter of strife and dispute, until the whole advantage of the reproof is utterly lost and vanisheth. A quiet, gentle, considerative, sedate frame of spirit is required unto this duty. (2.) *Pride and haughtiness of mind,* self-conceit, elation of spirit, — which will be inseparably accompanied with the contempt of others, and a scorn, that any should think themselves either so much wiser or so much better than ourselves as to reprove us in any kind, — are a fenced wall against any benefit or advantage by reproofs; yea, things that will turn judgment into hemlock, and the most sovereign antidote into poison. No wild beast in a toil doth more rave, and tear, and rend, than a proud man when he is reproved. And therefore, he who manifests himself so to be, hath secured himself from being any more troubled by serious reproofs from any wise man whatever. See [Prov. ix. 7, 8.](#) (3.) *Prejudices,* which are so variously occasioned, as it were endless to recount. If, now,



we make it not our constant business to purge our minds from these depraved affections, they will never fail effectually to exert themselves on all occasions, to the utter defeatment of all use in, or benefit by, the most necessary and regular reproofs.

3. *Reckon assuredly, that a fault, a miscarriage, which any one is duly reproofed for, if the reproof be not received and improved as it ought, is not only aggravated, but accumulated with a new crime, and marked with a dangerous token of an incurable evil.* — See [Prov. xxix.](#)

1. Let men do what they can, bear themselves high in their expressions, grow angry, passionate, excuse or palliate; unless they are seared and profligately obstinate, their own consciences will take part with a just and regular reproof. If hereupon they come not up to amendment, their guilt is increased by the occasional excitation of the light of conscience, to give it an especial charge. And there is an additional sin, in the contempt of the reproof itself. But that which principally should make men careful, and even tremble, in this case, is, that they are put on a trial, whether ever they will forsake the evil of their ways and doings, or no: for he who is orderly reproofed for any fault, and neglects or despiseth the rebuke, can have no assurance that he shall ever be delivered from the evil rebuked; but hath just cause to fear that he is entering into a course of hardness and impenitency.

4. *It is useful unto the same end, immediately to compare the reproof with the word of truth.* — This is the measure, standard, and directory of all duties, whereunto, in all dubious cases, we should immediately retreat for advice and counsel. And whereas there are two things considerable in a reproof, — first, the matter of it, that it be true, and a just cause or reason of a rebuke; and, secondly, the fight which the reprover hath unto this duty, with the rule which he walked by therein, — if both these, for the substance of them, prove to be justified by the Scripture, then have we, in such a case, no more to do with the reprover, nor any of his circumstances, but immediately and directly with God himself; for where he gives express warranty and direction for a duty in his word, his own authority is as directly exerted thereby as if he spoke unto us from heaven. Hereby will the mind be prevented from many wanderings and vain reliefs, which foolish imagination will suggest, and be bound up unto its present duty.

Let our unwillingness to be reproofed be what it will, as also our prejudices against our reprover, if we are not, at least, free to bring the consideration and examination of the one and the other unto the word of truth, it is because our deeds are evil, and therefore we love darkness more than light.

No milder nor more gentle censure can be passed on any, who is not free to bring any reproof that may be given him unto an impartial trial by the word, whether it be according to the mind of God or no. If this be done, and conviction of its truth and necessity do then appear; then let the soul know it hath to do with God himself, and wisely consider what answer he will return, what account he will give unto Him. Wherefore, —

5. *The best way to keep our souls in a readiness rightly to receive, and duly to improve, such reproofs as may regularly be given us by any, is to keep and preserve our souls and spirits, in a constant awe and reverence of the reproofs of God, which are recorded in his word. —* The neglect or contempt of these reproofs, is that which the generality of mankind do spilt themselves upon, and perish eternally. This is so fully and graphically expressed, [Prov. i.](#), that nothing can be added thereunto. And the great means whereby much hardness comes upon others, through the deceitfulness of sin, is want of keeping up a due sense or reverence of divine reproofs and threatenings on their souls. When this is done, — when our hearts are kept up unto an awful regard of them, exercised with a continual meditation on them, made tender, careful, watchful by them, — any just reproof from any, that falls in compliance with them, will be conscientiously observed, and carefully improved.

6. *We shall fail in this duty unless we are always accompanied with a deep sense of our frailty, weakness, readiness to halt or miscarry, and thereon a necessity of all the ordinances and visitations of God, which are designed to preserve our souls. —* Unless we have due apprehensions of our own state and condition here, we shall never kindly receive warnings beforehand to avoid approaching dangers, nor duly improve rebukes for being overtaken with them. It is the humble soul — that feareth always, and that from a sense of its own weakness, yea, the treacheries and deceitfulness of its heart, with the power of those temptations whereunto it is continually exposed that is ever likely to make work of the duty here directed unto.

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Sermon XIV.

The testimony of the church is not the only nor the chief reason of our believing the scripture to be the word of God.



## Sermon XIV. The testimony of the church is not the only nor the chief reason of our believing the scripture to be the word of God.

“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” — [Luke xvi. 29.](#)

As everlasting blessedness — men’s greatest and most desirable good — is that which God only can bestow, and the way to it, that which he only can discover (who knows the Lord’s mind like himself? who is so sure a guide in the way, as he who is himself the end? — nature can neither direct us to, nor fit us for, a supernatural happiness); so it is not only our interest to seek it, but likewise to see whether what pretends to be the rule of our walking, in order to our obtaining of it, be indeed the right one: which we can no otherwise be assured of, than by seeing that it be such an one as is given us by Him to whom alone it belongs to prescribe us the way, and who, being infinitely good, as well as infinitely wise, will no more deceive us than he can be himself deceived. Now, the holy scripture of the Old and New Testament, is that which we profess to own as the rule of our faith and life, in relation to our future glory. It is, then, the wisdom of every Christian to inquire upon what account he receives this rule; — why he believes it, and submits to it; whether he be persuaded that it is of God by God himself, or only by men. For if he can find indeed that he receives it upon the authority of God, he may be secure of the truth and sufficiency of it; but if only on that of men, they, being liable to mistakes, may lead him into error; and so he can never be sure that what he owns as his rule is indeed the right one, and of God’s own prescribing. Or admit [that] it really be so, yet if it be not received on right grounds, he will be exposed to innumerable fears and fluctuations, and never walk comfortably nor constantly in his way, when he doubts whether it be the right or a wrong one. The superstructure cannot be better than the foundation; and a well-ordered and comfortable conversation will never be the effect of an ill-grounded belief. It is good, therefore, in the beginning of our course, to be secure of our way, — to see both what we believe, and why; lest, otherwise, we be either forced to go back, or else upon as light grounds swerve from the way as we were at first persuaded to engage in it. Our great inquiry, then, in this discourse, will be, —

*Upon what account we believe the Scripture to be the word of God; whether upon the authority of God, or the church? which I ground upon these words, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”*

In this parable, whereof these words are a part, we have an account of the different estates of a wicked man, Dives, and a good man, Lazarus, both in this life and the other. In this life, Dives had his “good things,” the whole of his happiness, all the portion he was ever to enjoy; and Lazarus had his “evil things,” all the sorrow and misery he was ever to endure. And in the other life, we have Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, a place and state of rest, “entered into peace,” [Isa. lvii. 1, 2](#); and Dives in hell, a state of misery, and place of torments; where, finding so great a change, and being deeply affected with his now woful condition, he is

(though in vain) desirous, if not of release, as despairing of that, yet at least of a little ease; and therefore, addressing himself to Abraham, he entreats him that Lazarus might be sent to “dip” but even “the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue,” [verse 24](#); but this is denied him as impossible, [verse 26](#). Seeing that would not do, he desires, however, [that] his torments might not be increased by his brethren’s coming to him; whom we may suppose to have been his fellow-sinners, and partakers with him in his riot and luxury. Or, if you will believe so much charity to be among the damned, his request is, that Lazarus might be sent to them, to admonish them for their good, that so they might be brought to a timely repentance, ere they came to an untimely end, and then to endless torments, But this is denied him too, as altogether needless and unprofitable, [verse 31](#); and he is told, that God had made sufficient provision for them, — given them the most effectual means whereby they might be brought to repentance, in that he had given them his written word, “Moses and the prophets;” by whose writings if they were not persuaded to repent, a miracle would not persuade them. Lazarus rising from the dead would no more be believed than “Moses and the prophets,” whose writings were among them; and therefore to them Abraham sends them, as a means sufficient for the end pretended, at least, by Dives to be aimed at: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” As if he had said, “The will of God concerning thy brethren’s duty, and the truth of God concerning future rewards as the great motives to it, are clearly enough laid down in the Scripture; and if they believe not these things, and are not persuaded to repentance upon the authority of God in his word, much less will they be moved by the testimony of one coming from the dead.” Hence I infer, *that the holy Scripture, or written word of God, is sufficient in itself, and most effectually able, to convince men of the truth of those things which are contained in it.* It was so then; why not now? “Moses and the prophets” were so; why are not the apostles and evangelists? Is all the whole Scripture grown Old Testament, and so old as to be decayed? When and by what means did it lose that life and power, that authority and efficacy, it sometimes had? It had formerly more virtue to convince men than a miracle itself; and now, belike, it hath less than a council! It could have done more than a man “from the dead;” and now it can do less than a dead man, a sinful pope! For his Holiness of Rome may be very wicked, the Papists themselves being judges.

From the former proposition it will undeniably follow, *that the Scripture is sufficient in itself to convince men of its own divineness, or its being itself the word of God, that being one truth it doth so often assert.* The general must comprehend the particular; and therefore, if the Scripture be sufficient to satisfy the minds of men as to all that it affirms to be truth, it must needs be able to satisfy them as to this too, — that the whole of it is the word of God.

But this our adversaries will not allow; and therefore, instead of taking it for granted, or resting on this single proof, we must here put it to the question, from whence the Scripture hath its authority, or upon what grounds we are to believe it to be the word of God. If you



will give the Papists leave to answer, they will presently tell you, “Upon the sole authority of the church;” or, “Because the church declares it to be the word of God;” and that “without the determination of the church, it hath very little authority or weight in it,” and you are “no more bound to believe the gospel of Matthew, than the history of Livy.” Nay, one says plainly,<sup>327</sup> that “but for the church, you are no more bound to believe the Scripture than Æsop’s Fables.” And you may be sure the man was in earnest, when you do but consider how many incredible things another of them (alleged at large by our learned Whitaker) musters up out of the Scripture, which he would fain persuade the world would never be believed if the church did not interpose her testimony; and yet, as broad as the blasphemy mentioned is, another of the same party minceth the matter, and says [that] the words might be “piously spoken.” And if a private doctor of the Church of Rome may thus transubstantiate blasphemy into piety, or make that pass for pious which is really blasphemous, I see no reason why a pope might not add his authority, and make it canonical too. But, that we may give the best account of the controversy before us, — I. *Some things must be premised by way of explication, for the better understanding of terms.* II. *The state of the question must be laid down.* III. *The truth confirmed.* IV. *Popish objections answered.* V. *Some application made.*

I. *For explication of terms, let us see, —*

1. What we mean by the *Scripture*. By that, therefore, is understood “the word of God,” declaring his mind concerning men’s happiness and duty, or teaching us what we are to believe concerning God, and how we are to obey him; as it was at first revealed by himself to the apostles and prophets, and by them delivered by word of mouth; and afterward, for the perpetuity and usefulness of it, committed to writing, as we now have it, in the books of the Old and New Testament. So that “the word of God” and “the Scripture” are the same materially, and differ only in this, that “the word of God” doth not in itself imply its being written, nor exclude it, but may be considered indifferently as to either; whereas “the Scripture” signifies the same word, only with the addition of its being committed to writing.

2. What is meant by *authority*, when we inquire whence the Scripture hath its authority.<sup>328</sup> Authority in this business is a power of commanding or persuading, or, as some phrase it, “convincing,” arising from some excellency in the thing or person vested with such authority. Whatever hath authority *de facto*, so far forth hath esteem and honour, or reverence, yielded to it; as whatever hath authority *de jure*, hath such esteem or honour of due belonging to it, and answering it as its correlate. And both the one and the other are founded on some excellency:— sometimes of nature, both in persons and things; sometimes of office and dignity; sometimes of knowledge; sometimes of virtue and manners; sometimes

327 Surdis. *apud* Chamierum.

328 Camero *De Verbo Dei*.

of prudence, as in persons: according to each of which, a suitable respect and honour is due to the authority therefrom arising. And as any man excels in any of these, so he hath authority in that, though he may not in other things. Thus, he that excels in the knowledge of the law may have authority in that, though he may have none in physic or divinity, in which he may not excel; and an honest man, that excels in morality, may on that account have the authority of a witness, though not of a judge. Now, when we speak of the authority of the Scripture, and ask from whence it hath it, we do but inquire whence it is that the Scripture persuades, convinces, or binds us to believe it, or commands us to assent to it, as the word of God; or whereon its power of so doing is founded, — whether it be not some excellency inherent in itself, or whether it be only something foreign and extrinsical to it.

3. What we mean *by faith*, when it is demanded why we believe the Scripture to be the word of God. Faith, so far as it concerns the understanding (for in some acts of faith the will bears part), is an assent yielded to something proposed under the appearance, at least, of truth, built upon the testimony of another; and therefore, according as the testimony is, for the sake of which we believe any thing, accordingly will our faith be:— if it be the testimony of a man or men, our faith will be a human faith; but if the testimony be divine, or we believe a thing because God himself asserts it, we call it “a divine faith.” Only we must remember, that a truly divine faith hath always God for its author; so that three things concur to the producing the act of such a faith:— (1.) The truth believed; which is *objectum materiale*, “the object of it.” (2.) The testimony of God concerning that truth; which is *objectum formale*, “the formal reason and ground” of this faith. (3.) The efficiency of God producing it or working it in the mind. Now, when we speak of believing the Scripture to be the word of God, we speak of a divine faith. A man may, upon the credit of his parents, of his minister, of a particular church, or of the church catholic, if such a testimony can be had, believe the Scripture to be the word of God; but the question will be, what kind of faith that is, whether such an one as God requires him to receive the Scripture with.

4. What we understand by the *church* in the question. “The church” may be taken either for the universality of believers in all places of the world, so as to comprehend private saints as well as public officers, people as well as pastors, and those of former ages as well as the present, — prophets themselves, and apostles, and penmen of the Scripture. Or we may take it for that part of the catholic church which lives together in the same age, (call it, if you please, “the present catholic church,”) comprehending in it all the believers, people as well as pastors, alive at the same time in the several parts of the whole world. Or else we may understand “the church” in the popish sense, only for the present church; and that, too, for the Church of Rome, which they call “Catholic;” and that, again, only for the pastors of it, excluding the people; and they, again, may be considered either separately or in conjunction, as meeting together in a general council; and that, either by themselves without the pope, or together with him; or, lastly, as represented by him, or virtually contained in him: for



this great name, “The Church,” dwindles at last into one only man. But, sure, he is no small one that contains so many in him; for, if we believe the Papists (not only, though especially, the Jesuits), the pope, in this controversy, is nothing else but the church catholic compacted, and thrust into a single person, in whom all those several excellencies which are scattered among the members do, as in the head, collectively reside. And so the catholicness they vaunt so much of, is crowded into a narrow compass; for those, whether pastors or members of the church, that lived formerly, are first cut off, and the church is reduced to the present age; then the people, as excrescences, are pared away too, and the bulkiness of the church thereby lessened, the officers or pastors only remaining; and yet these, too, must be contracted into a council; and that at last epitomized into a pope, who is but the epitome of an epitome, and scarcely so much as a small synopsis of that voluminous thing “the church,” they talk so largely of.

II. For *the state of the question*, these things being premised, take it thus:— 1. *In some things we agree with them; 2. In some we differ from them.*

1. *In some we agree.*

(1.) That the scripture of the Old and New Testament, which we own (who yet exclude the apocryphal books of one sort or other) is the word of God, is acknowledged by them as well as by us.

(2.) Consequently, that it is in itself true and of divine authority, and that it doth not depend upon the church, as to that authority and truth which in itself it hath, — or that the testimony of the church doth not make it to be true, or to be the word of God, — the Papists themselves (at least the most wary among them) will (be sure, in words) grant. And therefore they have coined a distinction for the nonce: they tell us that the Scripture hath a twofold authority; one in itself, as it is true, and comes from God; the other in relation to us, as it binds us to receive and believe it. The former of these they own to be in the Scripture antecedently to the testimony of the church. The distinction is vain, when all authority is in relation to another, over whom either *de facto* it is, or *de jure* it ought to be, exercised. But let it pass.

(3.) That every Christian is bound, with a divine faith to receive the Scripture as the word of God, they grant as well as we do.

(4.) That the Holy Spirit hath a hand in men’s believing the Scripture to be the word of God, allow the Papists their sense, and they will likewise yield no less than we. That the faith whereby men own the Scriptures (if it be a divine one, as they say it is) is wrought in the hearts of men by the Spirit of God, they do grant, and must, unless they will avow themselves to be Pelagians.

(5.) And, lastly, that the church (allow us our sense) may be a help to us, and furtherance to our faith, in receiving the Scripture as the word of God, we will grant as well as they. That





the universal concurrence of all believers in receiving the Scripture, and [that] the testimony they do, and in all ages have, in their way and capacity, given to it, is a strong argument to persuade dissenters to submit to the divine authority of it, we easily yield; and that it is the duty of the present church, during its time, to labour to preserve the Scripture pure and entire, and to hold it forth to others, and endeavour to persuade them of its divineness, and so to perform the part of a teacher, we are willing likewise to yield. And so, in a word, we acknowledge the usefulness of the church's testimony, as an external help, and that by which some benefit may be reaped by men at the beginning of their faith. For it is the foundation of a human faith, and sufficient for the producing of that. And when a man hath so far yielded, as to receive the Scripture as God's word, though only on the credit of men, yet coming afterward to peruse and study it, and look more narrowly into it, he may then come to see better and more solid grounds for his belief; and, God working on his heart by the word, he may come to receive it with a divine faith, which at first he did only with a human; as, in [John iv.](#), the men of Samaria, who first believed Christ for the woman's words, did afterwards believe him because they heard himself. Thus far, therefore, there is some agreement between them and us. So that the question is not concerning the object of our faith, the thing to be believed; for both acknowledge it, in this business, to be the divineness of the Scripture: nor concerning the efficient cause of that faith; for both will own it to be the Spirit which works this faith in the heart: but concerning the medium or argument whereby the Spirit works it, and so the ground and foundation of our faith, that which is the formal reason why we believe the Scripture to be the word of God.

2. This, therefore, is *the thing wherein we and they differ*: something they affirm which we deny, and something we affirm which they deny.

(1.) They affirm *the testimony of the present church* (and that must be of Rome only now, for they count that only the catholic one) — that is, of the pastors of it convened in a general council, either with the pope, as some of them say, or without him, as others, or virtually in him, as others — to be *the only sufficient ground* of men's believing the Scripture to be the word of God; and so tell us that the Spirit bears witness to the divinity of the Scripture by the testimony of the church, and makes use of that as the medium or argument by which he persuades men to receive the Scripture as the word of God; and that without that testimony, or antecedently to it, men cannot know, nor are bound to believe, the Scripture so to be. This we deny.

(2.) We affirm, on the other side, that *the testimony of the Spirit of God in the word itself* — witnessing it to be of God, by that stamp and impress, or, which comes to the same, by those notes and marks of divinity which everywhere appear in it — is *the immediate and principal, and a sufficient, reason* of our believing it to be the word of God, and the medium the Spirit useth in working faith in us, or making us assent to the divinity of the Scripture. So that, as the Spirit, working inwardly in our hearts, moves as the efficient of our faith, so

the Scripture itself, in its own intrinsical beauty, lustre, power, and excellency, is that which moves us, in the way of an object or medium, to yield our assent to its being of God. By this the Spirit of God, as the author of the Scripture, witnesseth it to be of God; and, by an internal application of this to our minds, induceth us to assent to its so being. The testimony of the Spirit in the word is open, public, general, to all, if they have but eyes to see it; whereas the inward application of it by the efficiency of the Spirit is only to believers.

This they deny; and this we shall first, though more briefly, prove; and then disprove — as well as we deny — what they assert.

*Argument I. The Holy Ghost, in Scripture, calls us to the Scripture itself, and God's authority only in it, and not to the church, for the settling of our belief of its divinity; and therefore in the Scripture itself we have a sufficient argument to move us to believe its coming from God.* In [Isa. viii. 20](#), we are sent “to the law and to the testimony.” The prophets generally propound what they deliver merely in the name and on the authority of God: their usual style is, “Thus saith the Lord,” and, “The word of the Lord.” They do nowhere send us to the church to know whether it be so or not; but leave it with us, as being of itself (that is, without the testimony of the church) sufficient to convince us; and if we will not believe it, at our own peril be it. So, in the text, Abraham (that is indeed Christ, whose mind Abraham in this parable is brought in speaking) sends Dives' brethren to “Moses and the prophets:” and our Saviour Christ sends the Jews to the Scriptures, — bids them “search” them, [John v. 39](#); and so [verses 46, 47](#). And Luke commends the Bereans, not that they sent up to Jerusalem to the church there, or waited for a general council, to assure them of the divineness of what was preached to them; but that “they daily searched the Scriptures, to see if those things were so,” [Acts xvii. 11](#). But all this would be in vain, our labour would be lost in searching the Scriptures, and looking into them for the confirmation of themselves, if there were not something in them sufficient to persuade us of their having God for their author, but at last we must have recourse to the church to assure us of it. Why are we sent thus far about, if a nearer way be at hand?

*Arg. II. Those properties which the Holy Ghost in the Scripture attributes to the Scripture will prove the same.* It is light: “The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light,” [Prov. vi. 23](#); “A lamp to my feet, and a light to my path,” [Ps. cxix. 105](#); “A light shining in a dark place,” [2 Pet. i. 19](#). And, surely, that which is light may discover itself. He that needs another to tell him what is light, wants eyes. It “is quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword,” [Heb. iv. 12](#); it enters into the soul: and therefore by its own power and efficacy discovers itself to us as well as us to ourselves. It is “like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces,” [Jer. xxiii. 29](#). So likewise, [1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25](#); and [Ps. xix. 7, 8](#): from both which we may argue, That word which convinceth men, judgeth them, makes manifest the secrets of their hearts; that, again, which converts the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoiceth the heart, enlightens the eyes; is sufficiently able to discover itself to be of

God, though the church should not give in her testimony; but such a word is the Scripture: therefore, etc. And, farther, why may not God's word discover its author as well as his works do? If "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handy-work," [Ps. xix. 1](#); if "even the least creatures preach God to us,"<sup>329</sup> they that bear not his image on them, yet have some *vestigia*, some "footsteps" of him; and much more [if] his greater and more noble works, the glorious fabric of heaven and earth, and man, the most excellent of his creatures on earth, show forth that excellency in them which manifests itself to be from none but God; and [if] he hath, in a word, left such an impress of himself upon his works, as that they generally proclaim themselves to be his; why should it be thought incredible that God should leave the like notices of himself upon his word, and stamp that upon it which might plainly evidence it to be his? Nay, if men do commonly make themselves known by their works, — writers by their skill, artists by their curious pieces; if Apelles could have drawn such a picture, Phidias have cut such a statue, Cicero have penned such an oration, that any who had judgment in such things might have said [that] such a man, and no other, was the author of such a work; surely, then, much more may God in so lively a manner express himself in his word as clearly to notify to us that it is his. And if any should say, God could have done it, but would not, I desire to know a good reason why God, who hath left us so plain and conspicuous evidences of his wisdom, power, and goodness on his creatures, would not leave the print of himself in the like manner upon his word.

*Arg. III. God's revealing himself to us in the Scripture is the first and highest revelation upon which our faith is built; and therefore that revelation is sufficient to manifest itself to us, even without the church's testimony.*<sup>330</sup> The reason of the consequence is, because faith (a divine one, such as we speak of) being always built upon revelation, whatever it be which is the first revelation, whereon our faith is built, must be sufficient to notify itself to us; otherwise, our faith is not founded upon any revelation at all, if that revelation needs something else, which is not revelation, to give credit to it, or if that which is the first revelation yet needs another to make it manifest to us it is not itself the first; — which is a palpable contradiction. And for the antecedent, I thus make it appear:— In the business of faith, either we must come to some first revelation, or we must go on from one to another without any end; for either the faith whereby I believe this revelation — that "the Scripture is the word of God" — to be divine, is founded upon this very revelation itself, — namely, the Scripture, which so many times tells me it is of God, — or upon some other revelation. If upon this itself, then I have what I would, — that this is the first revelation whereon my faith is built; but if on another, I ask again, Must I believe that for itself, or for some other? If for itself, then that must be the first; if for some other, I shall ask again, Am I to believe

329 Præsentem clamat quælibet herba Deum.

330 Vide Rob. Baron., *Contra Turnebul.*

that for itself, or for another? And so there will be no end, no first revelation on which my faith is founded, but I must go higher, and higher, even *in infinitum*.

Other arguments might be produced to confirm what we assert, and are by our divines; but I intended brevity in these; — and the truth we maintain will be more confirmed by what I am in the next place to say against the Papists' assertion.

III. *That, therefore, the testimony of the church is not the only sufficient ground* (nor indeed a sufficient one at all) of *our believing the divinity of the Scripture*, I shall prove by several arguments.

Arg. I. I argue from [Eph. ii. 20](#), And we “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” *The Scripture is the foundation of the church, and therefore hath not its authority, even in respect of us, from the church; but, on the contrary, the church hath its authority from the Scripture, upon which it depends in its very being, and without which it is not the church, nor if built upon any other foundation; it hath no authority but from the Scripture, — none in itself, but as thence it derives it, and we know none [that] it hath but as there we find it.* And this is spoken of the true church, and not merely the church in the popish sense. If ever we would find out the nature and definition of the church, we must seek it in the Scripture, where alone it is that we see it to be God's will to have a church upon earth, and by what means it is called, and of whom it is constituted, and with what power and privileges it is endowed. He that will question whether the Scripture be the word of God, will as easily question whether the church be the church of God, or whether God have any church or not. Now, if the church have all its authority from the Scripture, by which alone it is a church, and known to be so, how can it be with any reason said that the Scripture hath its authority, even as to us, from the church? For if the church have no authority but from the Scripture, then the authority of the church must suppose that of the Scripture, and the Scripture must be owned, or the church cannot be owned. For who knows what or which the church is, but as the Scripture describes it to us? And so the Scripture hath not its authority, as to us, from the church. For can the Scripture both give authority to the church, and yet receive its own authority from it? Can it authorize the church, before it be itself authorized by it? Can it give the church a power to communicate authority to it, and yet have no authority hitherto itself? Nay, can it be consistent with common sense, that the Scripture should give the church a power to bind men to the belief of it, and yet have no power in itself to bind the church to the belief of it?

Again: when they say the Scripture hath its authority from the church, I ask, How shall I know that there is a church? For if I be one that own no such thing as the Scripture (which the church is persuading me to believe), withal I own no such society as the church; and how will they prove there is such an one, but by the Scripture? For I, who am supposed to acknowledge no church, do acknowledge no authority it hath, and shall not take its own word. And yet if I grant there be a church, how shall I know that such a company of men

as pretend to be the church are really so? I shall not take their own testimony; I am not satisfied in their being witnesses to themselves. And if they will prove themselves to be the church by the Scripture, then either the Scripture must have authority, as to me, before the church, or else they prove one obscure thing by another. If they say there be certain signs and marks of the church inherent in it, by which it may be known, — alas! I know not those marks but by the Scripture, which describes the church. If they say the Spirit witnesseth by those marks that this is the church, why may not I say the same of the Scripture; and so, that be known without the testimony of the church to be the word of God, as well as the church to be the church of God? And yet, after all this, granting this society of men to be the church, how shall I know that this church is infallible? And if I know it not to be so, I am not so mad as to build my faith upon its authority. If they say, “Because it is governed by the Holy Ghost,” how shall I know that? for it is not obvious to me that it is. If they say, “Because Christ hath promised that it should,” I ask, Where? where can it be but in the Scripture? Sure, then, the Scripture must be owned, and have its authority, as to me, or their proof is invalid, and they do but trifle instead of arguing.

Before I proceed to another argument, let us examine what is excepted against this. To this text, [Eph. ii. 20](#), it is replied by some of the Papists, —

*Exception.* I. That “by ‘foundation’ is not meant the *Scripture* written by the apostles and prophets, but their *preaching*.”

*Answer.* But, 1. If that were granted, it would not prejudice our cause. What they wrote and preached is the same truth, and differs not essentially, but only in the way of delivery; one being delivered to their present hearers *viva voce*, and the other by writing, transmitted likewise to posterity: “Witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come,” [Acts xxvi. 22](#). So [Acts xvii](#).

2. The preaching of the apostles and prophets did last but a while; whereas Paul speaks of the lasting, perpetual foundation of the church.

3. If he speaks only of the preaching of the apostles and prophets, how comes he to join these two together? For the prophets were long since dead; and their preaching, if that only were the foundation of the church, could be the foundation of that church only which lived with them, and heard them.

*Except.* II. “He meant, therefore,” say some of our adversaries, “the *New Testament* prophets, who preached at the same time with the apostles.”

*Answer.* But that is not so easily proved as said: for though such prophets are mentioned in some places of the New Testament, it doth not follow that they must needs be understood here. For why doth the apostle mention them only, and not evangelists too, nay, pastors and teachers likewise, whom he joins all together in [Eph. iv. 11](#), and who did at the same time preach the same truth which the apostles did? Beside that, we find, by the doctrine of “the prophets” mentioned in the New Testament, the truth preached and written by the



prophets under the Old commonly understood. So, [2 Pet. i. 19](#), “A more sure word of prophecy.” [Heb. i. 1](#), “God spake to the fathers by the prophets.” So also, [Rom. i. 2](#), and [Luke i. 70](#). The apostles under the New Testament were the chief that taught, though New Testament prophets, as likewise evangelists, pastors, and teachers, did preach the same doctrine; as formerly, under the Old Testament, the prophets that then lived were the chief, though others beside, as the Levites, did teach “the good knowledge of the Lord,” [2 Chron. xxx. 22](#).

*Except.* III. “But,” say they again, “the Ephesians were not built upon Paul’s writings, which were not then extant, but on his preaching; and therefore these other kind of prophets must be understood, on whose preaching, together with the apostles’, they were built.

*Ans.* The preaching [of] the truth, or writing it, makes no difference; but still it is the same truth, which is the foundation of the church, whether it be written or preached. And though the Ephesians were built on the word *as preached* by Paul, yet what hinders but they might likewise be built on the word *as written* by former prophets; whom, though they could not now hear, yet they might read? And Paul himself proves what he preached, by what the prophets had written; that so both the word preached and written might be propounded to the Ephesians as one and the same foundation of their faith.

*Except.* IV. They say that “by ‘the church’ in this place is understood, not the pastors, but the people; because the pastors were they that preached; and therefore, if they were meant, it would follow that they should be built upon themselves.”

*Ans.* 1. It is most absurd to say, that the pastors and doctors of the church are not built upon the doctrine of the apostles and prophets. Who ever heard of one foundation for the faith of the teachers, and another for the faith of the people? It seems, then, by their own confession, [that] the pope and his clergy are not built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; and if they have not this foundation, I am sure they have no better. The faith of pastors and people is the same; and why is not the foundation the same too? Are *they* fit to build up others in the faith of the Scriptures, *who* are not themselves built upon the Scriptures? And it is idle to say, [that] they are built on the Holy Spirit: for will they separate the Spirit from the Scripture? What doth the Spirit teach, but out of, and according to, the Scripture? To be led by the Spirit, and yet built on the Scriptures, are very well consistent.

*Ans.* 2. It is not absurd to say, that the teachers of the church are built on the doctrine they teach; though *not as they teach it*, yet *as they have BEFORE received and believed it*. Indeed, they ought to offer nothing to others, as the foundation of their faith, but what is the foundation of their own; nor to hazard the souls of their hearers upon any worse bottom than they would venture their own souls. And it doth not follow from hence that they are taught by themselves, or are a foundation to themselves; but only, that the doctrine they have themselves believed and are built upon, — they deliver to others, that they too may believe it, and be built upon it.

Arg. II. *The doctrine delivered in the Scripture doth not, as to our receiving it, depend upon the church; and therefore neither doth the Scripture itself: the doctrine of the Scripture and the Scripture itself are really the same, and differ but in an accident of being written, or not written.* The same doctrines we have in the Scripture, were published and known before they were written; and they did not then depend upon the authority of the church; and why should they now? Doth the writing of them make them of less authority, or less credible, or less able to convince men's minds, than they formerly were? Upon the authority of what church did Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham, etc., receive the word of God, when it was yet unwritten? What council was there, what pope to persuade them of it? And how come the same truths to have less power and efficacy to persuade us than them? Will our adversaries say, the patriarchs received the word immediately from God himself? True, some of them did; but what is that to the church and her authority? Or will they say, those patriarchs from whom others received the word were infallible? They will hardly be able to prove it. How came Abraham to persuade his wife to tell a lie, and expose her chastity thereby, for the saving of his life, if he were infallible? And how came other patriarchs to allow polygamy, if they were infallible? And do not the Papists themselves tell us that the church of the Jews was not infallible; and that infallibility is the peculiar privilege of the gospel church, the promise of it being made only to that?<sup>331</sup>

And, to come down lower, Moses received many things of the Lord which were immediately received by the people, — as the law of the passover, [Exod. xii.](#), — and where the people presently answer that all the words which the Lord had said, they would do, [Exod. xxiv. 3.](#) Did the people themselves (“the church in the wilderness,” [Acts vii. 38](#)) give authority to these laws, or did the council of the elders do it? We find nothing of their being convened together upon any such account as to consider whether God's laws should be received or not. Or did they receive them on the authority of any other church? If so, which was it, where was it? Or, lastly, was Moses an Old Testament pope, and the virtual church of Israel? Then, belike, that church was infallible as well as the gospel, contrary to their own doctrine. That Moses was infallibly inspired in all that he commanded the people from God, is sure; but that ever he pressed them to receive the word of God on his own authority, or any but God's, can never be proved. If they say that the people received the word on the account of the miracles wrought by Moses, that is more to our purpose than theirs. And what shall we say of the law written in men's hearts? on whose authority is that received? It is the same for substance with the law written in the word; and must there be the testimony of the church to assure men that even this law too is of God? or, if it be acknowledged for its own light and power, whereby it manifests itself to be of God, why may not the law written in the word be so acknowledged too?

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331 *Becani Man. Controv., lib. i. cap. 3.*

But come we farther down. On whose authority were the sermons of the prophets, after Moses' time, received? When they spoke to the people in the name of the Lord, did they ever cite the testimony of the church, to vouch what they said to be indeed from the Lord? or, did they ever seek the suffrages of the high priests and governors of the church, to establish their doctrine as divine? Their ordinary style is, "Thus saith the Lord;" not, "Thus saith the church," or, "The church says, that the Lord saith thus."

Lastly. If we descend to the times of the New Testament, we shall find the same there. When our Saviour Christ himself preached, what he spoke was as much the word of God when he spake it as now that it is written; but neither did he refer himself, as to the divinity of his doctrine, to the authority of the church, nor did any believe it on that account. He did not refer it to the church; for he did not receive testimony from men, [John v. 34](#), — no, not from John Baptist himself, though of no small authority in the Jewish church, and generally taken to be a prophet. Though John, as his duty was, did bear witness to Christ, and point to him, — "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," [John i. 29, 36](#); — yet Christ had no need of this testimony to make himself be received as the Messiah, or what he preached as the word of God; as if the one or the other could not have been received without it. He therefore tells the Jews that he had "greater witness than that of John," [John v. 36](#); — first his works; then his Father himself, [verse 37](#); then the written word: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me," [verse 39](#). All this while, here is not one tittle of the church and its testimony; and if that be the only means whereby men can be assured of the divineness of the word, how comes Christ to overlook it? And that they who believed Christ's doctrine did not believe it on the authority of the church is clear; for the church of the Jews was generally corrupt, erred in many things, and therefore was unfit. And it was, especially as to its guides and officers, generally against Christ; and therefore unwilling to give testimony to him. It neither owned him nor his doctrine; so that they who received and believed Christ's preaching, did it on some other account than the testimony of the then present church. If the Papists shall say, they received his doctrine on the account of Christ's own divine authority, I would inquire, how they came to know he had any such authority; for that Christ was the Messiah, and, consequently, had this divine authority, were some of the truths he preached. If they say, that Christ's doctrine was received either upon the account of his miracles, or of its agreement with the scripture of the Old Testament, they say more for us than for themselves, and, either way, desert their cause.

And if we look to the apostles that followed Christ, and preached the same doctrine, we shall see that it was not received on the account of the church, no more than commanded to the hearers thereon. In [Acts ii. 41](#), upon Peter's preaching, three thousand believed: "They gladly received the word;" they did not, it seems, expect the testimony of the church to tell them whether it were the word or not. In [Acts iv. 4](#), we read of either five thousand more,



or so many as made up the whole five thousand. And in [Acts viii.](#) the Samaritans receive the gospel on Philip's preaching; and afterward, the eunuch. And, to pass by others, the Bereans and Thessalonians receive the word, in [Acts xvii.](#) Of the former it is said, that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so," [verse 11.](#) Of the latter, Paul testifies that "they received the word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God," [1 Thess. ii. 13.](#) All this while, here is no church interposing its authority, or asserting the divineness of what Peter, or Philip, or Paul preached. On what account, then, did these people believe the word preached by the apostles? "On the authority of the church," say the Papists. But what church? "Why," says a great one among them,<sup>332</sup> speaking of the Thessalonians, "the voice of Paul was the voice of the church, when he preached to the Thessalonians; and so they, in receiving the word on Paul's authority, received it on the authority of the church." Say the same of Peter and Philip.

Paul, it seems, then, was the church; or else how could Paul's preaching be the voice of the church? What kind of church, then, was Paul? Was he the church virtual? Was he a pope, and was Peter, and Philip, and the rest of the apostles and evangelists, so too? A blessed church, sure, that had so many popes! or rather, a miserable one, that either had no visible head or had so many! If they say, Paul's voice was the voice of the church, because he was an officer of it, by whom the church published the doctrine she believed and was to propagate; — Paul was indeed an officer of the church; but yet made so by Jesus Christ himself, — not an apostle of men, nor by man, [Gal. i. 1.](#) And the doctrine he preached was no otherwise the doctrine of the church, than as it was the same which the church believed, but never taught it him; for he "received it not of men, neither was taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," [verse 12.](#) And, therefore, they might more reasonably have said, that the voice of Paul was the voice of Christ; the word he preached being more properly the word of Christ, who was the author of it, than the word of the church, who only received it of Christ. But what will become of this fine invention of our Jesuit, if the Thessalonians did not receive the word on the authority of Paul himself, whether in his single or representative capacity, or call it as you please? And, surely, they did not; for then his authority must be owned, ere, on the account of that, his preaching could be believed. But both Paul and his authority, whatever it were, were unknown to the Thessalonians when he first preached among them; and therefore could not induce them to believe what he taught. The same we may say of the other apostles, in their first planting the gospel when they came to the Gentiles; they were unknown till they made themselves and their authority known by their preaching. And when they came to the Jews, where they were known, yet they were not trusted, nor



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their apostolical authority acknowledged. And so it could prevail neither with the one nor with the other, till their doctrine was first believed.

Arg. III. *The Scripture hath its authority, in relation to us, before the church pass its judgment concerning it; and therefore it hath not that authority from the church.* This will appear, —

1. By the concession of the Papists themselves, who acknowledge that the church only declares the Scripture to be authentic, but doth not make it so. Surely, then, it was authentic in itself before that declaration of the church, which is only a pronouncing that to be which was before. And if it be in itself authentic, it is so to us too; that is, it hath in itself a power of binding us to the belief of it, so soon as we come to hear of it, whether the church hath declared its authenticity or not.

2. If the Scripture hath not its authority as to us, before the judgment of the church, then either it must be a private or public judgment of the church which gives it that authority. A private one it cannot be: for when we speak of the authority of the Scripture *as to us*, it is understood of all Christians everywhere; and it is not fit that a private judgment of the church, or, which is the same, the judgment of a private church, should give laws to all the rest, Nor can it be the public testimony, or that of the catholic church; for none such can be produced by the Papists from whence the Scripture hath its authority. Let them, if they can, show us the first general council that ever declared the Scripture to be the word of God. The council of Jerusalem, in [Acts xv. 1](#), if it were a general one, is the first we read of; and that toucheth not the point in hand, — doth not declare the Scripture to be authentic, but takes it for granted. They that were there met cite the scripture of the Old Testament, and thereby own its authority, but do not then first establish it. And Peter and the rest do the like in their preaching, [Acts ii., iii.](#) And dare the Papists say, then, that the Old Testament was not authentic before this council? Had the church hitherto no certain canon, nor authentic Scripture, to be the rule of its faith? After this council we find no general one till that of Nice. And was the church of God all this while too (for three hundred years) without the canon of the Scripture? to say nothing that the Council of Nice itself did never define which it was; but acknowledged it as already received.

3. If a council meets to declare the divine authority of the Scripture, we would know by what authority it meets. If the several pastors of the church come together on the authority and by the command of the Scripture itself, then it hath its authority before they meet; else it could not make it their duty so to do. If by some revelation or impulse of the Spirit without the Scripture, what kind of spirit is that which acts in separation from the Scripture? And if the Papists will affirm this, let them no more call themselves good Catholics, but even the worst of fanatics.

Arg. IV. *The authority o/the church is not more certain or clear, as to us, than that of the Scripture; and therefore the Scripture cannot have its authority from it.* That which proves



another thing, must itself be more clear and better known. But that the authority of the church is not better known to us than that of the Scripture will soon appear; for whatever authority the church hath, she must prove it either from herself, or from something else.

If from any thing else, it must either be from the testimony of those that are out of the church; but they know not the church, nor any authority it hath: or from the Scripture; but then the authority of the Scripture must be more known than that of the church: or from the Spirit; but how will they make it out that they have the testimony of the Spirit for them, otherwise than by the Scripture, in and by which he is wont to bear witness? If they say the Spirit witnesseth to the authority of the church inwardly, so as to persuade the minds of dissenters that the church is the church of God; this is merely begged, and not proved, and yet will not satisfy neither. For we ask not, "What is the efficient cause of men's believing the authority of the church?" but, "What is the argument whereon that belief is grounded, and whereby the church persuades men of its own authority?"

Or else, on the other side, if the church prove its authority from itself, then the same thing shall be proved by itself. But yet, I ask, What judgment of the church is it whereby its authority is proved? They say, "Both the testimony of the ancient and of the present church." But how can the testimony of the ancient church be known but by the writings of those that formerly lived, the books of fathers, and decrees of councils? But we would know how we shall have greater assurance that those books were written by those fathers whose names they bear, and those decrees made by those councils to which they are ascribed, than that the Scripture is the word of God. How came we to be more certain that Cyprian's or Austin's works were written by them, than that the four Gospels were written by the four evangelists, or Paul's Epistles by him? And if the present church prove its authority by the ancient church, it must prove it but to very few; for they are but few that ever saw, and yet fewer that ever read, the writings of the ancients; and many, perhaps, have never heard of them. And besides, the ancient church was some time the present church; and when it was so, from whence might it prove its authority? From some more ancient, no doubt; according to our adversaries' discourse, it must be. But from whence did the first church prove its authority (for we must come to a first), when there was none before it to prove it by?

Lastly. The authority of the present church cannot be proved by the testimony of the present church. For then it must be either by a part of it; but that cannot be, for a part of the present church is inferior to the whole of it, and he that questions the authority of the whole will no less question that of a part: or else by the whole church; and then the authority of the whole church must be proved by the authority of the whole church, — we must believe she is the church, because she says she is the church.

*Arg. V. If we are to believe the divinity of the Scripture merely on the church's authority, then that faith can be but a human faith, because founded on no better than the authority of men. Our faith can be no better than its foundation; a divine faith cannot be built upon*



human testimony. But the Papists themselves are ashamed to own a thing so grossly absurd, as that the faith whereby we believe one main article of religion — the divineness of the Scripture — should be but a human faith.

*Except.* To this, therefore, they say, that “the faith whereby we believe the Scripture to be the word of God is a divine faith, and built on the testimony of God; and that testimony is no other than the testimony of the church.”<sup>333</sup> We easily reply, —

*Ans.* 1. That the church’s testimony is no otherwise the testimony of God than as it agrees with the word of God; and when it doth so, we are to believe what the church says, not merely because the church says it, but because God says it. And if the church holds forth to me any divine truth, and I yield my assent to it merely because the church declares it to me, though what I believe be a divine truth, yet the faith with which I receive it will be but a human faith; the truth is of God, but my faith is in man. Whereas, if I believe any truth because God speaks it, though not by the church, nor any officer of it, but some private person, yet my faith is a divine faith, and the testimony of a private person, speaking what the Scripture speaks, is as really the voice of God as the testimony of the church.

2. Some of the most learned of the Papists themselves<sup>334</sup> make a great difference between the testimony of God and of the church. The former they grant to be altogether divine; the latter, *modo quodam*, “after a sort” divine. The former they reckon to be the primary foundation of faith; the latter, but the secondary. Nay, some of them acknowledge that faith which rests only on the authority of the church not to be divine; and some, the church’s testimony to be but the *conditio sine qua non*, “the condition without which we cannot” believe the divinity of the Scriptures; — which surely they would scarcely do, if they thought the testimony of the church to be the testimony of God. And if the testimony of the church be but “in some sort” a divine testimony, the faith which is built upon it can be but “in some sort” a divine faith. And if the testimony of the church be but the secondary foundation of faith, how comes it to be (according to Stapleton) the testimony of God himself, which surely they will allow to be the primary foundation of faith?

3. Before they can evince the testimony of the church to be the testimony of God, they must first prove the church to be absolutely infallible, and see they agree among themselves about it; lest we be still at a loss how to know what is that church whose testimony is the voice of God himself. And, —

4. If I do but deny the testimony of the church to be the testimony of God (as we do), how will they prove it? “By the testimony of the church.” I shall not take its word. Or will they say it hath such notes of its being the voice of God in it, as thereby to manifest itself to

333 “Deus per ecclesiam loquens non aliter loquitur, quàm si immediatè per visiones et somnia, aut quovis alio supernaturali modo revelandi, nobis loqueretur.” — Stapletonus.

334 Bellarminus; Becanus apud Rob. Baron.; *Melchior Carus, lib. ii. cap. 8.*



be his voice? They will get nothing by that; for I am ready to say the same of the Scripture. Or, lastly, will they prove it by the Scripture? Then they plainly give away their cause, and own the authority of the Scripture to be before the testimony of the church.

*Arg. VI. If we must believe the Scripture to be the word of God only because the church determines it to be so, then we must believe all things in it to be of God/or the same reason only.* That “Christ came into the world to save sinners,” 1 Tim. i. 15; that “whosoever believeth in him shall have everlasting life,” etc., John iii. 16; and all the promises of the gospel, must be believed to be made to us by God, only because the church tells us they were; and the truth of them, as to us, depends merely on the church’s authority: and so all the comfort of our hearts, and the hopes we have of heaven, must be primarily derived from the authority of the church, and ultimately resolved into it. What a case had we been in, if it had not pleased the church to receive these promises into the canon! And if the Papists say true, she might not have received them: for, as we shall see by-and-by,<sup>335</sup> it depends wholly upon the church what books shall be canonical, and what not; and, by the same reason, what parts of those books; and, consequently, whether all the promises of the gospel shall be canonical or not. And so we owe all our hope to the church’s charity; and must count her a good-natured mother for not cutting off these “breasts of consolations,” Isa. lxvi. 11; but leaving something for her poor children to hang upon, to keep them from perishing. Belike it is the church’s favour that all the world is not damned. I am sure the best promises in the Scripture, if the popish doctrine take place, can afford but cold comfort. For if I be asked what ground I have for my hopes of salvation, I answer, The promises of God. If I be asked again, “Are these promises true?” I answer, Yes, “But how doth that appear?” Why, because God made them. “But how do I know God made them?” Well enough; for the church says he did. Here the authority of the church is the first foundation of all my hopes: and poor ones, God knows, they are, if no better grounded, and little comfort I am like to have in them. It is to little purpose to tell me the testimony of the church is not merely human; for is it merely divine? If it be not, it cannot found a faith which is merely divine. And when my soul and the everlasting salvation of it lie at stake, I think I am concerned to see that my faith and hopes have a sure foundation; and *that*, I am sure, none can be which is not merely divine.

*Arg. VII. If the testimony of the church is necessary, and the only sufficient reason of our believing the divineness of the Scripture, then it will certainly follow, that no man who is out of the church can be called into the church by the Scripture; — which is pretty strange doctrine, and yet I see not how possibly the Papists can evade it. For they that are called into the church by the Scripture are persuaded by the Scripture, and convinced by it, that it is their duty to join themselves to the church; but this can never be if the Scripture be of no authority with them.*<sup>336</sup> Whatever convinceth or persuades a man, must certainly have some authority

335 See the Papists’ Objections, under head IV. of this discourse, pages 522–532. — Ed.

336 Vide Chamieri Panstratia, de Can., lib. vi. c. 18.

with him; and if, therefore, the church persuades men by the Scripture, that Scripture must needs be received and owned ere they be joined to the church, the Scripture being the very reason and argument whereby they are persuaded. The conclusion will not be yielded to, if the medium from whence it is inferred be not first granted; and in this case the Scripture is the medium the church makes use of, in persuading men to embrace her society. Thus it was in the beginning of the gospel church; Peter disproves the conceit some of the Jews had of him and the rest of the apostles, that they were “full of new wine,” [Acts ii. 13](#), by the testimony of Scripture, prophesying concerning the pouring out of the Holy Ghost in the latter days, [Joel ii. 28–32](#). Then he proves the resurrection of Christ by [Ps. xvi. 8](#), etc.; and his ascension into heaven by [Ps. cx. 1](#); and his being the Christ promised to David to be of the fruit of his loins, by [Ps. cxxxii. 11](#). And hereupon follows the bringing into the church three thousand of the hearers, who, “when they heard these things, were pricked in their hearts,” [Acts ii. 37](#). And so, in [Acts iii.](#), how often doth Peter cite the prophets, particularly Moses! [verse 22](#). And Philip thus preacheth to the eunuch out of the prophet Isaiah, [Acts viii. 27–39](#); and Peter again to Cornelius out of the prophets, [Acts x. 43](#); and Paul, in [Acts xiii.](#), where we find some, both Jews and Gentiles, wrought on by his preaching, and brought into the church. And was it the authority of these apostles (that is, in the Papists’ style, the church) that persuaded thus many? Alas! they that heard them did not once dream of their being the church; and therefore did not believe on that account.

*Arg. VIII. No law receives its authority of binding men to subjection to it from those that are merely subject to it, and did not make it; therefore the Scripture hath not its authority from the church, which is merely subject to it as a law, and is not the author of it.* The whole church is so, and not only pastors, but people; and if the pope himself be not under the Scripture, as the law by which he is to be ruled, well may he pass for ὁ ἄνομος, “that wicked or lawless one,” spoken of in [2 Thess. ii. 8](#). True, indeed, a law may be made known by a herald that proclaims it; but who can say it receives its authority of binding the subjects from him, when he himself is one of them, and as much bound to it as any else? Allow the church to be the herald which proclaims and publisheth this law, must she therefore give authority to it? Put [a] case: a subject hears of a law, though not by a herald; — is he not bound to submit to it, because he did not hear it proclaimed? Suppose a man come to the knowledge of the Scripture some other way than by the ministry of the church, in the popish sense, — that is, the pastors of it (as it is storied the Indians and the Iberians did, by the help of private persons), — is he not bound to submit to it? Must he suspend his belief till he have the testimony of the church to assure him that the Scripture is of God?

If it be said, that “a law doth not bind till it be promulged, and the promulgation of it is the church’s business;” I answer, God hath published his law sufficiently in the Scripture, and to it all must be subject to whom the Scripture comes, whether the church farther tells them that it is the word of God or not; as in the case mentioned, it was received and submitted



to. I wonder how the church was the herald that proclaimed the law of God to the Iberians, when they received it from a poor captive woman. Stapleton (before) tells us, that when Paul preached to the Thessalonians, his voice was the voice of the church; and, I pray, was this poor woman's voice the voice of the church too? By my consent, let her even be the church itself, virtual, infallible, — a mere pope Joan I. But, farther: if the church publish this law we speak of, and it doth not bind till published by her, upon what account did she herself believe it when she first published it? (Let the question be concerning the herald himself, why he believes the law which himself proclaims.) Doth the church believe the Scripture to be the word of God at all, antecedently to her own publishing and propounding it to others, or not? Is her faith wrought in her by the testimony she herself gives to the Scripture, or by something before? I suppose the Papists will scarce be so mad as to say the former; for what kind of faith must that be, when a man believes merely upon his own testimony? And how can the church be the church before she believes? If they say the church's faith in the Scripture was wrought in her before her own testimony concerning its divineness, I would fain know what that is by which it is wrought. If it be any thing in the word itself, or be the testimony of the Spirit, why may not I, or any man else, believe the Scripture, before the church give in her testimony concerning it, upon the same account that she herself doth? But if she believe the divinity of the Scripture upon the testimony of the former church, I would know, again, what better assurance she hath of the testimony of the former church than of the Scripture itself, seeing she can know it only out of the writings of the ancients; and whoever questions the authority of the Scripture, may, upon much better grounds, question the writings of fathers, and decrees of councils, as was said before.

*Arg. IX. They that believe not the Scripture to be the word of God, when propounded to them as such, though they have not the testimony of the church to confirm them in it, yet sin in their not believing it; and are therefore bound to believe it antecedently to the church's testimony (for if they were not bound to believe it, they should not sin in disbelieving it): and consequently the Scripture hath its authority in itself, and before the testimony of the church, and therefore not from it.* That men sin in not believing the Scripture even without the church's testimony, is proved from [Acts xiii. 46, 51](#), where Paul shakes off the dust of his feet against the unbelieving Jews, and tells them they "judge themselves unworthy of eternal life." See [Acts xxviii. 24](#), etc., where he declares their actual unbelief to be the effect of their hard-heartedness; which, though it might be judicial, they being left of God to themselves and their own lusts, yet withal it was sinful too, and contracted by themselves. And will any man say that these Jews, in refusing the gospel, did not sin? I suppose the Papists themselves scarcely will. If they say, as formerly, that Paul's testimony was the testimony of the church; I answer, those Jews owned no such thing as a gospel church, nor any authority it had to bind them to the belief of the gospel; and consequently could not own Paul as an officer of that church, his apostleship being merely a gospel office; which a man could not submit to

who did not first receive the gospel by which he was constituted an apostle. If they say, they might know him to be an apostle by the miracles he wrought; I answer again, that when he preached at Antioch in Pisidia, we have no mention of any miracle he there wrought; yet some, both Jews and Gentiles, believed, [Acts xiii. 42, 43](#): and therefore they neither received himself nor his preaching upon the account of his miracles; nor could miracles make it the duty of the unbelieving Jews to submit to Paul as an officer of the gospel church, when no miracle was wrought by him. If it be said that he was known by the fame of his miracles elsewhere wrought, which gave credit to him; then it will follow that Paul was to be believed for his miracles' sake, as well as the gospel for his sake; and thence, again, that the gospel was not to be believed merely for Paul's own authority, but principally for his miracles, it being for their sake that he himself was owned as having any authority. And if so, either Paul's authority was not the authority of the church, or the authority of Paul as the church was not supreme; for that of his miracles was above it, — that which procured credit to him was of greater authority than himself. Upon the whole, it seems, by this reply of the Papists, that miracles were the great thing which procured credit to Paul's preaching; and if they did, the authority of the church did not, — unless, as before they made Paul and the church the same, so here they will make miracles and the church the same.

*Arg. X. It cannot be certainly known, by the testimony of the church, that the Scripture is the word of God; and therefore it hath not, as to us, its authority from the church.* If it may be certainly known that the Scripture is the word of God by the testimony of the church, then either it must be by the testimony of the universality of believers, or of the pastors. Not the former: for (beside that the Papists themselves exclude them, and say that the Scripture is to have authority *with* them, but not *from* them,<sup>337</sup>) either we speak of the multitude of believers separately and disjunctively; and so they cannot give credit to the Scripture, when they are all of them fallible and liable to error: or else all together and in conjunction; but so likewise they cannot certify us of the divineness of the Scripture, because they never did, never will, meet together to do it. And we may stay long enough ere we believe the divinity of the Scripture, if we tarry till all the believers in the world meet together to give in their verdict concerning it. If we speak of the church merely in the popish sense, for the pastors of it, there will be as much uncertainty as in the other; for either we must consider them separately too, or in conjunction. If separately, they are all liable to error; and, according to the Papists themselves, they do all believe the Scripture on the authority of the church; and therefore cannot give authority to it. If we consider them all together, when did, or when will, the pastors of all the churches in the world meet together, to give their joint testimony to the Scripture? And if they should, why are we bound to believe them? They were not infallible singly, nor can they be any more so conjunctly. If all the several parts of the integral



337 *Vide Syntagma Thesium in Acad. Salmurien.*



— the church — be liable to error or corruption, why is not the whole? But suppose the pastors meet by their delegates in a general council, will that mend the matter? Not at all, that I see; for it is not yet determined by the Papists themselves, where the supreme authority, which should give testimony to the Scripture, doth reside, — whether in pope, council, or both. And so we are left at uncertainties, and know not to whom to go, — whose word to take; but must suspend our belief of the divineness of the Scripture, till it be agreed upon among our adversaries whose authority is indeed supreme, and to be relied upon.

Yet put [the] case, [that] a general council be the chief which gives testimony to the Scripture: how shall we know that this council hath not erred, in determining the Scripture to be the word of God? Shall we know it by the Scripture? It is supposed we doubt concerning that; and so its testimony is not valid. Or by the testimony of the church? Why, this council is the church itself, which determines in its own case; and so we must believe this council hath not erred, because it says it hath not erred. If the pope be the church virtual, and we must receive the Scripture on his credit, the same objection will be against him; for how shall we know he doth not err? By the Scripture? But it is yet in question. Or by the testimony of the church? The pope himself is this church; and then we must believe he hath not erred, only because he saith he hath not erred.

Lastly, let pope and council both together be this church: how shall we know they both together do not err? Not by the Scripture, for that is not yet owned; nor by the testimony of the church, for pope and council together, are this church, and their testimony concerning themselves is not to be received. And, to conclude, how shall we know that pope and council are the church? Not because they themselves say so, nor because the Scripture doth; for that is not yet believed. Not by the testimony of the Spirit; for why shall that bear witness any more to the church, than to the Scripture, that it is the word of God? Nor yet by notes or marks inherent in the church; for why may not the same be allowed to the Scripture? And how shall we know these marks to be true, but by the Scripture; by which alone we can judge of the nature and properties of the church? And yet still it is supposed that the Scripture is not believed.

IV. This may suffice, to show the absurdity of the popish doctrine. Let us, in the next place, see *what grounds they have for it, and how they oppose the truth*. I shall only speak to the chief of their arguments, and reduce them to as few heads as I well can. Any that would see them more largely handled, may consult several of our protestant divines, who speak more fully to this point than the shortness of a sermon will permit.

*Object.* I. “Either,” say they, “the authority of the Scripture must be known by the church, or by the Scripture itself, or by the testimony of the Spirit; but it cannot be known either of the two latter ways: and therefore can only [be known by] the first.”

First. That it cannot be known *by the Scripture itself* they prove, because “neither the whole Scripture can be proved by the whole, nor one part of it by another. For if a man deny

the whole Scripture, it will be in vain to attempt the proof of one part by another, when such an one doth no more receive the authority of one part than of another. And the whole cannot be proved by the whole; for then the same thing should be proved by itself: and whereas that which is brought to prove another thing should itself be more clear than that which it is to prove, in this case one obscure thing should prove another; or rather, an obscure thing be brought to prove itself, for the whole Scripture cannot be said to be more clear or better known than itself.”

Before I propound the other part of their proof, I shall answer to this.

*Ans.* The divine authority of the Scripture may be known by the Scripture itself. For, —

1. *The authority of one part of it may be proved by another part, to those that do not deny the whole.* Some there have been, and still may be, who have received some part of the Scriptures, and not others; to such we may prove that part which they deny by that which they allow. The Sadducees acknowledged the Five Books of Moses, but not “the Prophets;” our Saviour Christ, therefore, when he had to do with them, did not cite the prophecy of Daniel to prove the resurrection of the dead, but Moses’ writings, [Matt. xxii. 1](#). But when he dealt with others of the Jews who received the whole Old Testament, he proved what he spake out of other parts of it, — out of the prophets themselves; and so bids them, more generally, “search the Scriptures,” [John v. 39](#). Why may not we do likewise? We shall see how the Old and New Testament prove each other; so that we may argue with men that acknowledge the one, so as, by that they allow, to prove that which they deny:—

(1.) *The Old Testament is proved by the New.* Christ divides the whole Old Testament into Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms; and thereby declares them all to be canonical, [Luke xxiv. 44](#). That was then the usual way by which the Jews did divide the Old Testament. And here in the text Abraham sends Dives’ brethren to Moses and the Prophets. And Christ, mentioning a place out of the Psalms, bears witness to the whole Old Testament under the name of “The Scripture:” “The Scripture cannot be broken,” [John x. 34, 35](#). And we find particular parts of the Old Testament proved in the New. In [Matt. v.](#), Christ confirms the Law of Moses, as to its divine authority, when he explains it; beside other places, in which he speaks of some particular laws. In [Matt. xii. 38–42](#), and [Luke iv. 25–27](#), and especially [Heb. xi.](#), the historical part of the Scripture is confirmed. And how many testimonies have we out of the Psalms and Prophets everywhere which do the same! The twelve lesser prophets are at once proved by Stephen’s alleging them, in [Acts vii. 42](#), where the testimony cited is out of Amos: but Stephen mentions the “book of the prophets;” that is, that volume of the smaller prophets which, among the Jews, was reckoned as one book.

(2.) *The New Testament is confirmed by the Old.* For how often do Christ and his apostles prove their doctrine out of the Old Testament! When they quote the Old Testament, it is a good proof of its authority to any that own the New; and when by those quotations they prove their own doctrine, it is a good argument for the proof of the New Testament to them



that believe the Old, as the case was of the Jews at that time. And therefore our Saviour Christ refers them to the Old Testament, particularly Moses, [John v. 45, 46](#), for the proof of the great doctrine he held forth to them, — that he was the Messiah that should come into the world. So Peter, in [Acts iii. 22, 23](#), refers to [Deut. xviii. 18, 19](#), to prove what he was preaching: “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you,” etc. The same we may say of the types of the Old Testament, — that they confirm the New, in which we find them fulfilled. If any say, “We find no particular confirmation of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther in the New Testament;” I answer, They are confirmed by our Saviour Christ in his general division of the Old Testament, according to the Jewish account, into the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, under which these books were contained, the whole volume of the Hagiographa going under the name of “The Psalms.”

2. “But now, what if we have to do with *those that deny the whole Scripture*, — *admit no part of it?* how shall we convince them that it is the word of God?” I answer, —

(1.) Not by the church, be sure; for if they have no reverence for any part of the Scripture, they will have as little for the church, which hath no being, as a church, but from the Scripture. And therefore it will be a most vain thing to attempt a proof of the Scripture, either in part or in the whole, by the church, which is as unknown, in the nature of a church, to them that question the Scripture, as the Scripture itself is.

(2.) *We would prove the whole Scripture by the whole*, as well as one part of it by another. For as the whole system of God’s works in the creation proves itself to be of God, and to have him for its author, [Ps. xix. 1](#), etc., by all those eminent signs and effects of God’s goodness, power, and wisdom, which are to be seen in the whole; so likewise doth the whole Scripture prove God to be the author of it, by all those signs and evidences of his wisdom, goodness, power, and holiness, which appear in the whole, and manifest it to be of God. Nor doth it follow from hence, that if the whole Scripture prove itself, it is, as the Papists say, more known than itself, simply and absolutely, though in some respects it certainly may be so; as a man in one respect, may be more known than himself in another. A man, when he hath given some eminent proofs of his learning, is thereby more known than without them he is; so the Scripture, too, considered with all those evidences of God’s goodness, wisdom, holiness, etc., which appear in it, is more known than itself, when these are not considered. How do we prove the sun to be the sun, but by the glory of its light, which so far excels the light of other stars? And is not the sun, considered with its light, more known to us than considered in itself. How do we come to the knowledge of the nature of things in the world, but by considering their properties, qualities, effects, etc.; which plainly declare what their nature is, seeing such properties, etc., could not be but where such a nature is? So likewise here, there are those properties in the Scripture, those excellencies, which could be from none but God; and, therefore, make it appear that that writing, which hath those



excellencies in it, is of God. To speak of these distinctly is not my present business, not having to do with them that deny the Scripture.

Secondly. "We cannot," say the Papists again, "know the Scripture to be the word of God *by the testimony of the Spirit*. For either it is by the public testimony, which is that of the church" (and if this be granted, they have enough); "or it is private testimony. But then," they say, "it will follow, — 1. That our faith in the Scripture is enthusiasm. 2. That if the private testimony of the Spirit be questioned, it cannot be proved but by the Scripture; and so the Scripture being proved by the Spirit, and the Spirit again by the Scripture, we shall run in a round, which is no lawful way of arguing."

*Ans.* To this I answer, that we know the Scripture to be of God by the public testimony of the Spirit; but I deny his public testimony to be his witnessing by the church. It is indeed his witnessing by the Scripture itself, when he witnesseth it to be of God, by those excellencies of it which evidence it so to be; and this he witnesseth to all that have their eyes open to see it: and in that respect it may be called "public." And when he witnesseth the same thing, by the same means, in the hearts of particular believers, and so applies his public testimony to private consciences, enlightening and enabling men to believe upon his public testimony, you may, if you please, call that "his private testimony." This clearly cuts off all that the adversaries object; and no such things will follow, as they pretend, upon what we maintain. We know no other private testimony of the Spirit, but this particular application of his public one; and then, I am sure, there is no danger of enthusiasm. For that is properly enthusiasm, when God reveals any thing to men's minds immediately and in an extraordinary way, and without the intervention of the usual means whereby he is wont to make himself known to men; as in former times he did to the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles (and the enthusiasm both the Papists and we find fault with is, when men pretend to this, which yet they have not): but when God makes known his will in an ordinary way, by the use of instruments and means for the conveying of spiritual knowledge to them, this is not enthusiasm; as when "faith comes by hearing," [Rom. x. 17](#). And so it is in the case before us: when the Spirit witnesseth to the hearts of private believers that the Scripture is the word of God, he doth it in an ordinary way, — working in them a faith of the Scripture by those arguments of divinity which are in the Scripture itself; and makes use of them as means to induce them to believe. As the light and brightness of the sun is the medium whereby it is known to be the sun; so that divine light and power which is in the word, is the very medium and argument whereby the Spirit, enabling us to perceive it, persuades us that that word is the word of God. And I would ask our adversaries, Can a private man believe the divinity of the Scripture merely on the authority of the church, without the Spirit's witnessing it to him by that authority? If they say, "Yes," then they must acknowledge that faith to be merely human, because not wrought by God. If they say, "No," (as they must if they be constant to themselves, in holding that the Spirit witnesseth by the church,) then, when the Spirit witnesseth to the



conscience of a private believer by the church, why is not that enthusiasm too? For when he witnesseth to a private conscience by this application of his public testimony, here is as much a private spirit, and a private testimony, as any we speak of. The only difference is in the medium the Spirit useth in this private work; which they say is the testimony of the church, and we say is the Scripture itself. Both of us agree that it is the Spirit's public testimony; but they call one thing so, and we another. If they say that yet this is not enthusiasm, because here is no immediate revelation, but means are made use of; I say the same of the Spirit's witnessing to the divinity of the Scripture in the heart of a private believer by the Scripture itself, or those notes of divinity which are apparent in the word. This is no more immediate than the other, nor any less [so], by the intervention of means.

And for the other consequent they would infer from the private testimony of the Spirit, — that then “we shall run in a round, and prove the Scripture to be the word of God by the testimony of the Spirit, and prove the Spirit again by the Scripture,”<sup>338</sup> — there is as little fear of this as of the other. For we bring not the private testimony of the Spirit in our consciences (against which only this objection is made), or his applying his public testimony to us in a way of illumination and conviction of our minds, as the argument inducing us to believe; but that, we say, is his public testimony in the word, when he witnesseth its divinity to us by that excellency, light, and power which is in the word itself, and makes use of that to persuade us to believe. The Spirit, indeed, is the efficient of our faith, or the agent which causeth us to believe, enlightening our minds, and drawing our hearts to consent to the truth; but the evidences of divinity we see in the Scripture, through the Spirit's enlightening us, is the reason or motive of our believing; they move us to believe objectively, but the Spirit effectively. So that here is no danger of a circle in our discourse, or proving *idem per idem*. For if I be asked, how I know the Scripture to be the word of God; this question may have a double sense: for either it is meant of the power and virtue whereby I believe; and then I answer, By the power and efficiency of the Spirit of God, opening the eyes of my understanding, and enabling me to believe; — or it is meant of the medium or argument made use of, and by which, as a motive, I am drawn to believe; and then I answer, Those impressions of divinity the Spirit hath left on the word, and by which he witnesseth it to be of God, are the argument or motive persuading me to believe. Now, when they ask how I know the Spirit, who witnesseth in my conscience to the divinity of the Scripture, to be the Spirit of God, the question is plainly, by what means or argument I am persuaded that it is the Spirit of God; and then I answer, By those properties of the Spirit which the Scripture mentions. And so the question, how I know the Scripture to be the word of God, either is concerning



338 Vide R. Baron., *Contra Turneb.*; *Cameronem De Verbo Dei*; et *Turretinum De Cr. Pontiff.*

the *efficient* of my belief of the Scripture, or else it is not to the purpose (for I do not allege the efficiency or inward operating of the Spirit as the *motive* of my faith); and the latter is concerning the *objective cause* or *argument* inducing me to believe the Spirit to be the Spirit of God. The mistake is this, — they would fasten upon us, that we make the Spirit in his inward work upon our hearts to be the motive to our faith; whereas we only make it to be the efficient of our faith.

To conclude this answer to their first argument:— let us see if it may not be retorted upon themselves. If the church's testimony give authority to the Scripture, as Papists say, then if a man deny the authority of the church, how will they prove it? For neither one part of the church can give credit to the other, when the whole is questioned; nor can the whole church give credit to itself; for then the whole church will be more known than itself. Or if we ask, How comes the church to believe the Scripture? is it by its own testimony? But surely it must believe it ere it can give testimony to it Or is it by the testimony of the Spirit? If so, is it by the public testimony of the Spirit? That cannot be; for, according to them, that is no other than the testimony of the church itself, the absurdity of which hath been already shown. Or if it be the private testimony of the Spirit; then they, by their own arguing, will run into enthusiasm, as well as we. And, indeed, they do plainly run into a circle, in their proving the Scripture by the authority of the church, and the authority of the church again by the Scripture; for with them the authority of the church is the motive or argument, whereby they prove the divine authority of the Scripture, and that again is the motive or argument, by which they prove the authority of the church. And so both the church and the Scripture are more known than each other, and yet less, too: more known, because they prove each other; and less known, because they are proved by each other. Here they are themselves in a noose. But it is no matter; the pope's omnipotency can easily break it, or the church's authority make her logic canonical, though all the Aristotles in the world should make it apocryphal!

*Object.* II. "It is necessary for us, in religion, to have the canon of Scripture certain: but this we cannot have, otherwise than by the church; because its authority is most certain, and the only one which is sufficient, to remove all doubts concerning the divineness of the Scripture out of our minds; both because God speaks by the church, and because the church best knows the Scripture. She is Christ's bride, and therefore best knows the voice of the Bridegroom; she hath the Spirit of Christ, and therefore can best judge of his word and the style of it."

*Ans.* We deny that the canon of the Scripture cannot be known but by the church, and the contrary hath been already proved: the Scripture hath been owned and received where no such judgment of the church hath been. And it is as false, that the authority of the church is the greatest and most certain; for that of the Scripture, upon which the church and her authority depend, is above it. God speaks in the Scripture, and by it teacheth the church



herself; and therefore his authority in the Scripture is greater, — the authority of him that teacheth, than of those by whom he teacheth: as the authority of a king in his laws, is greater than that of an officer that proclaims them. A king may, by his council or judges, acquaint his subjects with his laws; but will it therefore follow, because he speaks his mind, which is in those laws, by such officers, that their authority is greater than that of those laws themselves? God speaks by the church (the true church, we mean); but he speaks nothing by her but what he speaks in the Scripture, which she doth only ministerially declare to us: and therefore the authority of God and his law is above hers, who, though she publish, yet did not make it, but is herself subject to it, and by that law only stands obliged to publish it to others. And for what they say of the church's ability to judge of the Scripture, we answer, that she cannot judge of the style of the Scripture otherwise than by the help of the Spirit, and by the same private Christians may judge too; and there be no means whereby the church can know the Scripture to be the word of God, but particular believers may know it by the same. And if the church's authority be so great, in our adversaries' opinion, because she can so well judge of the style of the Scripture, how much greater is that of the Scripture, which is able, by its style, to manifest itself to the church!

*Except.* "But," say they, "we do not know the voice of Christ in the Scripture but by the church; therefore her authority is greater."

*Ans.* This is both false and inconsequent: *false*, for it hath been sufficiently evinced that the voice of Christ may be otherwise known, and hath been, too; *inconsequent*, in that it follows not that the authority of the church is therefore greater than that of the Scripture. John Baptist directed many to Christ: and suppose, without his direction of them and witnessing to Christ, they had never come to him, will it thence follow that John's authority was greater than Christ's? The church, we grant, may be a mean whereby many are brought to the belief of the Scripture, who yet, afterward, do believe upon better grounds, as being persuaded by the word itself.

*Object.* III. "We can no otherwise know the Scripture to be the word of God, than as we know what books are canonical, and what not — what were written by inspired men, and what were not; but this we can know only by the authority of the church. This is proved, because some books which at first were not received as canonical, the church did afterwards receive, as Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Susanna, the books of Maccabees, etc.; the Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, second and third of John, and the Revelation. And books which are not canonical, are therefore not canonical because the church would not allow them as such; namely, the Revelation of Paul, the Gospel of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, etc. And, lastly, some books written by prophets and apostles are not canonical, because the church hath not determined that they are so."



*Ans.* To let pass what a learned Protestant<sup>339</sup> largely proves, — namely, that it is possible to know the Scripture to be the word of God, and yet not know which books are particularly canonical and written by inspired penmen, — that it may be known that the doctrine contained in those books is of God, though it be not known whether it were written by such as were immediately inspired themselves, or had it from those that were, — in the primitive times, some not only good men, but churches too, did deny some of those books to be canonical which we now generally receive; and yet they did receive the word of God, and the doctrine contained in those books, though they questioned whether those books themselves were written by such as were immediately inspired or not. And do not the Papists themselves tell us, that the canon of the Scripture was not established for a long time after the apostles' days, till it might be done by general councils? And yet, surely the church did in the meantime own the word of God, and know the voice of Christ.

We say, then, that it may be known which books are canonical, and which are not, otherwise than by the church; for the church herself knows them otherwise than by herself, or her own authority. When she declares them to be canonical, she believes them to be canonical; and her believing them to be canonical is antecedent to her declaring them to be so. She must learn herself, before she can teach others: she believes them, therefore, to be canonical, because she sees the stamp of God upon them, and that they are such as can be of none but God. The same way, likewise, private believers may know them. And when the church sees this stamp of God upon a book, she thence concludes it to be divine, and then declares it to be so.

*Except.* “But how, then, comes it to pass, that some books of canonical Scripture were not so soon received as others, if all have such an impress of divinity upon them?”

*Ans.* I answer, that these notes of divinity, which are sufficient in all the several books of Scripture to demonstrate them to be of God, yet may be more clear and illustrious in some than in others; as God's power and wisdom may be more apparent and conspicuous in some of his works than in others of them. Or else it may be from the different degrees of illumination afforded to different persons, and in different ages. When some doubted of some books of Scripture, all did not; and they that did not, had a greater measure of the Spirit, as to that at least, than others had.

Now, to their particular proofs of the minor proposition in their arguments, we answer particularly, —

1. That those books annexed by the Papists to the Old Testament, and called by them “deutero-canonical,” and by us no better still than “apocryphal,” such as the books of Maccabees, Esdras, Tobit, etc., never were received into the canon by the ancient church, nor can they produce the decree of any one ancient council wherein they were owned; as for

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339 Camero.



modern councils, we matter them not. They say that these books were doubted of at first, and afterward received. Belike, then, the church at first did not know them to be the word of God; and if she be the bride of Christ, who best of all knows the Bridegroom's voice, how came she for so long time not to know it? Here, certainly, in spite of infallibility, the church must be in an error; for if she doubted of the divinity of these books, when yet they were really divine, she erred in so doubting; and if she did know them to be of God, and yet did not receive them, she was more than erroneous; that is, she was plainly rebellious. As for the Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, and those others which we all own as canonical, though some particular persons or churches might doubt of their authenticity, yet it doth not appear that all ever did. Some of the Papists themselves confess that the Epistle to the Hebrews was generally acknowledged, unless by two or three of the Latin fathers; and Jerome reckons both that and the Revelation as generally acknowledged for canonical.<sup>340</sup> However, when these books were owned as canonical, it was not on the bare authority of the church. For how came the church herself to acknowledge them? How came she to know that they were written by inspiration? Did she believe it on her own credit? or did she not rather receive them as canonical because she found them canonical, perceiving the stamp of God upon them? And surely the same reason might make us receive them, though the church had not testified concerning them.

2. To the second thing they allege concerning the Revelation of Paul, the Gospel of Peter, etc., or any book written by philosophers or by heretics, I answer, that if the church did reject them, she did do but her duty; and it will not follow from her rejecting them, that there was no other way of knowing them not to be canonical, beside the church's disowning them. For upon what grounds did the church disown them? upon her own authority? Then she rejected them, because she rejected them! — judged them not to be canonical, because she judged them not to be canonical! If she did disown them, because she saw not that dignity and excellency in them which she saw in the books of the Old and New Testament, and which might persuade that they were of God; surely, then, it was not merely the church's authority which made them not to be canonical; — and on the same grounds that the church rejected those books we likewise may do it. Sure I am, Eusebius reckons those books not only “as forged,” but as something worse, — that is, “absurd and impious.”<sup>341</sup>

3. When they say that “some writings of the prophets and apostles themselves are not canonical, — and *therefore* not so, because not acknowledged by the church to be so, — I

340 Speaking of both: “Et tamen nos utramque suscipimus, nequaquam hujus temporis consuetudinem, sed veterum Scriptorum auctoritatem sequentes, qui plerumque utriusque utuntur testimoniis, non ut interdum de apocryphis facere solent,” etc. — *Epist ad. Dardan.*

341 Ὅθεν οὐδ' ἐν νόθοις αὐτὰ κατακτέον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἄτοπα πάντη καὶ, δυσσιβῆ παρατητέον.— Lib. iii. cap. 25.

answer, that some things the prophets and apostles might write as private men, and not by the inspiration and special direction of the Holy Ghost; and such never were to be received into the canon of the Scripture, nor were written with any intent that they should. But those things which they wrote as prophets and as apostles, by the immediate inspiration and special direction of the Spirit, and for this end, that they might be the rule of the saints' faith, were all received into the canon. If they deny this, let them produce any such writing of prophets or apostles not yet received as canonical For what they say, out of [1 Chron. xxix. 29](#), of the writings of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, how will they ever make it evident that they were other than the books of Samuel, written partly by himself while he lived, and partly by Gad and Nathan after his death? And so, likewise, [2 Chron. ix. 29](#), the writing of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo; and [2 Chron. xiii. 22](#), Iddo again; [2 Chron. xx. 34](#), Jehu: how will they ever prove them to be other than what we have in the books of Kings? It is true, too, that mention is made of some writings of Solomon which are not in the canon; but how will it appear that they ever ought to be there, or were ever written for that purpose? As for any writings of the apostles which are not in the Scripture, the chief insisted on is the Epistle (as they would have it) of Paul to the Laodiceans, mentioned [Col. iv. 16](#); which we deny to have been written by Paul, nor will the words enforce any such thing: "the epistle *from* Laodicea" is one thing, and "*to* Laodicea" another.<sup>342</sup> It is most likely to have been some letter written by the Laodiceans to Paul, in which there being some things that concerned the Colossians, the apostle adviseth them to read that epistle. Jerome saith of this epistle, that "some do read it as one of Paul's; but *it is generally rejected*."<sup>343</sup> And for other books which they mention, they have been, as generally, disowned by the church as fictitious, and not written by the authors whose names they bear. The same father cashiers several of them together that went under the name of Peter, "as being all apocryphal."<sup>344</sup>

*Object.* IV. "We cannot confute heretics who deny the Scripture, or part of it, but by the authority of the Catholic Church, which receives it."

*Ans.* Those heretics that will acknowledge the church, may be confuted by its authority, but not have faith wrought in them: they may have their mouths stopped, but not their minds enlightened, by it. And though we may make use of the authority of the church with such, yet not as the chief, and much less only, argument to persuade them of the divinity of the Scripture. But even by the same way whereby believers are persuaded of it, may heretics be persuaded too. And if we meet with such heretics as pay no more reverence to the church than to the Scripture, we are in a fine case if we have no other way of dealing with them but

342 It is in the Greek, ἐκ Λαοδικείας, not πρὸς Λαοδικεῖαν.

343 Παρὰ πάντων ἐκβάλλεται. — *De Script. Eccles.*

344 Ὡς ἀπόκρυφα ὄντα ἀποδοκιμάζεται. — *Ibid.*

by urging the authority of the church: surely they that deny the divinity of the one will not stick to deride the testimony of the other.

*Object.* V. To pass by other testimonies [which] they cite out of the ancients, one they mainly triumph in, — that saying of Austin, that he had not believed the gospel had not the authority of the church moved him to it.<sup>345</sup>

*Ans.* Austin speaks, when converted and orthodox, of himself as formerly a Manichee; and shows that he had *then* been moved by the authority of the church to receive the gospel. When he was a Manichee he was a heretic, not a heathen, and so might have some esteem for the church; or if he had no respect for the church as the church, yet he might — even by the confession of Papists themselves, so far as he saw the consent of so many nations, and the prescription of so long time, and other like arguments in the church, to induce him reverence it.

*V. Application:—*

*Use I.* From what hath been spoken, we may conclude, —

1. *The mischief and danger of Popery as to this particular doctrine.* How dishonourable and injurious to God is this doctrine of the Papists, and how destructive to religion!

(1.) *How dishonourable to God, for the credit of his word to depend upon the testimony of men, and not to be able of itself to discover its author!*

1st. *A dishonour it is to his wisdom,* if he could not otherwise assure men of the divine original of the Scripture, than by having men bear witness to it; if he knew no other way of certifying us of his will, and making known his laws to us, but by the help of our fellow-creatures, who, as well as we, are subject to those laws. Can God make “the heavens declare his glory,” and cannot he make the Scripture do it? [Ps. xix. 1](#). Can he make himself “known by the judgments which he executes,” and not by the statutes he establisheth? [Ps. ix. 16](#). Can he show forth his wisdom, power, and goodness by the things he doeth, and not by the things he speaks; and so make his works praise him, but not his word? [Ps. cxlv. 10](#). Nay, can en so write, so speak, as thereby to discover themselves, and what wisdom, or knowledge, or skill they have; and cannot God do as much? Is God less wise and able than they are; or is he wise in some things, and not in others? How came “the Spirit of the Lord” to be thus “straitened,” [Mic. ii. 7](#), as to have but this one way of making known the word to us; and that such an one as he must be beholden to his creatures for it? It is certain that formerly he had other ways; and why hath he not now? How comes he to be less wise than he was? Surely, if there be “no variableness” in God, “nor shadow of turning,” [James i. 17](#), he must



345 “Ego non crederem evangelio, nisi me ecclesiae catholicae commoveret autoritas.” “Crederem et commoveret,” for “credidisset, et commovisset,” as is a frequent way of speaking with that father. — See *Chamieri Panstr., lib. ii. cap. 11*, at large.

be as unchangeable in his wisdom as in any other attribute, and there can be no diminution of it.

2d. If God can otherwise make known the divineness of his word, than by the testimony of the church, and yet will not, *it looks* (to say no worse) *very like a reflection upon his goodness*, to leave men a more uncertain way of coming to the knowledge of his will and their duty, when he could give them a more sure one, — to leave his people no better helps against their weakness and doubtings, than the uncertain authority of a man, or a company of men, who may as easily be deceived in the testimony they give, as others may in the faith they yield to it. And if God did, formerly, give his people a better and more sure foundation for their faith than the authority of mere men, weak men, fallible men (as hath been proved), how comes his goodness to fail now, and to be less to saints under the gospel, than to those under the law, or the patriarchs before it?

3d. *This doctrine of the Romanists greatly derogates from God's sovereignty.* It degrades his authority, and lifts up the church into his place; it doth worse than make princes go on foot, and servants ride on horses, [Eccles. x. 7](#). If what the Papists teach in this point be true, the Holy Ghost is in a worse condition than his apostle was, who needed not “letters of commendation” to or from the churches, [2 Cor. iii. 1](#); he must be fain to canvass for the votes of men, or seek their testimonials; God himself cannot establish his laws without the church's leave; Jesus Christ shall not be King of saints, — not sway his sceptre nor rule his house, without the good-liking of the pope and council. What is this but what was said of old? — “Nisi homini Deus placuerit, Deus non erit;”<sup>346</sup> — “God must be concerned to please men,” at least the Papists: “for if he doth not, they know how to be quit with him; for then he shall not exercise his authority over them,” — not bind their consciences, not command their faith, not prescribe them their duty, not govern their lives: the church will not give their approbation to his laws, and so he shall not be their Sovereign, he shall not be their God. What can be more injurious to God's supremacy than this doctrine, which subjects the authority of God in his word to the pleasure of his creatures? What sovereign prince upon earth will endure to be so dealt with, — to have the authority of his laws suspended upon the testimony of those that publish them, of those that are themselves subject to them? I dare say, the pope scorns to have it said, that his decretals have their force from him that divulgeth them, or his bulls from him that posts them up. He would not endure, if he sent out his orders to a church or council, that they should sit upon them, and subject them to their judgment, and approve or disallow of them as they saw fit; he would expect, that they should be received and submitted to, upon the account of his stamp upon them, and seal annexed to them. Why may not the Scripture be allowed as much, which hath God's stamp so fairly impressed on it, and had the seal of so many miracles to confirm it?



346 Tertullianus.

(2.) *This doctrine of the Papists is prejudicial, indeed destructive, to Christian religion.* It leaves us only the name of Christianity, and no more. What is all religion, if God be not the author of it and, if the Papists say true, we can never be sure, that God is the author of that which we call Christian. This one doctrine of the Romish synagogue puts us into a worse condition than the Jewish one is in; which hath some foundation for its faith and worship, whereas this leaves none at all for ours. It is, in a word, most perniciously contrary to, and destructive of, a Christian *faith, and comfort, and obedience,* all at once:—

*1st. It is destructive to our faith.* It leaves us no firm footing for it, when it must be first founded upon, and lastly resolved into, the authority of men; and we can never know the Scripture to be the word of God, without either the concurring votes of all the Christian world to assure us of it, or at least the definitive sentence of a pope or council, and have no better assurance of its being divine than their say-so. What can ruin our faith, if the undermining of it do not? and what is it to undermine it, if this be not? It takes away the very foundation of it; and, instead of the infallible veracity of the God of truth, puts us off with the uncertain testimony of, at least, a company of fallible men, who may every one of them be deceived; and therefore so may we too, for company, if we rely on their authority. Indeed, it leaves us little (if any at all) more certainty for our religion than the Turks have for theirs; for why may not they as well require us to believe, that God speaks to us in the Alkoran, because they say he doth, as the Papists require us to believe he speaks to us in the Scripture, merely because the pope or council says so? nay, how little difference doth this cursed doctrine make between the great mysteries of the gospel, the articles of our faith, and the ridiculous fables of the rabbins, or abominations of Mohammed! For if some writings are not canonical Scripture, merely because the church (that is, pope or council) hath not canonized them, and some are, because it hath, — the Acts of Peter and the Revelation of Paul are not the word of God, because the church would not so far dignify them; and the Epistles of Peter and Paul are therefore of divine authority, because it so seemed good to the church to determine, — why might not the same church, if she had been so pleased, have added the Talmud to the Scripture, ay, and the Alkoran too? And they cannot say, it is because these books contain not only innumerable fopperies, but notorious lies, unless they will eat their own words, and recede from one of their chiefest arguments; namely, that the apocryphal books they themselves do not receive are therefore only not canonical, because the church hath not received them, when the rest are, because she hath.

*2d. It is as destructive to our comfort.* When our great comfort proceeds from our faith, such as the one is, so will the other be too; an ill-grounded faith can never produce a well-grounded comfort: the foundation being shaken, the building must needs totter. What will become of that “comfort of the Scripture” the apostle speaks of, [Rom. xv. 4](#), — that “joy and peace in believing,” [verse 13](#), — that hope in God’s word David mentions, [Ps. cxix. 81, cxxx. 5](#), — if we can no otherwise be sure that it is God’s word, but only because men tell us it is



so? How will our hope and comfort fail us, and our hearts fail us, when we come to consider, that that testimony of man, which is the ground of our faith, and therefore of our comfort, for aught we know, will (sure enough may) fail us! How should we stand, if our foundation sink under us? If the rain should descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon us, what shelter, what fence should we have? How great would our fall be! [Matt. vii. 27](#). If temptations should arise, and assault and shake our faith, how should we maintain our comforts? Would it not be sad for us, or any of us, to say within ourselves, "I have ventured my soul and its eternal welfare upon the Scripture, and the promises I there find; but how do I know that this Scripture is the word of God? How do I know I am not mistaken? Am I as sure I am not deceived as I am certain of being miserable if I be? Here is, indeed, a company of men that call themselves "the church;" but that is a hard word; I never meet it anywhere but in their mouths, and in this book which they have put into my hands; and yet these are the only men that tell me it is the word of God. But what reason have I to believe them? They say, indeed, they are infallible, and cannot be deceived; but how shall I know that? They say the Scripture says so. Suppose it doth, what know I but they make it say so, and the Scripture and they are agreed together to gratify one another, and speak for one another? I see not that they are the church unless the Scripture makes them so; and yet they tell me, that the Scripture is not the word of God to me unless they make it so. I know no authority they have to bind me to believe them, but what this book gives them; and they know none it hath to bind me to believe it, but what they give it. And thus I am quite at a loss, if either this thing called "the church" be not honest, but will cheat me; or be not infallible, but may deceive me. How vain, then, and flattering have all my hopes been hitherto! how uncertain my faith, how deceitful my joys and comforts! Farewell "glory, and honour, and peace!" Farewell "life and immortality!" Farewell "the inheritance of the saints," and the "crown of righteousness!" Fine things, if I knew where to have them! [Rom. v. 10](#); [2 Tim. i. 10](#); [Col. i. 12](#); [2 Tim. iv. 8](#). How would you like this, Christians? Do ye not even tremble at the thoughts of such dismal temptations? What think you, then, of the religion of the Papists, which exposeth all that embrace it to such uncertainties? It is no wonder they allow no certainty of salvation to believers, when they leave them at so great uncertainties for the very foundation of their faith.

*3d. It is as destructive to our obedience as to either of the other.* Gospel obedience is the fruit of faith; and therefore such as is the faith we have, such will be the obedience we yield. If our faith be not right, our obedience can be no better. A human faith is not sufficient to found our duty to God upon; and that obedience which proceeds only from such a faith, will neither be acceptable to God nor available to us. And yet such is the faith, and no higher, which causeth our obedience, if it be grounded only, or firstly, in the testimony of man, and resolved into it. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," [Heb. xi. 6](#); and that faith, surely, is a divine faith, such as rests on God's own authority. But if we believe the



Scripture to be of God only because men say it is, that faith cannot be divine; nor, therefore, the obedience which flows from it acceptable. In this case, the same testimony of the church, which would be the foundation of our faith, would likewise be the cause of our obedience. We should believe duty to be duty with the same kind of faith with which we believed the command of it to be of God, and that would be no other than men's telling us that it is; and so the result of all would be, that we must obey God, because they tell us he commands us to obey him; and so we first show a respect to men in believing, before we show any to God in obeying him. And then, not only we must be beholden to the church for the knowledge we have of our duty, but God must be beholden to her too for our performing of it.

2. *How much better a religion is ours than that of the Papists!* We are the veriest fools upon earth, if ever we change our own for theirs.

(1.) *We have more certainty in our way than they have, or ever can have, in their way.* Our faith is built upon no worse a bottom than the infinite veracity of Him who is the truth itself, revealing himself to us in the Scripture of truth, and not on the sandy foundation of any human testimony:— it leans upon God, not upon men; upon “Thus saith the Lord,” not, “Thus saith the church.” Though we despise not the true church, but pay reverence to all that authority wherewith God hath vested it, yet we dare not set it up in God's place. We are willing it should be a help to our faith, but not the foundation of it; and so should do its own office, but not invade God's seat, nor take his work out of his hands: that would neither be for his glory nor our own security. Our faith is a better than such an one would be: we receive it not from churches, from popes, from councils; but from God himself, that cannot lie to us, and will not deceive us. If we are beholden to men, parents, ministers, etc., for putting the Bible into our hands, and directing us to the Scripture; yet when we read it, hear it opened, and are enlightened by it, and see what a spirit there is in it; when the word enters into us, as the sunbeams into a dark room, and gives us light, [Ps. cxix. 130](#); when we see its excellency, are ravished with its beauty, taste its sweetness, feel its power, admire its majesty; when we find it to be such a word as searcheth our hearts, judgeth our thoughts, tells us all that is within us, all that ever we did in our lives, [John iv. 29](#), awakens our consciences, commands the most inward spiritual obedience, sets before us the noblest ends, and offers us the most glorious reward, — an unseen one, — an eternal one; — then we come to acknowledge that of a truth God is in it, — no mere creature could be the author of it. And so we believe it, not because men have ministerially led us to the knowledge of it, or have persuaded or commanded us to receive it, or told us it is of God; but because we ourselves have heard and felt him speaking in it. The Spirit shines into our minds by the light of this word, and speaks loudly to our hearts by the power of it, and plainly tells whose word it is; and so makes us yield to God's authority. Take a Christian whose faith is thus bottomed, and overturn it, if you can:— you must first beat him out of his senses, — persuade him he hath no eyes, no taste, no feeling, no understanding, no affections, no reflection upon himself,

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no knowledge of what is done in his own soul, and so, indeed, that he is not a man, but a brute or a stock, — ere ever you can persuade him that the Scripture is not the word of God. Whereas, on the other side, the Papists' religion is built merely on men, and their faith hath no more certainty than those men have infallibility. Ask them what is the great, nay, the only convincing reason why they believe the Scripture to be the word of God, and they will tell you, "The church's testimony concerning it." They believe it, because the church commands it; that is, the pope doth so, or a general council, or somebody, — they know not who.

And here they are at a loss already; for as much as they fill our ears with a great noise and din of "the church!" and can scarcely talk of any thing but "the church! the church!" yet they are not so much agreed among themselves what this very church is, upon whose authority they build their faith, and would have us build ours. In several countries they have several churches, several supremacies, several infallibleships: a council is the church, and supreme and infallible, in France; and the pope is the same in Italy. And so (amongst the Papists), if you do but change your climate, you must change your faith too; — if you but cross the Alps, you must translate your faith, and shift it from a council's shoulders to the pope's. A strange, variable thing you will find it, which must be calculated according to the meridian you are in, and will not serve indifferently for all places; so that you must be sure to fix your habitation, ere you can settle your belief. And yet, if this were agreed upon, you would still be at an uncertainty, as to the infallibility of whatsoever they call "the church:" — for you are likely to have nothing but their own word for it; and if you will take it so, you may; or if they prove it by the Scripture, they desert their cause, and own the Scripture as above them, and authentic without them; and so, while they would establish their infallibility, they lose their authority.

And so, to conclude, there is nothing certain, nothing solid, among them, nothing able to bear the weight of an immortal soul, — nothing upon which a man can venture his everlasting salvation. I see no such thing as a truly divine faith among them, unless it be therefore divine, because built upon the authority of their lord god, the pope. They call the pope *ecclesiae catholicae principem et sponsum*. In the mass at the election of him, they apply that to him which is said of the Holy Ghost: "I will pray the Father, and he will send you another Comforter," [John xiv. 16](#). And in the time of Leo X. it was disputed in their schools, among other blasphemies, whether the pope were a mere man, or *quasi deus*, "as it were a god;" and whether he did not partake of both the natures of Christ, *Mornæi Myster. Iniquit.*, p. 636.

(2.) *Our religion is more comfortable, as well as more certain.* Our faith being built upon the truth of God himself, and our comfort upon our faith, so long as our foundation remains immovable, we need not fear our superstructure. If our faith have good footing, our hopes and comforts will keep their standing. Faith in the promises is that from whence all the



comfort of our hearts, and our “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God,” doth proceed, [Rom. v. 2](#). A Christian’s joy, “is joy in believing;” and his peace, “the peace of God,” [Phil. iv. 7](#); and his comforts, the comforts of the Holy Ghost: but this can never be, if our faith be founded immediately on the testimony of men, and not of God; or if we believe the promises of the word to be made by God, because men tell us he made them. So long as we hold to the “sure word,” [2 Pet. i. 19](#), we have sure hopes and sure comforts, and no longer; and therefore a Papist can never have any “strong consolation” by his faith, [Heb. vi. 18](#), when his faith itself hath so weak a foundation. How can they ever rejoice in hopes of heaven, when they believe there is a heaven with no better a faith than they believe a pope or council to be infallible? It is to little purpose to say they believe there is a heaven (say the like of other articles), because God in the Scripture tells them so, when they would not have believed one tittle of that very Scripture, if a pope or a council had not bid them believe it: for then their hopes and comforts are all resolved into the authority of this church (whatever it be), as well as their faith is; and both the one and the other rest not on the real infallibility of the God of truth, but on the pretended infallibility of one single prelate at Rome, or a convention of them at Trent. From such a foundation for our faith, and such comforters of our consciences, the Lord deliver us!

By this you may gather what you must do, if you would be Papists. You must renounce your reason and faith too, if you would embrace their religion; you must enslave your consciences to the authority of men, and so put out your own eyes that you may see with other men’s. You must not be “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” [Eph. ii. 20](#), but of popes and councils, — it may be, of a single pope; and so hazard your eternal peace and welfare on the credit of a man who may be himself a murderer, an adulterer, a sodomite, a necromancer, a blasphemer, a heretic; and may be so far from being saved himself, that he may, as some Papists acknowledge, carry whole cart-loads of souls to hell with him. Yet still he is infallible! — an infallible murderer, an infallible sodomite, an infallible sorcerer! etc. And you must believe him to be infallible all this while, by himself, or with a council, or you cannot be saved, — among them. The church, to be sure, you must believe and adore, whatever it be, either representative or virtual; you must not ask a reason for your faith neither, but tamely submit to its tyrannical dictates. And if it should ever come to this, would it not be as hard a chapter as [the third of Daniel](#)? — would not Smithfield be as hot a place as the plain of Dura, if every one that would not fall down and worship this great golden idol — Holy Church — should be cast into the burning fiery furnace?

*Use II.* And, therefore, to prevent this, and that your faith may be firm and immovable, as standing not in the authority or wisdom of men, but the power and truth of God; that your hearts may be full of comfort, your lives full of holiness, your deaths full of sweetness; and that you may be “more than conquerors” over all those temptations whereby the wicked one may at any time assault your faith, — *be sure to see that it have a good foundation, —*

*see that you believe the Scripture upon solid and lasting grounds.* Trust the authority of no mere man, nor company of men, in the world, in a business on which the everlasting blessedness or misery of your soul doth depend. Hear Moses and the prophets; hear the apostles and evangelists. We are sure God spake by them; and they never err. As for popes and councils, we are sure they have erred, and so may do again. And so may your parents that first instructed you: masters, teachers, churches, all may err. And though, *de facto*, they do not err in this, when they tell you the Scripture is the word of God; yet, they being but men, and having no promise of absolute infallibility, and being liable to mistakes in other things, — when you find that, you may come to question whether they were not mistaken in this too; and so think you have been deluded all this while, and [have] taken that for the word of God and rule of your lives which is nothing less. And then you will either cast away your faith, or you must seek a new foundation for it. And if you come in a Papist's way, and hear talk of Peter's successors, Christ's vicars, catholic churches, general councils, infallibilities, long successions, apostolical traditions, you do not know what kind of spirit such conjuring words may raise up in you. You may be apt to think the major part (as you will be told, though falsely, it is) must carry it, and so determine your faith by the votes of men, — that is, not so much change the foundation of it, as enlarge it; and whereas, before, it was built upon the credit of a parent or a pastor, now build it upon the credit of a great many, or a great one in the name of all the rest; or if it rested before on a particular church, now it shall rely on that which you are told is the catholic one. For my part, I shall never wonder to see ill-grounded Protestants easily turn Papists: they are semi-Papists already, and they may soon be wholly such. They have a pope at home; and if they do not like him, they may easily exchange him for another abroad. He that pins his faith upon one man's sleeve may soon do it upon another's: he is already a church-Papist, and may soon be a Mass one.

And therefore, to conclude, whoever thou art, if thou have not formerly done it, search thyself now, ere Satan sift thee; try thy faith in the Scripture, that it may be approved; see whose image and superscription it bears, what foundation it hath, what answer thou canst give to any one that asks thee a reason of it; nay, what answer thou canst give thyself. Ask thyself, "Why do I believe the Bible to be the word of God? How do I know it was not the invention of man? By what arguments, by what authority, was I induced to give my assent to it? Do I take it merely on the credit of those of whom I was born, among whom I was bred, — with whom I have conversed? Is this a sufficient foundation for my faith? Dare I venture my soul upon such a bottom? Is this to build my house upon a rock? How near the Papists am I come, ere I was aware of it! I spit at them, and defy them, and yet act like them, if not below them, and can scarcely say so much for my faith as they can for theirs." If this be thy condition, — to work anew, for shame! and begin quickly too, and get thy faith well settled, and upon its right basis; or, I dare say, thou wilt never keep thy faith at the expense of thy life, but rather turn ten times than burn once. If thou hast, therefore, any regard to



the constancy of thy faith, to the comfort of thy life, the honour of God, or the salvation of thy own soul, labour immediately to get thy belief of the word better founded: read the Scripture constantly, study it seriously, search it diligently, hear it explained and applied by others, meditate on it thyself, and beg of God an understanding of it, and a right faith in it; that he would give thee “an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear,” [Deut. xxix. 4](#); that he would “open thine eyes to behold wondrous things out of his law,” [Ps. cxix. 18](#); that he would give thee his Spirit, that thou mayest “search the deep things of God,” [1 Cor. ii. 10](#); — that he would cause thee to hear his voice in that word which thou hast hitherto taken to be his, and direct thy heart into the surest grounds of believing it.

And, be sure hold on in such a way of painful endeavours for the getting thy faith settled till it be done, and what thou hast hitherto received on the account of man thou now believest for the sake of God himself. I deny thee not the testimony of the universal church of Christ in all ages, so far as thou art capable of knowing it, as well as of the present church, or any particular one to which thou art any way related, as a help to thee: make the best thou canst of it, only rest not on it. But especially take notice, if thou see not the stamp of God upon the word, characters of divinity imprinted on it, as well as external notes accompanying it, consider the antiquity of it, the continuance of it, the miracles that confirmed it, the condition of the men that penned it, — their aims, their carriage and conversation, — God’s providence in keeping it and handing it down to thee through so many successive generations, when so many in all ages would have bereaved the world of it. And, farther, consider the majesty and gravity, and yet plainness and simplicity, of its style; the depth of the mysteries it discovers, the truth and divineness of the doctrine it teacheth, the spirituality of the duties it enjoins, the power and force of the arguments with which it persuades, the eternity of the rewards it promises and the punishments it threatens; the end and scope of the whole, — to reform the world, to discountenance and extirpate wickedness, and promote holiness and righteousness, and thereby advance God’s glory, and lead man on to everlasting blessedness, etc.

And, be sure, leave not off till thou find thy faith raised from so low a bottom as the authority of men, and fixed on God’s own testimony; till thou canst safely and boldly say, “I believe the Scripture now to be the word of God, not because I have heard men say so, but because I hear God himself in this very Scripture bearing witness to it: his Spirit hath given me new eyes, and enabled me to see the divineness of it. I know, and am sure, that this is the word of God: never mere man spake at such a rate; never did the word of man work such effects. The entrance of it hath given light to my soul, which was before in darkness, not knowing whither it went. How many glorious mysteries do I see in it! what purity, what spirituality, what holiness! etc. — all which speak the wisdom, and power, and goodness, and holiness, and truth of the Author of it. What sweetness have I tasted in it! It hath been as the ‘honey and honeycomb’ to me, [Ps. xix. 10](#). What power, what life, what strange energy



have I experienced in it! What a change hath it wrought in me! What lusts hath it discovered and mortified! What duties hath it convinced me of, and engaged me in! What strength hath it furnished me with! How hath it quickened me when I was dead in sin, revived my comforts when they were dying, actuated my graces when they were languishing, roused me up when I was sluggish, awaked me when I was dreaming, refreshed me when I was sorrowful, supported me when I was sinking, answered my doubts, conquered my temptations, scattered my fears, enlarged me with desires, and filled me “with joy unspeakable and full of glory!” 1 Pet. i. 8. And what word could ever have wrought such effects, but that of the eternal, all-wise, all-powerful God? And therefore upon his alone authority I receive it; him alone I adore in it, whose power I have so often found working by it. I durst venture a hundred souls, if I had them, and a hundred heavens, if there were so many, upon the truth and divine authority of this word; and should not stick, not only to give the lie to the ‘most profound,’ and ‘most resolute,’ and ‘invincible,’ and ‘irrefragable,’ and ‘angelical,’ and ‘seraphical’ doctors,<sup>347</sup> nay, and ‘infallible’ popes and councils too, but even to say ‘Anathema’ to angels themselves, and seraphims, if they should tell me the Scripture were not the word of God.”

Christian! get but such a faith of the word as this into thy heart, and then thou mayest defy scoffers, atheists, Papists, and all their works. If they deride thee, let them mock on; thou wilt not easily be laughed out of thy senses, nor overcome by men’s jeers to disbelieve what thou hast seen and felt. If they will not believe as thou dost, yet thou shalt never be brought to play the infidel as they do; no more than cease to behold and admire the glory of the sun, because birds of the night, owls and bats, care not for looking on it: thou wilt never deny what thou plainly seest, because others do not who have no eyes. Sure I am, if they see not what thou dost, it is either because they wink against the light, or look off from it; or God hath not yet in mercy opened their eyes, or hath in judgment closed them up: “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,” 2 Cor. iv. 3.



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347 Such titles the Papists give their schoolmen.

Sermon XV.

The chamber of imagery in the church of Rome laid open;

or,

an antidote against Popery.



## Sermon XV. The chamber of imagery in the church of Rome laid open.

Question: *How is the practical love of truth the best preservative against Popery?*

“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” — 1 Pet. ii. 3.

When false worship had prevailed in the church of old unto its ruin, God showed and represented it unto his prophet under the name and appearance of “a chamber of imagery,” Ezek. viii. 11, 12. For therein were portrayed all the abominations wherewith the worship of God was defiled, and religion corrupted. Things relating unto divine truth and worship have had again the same event in the world, especially in the Church of Rome; and my present design is to take a view of the chambers of their imagery, and to show what was the occasion and what were the means of their erection: and in them we shall see all the abomination wherewith the divine worship of the gospel hath been corrupted, and Christian religion ruined. Unto this end it will be necessary to lay down some such principles of sacred truth as will demonstrate and evince the grounds and causes of that transformation of the substance and power of religion into a lifeless image, which shall be proved to have fallen out amongst them. And because I intend their benefit principally who resolve all their persuasion in religion into the word of God, I shall deduce these principles from that passage of it in 1 Pet. ii. 1–3.

The *first verse* contains an exhortation unto, or an injunction of, universal holiness, by the laying aside or casting out whatever is contrary thereunto: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings;” the rule whereof extends unto all other vicious habits of mind whatever.

And in the *second*, there is a profession of the means whereby this *end* may be attained; namely, how any one may be so strengthened in grace, as to cast out all such sinful inclinations and practices as are contrary unto the holiness required of us, — which is the divine word; compared therefore unto food, which is the means of preserving natural life, and of increasing its strength: “As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”

Hereon the apostle proceeds, in *verse third*, to declare the *condition* whereon our profiting, growing, and thriving by the word doth depend; and this is an experience of its power, as it is the instrument of God whereby he conveys his grace unto us: “If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” See 1 Thess. i. 5. Therein lies the first and chief principle of our ensuing demonstration, and it is this:—

*Principle I. All the benefit and advantage which any men do or may receive by the word, or the truths of the gospel, depend on an experience of its power and efficacy in communicating the grace of God unto their souls.*

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This principle is evident in itself, and not to be questioned by any but such as never had the least real sense of religion on their own minds. Besides, it is evidently contained in the testimony of the apostle before laid down.

Hereunto three other principles of equal evidence with itself are supposed, and virtually contained in it.

*Principle II. There is a power and efficacy in the word, and the preaching of it, Rom. i. 16,* “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.”

It hath a divine power, the power of God, accompanying it, and put forth in it, unto its proper ends: “For the word of God is quick and powerful,” [Heb. iv. 12.](#)

*Principle III. The power that is in the word of God consists in its efficacy to communicate the grace of God unto the souls of men.*

In and by it they “taste that the Lord is gracious;” that is its efficacy unto its proper ends. These are salvation, with all things requisite thereunto; such as the illumination of our minds, the renovation of our natures, the justification of our persons, the life of God in holy worship and obedience, — all leading unto our eternal enjoyment of him. These are the ends whereunto the gospel is designed in the wisdom of God, whereunto its efficacy is confined.

*Principle IV. There is an experience to be obtained of the power and efficacy of the word.*

In that place of the apostle it is expressed by “tasting.” But there is something antecedent unto their tasting, specially so called, and something consequent unto it, both inseparable from it; and therefore belonging unto the experience whereof we speak. Wherefore, —

1. The first thing required hereunto is light; that is, a spiritual, supernatural light, enabling us to discern the wisdom, will, and mind of God in the word, in a spiritual manner; without which we can have no experience of its power. Hence the gospel is hid unto them that perish, though it be outwardly declared unto them, [2 Cor. iv. 3.](#) This is the only means which lets into the mind and conscience a sense of this efficacy. This, in the increases of it, the apostle prays for on the behalf of believers, that they may have this experience, [Eph. i. 16–19, iii. 16–19;](#) and declares the nature of it, [2 Cor. iv. 6.](#)

2. The taste intended follows hereon; wherein consists the life and substance of the experience pleaded for. And this taste is a spiritual sense of the goodness, power, and efficacy of the word and the things contained in it, in the conveyance of the grace of God unto our souls, in the instances mentioned, and others of a like nature; for in a taste, there is a sweetness unto the palate, and a satisfaction unto the appetite. By the one in this taste, our minds are refreshed; and by the other, our souls are nourished; — of both believers have an experience. And this is let into the mind by spiritual light, without which nothing of it is attainable. “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness,” shine into your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory “in the face of Jesus Christ,” [2 Cor. iv. 6.](#)

3. To complete the experience intended, there follows hereon a conformity in the whole soul and conversation unto the truth of the word, or the mind of God in it, wrought in us by its power and efficacy. So the apostle expresses it, [Eph. iv. 20–24](#), “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Hereupon follows our last principle, which is the immediate foundation of the ensuing discourse, or that which is to be confirmed; and it is this:—

Principle V. *The loss of an experience of the power of religion hath been the cause of the loss of the truth of religion; or it hath been the cause of rejecting its substance, and setting up a shadow or image in the room of it.*

This transformation of all things in religion began and proceeded on these grounds. Those who had the conduct of it were always possessed of the general notions of truth, which they could not forego without a total renunciation of the gospel itself. But, having lost all experience of this power in themselves, they wrested them unto things quite of another nature, — destructive to the truth, as well as devoid of its power; hereon it came to pass that there was a dead image made and set up of religion in all the parts of it, called by the name of that which was true and living, but utterly lost. All experience, I say, of the power and efficacy of the mystery of the gospel, and the truth of it, in communicating the grace of God unto the souls of men, being lost, retaining the *general notion* of it, they contrived and framed an *outward image* or representation of them, suited unto their ignorance and superstition. Thus was the truth of religion once almost totally lost in the world, as we shall see; neither will it ever be lost any other way, or by any other means. When churches or nations are possessed of the truth and the profession of it, it is not laws, nor fines, nor imprisonments, nor gibbets, nor fires, that shall ever dispossess them or deprive them of it. Whilst an experience of the power of religion continued in the primitive times, all the bloody rage and cruelty of the world, all the craft of Satan, and the subtlety of seducers, who abounded, did utterly fail in attempting to deprive Christians of the truth, and the profession of it. But when this began to decay and be lost amongst them, they were quickly deceived, and drawn off from the simplicity of the gospel. Upon the reformation of religion in these parts of the world, when the truth was received in the *love and power* of it, and multitudes had experience of the spiritual benefit and advantage which they *received* thereby, in liberty, holiness, and peace, — all the prisons, tortures, swords, and fires, that were applied unto its extirpation, did nothing but diffuse the profession of it, and root it more firmly in the minds of men. It cannot be lost but by another way, and other means. The Jesuits and their associates have been, for a hundred years, contriving methods and arts for the dispossessing nations and churches of the truth which they have received, and the introducing the Romish super-





stitution. They have written books about it, and practised according to their principles, in every kingdom and state of Europe who own the Protestant religion. But the folly of most of their pretended arts and devices unto this end hath been ridiculous and unsuccessful; and what they have added hereunto of force hath been divinely defeated. There is but *one way*, one effectual engine to deprive any people of the profession of the truth which they have once received; and that is, by leading them into such profaneness and ignorance, as whereby they may lose all experience of its power and efficacy in communicating the grace of God unto their souls, and therein all sense of the advantage which they might have had by it. When this is done, men will as easily lay aside the profession of religion as burdensome clothes in summer.

There is much talk of a plot and conspiracy to destroy the Protestant religion, and introduce Popery again amongst us. *They* may do well to take care thereof who are concerned in public affairs: but as unto the event, there is but one conspiracy that is greatly to be feared in this matter; and that is, between *Satan* and the *lusts* of men. If they can prevail to deprive the generality of men of an experience in their own minds of the power and efficacy of the truth, with the spiritual advantage which they may have thereby, they will give them up to be an easy prey unto the other designers. And there are two engines that are applied unto this purpose; — the one is *ignorance*, the other is *profaneness*, or sensuality of life. Whenever either of these prevails, the experience intended must necessarily be lost and excluded; and the means of their prevailing are, *want of due instruction* by those who are the leaders of the people, and *the encouragement of sensuality* by impunity and great examples. This is the only formidable conspiracy against the profession of the truth in this nation; without whose aid all power and force will be frustrate in the issue. And as there is a great appearance of divine permission of such a state of things at present amongst us, so, if they be managed by counsel also, and that those ways of ignorance and sensuality are countenanced and promoted for this very end, that, the power of truth being lost, the profession of it may be given up on easy terms, — there is nothing but sovereign grace that can prevent the design. For the principle which we have laid down is uncontrollable in reason and experience, — namely, that the loss of an experience of the power of religion will issue, one way or other, in the loss of the truth of religion and the profession of it. Whence is it that so many corrupt opinions have made such an inroad on the Protestant religion and the profession of it? Is it not from hence, that many have lost an experience of the power and efficacy of the truth, and so have parted with it? Whence is it that profaneness and sensuality of life, with all manner of corrupt lusts of the flesh, have grown up, unto the shame of profession? Is it not from the same cause as the apostle expressly declares it comes by? [2 Tim. iv. 2–5](#). One way or other, the loss of experience of the power of truth will end in the loss of the profession of it.



But I proceed unto the instance which I do design in the Church of Rome; for the religion of it, at this day, is nothing but a dead image of the gospel, erected in the loss of an experience of its spiritual power, overthrowing its use, with all its ends, being suited to the taste of men, carnal, ignorant, and superstitious. This I shall make evident by all sorts of instances in *things relating to*, — I. *The person and offices of Christ*; II. *The state, order, and worship of the church; with*, III. *The graces and duties of obedience required in the gospel*. And in all my principal design is, to demonstrate what is the only way and means of securing our own souls, — any church or nation, — from being ensnared with, or prevailed against, by Popery.

I. *Section I*. It is a general notion of truth, that *the Lord Christ, in his person and grace, is to be proposed and represented unto men as the principal object of their faith and love*.

He himself, in his Divine Person, is absolutely invisible unto us; and, as unto his human nature, absent from us; for the heaven must receive him “until the times of restitution of all things.” There must, therefore, an image or representation of him be made unto our minds, or he cannot be the proper object of our faith, trust, love, and delight. This is clone in the gospel, and the preaching of it; for therein he is “evidently set forth” before our eyes, as “crucified amongst us,” [Gal. iii. 1](#). So, also, are all the other concerns of his person and offices therein clearly proposed unto us; yea, this is the principal end of the gospel, — namely, to make a due representation of the person, offices, grace, and glory of Christ unto the souls of men, that they may believe in him, and “believing, have eternal life,” [John xx. 31](#). Upon this representation made of Christ and his glory in the gospel, and the preaching of it, believers have an experience of the power and efficacy of the divine truth contained therein, in the way before mentioned, as the apostle declares, [2 Cor. iii. 18](#), for “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Having a spiritual light to discern and behold the glory of Christ, as represented in the glass of the gospel, they have experience of its transforming power and efficacy, changing them into the likeness of the image represented unto them, — that is, of Christ himself; which is the saving effect of gospel power. But this *spiritual light* was lost among men, through the efficacy of their darkness and unbelief; they were not able to discover the glory of Christ, as revealed and proposed in the gospel, so as to make him the present object of their faith and love. And this light being lost, they could have no *experience* of the power of divine truth concerning him changing them into his image. They could make no *affecting* discovery of him in the Scripture. All things therein were dark and confused, or at least seemed an inaccessible mystery, which they could not reduce to practice. Hence, those who had got the public conduct of religion drove the people from reading the Scripture, as that which was of no use, but rather dangerous unto them. What shall these men, then, betake themselves unto? Shall they reject the notion in general, that there ought to be *such a representation made of Christ unto the minds of men, as to inflame their devotion, to excite their faith, and stir up their affection to him?* This cannot be



clone without an open renunciation of him, and of the gospel as a fable. Wherefore they will find out another way for it, — another means unto the same end; — and this is, by malting *images of him* of wood and stone, or gold and silver, or painting on them. Hereby they supposed he would be made present unto his worshippers; — that he would be so represented unto them, as that they should be immediately stirred up unto the embraces of faith and love. And herein they found sensible effects, unto their great satisfaction; for their minds being dark, carnal, and prone to superstition, — as are the minds of all men by nature, — they could see nothing in the spiritual representation of him in the gospel that had any power on them, or did in any measure affect them. In these images, by the means of sight and imagination, they found that which did really work upon their affections, and, as they thought, did excite them unto the love of Christ.

And this was the true original of all the *imagery* in the Church of Rome, as something of the same nature, in general, was of all the image-worship in the world. So the Israelites in the wilderness, when they made the golden calf, did it to have a representation of a deity near unto them, in such a visible manner as that their souls might be affected with it: so they expressed themselves, [Exod. xxxii. 1](#). Wherefore in this state, under a loss of spiritual light and experience, men of superstitious minds found themselves entangled. They knew it necessary that there should be such a representation made of Christ as might render him a present object of faith and love, wherewith they might be immediately affected. How this was done in the gospel they could not understand, nor obtain any experience of the power and efficacy of it unto this end. Yet the principle itself must be retained, as that without which there could be no religion; wherefore, to extricate themselves out of this difficulty, they brake through all God's commands to the contrary, and betook themselves to the making images of Christ, and their adoration. And from small beginnings, according as darkness and superstition increased in the minds of men, there was a progress in this practice, until these images took the whole work of representing Christ and his glory out of the hands, as it were, of the gospel, and appropriated it unto themselves. For I do not speak of them, now, so much as they are images of Christ, or objects of adoration, as of their being dead images of the gospel; that is, somewhat set up in the room of the gospel, and for the ends of it, as means of teaching and instruction. They shall do the work which the gospel was designed of God to do; for as unto this end, of the representation of Christ as the present object of the faith and love of man, with an efficacy to work upon their affections, there is in the Church of Rome a thousand times more ascribed unto them than unto the gospel itself. The whole matter is stated by the apostle, [Rom. x. 6–8](#), “The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” The inquiry is, how we may be made

partakers of Christ, and righteousness by him: or, how we may have an interest in him, or have him *present* with us. This, saith the apostle, is done by the *word of the gospel* which is preached, which is nigh unto us, — in our mouths, and in our hearts. “No,” say these men, “we cannot understand how it should be so; we do not find that it is so, — that Christ is made nigh unto us, present with us, by this word. Wherefore we will ascend into heaven to bring down Christ from above; for we will make images of him in his glorious state in heaven, and thereby he will be present with us, or nigh unto us. And we will descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the dead; and we will do it, by making first crucifixes, and then images of his glorious resurrection, bringing him again unto us from the dead. This shall be in the place and room of that word of the gospel, which you pretend to be alone useful and effectual unto these ends.”

This, therefore, is evident, that the introduction of this abomination, in principle and practice destructive unto the souls of men, took its rise from the loss of an experience of the representation of Christ in the gospel, and the transforming power in the minds of men which it is accompanied with, in them that believe. “Make us gods,” say the Israelites, “to go before us; for as for this man Moses,” who represented God unto us, “we know not what is become of him.” What would you have men do? Would you have them live without all sense of the presence of Christ with them, or being nigh unto them? Shall they have no representation of him? No, no; make us gods that may go before us, — let us have images unto this end; for how else may it be done we cannot understand. And this is the reason of their obstinacy in this practice against all means of conviction; yea, they live hereon in a perpetual contradiction unto themselves. Their temples are full of graven images, like the house of Micah, — “houses of gods;” and yet in them are the Scriptures (though in a tongue unknown to the people), wherein *that practice is utterly condemned*; [so] that a man would think them distracted, to hear what their book says, and to see what they do in the same place. But nothing will reach unto their conviction, until the vail of blindness and ignorance be taken from their minds. Until they have spiritual light enabling them to discern the glory of Christ as represented in the gospel, and to let in an experience of the transforming power and efficacy of that revelation in their own souls, they will never part with that means for the same end, which they are sensible of to be useful unto it, and which is suited unto their inclination. Whatever be the issue, though it cost them their souls, they will not part with what they find, as they suppose, so useful unto their great end of making Christ nigh unto them, for that wherein they can see nothing of it, and of whose power they can have no experience.

But the principal design of this discourse is, to warn others of these abominations, and to direct unto their avoidance; for if they should be outwardly pressed unto the practice of this idolatry, whatever is of carnal affection, of blind devotion, or superstition in them, will quickly be won over unto a conspiracy against their convictions. Nothing will then secure

them, but an experience of the efficacy of that representation which is made of Christ in the gospel. It is, therefore, the wisdom and duty of all those who desire a stability in the profession of the truth, continually to endeavour after this experience, and an increase in it. He who lives in the exercise of faith and love in the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the gospel, as evidently crucified, and evidently exalted therein, and finds the fruit of his so doing in his own soul, will be preserved in the time of trial. Without this, men will, at last, begin to think that it is better to have a *false* Christ than *none at all*; they will suppose that something is to be found in *images*, when they can find nothing in the *gospel*.

*Sect. II.* It is a prevalent notion of truth, that *the worship of God ought to be beautiful and glorious*.

The very light of nature seems to direct unto conceptions hereof. What is not so may be justly rejected, as unbecoming the divine Majesty; and therefore, the *more holy and heavenly* any religion pretends to be, the more glorious is the worship prescribed in it, or ought so to be. Yea, the true worship of God is the height and excellency of all glory in this world: it is inferior unto nothing but that which is in heaven, which it is the beginning of, the way unto, and the best preparation for. Accordingly, even that worship is declared to be glorious, and that in an eminent manner, above all the outward worship of the Old Testament, in the tabernacle and temple, whose glory was great, and, as unto external pomp, inimitable. To this purpose the apostle disputes at large, [2 Cor. iii. 6–11](#). This, therefore, is agreed, that there ought to be *beauty and glory in divine* worship; and that they are most eminently in that which is directed and required in the gospel. But withal the apostle declares, in the same place, that this glory is spiritual, and not carnal: so did our Lord Jesus Christ foretell that it should be; and that, unto that end, all distinction of places, with all outward advantages and ornaments belonging unto them, should be taken away, [John iv. 20–24](#).

It belongs, therefore, unto our present design, to give a brief account of its glory, and wherein it excels all other ways of divine worship that ever were in the world; even that under the Old Testament, which was of divine institution, wherein all things were ordered “for beauty and glory.” And it may be given in the instances that ensue:—

1. The express *object* of it is God, not as absolutely considered, but as existing in *three persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. This is the principal glory of Christian religion and its worship. Under the Old Testament, the conceptions of the church about the existence of the divine nature in distinct persons were very dark and obscure; for the full revelation of it was not to be made, but in *the distinct actings* of each person in the works of redemption and salvation of the church; — that is, in the incarnation of the Son, and mission of the Spirit after he was glorified, [John vii. 39](#). And in all the ways of *natural* worship, there was never the least shadow of any respect hereunto. But this is the foundation of all the glory of evangelical worship. The object of it, in the faith of the worshipper, is the holy Trinity; and

it consists in an ascription of divine glory unto each person, in the same individual nature, by the same act of the mind. Where this is not, there is no glory in religious worship.

2. Its glory consists in that constant respect which it hath unto *each divine person*, as unto their peculiar work and actings for the salvation of the church. So it is described, [Eph. ii. 18](#), “Through him” — that is, the Son as mediator — “we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” This is the immediate glory of evangelical worship, comprehensive of all the graces and privileges of the gospel; and to suppose that the glory of it doth consist in any thing but the light, graces, and privileges which it doth itself exhibit, is a vain imagination. It will not borrow glory from the invention of men. We shall therefore a little consider it as it is here represented by the apostle:—

(1.) The *ultimate object* of it, under this consideration, is God as the Father: “We have access” therein “unto the Father.” And this consideration, in our worship, of God as a Father — relating unto the whole dispensation of his love and grace by Jesus Christ, as he is his God and our God, his Father and our Father — is peculiar unto gospel worship, and contains a signal part of its glory. We do not only worship God as a Father, — so the very heathens had a notion that he was the Father of all things, — but we worship him *who is the Father*; and as he is so, both in relation to the eternal generation of the Son, and the communication of grace by him unto us, as our Father. So, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,” [John i. 18](#). This access in our worship unto *the person of the Father*, as in heaven, the holy place above, as on a throne of grace, is the glory of the gospel. See [Matt. vi. 9](#); [Heb. iv. 16](#), [x. 19–21](#).

(2.) The *Son* is here considered as a Mediator — through him we have this access unto the Father. This is the glory that was hidden from former ages, but brought to light and displayed by the gospel. So speaks our blessed Saviour himself unto his disciples: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive,” [John xvi. 23, 24](#). To ask God expressly in the name of the Son, as mediator, belongs unto the glory of the gospel worship.

The especial instances of this glory are more than can be enumerated. The chief of them may be reduced to these three heads:—

1st. It is he who makes both the persons of the worshippers and their duties *accepted* of God. See [Heb. ii. 17, 18](#), [iv. 16](#), [x. 19](#).

2dly. He is the administrator of all the worship of the church in the holy place above, as its great *High Priest* over the house of God, [Heb. viii. 2](#); [Rev. viii. 3](#).

3dly. *His presence* with and among gospel worshippers in their worship gives it glory. This he declares and promises, [Matt. xviii. 19, 20](#), “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”



All success of the prayers of the church dependeth on, and ariseth from, the presence of Christ amongst them: he is so present for their assistance and for their consolation. This presence of a *living Christ*, and not a *dead crucifix*, gives glory to divine worship. He who sees not the glory of this worship, from its relation unto Christ, is a stranger unto the gospel, with all the light, graces, and privileges of it.

(3.) It is in one Spirit that we have *access* unto God in his worship: and in his administration doth the apostle place the glory of it, in opposition unto all the glory of the Old Testament, as doth our Lord Jesus Christ also in the place before referred unto; for, —

1st. The whole *ability* for the observance and performance of it, according to the mind of God, is from him alone. His communication of grace and gifts unto the church is that alone which makes it to give glory to God in his divine service. If this should cease, all acceptable worship would cease in the world. To think to observe the worship of the gospel without the aid and assistance of the Spirit of the gospel, is a lewd imagination. But where he is, there is *liberty and glory*, 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.

2dly. By him the sanctified minds of believers are made *temples of God*, and so the principal seal of evangelical worship, 1 Cor. iii. 16, vi. 19. This temple being of God's own framing, and of his own adorning by his Spirit, is a much more glorious fabric than any that the hands of men can erect.

3dly. By him is the church led into internal *communion* and converse with God in Christ, in light, love, and delight, with holy boldness; the glory whereof is expressed by the apostle, Heb. x. 19, 21, 22.

In these things, I say, doth the *true glory of evangelical worship* consist; and if it doth not, it hath no glory in comparison of that which did excel in the old legal worship. For the wit of man was never yet able to set it off with half the outward beauty and glory that was in the worship of the temple. But herein it is that it not only leaves no glory thereunto in comparison, but doth unspeakably excel whatever the wit and wealth of men can extend unto.

But there is a *spiritual light* required, that we may discern the glory of this worship, and have thereby an *experience* of its power and efficacy in reference unto the ends of its appointment. This the church of believers hath. They see it as it is a blessed means of giving glory unto God, and of receiving gracious communications from him; which are the ends of all the divine institutions of worship: and they have therein such an experience of its efficacy, as gives rest, and peace, and satisfaction, unto their souls. For they find, that as their worship directs them unto a blessed view, by faith, of God in his ineffable existence, with the glorious actings of each person in the dispensation of grace, which fills their hearts with joy unspeakable; so also, that all graces are exercised, increased, and strengthened in the observance of it, with love and delight.



But all light into, all perceptions of this glory, all experience of its power, was, amongst the most, lost in the world. I intend, in all these instances the time of the papal apostasy. Those who had the conduct of religion could discern no glory in these things, nor obtain any experience of their power. Be the worship what it will, they can see no glory in it, nor did it give any satisfaction to their minds; for having no light to discern its glory, they could have no experience of its power and efficacy. What, then, shall they do? The *notion* must be retained, that divine worship is to be beautiful and glorious. But in the spiritual worship of the gospel they could see nothing thereof; wherefore they thought necessary to make a glory for it, or to dismiss it out of the world, and set up such an image of it as might appear beautiful unto their fleshly minds, and give them satisfaction. To this end they set their inventions on work to find out *ceremonies, vestments, gestures, ornaments, music, altars, images, paintings, with prescriptions of great bodily veneration*. This pageantry they call the beauty, the order, the glory, of divine worship. This is that which they see and feel, and which, as they judge, doth dispose their minds unto devotion. Without it they know not how to pay any reverence unto God himself; and when it is wanting, whatever be the life, the power, the spirituality of the worship in the worshippers — whatever be its efficacy unto all the proper ends of it — however it be ordered according unto the prescription of the word, — it is unto them empty, indecent; they can neither see beauty nor glory in it. This light and experience being lost, the introduction of *beggarly elements* and carnal ceremonies in the worship of the church, with attempts to render it decorous and beautiful by superstitious rites and observances, — wherewith it hath been defiled and corrupted, as it was and is in the Church of Rome, — was nothing but the setting up a deformed image in the room of it. And this they are pleased withal. The beauty and glory which carving, and painting, and embroidered vestures, and musical incantations, and postures of veneration, do give unto divine service, they can see and feel; and, in their own imagination, are sensibly excited unto devotion by them. But hereby, instead of representing the true glory of the worship of the gospel, wherein it excels that under the Old Testament, they have rendered it altogether inglorious in comparison of it; for all the ceremonies and ornaments which they have invented for that end come unspeakably short, for beauty, order, and glory, of what was appointed by God himself in the temple, — scarce equalling what was among the Pagans.

It will be said, that the things whereunto we assign the glory of this worship are spiritual and invisible. Now, this is not that which is inquired after; but that whose beauty we may behold, and be affected with: and this may consist in the things which we decry, at least in some of them; — though I must say, if there be glory in any of them, the more they are multiplied the better it must needs be. But this is that which we plead:— men, being not able, by the light of faith, to discern the glory of things spiritual and invisible, do make images of them unto themselves, as gods that may go before them; and these they are affected withal: but the worship of the church is spiritual, and the glory of it is invisible unto eyes of



flesh. So both our Saviour and the apostles do testify in the celebration of it: “We are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel,” [Heb. xii. 22–24](#). The glory of this assembly, though certainly above that of organs, and pipes, and crucifixes, and vestments, yet doth not appear unto the sense or imaginations of men.

That which I design here is, to obviate *the meretricious allurements* of the Roman worship, and the pretences of its efficacy to excite devotion and veneration by its beauty and decency. The whole of it is but a deformed image of that glory which they cannot behold. To obtain, and preserve in our hearts, an experience of the power and efficacy of that worship of God which is in spirit and in truth, as unto all the real ends of divine worship, is that alone which will secure us. Whilst we do retain right notions of the proper object of gospel worship, and of our immediate approach by it thereunto, — of the way and manner of that approach, through the mediation of Christ, and assistance of the Spirit; whilst we keep up faith and love unto their due exercise in it (wherein, on our part, the life of it doth consist), preserving an experience of the spiritual benefit and advantage which we receive thereby, we shall not easily be inveigled to relinquish them all, and give up ourselves unto the embraces of this *lifeless image*.

*Sect. III.* It is a *universal*, unimpeachable persuasion among all Christians, that there is a *near, intimate communion with Christ, and participation of him, in the supper of the Lord*.

He is no Christian who is otherwise minded. Hence, from the beginning, this was always esteemed the principal mystery in the *agenda* of the church; and that deservedly, for this persuasion is built on infallible divine testimonies. The communication of Christ herein, and our participation of him, are expressed in such a manner as to demonstrate them to be peculiar, — such as are not to be obtained in any other way or divine ordinance whatever; not in praying, not in preaching, not in any other exercise of faith on the word or promises. There is in it *an eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ*, with a spiritual *incorporation* thence ensuing, which are peculiar unto this ordinance. But this especial and peculiar communion with Christ, and participation of him, is *spiritual* and *mystical*, by faith, — not carnal or fleshly. To imagine any other participation of Christ in this life but by faith, is to overthrow the gospel. To signify the real communication of himself and benefits of his mediation unto them that believe, whereby they should become the food of their souls, nourishing them unto eternal life, in the very beginning of his ministry, he himself expresseth it by eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood; [John vi. 53](#), “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.” But hereon many were offended, as supposing that he had intended an oral, carnal eating of his flesh, and drinking of his



blood; and so would have taught them to be *cannibals*. Wherefore, to instruct his disciples aright in this mystery, he gives an eternal rule of the interpretation of such expressions, [verse 63](#), “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” To look for any other communication of Christ, or of his flesh and blood, but what is spiritual, is to contradict him in the interpretation which he gives of his own words.

Wherefore, this especial communion with Christ, and participation of him, is by *faith*. If it were not, unbelievers ought all to partake of Christ as well as those that believe, — which is a contradiction: for to believe in Christ, and to be made partakers of him, are one and the same. We must, therefore, find this peculiar participating of Christ in the special actings of faith, with respect unto the especial and peculiar exhibition of Christ unto us in this ordinance.

And these actings of faith are diverse and many, but maybe referred unto four heads:—

1. It acts itself by *obedience* unto the authority of Christ in this institution. This is the foundation of all communion with Christ, or participation of him, in any ordinance of divine worship whatever, that is peculiarly of his own sovereign appointment; and that in and with such circumstances (as unto the time or season and manner of it) as require especial actings of faith with respect thereunto; for the institution of this ordinance was in the close of his ministry or prophetic office on the earth, and in the entrance of the exercise of his priestly office in offering himself a sacrifice unto God for the sins of the church. Between them both, and to render them both effectual unto us, he interposed an act of his kingly office, in the institution of this ordinance; and it was in “the same night in which he was betrayed,” when his holy heart was in the highest exercise of zeal for the glory of God, and compassion for the souls of sinners. Faith hath herein an especial regard unto all these things. It doth not only act itself by a subjection of soul and conscience unto the authority of Christ in the institution, but respects also the exerting of his authority in the close of his prophetic, and entrance of the exercise of his sacerdotal office on the earth; with all those other circumstances of it which recommend it unto the souls and consciences of believers. This is peculiar unto this ordinance, and unto this way of the participation of Christ. And herein faith, in its due exercise, gives the soul an intimate converse with Christ.

2. There is in this divine ordinance a *peculiar representation of the love and grace of Christ in his death and sufferings*, with the way and manner of our reconciliation unto God thereby. The principal design of the gospel is, to declare unto us the love and grace of Christ, and our reconciliation unto God by his blood. Howbeit, herein there is such an eminent *representation* of them, as cannot be made by words alone. It is a *spiritual image* of Christ proposed unto us, intimately affecting our whole souls. These things, — namely, the ineffable love and grace of Christ, the bitterness of his sufferings and death in our stead, the sacrifice that he offered by his blood unto God, with the effect of it in atonement and reconciliation,



— being herein contracted into one entire proposal unto our souls, faith is exercised thereon in a peculiar manner, and so as it is not in any [other] divine ordinance or way of the proposal of the same things unto us. All these things are, indeed, distinctly and in parts, set before us in the Scripture, for our instruction and edification: but as the light, which was first made and diffused unto the whole creation, did suffice to enlighten it in a general way, yet was far more useful, glorious, and conspicuous, when it was reduced and contracted into the body of the sun; — so the truths concerning Christ, as they are diffused through the Scripture, are sufficient for the illumination and instruction of the church; but when, by divine wisdom and institution, they are contracted into this ordinance, their taste and efficacy is more eminent and communicative unto the eyes of our understandings, — that is, our faith, — than as merely proposed by parts and parcels in the word. Hereby faith leads the soul unto a peculiar communion with Christ; which is thereon made partaker of him in an especial manner.

3. Faith, herein, respects *the peculiar way of the communication and exhibition of Christ unto us, by symbols, or sensible outward signs of bread and wine*. It finds the divine wisdom and sovereignty of Christ in the choice of them, having no other foundation in reason or the light of nature: and the representation that is made herein of him, with the benefits of his death and oblation, is suited unto faith only, without any aid of sense or imagination; for although the symbols are visible, yet their relation unto the things signified is not discernible unto any sense or reason. Had he chosen for this end an *image* or a *crucifix*, or any such *actions* as did, by a kind of natural and sensible resemblance, show forth his passion, and what he did and suffered, there had been no need of faith in this matter; and therefore, as we shall see, such things are found out unto this end, by such as have lost the use and exercise of faith herein. Besides, it is faith alone that apprehends the *sacramental* union that is between the outward signs and the things signified, by virtue of divine institution; and hereby the one [latter] (that is, the body and blood of Christ) are really exhibited and communicated unto the souls of believers, as the outward signs are unto their bodily senses, — the signs becoming, thereby, *sacramentally*, unto us what the things signified are in themselves, and are therefore called by their names. Herein there is a peculiar exercise of faith, and a peculiar participation of Christ, such as are in no other ordinance whatever. Yea, the actings of faith with respect unto the sacramental union and relation between the signs and things signified, by virtue of divine institution and promise, is the principal use and exercise of it herein.

4. There is a peculiar exercise of faith in the *reception of Christ, as his body and blood are tendered and exhibited unto us in the outward signs of them*; for though they do not contain *carnally* the flesh and blood of Christ in them, nor are turned into them, yet they *really* exhibit Christ unto them that believe, in the participation of them. Faith is the grace that makes the soul to receive Christ, and whereby it doth actually receive him. To “as many

as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," [John i. 12](#). And it receives him according as he is proposed and exhibited unto us in the declaration and promise of the gospel, wherein he is proposed; it receives him by the gracious *assent* of the mind unto this truth, the *choice* of him, cleaving and trusting unto him with the will, heart, and affection, for all the ends of his person and offices, as the mediator between God and man: and in the sacramental mysterious proposal of him, his body and blood, — that is, in the efficacy of his death and sacrifice, — in this ordinance of worship, faith acts the whole soul in the reception of him unto all the especial ends for which he is exhibited unto us in this way and manner. What these ends are, which give force and efficacy unto the actings of faith herein, this is not a proper place to declare.

I have mentioned these things, because it is the great plea of the Papists at this day, in behalf of their transubstantiation, that, *if we reject their oral or carnal manducation of the flesh of Christ and drinking of his blood, there cannot be assigned a way of participation of Christ, in the receiving of him in this sacrament, distinct from that which is done in the preaching of the word*. But hereby, as we shall see, they only declare their ignorance of this heavenly mystery. But of this blessed, intimate communion with Christ, and participation of him in the divine institution of worship, believers have *experience* unto their satisfaction and ineffable joy. They find him to be the spiritual food of their souls, by which they are nourished unto eternal life by a spiritual incorporation with him. They discern the truth of this mystery, and have experience of its power. Howbeit, men growing carnal, and being destitute of *spiritual light*, with the wisdom of faith, utterly lost all experience of any communion with Christ, and participation of him in this sacrament. On the principles of gospel truth, they could find nothing in it; no *power*, no *efficacy*, — *nothing* that should answer the great and glorious things spoken of it: nor was it possible they should; for, indeed, there is nothing in it but unto faith, — as the light of the sun is nothing to them that have no eyes. A dog and a staff are of more use to a blind man than the sun; nor is the most melodious music any thing to them that are deaf. Yet, notwithstanding this loss of spiritual experience, they retained the *notion* of truth, that there must be a *peculiar participation* of Christ in this sacrament distinct from all other ways and means of the same grace.

Here the wits of men were hard put to it to find out an image of this spiritual communion, whereof in their minds they could have no experience; yet they fashioned one by *degrees*, and after they had greatened the mystery in words and expressions (whereof they knew nothing in its power), to answer unto what was to be set up in the room of it, until they brought forth the *horrid monster of transubstantiation*, and *the sacrifice of the mass*. For hereby they provided that all those things which are spiritual in this communion should be turned into and acted in things carnal: bread shall be the body of Christ carnally, the mouth shall be faith, the teeth shall be the exercise, the belly shall be the heart, and the priest shall offer Christ unto God. A *viler image* never was invented; and there is nothing of faith required

herein; — it is all, but a fortifying of imagination against all sense and reason. Because there is a singular mystery in the sacramental union that is between the external signs and the things signified, — whence the one is called by the name of the other, as the bread is called the body of Christ, — which faith discerns in the exhibition and receiving of it, they have invented, for a representation hereof, such a prodigious imagination, of the real conversion or transubstantiation of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, as overthrows all faith, reason, and sense also. And in the room of that *holy reverence* of Christ himself, in his institution of this ordinance, in the mystical exhibition of himself unto the souls of believers, in the demonstration of his love, grace, and sufferings for them, they have set up a wretched image of an idolatrous adoration and worship of the “Host,” as they call it, to the ruin of the souls of men. And — whereas the Lord Jesus Christ, “by one offering, perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” appointing this ordinance for the remembrance of it — having lost that spiritual light whereby they might discern the efficacy of that *one offering*, so long since accomplished, in the application of it by this ordinance unto the actual perfecting of the church, they have erected a *new image* of it, in a pretended *daily repetition of the same sacrifice*; wherein they profess to offer Christ again for the sins of the living and the dead, unto the overthrow of the principal foundation of faith and religion. All these abominations arose from the loss of an *experience* of that spiritual communion with Christ, and the participation of him by faith, which there is in this ordinance by divine institution. This cast the thoughts of men on invention of these images, to suit the general notion of truth unto the superstition of their carnal minds. Nor is it ordinarily possible to retrieve them from these infatuations, unless God be pleased to communicate unto them that *spiritual light* whereby they may discern the glory of this heavenly mystery, and have an experience of the exhibition of Christ unto the souls of believers therein without these. From innumerable prejudices and inflamed affections towards their idols, they will not only abide in their darkness against all means of conviction, but endeavour the temporal and eternal destruction of all that are otherwise minded.

This *image*, like that of Nebuchadnezzar, was once set up in this nation, with a law, that whoever would not bow down to it, and worship it, should be cast into the fiery furnace. God grant it to be so no more! But if it should, there is no preservation against the influence of force and fires, but a real experience of an *efficacious communication of Christ* unto our souls in this holy ordinance, administered according to his appointment. This, therefore, is that we ought with all diligence to endeavour; and this, not only as the only way and means of our edification in this ordinance, by an exercise in grace, the strengthening of our faith and present consolation, but as the effectual means of our preservation in the profession of the truth, and our deliverance from the snares of our adversaries. For whereas it is undeniable that this peculiar institution, distinct from all others, doth intend and design a distinct communication and exhibition of Christ; if it be pressed on us that these must be done by

*transubstantiation and oral manducation* thereon, and can be no otherwise, nothing but an experience of the power and efficacy of the mystical communion with Christ in this ordinance, before described, will preserve us from being ensnared by their pretences. There is not, therefore, on all accounts of grace and truth, any one thing of more concernment unto believers, than the due exercise of spiritual light and faith unto a satisfactory experience of a peculiar participation of Christ in this holy institution.

II. The same is fallen out amongst them with reference unto the *church*, and all the principal concerns of it; — having lost or renounced the things which belong unto its primitive constitution, they have erected a *deformed image* in their stead; as I shall manifest in some instances.

Sect. IV. It is an unquestionable principle of truth, that the Church of Christ is in itself a *body*, — *such* a body as hath a *head*, whereon it depends, and without which it would immediately be dissolved.

A body without a head is but a carcase, or part of a carcase; and this head must be always present with it. A head distant from the body, — separated from it, not united unto it by such ways and means as are proper unto their nature, — is of no use. See [Eph. iv. 15, 16](#); [Col. ii. 19](#).

But there is a double notion of a *head*, as there is of a *body* also; for they both of them are either *natural* or *political*. There is a *natural* body, and there is a *political* body; and, in each sense, it must have a head of the same kind. A natural body must have a head of *vital influence*, and a political body must have a head of *rule and government*. The church is called a body, — compared to it, — is a body in both senses, or in both parts of the comparison; and in both must have a head. As it is a *spiritually living body*, compared to the natural, it must have a head of vital influence, without which it cannot subsist; and as it is an *orderly society* for the common ends of its institution, compared unto a political body, it must have a head of *rule and government*, without which neither its being nor its use can be preserved. But these are only distinct considerations of the church, which is every way one and the same. It is not two bodies; for then it must have two heads: but it is one body, under two distinct considerations, which divide not its *essence*, but declare its different *respects* unto its head.

And in general, all who are called Christians are thus far agreed, — nothing is of the church, nothing belongs unto it, which is not dependent on, which is not united to, the head. That which *holds the head* is the true church; that which doth not so, is no church at all. Herein we agree with our adversaries; namely, that all the privileges of the church, all the right and title of men thereunto, depend wholly on their *due relation to the head of it*, according to the distinct considerations of it. Be that head who or what it will, that which is not united unto the head, which depends not on it, which is separated from it, belongs not to the church. This head of the church is *Christ Jesus alone*; for the church is but one,



although, on various considerations, it be likened unto two sorts of bodies. The *catholic church* is considered either as believing, or as professing; but the believing church is not *one*, and the professing *another*. If you suppose another catholic *church* besides this one, whoso will may be the head of it, we are not concerned therein; but unto this church Christ is *the only head*. He only answers all the properties and ends of such a head to the church. This the Scripture doth so positively and frequently affirm, without the least intimation, either directly or by consequence, of any other head, that it is wonderful how the imagination of it should befall the minds of any, who thought, it not meet at the same time to cast away their Bibles.

But, whereas a head is to be *present* with the body, or it cannot subsist, the inquiry is, *How the Lord Christ is so present with his church?* And the Scripture hath left no pretence for any hesitation herein; for he is so *by his Spirit and his word*, by which he communicateth all the powers and virtues of a head unto it continually. His promises of this way and manner of his presence unto the church are multiplied; and thereon doth the being, life, use, and continuance of the church depend. Where Christ is not present by his Spirit and word, there is no church; and those who pretend so to be, are the synagogues of Satan. And they are inseparable and conjunct in their operation, as he is the head of influence unto the church, as also as he is a head of rule; for, in the former sense, the Spirit worketh by the word, and in the latter, the word is made effectual by the Spirit. But the sense and apprehension hereof was for a long time lost in the world, amongst them that called themselves “the church.” A head they did acknowledge the church must always have, without which it cannot subsist; and they confess that, in some sense, he was a head of influence unto it. They knew not how to have an image thereof; though by many other pernicious doctrines they overthrew the efficacy and benefit of it. But how he should be the only head of rule unto the church they could not understand; they saw not how he could act the wisdom and authority of such a head, and without which the church must be headless. They said, he was *absent* and *invisible*, — they must have one that they could see, and have access unto; he is in heaven, and they know not how to make address to him, as occasion did require: all things would go to disorder, notwithstanding such a headship. The church is visible, and it must, they thought, have a visible head. It was meet, also, that this head should have some such grandeur and pomp in the world as became the head of so great and glorious a society as the church is. How to apply these things unto Christ and his presence with the church, by his word and Spirit, they knew not. Shall they, then, forego the principle, that the church is to have such a head and supreme ruler? That must not be done, but be sacredly retained; not only because to deny it, in general, is to renounce the gospel, but because they had found out a way to turn it unto their own advantage. They would therefore make an image of Christ, as this head of the church, to possess the place and act all the powers of such a head; for the church, they say, is visible, and must have a visible head: as though the catholic church, as such,



were any other way visible but as the head of it is, — that is, by faith. That there must be a head and centre of union, wherein all the members of the church may agree and be united, notwithstanding all their distinct capacities and circumstances, and how this should be Christ himself, they know not; that without a supreme ruler present in the church, to compose all differences, and determine all controversies, even those concerning himself, which they vainly pretend unto, they expressly affirm there never was a society so foolishly ordered as that of the church. And hereon they conclude the insufficiency of Christ to be this *sole head* of the church; another they must have for these ends. And this was their pope, — such an image as is one of the worst of idols that ever were in the world. Unto him they give all the titles of Christ, which relate unto the church; and ascribe all the powers of Christ in and over it, as unto its rule, to him also. But here they fell into a mistake; for, when they thought to give him *the power of Christ*, they gave him *the power of the dragon* to use against Christ, and those that are his. And when they thought to make an *image of Christ*, they made an *image of the first beast*, set up by the dragon, which had two horns like a lamb, but spake as a dragon; whose character and employ is at large described, [Rev. xiii. 11–17](#).

This is the sum of what I shall offer on this head:— those who called themselves “the church,” had lost all *spiritual light*, enabling them to discern the beauty and glory of the rule of Christ over the church, as its head; and hereon their minds became destitute of all *experience* of the power and efficacy of his Spirit and word, continually to order the affairs thereof, in the ways, and through the use of means, by himself appointed; they knew not how to acquiesce in these things, nor how the church could be maintained by them: wherefore, in this case, “they helped every one his neighbour, and every one said to his brother, Be of good comfort; so the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer, him that smiteth the anvil.” They set themselves, in their several capacities, to frame this idol, and set him up in the place and stead of Christ; so fixing him in the temple of God, that he might show himself from thence to be as God. Neither will this idol be ever cast out of the church, until the generality of Christians become spiritually sensible of the authority of Christ exerting itself, in the rule of the church, by his Spirit and his word, unto all the ends of unity, order, peace, and edification. Until that be done, a pope, or something like him, will be thought necessary unto these ends. But never was there a more horrid, deformed image made of so beautiful and glorious a head: all the craft of Satan, all the wits of men, cannot invent any thing more unlike Christ, as the head of the church, than this *Pope* is. A worse figure and representation of him cannot possibly be made.

This is he of whom nothing not great, nothing common, nothing not exceeding the ordinary state of mankind, on the one hand or the other, is thought or spoken. Some say he is “the head and husband of the church,” “the vicar of Christ over the whole world,” “God’s vicegerent,” “a vice-god,” “Peter’s successor,” “the head and centre of unity” unto the whole catholic church, endued with a plenitude of power, with other ascriptions of the





same nature innumerable; whereon it is necessary unto every soul, under pain of damnation, to be subject unto him; — others aver that he is “antichrist,” “the man of sin,” “the son of perdition,” “the beast that came out of the earth with two horns like a lamb, and a voice like the dragon,” “the false prophet,” “the idol shepherd,” “the evil servant that beateth his fellow-servants,” “the adulterer of a meretricious and false church:” and there is no mean betwixt these; — he is undoubtedly the one or the other. The Lord Jesus Christ, who hath determined this controversy already in his word, will ere long give it its ultimate issue in his own glorious person, and by the brightness of his coming. And this is an eminent idol in the *Chamber of Imagery* in the *Roman Church*. But at present it is evident wherein lies the preservation of believers from being inveigled to bow down to this image, and to worship it. A due sense of the sole authority of Christ in and over his church, with an experience of the power of his word and Spirit unto all the ends of its rule and order, will keep them unto the truth herein; and nothing else will so do. And if once they decline from this in any instances, seem they never so small, so as to admit of any thing in the church or its worship which doth not derive immediately from his authority, they will be disposed to admit of another guide and head in all other things also.

*Sect. V.* Again: it is a notion of truth, that *the Church of Christ is beautiful and glorious*.

There are many prophecies and predictions concerning it, that so it should be; and there are sundry descriptions given of it as such. Its relation unto Christ, with his love unto it, and valuation of it, do require that it should be so glorious; yea, his great design towards it was to make it so to be, [Eph. v. 25–27](#). This, therefore, all do agree in who profess Christian religion; but *what that glory is*, and wherein it doth consist, — whence it is, and is said to be glorious, — is not agreed upon. The Scripture, indeed, plainly declares this glory to be *spiritual and internal*; — that it consists in its union unto Christ, his presence with it, the communication of his quickening Spirit unto it, the clothing of it with his righteousness, in its sanctification and purification from the defilement of sin, with its fruitfulness in obedience, unto the praise of God. Add hereunto the celebration of divine worship in it, with its rule and order, according to the commandment of Christ, and we have the substance of this glory. And this glory believers do discern, so as to be satisfied with its excellency. They know that all the glories of the world are no way to be compared to it; for it consists in, and arises from, such things as they do value and prefer infinitely above all that this world can afford. They are a reflection of the glory of God or of Christ himself upon the church; yea, a communication of it thereunto. This they value in the whole, and in every member of it; neither the nature, use, nor end of the church, will admit that its glory should consist in things of any other nature. But the generality of mankind had lost that *spiritual light* wherein alone this glory might be discerned. They could see no form or beauty in the spouse of Christ, as only adorned with his graces. To talk of a glorious state of men, whilst they are poor and destitute, it may be, clothed with rags, and haled into prisons or to stakes, as hath been the

lot of the church in most ages, was, in their judgment, a thing absurd and foolish. Wherefore, seeing it is certain that the Church of Christ is very glorious and illustrious in the sight of God, holy angels, and good men, a way must be found out to make it so, and so to appear in the world. Wherefore they agreed on a lying image of this glory, — namely, the *dignity, promotion, wealth, dominion, power, and splendour*, of all them that had got the rule of the church. And although it be evident unto all that these things belong unto the glories of this world, which the glory of the church is not only distinguished from, but opposed unto, yet it [they?] must be looked on as that wherein it is glorious; and it is so, though it have not one saving grace in it, as they expressly affirm. When these things are attained, then are all the predictions of its glory accomplished, and the description of it answered. This *corrupt image of the true spiritual glory* of the church, — arising from an ignorance of it, and want of a real experience of the worth and *excellency* of things internal, spiritual, and heavenly, — hath been attended with pernicious consequents in the world. Many have been infatuated by it, and enamoured of it, unto their own perdition. For, as a teacher of lies, it is suited only to divert the minds of men from a comprehension and valuation of that real glory, wherein if they have not an interest, they must perish forever.

Look into foreign parts, as Italy and France, where these men pretend their church is in its greatest glory: what is it but the wealth, and pomp, and power of men, for the most part openly ambitious, sensual, and worldly? Is this the glory of the Church of Christ? Do these things belong unto his kingdom? [No;] but by the setting up of this image, by the advancement of this notion, all the true glory of the church hath been lost and despised. Yet these things, being suited unto the designs of the carnal minds of men, and satisfactory unto all their lusts, — having got this paint and gilding on them, that they render the Church of Christ glorious, — have been the means of filling this world with darkness, blood, and confusion. For this is that glory of the church which is contended for with rage and violence. And not a few do yet dote on these images, who are not sharers in the advantage it brings unto its principal worshippers, whose infatuation is to be bewailed.

The means of our preservation from the adoration of these images also is obvious, from the principles we proceed upon. It will not be done without light to discern *the glory of things spiritual and invisible*; wherein alone the church is glorious. And in the light of faith they appear to be what indeed they are in themselves, — of the same nature with the glory that is above. The present glory of the church, I say, is its initiation into the glory of heaven, and in general of the same nature with it. Here it is in its dawns and entrances; there, in its fulness and perfection. To look for any thing that should be cognate, or of near alliance unto the glory of heaven, or any near resemblance of it, in the outward glories of this world, is a fond imagination. And when the mind is enabled to discern the true beauty and glory of spiritual things, with their alliance unto that which is above, it will be secured from

seeking after the glory of the church in things of this world or putting any value on them unto that end.

That *self-denial* also, which is indispensably prescribed in the gospel unto all the disciples of Christ, is requisite hereunto; for the power and practice of it is utterly inconsistent with an apprehension that secular power, riches, and domination, do contribute any thing unto the church's glory. The mind being hereby crucified unto a value and estimation of these things, it can never apprehend them as any part of *that raiment of the church* wherein it is glorious. But where the minds of men, through their native darkness, are disabled to discern the glory of spiritual things, and, through their carnal, unmortified affection, do cleave unto, and have the highest esteem of, worldly grandeur, it is no wonder if they suppose the beauty and glory of the church to consist in them.

*Sect. VI.* I shall add one instance more with reference unto the state of the church; and that is in its *rule and discipline*.

Here, also, hath been as fatal a miscarriage as ever fell out in Christian religion. For the truth herein being lost, as unto any sense and experience of its efficacy or power, a *bloody image*, destructive to the lives and souls of men, was set up in the stead thereof. And this also shall be briefly declared. There are certain principles of truth with respect hereunto that are acknowledged by all; as, —

1. That the Lord Christ hath appointed a rule and *discipline* in his church, for its good and preservation. No society can subsist without the power and exercise of some rule in itself; for rule is nothing but the preservation of order, without which there is nothing but confusion. The church is the most perfect society in the earth, as being united and compacted by the best and highest bonds which our nature is capable of, [Eph. iv. 16](#); [Col. ii. 19](#). It must, therefore, have a rule and discipline in itself; which, from the wisdom and authority of Him by whom it was instituted, must be supposed to be the most perfect.

2. That this discipline is *powerful and effectual unto all its proper ends*. It must be so esteemed, from the wisdom of Him by whom it is appointed; and it is so accordingly. To suppose that the Lord Christ should ordain a rule and discipline in his church, that in itself, and by its just administration, should not attain its ends, is to reflect the greatest dishonour upon him. Yea, if any church or society of professed Christians be fallen into that state and condition, wherein the discipline appointed by Christ cannot be effectual unto its proper ends, Christ hath forsaken that church or society. Besides, the Holy Ghost affirms that the ministry of the church, in the administration of it, is “mighty, through God,” unto all its ends, [2 Cor. x. 4, 5](#).

3. The ends of this discipline are the *order, peace, purity, and holiness of the church, with a representation of the love, care, and watchfulness of Christ over it, and a testimony unto his future judgment*. An imagination of any other ends of it hath been its ruin.

And thus far all who profess themselves Christians are agreed, at least in words. None dare deny any of these principles; no, not to secure their abuse of them, which is the interest of many.

4. But unto them all we must also add, and that with the same uncontrollable evidence of truth, that *the power and efficacy of this discipline, which it hath from the institution of Christ, is spiritual only*, and hath all its effects on the souls and consciences of those who profess subjection unto him, with respect unto the ends before mentioned. So the apostle expressly describes it, *2 Cor. x. 4, 5*, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” These are the ends, as of preaching of the gospel, so of the discipline of the church; and these are the ways and means of its efficacy:— it is spiritually mighty, through God, unto all these ends; and others it hath none. But we shall immediately see the total reverse of this order, in an image substituted in the room of it.

5. Of the power and efficacy of this *spiritual discipline* unto its proper end, *the primitive Christians*, at least, had experience. For three hundred years, the church had no other way or means for the preservation of its order, peace, purity, and holiness, but the spiritual efficacy of this discipline on the souls and consciences of professed Christians. Neither did it fail therein, nor were the churches any longer preserved in peace and purity, than whilst they had this discipline alone for their preservation, without the least contribution of assistance from secular power, or any thing that should operate on the outward concerns of mankind. And there can be no other reason given, why it should not be of the same use and efficacy still unto all churches, but only the loss of all those internal graces which are necessary to make any gospel institution effectual: wherefore, all sense and experience hereof — of the spiritual power and efficacy of this discipline — was utterly lost amongst the most of them that are called Christians. Neither those who had assumed a pretence of the administration of it, nor those towards whom it was administered, could find any thing in it that did affect the consciences of men, with respect unto its proper ends. They found it a thing altogether useless in the church, wherein none of any sort would be concerned. What shall they now do? what course shall they take? Shall they renounce all those principles of truth concerning it which we have laid down, and exclude it, both name and thing, out of the church? This probably would have been the end of it, had they not found out a way to wrest the pretence of it unto their unspeakable advantage. Wherefore they contrived and made a horrid image of the holy spiritual rule and discipline of the gospel: an image it was, consisting in outward force and tyranny over the persons, liberties, and lives of men; exercised with weapons mighty through the devil to cast men into prison, and to destroy them. Hereby that which was appointed for the *peace* and *edification* of the church being lost, an engine was framed, under its name and pretence, unto its ruin and destruction; and so it continues unto this

day. It had never entered into the hearts of men to set up a discipline in the Church of Christ by law, courts, fines, mulcts, imprisonments, and burnings, but that they had utterly lost in themselves, and suffered to be lost in others concerned, all experience of the power and efficacy of the discipline of Christ towards the souls and consciences of men. But hereon they laid it aside, as a useless tool, that might do some service in the hands of the apostles and the primitive churches, whilst there was spiritual life and sense left amongst Christians; but as unto them, and what they aimed at, it was of no use at all. The deformity of this image in the several parts of it; its universal dissimilitude unto that whose name it bears, and which it pretends to be; the several degrees whereby it was forged, framed, and erected; with the occasions and advantages taken for its exaltation, would take up much time to declare: for it was subtly interwoven with other abominations, in the whole *Mystery of Iniquity*, until it became the very life or animating principle of Anti-christianism. For, however men may set light by the rule and discipline of Christ in his church, and its spiritual power or efficacy towards the souls and consciences of men, the rejection of it, and the setting up of a horrid image of worldly power, domination, and force in the room of it, and under its name, is that which began, carried on, and yet maintains, the fatal apostasy in the Church of Rome.

I shall instance only in one particular. On the change of this rule of Christ, and, together with it, the setting up of Malizzim, or an image, or “god of forces,” [Dan. xi. 38,] in the stead of it; they were compelled to change all the ends of that discipline, and to make an image of them also. For this new instrument of outward force was of no use with respect unto them; for they are, as was declared, the spiritual peace, purity, love, and edification of the church. Outward force is no way meet to attain any of these ends. Wherefore, they must make an image of these also, or substitute some dead form in their room; and this was a universal subjection unto the pope, according unto all the rules, orders, and canons which they should invent. *Uniformity* herein, and *canonical obedience*, is all the end which they will allow unto their church discipline; and these things hang well together, for nothing but outward force by law and penalties is fit to attain this end. So was there an image composed and erected of the holy discipline of Christ, and its blessed ends, consisting of these two parts, *outward force* and *feigned subjection*. For hardly can an instance be given in the world of any man who ever bowed down to this image, or submitted unto any ecclesiastical censure, out of a conscientious respect unto it. Force and fear rule all.

This is that discipline in whose execution the blood of an innumerable company of *holy martyrs* hath been shed, — that wherein all the *vital spirits* of the Papacy do act themselves, and whereby it doth subsist; and although it be the image of jealousy, or the image of the first beast, set up by the dragon, yet it cannot be denied, but that it is very wisely accommodated unto the present state of the generality of them that are called Christians amongst them. For being both blind and carnal, and having thereby lost all sense and experience of the *spiritual power* of the *rule* of Christ in their consciences, they are become a herd not fit to



be governed or ruled any other way. Under the bondage of it, therefore, they must abide, till the vail of blindness be taken away, and they are turned unto God by his word and Spirit; for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there,” and there alone, “is liberty.”

*Sect. VII.* Unto the foregoing *particular* instances, with respect unto the church, I shall yet add one more *general*; which is indeed comprehensive of them all, or the root from whence they spring, — a root bearing gall and wormwood: and this is concerning *the catholic church*.

What belongs unto this catholic church, what is comprised in its communion, the apostle declares, [Heb. xii. 22–24](#). It is the recapitulation of all things in heaven and earth in Christ Jesus, [Eph. i. 10](#); — his body, his spouse or bride, the Lamb’s wife, the glorious temple wherein God doth dwell by his Spirit; — a holy mystical society, purchased and purified by the blood of Christ, and united unto him by his Spirit, or the inhabitation of the same Spirit in him and those whereof it doth consist. Hence they with him, as the body with its head, are mystically called Christ, [1 Cor. xii. 12](#). And there are two parts of it, the one whereof is already *perfected in* heaven, as unto their spirits; and the other yet continued in the way of faith and obedience in this world. Both these constitute “one family in heaven and earth,” [Eph. iii. 15](#); — in conjunction with the holy angels, one mystical body, one catholic church. And although there is a great difference, in their present state and condition, between these two branches of the same family, yet are they both equally purchased by Christ, and united unto him as their head, having both of them effectually the same principle of the life of God in them. Of a *third part of this church*, neither in heaven nor in earth, in a temporary state, participant somewhat of heaven, and somewhat of hell, called purgatory, the Scripture knoweth nothing at all; neither is it consistent with the analogy of faith, or the promises of God unto them that do believe, as we shall see immediately. This church, even as unto that part of it which is in this world, as it is adorned with all the graces of the Holy Spirit, is the most beautiful and glorious effect, — next unto the forming and production of its Head, *in the incarnation of the Son of God* — which divine wisdom, power, and grace will extend themselves unto here below. But these things — the glory of this state — is visible only unto *the eye of faith*; yea, it is perfectly seen and known only to Christ himself. We see it obscurely in the light of faith and revelation, and are sensible of it according unto our participating of the graces and privileges wherein it doth consist.

But that spiritual light which is necessary to the discerning of this glory was lost among those of whom we treat. They could see no reality nor beauty in these things, nor any thing that should be of advantage unto them. For upon their principle, of the *utter uncertainty* of men’s spiritual estate and condition in this world, it is evident that they could have no satisfactory persuasion of any concernment in it. But they had possessed themselves of the notion of a *catholic church*; which, with mysterious artifices, they have turned unto their own incredible secular advantage. This is that whereof they boast, appropriating it unto themselves,



and making it a pretence of destroying others, what lies in them, both temporally and eternally. Unto this end they have formed the most deformed and detestable image of it that ever the world beheld; for the catholic church which they own, and which they boast that they are, instead of that of Christ, is a company or society of men, unto whom, in order unto the constitution of that whole society, there is *no one real Christian grace* required, nor spiritual union unto Christ, the head, but only an outside profession of these things, as they expressly contend; — a society united unto the Pope of Rome, as its head, by a subjection unto him and his rule, according to the laws and canons whereby he will guide them. This is the formal reason and cause constituting that catholic church which they are, which is compacted in itself by *horrid bonds and ligaments*, for the ends of ambition, worldly domination, and avarice; — a catholic church openly *wicked* in the generality of its rulers, and them that are ruled; and in its state *cruel*, oppressive, and dyed with the blood of saints, and martyrs innumerable. This, I say, is that image of the holy catholic church, the spouse of Christ, which they have set up. And it hath been as the image of Moloch, that hath devoured and consumed the children of the church; whose cries, when their cruel stepmother pitied them not, and when their pretended ghostly fathers cast them into the flames, came up unto the ears of the Lord of hosts; and their blood still cries for vengeance on this idolatrous generation. Yet is this pretence of the catholic church pressed, in the minds of many, with so many *sophistical* artifices, through the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, proposed with the allurements of so many secular advantages, and imposed oftentimes on Christians with so much force and cruelty, that nothing can secure us from the admission of it, unto the utter overthrow of religion, but the means before insisted on. A spiritual light is necessary hereunto, to discern the internal spiritual beauty and glory of the true catholic church of Christ. Where this is in its power, all the paintings and dresses of their deformed image will fall off from it, and its abominable filth will be made to appear. And this will be accompanied with an effectual experience of the glory and excellency of that grace in the souls of those that believe, derived from Christ, the sole head of this church, whereby they are changed “from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The power, life, and sweetness hereof, will give satisfaction unto their souls, to the contempt of the pretended order, or dependence on the pope as a head. By these means the true catholic church, — which is the body of Christ, the fulness of him that filleth all in all, — growing up unto him in all things who is the head, despiseth this *image*, and *Dagon* will fall to the ground when this *Ark* is brought in; yea, though it be in his own temple.

III. In the farther opening of this Chamber of Imagery, we shall yet, if it be possible, see greater abominations; at least, that which doth next ensue is scarce inferior unto any of them that went before.

Sect. VIII. It is a principle in Christian religion, an acknowledged verity, that *it is the duty of the disciples of Christ, especially as united in churches, to propagate the faith of the*

*gospel*, and to make the doctrine of it known unto all as they have opportunity; yea, this is one principal end of the constitution of churches, and officers in them, [Matt. v. 13–16](#); [1 Tim. iii. 15](#).

This our Lord Jesus Christ gave in special charge unto his apostles at the beginning, [Matt. xxviii. 19, 20](#); [Mark xvi. 15, 16](#). Hereby they were obliged unto the work of propagating the faith of the gospel, and the knowledge of him therein, in all places, and were justified in their so doing. And this they did with that efficacy and success, that, in a short time, like the light of the sun, “their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world,” [Rom. x. 18](#); and the gospel was said to be “preached to every creature which is under heaven,” [Col. i. 23](#). The way, therefore, whereby they propagated the faith, was by diligent, laborious preaching of the doctrine of the gospel unto all persons in all places, with patience and magnanimity in undergoing all sorts of sufferings on the account of it, and a declaration of its power in all those virtues and graces which are useful and exemplary unto mankind. It is true, their office and the discharge of it is long since ceased; howbeit it cannot be denied but that the work itself is incumbent, in a way of duty, on all churches, yea, on all believers, as they have providential calls unto it, and opportunities for it. For it is the principal way whereby they may glorify God and benefit men in their chiefest good; which, without doubt, they are obliged unto.

This notion of truth is retained in the Church of Rome: and the work itself is appropriated by them unto themselves alone. Unto *them*, and *them only*, as they suppose, it belongs to take care of the propagation of the faith of the gospel, with the conversion of infidels and *heretics*. Whatever is done unto this purpose by others, they condemn and abhor. What do they think of the primitive way of doing it, — by personal preaching, sufferings, and holiness? Will the pope, his cardinals and bishops, undertake this work or way of the discharge of it? Christ hath appointed no other; the apostles and their successors knew no other; — no other becomes the gospel, nor ever had success. No; they abhor and detest this way of it. What, then, is to be done? Shall the truth be denied? shall the work wholly and avowedly be laid aside? Neither will this please them; because it is not suited unto their honour: wherefore they have erected a dismal image of it, unto the horrible reproach of Christian religion. They have, indeed, provided a double painting for the image which they have set up. The first is the constant consult of some persons at Rome, which they call “*Congregatio de Propagandâ Fide*,” — a council for the propagation of the faith; under the effect of whose consultations Christendom hath long groaned: and the other is, the sending of missionaries, as they call them, or a surcharge of friars from their over-numerous fraternities, upon their errands into remote nations.

But the real image itself consists of these three parts:— 1. *The sword*; 2. *The inquisition*; 3. *Plots and conspiracies*.





By these it is that they design to propagate the faith and promote Christian religion; and if hell itself can invent a more deformed image and representation of the sacred truth and work, which it is a counterfeit of, I am much mistaken.

1. Thus have they, in the *first way*, carried Christian religion into the Indies, especially the western parts of the world so called. First the Pope, out of the plenitude of his power, gives unto the Spaniard all those countries and the inhabitants of them, that they may be made Christians. But Christ dealt not so with his apostles, though he were Lord of all, when he sent them to teach and baptize all nations. He dispossessed none of them of their temporal rights or enjoyments, nor gave to his apostles a foot-breadth of inheritance among them. But upon this grant, the Spanish Catholics propagated the faith, and brought in Christian religion amongst them. And they did it by killing and murdering many millions of innocent persons; as some of themselves say, more than are alive in Europe in any one age. And this savage cruelty hath made the name of Christians detestable amongst all that remained of them that had any exercise of reason; [only] some few slavish brutes being brought by force to submit unto this new kind of idolatry. And this we must think to be done in obedience unto that command of Christ, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” This is the deformed image which they have set up of obedience unto his holy commands; whereunto they apply that voice to Peter with respect unto the eating of all sorts of creatures, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.” So have they dealt with those poor nations whom they have devoured. But blood, murder, and unjust war (as all war is for the propagation of religion), with persecution, began in Cain, who derived it from the devil, that “murderer from the beginning;” for he “was of that wicked one, and slew his brother,” [John iii. 12.] Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was manifested to “destroy the works of the devil,” [1 John iii. 8.] And he doth it in this world by his word and doctrine, judging and condemning them. And he does it in his disciples by his Spirit, extirpating them out of their minds, hearts, and ways; so as that there is not a more assured character of a derivation from the evil spirit, than force and blood in religion for the propagating of it.

2. The next part of this image, the next way used by them for the propagating of the faith, and the conversion of them they call heretics, — is the *Inquisition*. So much hath been declared and is known thereof, that it is needless here to give a portraiture of it. It may suffice, that it hath been long since opened, like Cacus’s den, and discovered to be the greatest arsenal of cruelty, the most dreadful shambles of blood and slaughter, that ever was in the world. This is that engine which hath supplied the scarlet whore with the blood of saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, until she was drunk with it. And this is the *second way* or means whereby they propagate the faith of the gospel, and endeavour, as they say,



the conversion of the souls of men; this is the second part of that image which they have set up instead of the holy appointment of Jesus Christ.

3. The *third way* they insist on unto this purpose, — the third part of this image, — consists in *plots and contrivances* to murder princes, to embroil nations in blood, to stir up sedition unto their ruin, inveigling and alluring all sorts of vicious, indigent, ambitious persons, into an association with them, so as to introduce the Catholic religion in the places which they design to subvert. This engine for the propagation of the faith hath been plied with various successes in many nations of Europe, and is still at work unto the same purpose. And hereunto belong all the arts which they use for the infatuation of the minds of princes and great men, — all the baits they lay for others of all sorts, to work them over into a compliance with their designs.

Of these parts, I say, is that dreadful image made up and composed, which they set up, embrace, and adore, in the room of the holy way for the propagation of the gospel appointed by Jesus Christ. *In his way* they can see no beauty, they can expect no success; — they cannot believe that ever the world will be converted by it, or be brought in subjection unto the pope; and therefore betake themselves unto their own. Faith, prayer, holiness, preaching, suffering, all in expectation of the promised presence and assistance of Christ, are no ways, for efficacy, success, and advantage, to be compared unto the sword, inquisition, and underhand designings. And this also is that which they call zeal for the glory of God, and the honour of Christ! — another deformed image which they have brought into religion. For whereas that grace consists principally in *postponing self*, and all self-concerns, with an undervaluation of them, unto the glory of God, and the special duties whereby it may be promoted, this impious design to destroy mankind by all ways of subtlety and cruelty, unto their own advantage, is set up in the room of it. But the consideration of the *nature* and *spirit*, of the *use* and *end*, of the gospel, — of the design of Christ in it and by it, — is sufficient to preserve the souls of men, not utterly infatuated, in an abhorrency of this image of its propagation. It is that wherein “the god of this world,” by the help of their blindness and lusts, hath put a cheat on mankind, and prevailed with them, under a pretence of doing Christ honour, to make the vilest representation of him to the world that can be conceived. If he hath appointed this way for the propagating of the gospel, he cannot well be distinguished from Mohammed; but there is nothing more contrary unto him, — nothing that his holy soul doth more abhor. And had not men lost all spiritual sense of the nature and ends of the gospel, they could never have given up themselves unto these abominations. For any to suppose that the faith of the gospel is to be propagated by such cruelty and blood, — by art and subtlety, — by plots, conspiracies, and contrivances, — any way but by the foolishness of preaching, which, unto that end, is the power and wisdom of God, — is to declare his own ignorance of it, and unconcernment in it. And had not men conceived and embraced another religion than what is taught therein, or abused a pretence thereof unto ends and advantages of their own, this

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imagination of the propagation of it had never taken place in their minds, it is so *diametrically* opposite unto the whole nature and all the ends of it.

Sect. IX. There is yet amongst them another image of a *general principle*, no less horrid than that before mentioned, and that with respect unto religious obedience. It is the great foundation of all religion, and in especial of Christian religion, that *God in all things is to be obeyed, absolutely and universally*.

Of all our obedience, there is no other reason, but that it is his will, and is known unto us so to be. This follows necessarily from the infinite perfections of the divine nature. As the first Essential Verity, he is to be believed in what he reveals, above and against all contradiction from pretended reasons, or any imaginations whatever; and as he is the only Absolute Independent Being, Essential Goodness, and the Sovereign Lord of all things, he is, without farther reason, motive, or inducement, to be absolutely obeyed in all his commands. An instance whereof we have in Abraham offering his only son without dispute or hesitation, in compliance with a divine revelation and command.

It will seem very difficult to frame an image hereof amongst men, with whom there is not the least shadow of these divine perfections, — namely, Essential Verity and Absolute Sovereignty in conjunction with Infinite Wisdom and Goodness; which alone render such an obedience lawful, useful, or suitable unto the principles of our rational natures. But those of whom we speak have not been wanting unto themselves herein, especially the principal craftsmen of this image-trade. The order of the Jesuits have made a bold attempt for the framing of it. Their *vow of blind obedience* (as they call it) unto their superiors, whereby they resign the whole conduct of their souls, in all the concernments of religion, in all duties toward God and man, unto their guidance and disposal, is a cursed image of this absolute obedience unto the commands of God which he requireth of us. Hence the founder of their order was not ashamed, in his Epistle *ad Fratres Lusitanos*, to urge and press this blind obedience from the example of Abraham yielding obedience unto God, without debate or consideration; as if the superiors of the order were good, and not evil and sinful men. Whilst this honour was reserved unto God, whilst this was judged to be *his prerogative* alone, — namely, that his commands are to be obeyed in all things, without reasonings and examinations as unto the matter, justice, and equity of them, merely because they are his, which absolutely and infallibly concludes them good, holy, and just, — the righteous government of the world, and the security of men in all their fights, were safely provided for; for he neither will nor can command any thing but what is holy, just, and good: but, since the ascription of such a god-like authority unto men, as to secure blind obedience unto all their commands, innumerable evils, in murders, seditions, and perjuries, have openly ensued thereon. But, besides those particular evils, in matter of fact, which have proceeded from this corrupt fountain, this persuasion at once takes away all grounds of peace and security from mankind; for who knows what a crew or sort of men called the Jesuits' superiors,



known only by their restless ambition and evil practices in the world, may command their vassals, who are sworn to execute whatever they command, without any consideration whether it be right or wrong, good or evil?

Let princes, and other great men, flatter themselves whilst they please, that, on one consideration or other, they shall be the objects only of their kindness; if these men, according to their profession, be obliged in conscience to execute whatever their superiors shall command them, — no less than Abraham was, to sacrifice his son on the command of God, they hold their lives at the mercy and on the good nature of these superiors, who are always safe out of the reach of revenge. It is marvellous, that mankind doth not agree to demolish this cursed image, or the ascription of a god-like power unto men to require blind obedience unto their commands, especially considering what effects it hath produced in the world. All men know by whose device it was first set up and erected; — by whom, by what means, and unto what end, it was confirmed and consecrated: and, at this day, it is maintained by a society of men of an uncertain extract and original, like that of the Janizaries in the Turkish empire, — their rise being generally out of obscurity, among the meanest and lowest of the people. Such they are, who, by the rules of their education, are taught to renounce all respect unto their native countries, and alliances therein, but so as to make them only the way and matter for the advancement of the interest of this new society. And this sort of men being nourished, from their very first entrance into the conduct of the society, unto hopes and expectations of wealth, honour, power, interest in the disposal of all public affairs of mankind, and the regulation of the consciences of men, it is no wonder if, with the utmost of their arts and industry, they endeavour to set up and preserve this image which they have erected, from whence they expect all the advantage which they do design. But hereof I may treat more fully when I come to speak of the image of Jealousy itself.

*Sect. X.* From these *generals* I shall proceed unto more particular instances; and those, for the most part, in important principles of religion, wherein Christian faith and practice are most concerned: and I shall begin with that which is of signal advantage unto the framers of these images, — as the other also are in their degree, for by this craft they have their livelihood and wealth, — and most pernicious to the souls of other men.

It is a principle of truth, and that such as wherein the whole course of Christian obedience is concerned, that *there is a spiritual defilement is sin.*

This the Scripture everywhere declares, representing the very nature of it by spiritual uncleanness. And this uncleanness is its contrariety unto the holiness of the divine nature, as represented unto us in the law. This defilement is in all men equally by nature; — all are alike born in sin, and the pollution of it: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” And it is in all personally, in various degrees; some are more polluted with actual sins than others, but all are so in their degree and measure. This pollution of sin must be purged and taken away, before our entrance into heaven; for no unclean thing shall enter into the

kingdom of God. Sin must be destroyed in its nature, practice, power, and effects, or we are not saved from it. This purification of sin is wrought in us, initially and gradually, in this life, and accomplished in death, when the spirits of just men are made perfect. In a compliance with this work of God's grace towards them, whereby they purify themselves, consists one principal part of the obedience of believers in this world, and of the exercise of their faith. The principal, internal, immediate, efficient cause of this purification of sins, is *the blood of Christ*. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all our sins, [1 John i. 7](#). The blood of Jesus purgeth our consciences from dead works, [Heb. ix. 14](#). He washeth us in his own blood, [Rev. i. 5](#). And there is an external helping cause thereof; which is trials and afflictions, made effectual by the word, and accomplished in death.

But this way of purging sins by the blood of Christ is *mysterious*. There is no discerning of its glory but by spiritual light, — no experience of its power but by faith. Hence it is despised and neglected by the most, that yet outwardly profess the doctrine of the gospel. Men generally think there are a thousand better ways for the purging of sin than this by the blood of Christ, which they cannot understand. See [Mic. vi. 6, 7](#). It is mysterious in the application of it unto the souls and consciences of believers by the Holy Ghost. It is so, in the spring of its efficacy, which is the oblation of it for a propitiation; and in its relation unto the new covenant, which first it establisheth, and then makes effectual unto this end. The work of it is gradual and imperceptible unto any thing but the eyes of faith, and diligent spiritual experience.

Again; it is so ordered by divine wisdom, as strictly to require, to begin, excite, and encourage the utmost diligence of believers in a compliance with its efficacy unto the same end. What Christ did for us, he did without us, without our aid or concurrence. As God *made* us without ourselves, so Christ *redeemed* us; but what he doth *in us*, he doth also *by us*; what he works in a way of *grace*, we work in a way of *duty*. And our duty herein consists, as in the continual exercise of all gracious habits, renewing, changing, and transforming the soul into the likeness of Christ (for he who hopes to see him, “purifieth himself, as he is pure”); so also in universal, permanent, uninterrupted mortification unto the end; — whereof we shall speak afterward. This also renders the work both mysterious and difficult. The improvement of afflictions unto the same end is a principal part of the wisdom of faith; without which they can be of no spiritual use unto the souls of men.

This notion of the *defilement of sin*, and that of the *necessity of its purification*, were retained in the Church of Rome; for they could not be lost, without not only a rejection of the Scripture, but the stifling of natural conceptions about them, which are indelibly fixed in the consciences of men. But spiritual light into the glory of the thing itself, or the mystical purification of sin, with an experience of the power and efficacy of the blood of Christ, as applied unto the consciences of believers unto that end by the Holy Ghost, were lost amongst them. In vain shall we seek for any thing of this nature, either in their doctrine or their



practice. Wherefore, having lost the substance of this truth, and all experience of its power, to retain the use of its name, they have made sundry little images of it, — creeping things, — whereunto they ascribe the power of purging sin; such as holy water, pilgrimages, disciplines, masses, and various commutations. But they quickly found, by experience, that these things would neither purify the heart, nor pacify the consciences of sinners, any more than the blood of bulls and of goats could do it under the law; yea, any more than the lustrations and expiations of sin amongst the heathen could effect it. Wherefore they have at length formed a more stated and specious image of it, to serve all the turns of convinced sinners. And this is a *purgatory* after this life; that is, a subterraneous place and various means, where and whereby the souls of men are purged from all their sins and made meet for heaven, when the Lord Christ thinks meet to send for them, or the pope judges it fit to send them to him. Hereunto, let them pretend what they please, the people under their conduct do trust a thousand times more for the purging of their sins than unto the blood of Christ; but it is only a cursed image of the virtue of it, set up to draw off the minds of poor sinners from seeking an interest in a participation of the efficacy of that blood for that end, which is to be obtained by faith alone, [Rom. iii. 25](#). Only, they have placed this *image* behind the curtain of mortality, that the cheat of it might not be discovered. None, who find themselves deceived by it, can come back to complain or warn others to take care of themselves. And it was, in an especial manner, suited unto their delusion who lived in pleasures or in the pursuit of unjust gain, without exercise of afflictions in this world. From these two sorts of persons, by this engine, they raised a revenue unto themselves beyond that of kings or princes; for all the endowments of their religious houses and societies were but commutations for the abatement of *the fire of this purgatory*. But whereas in itself it was *a rotten post*, that could not stand or subsist, they were forced to prop it with many other imaginations. For unto this end, to secure work for this purgatory, they coined *the distinction of sins into mortal and venial*; — *not as unto their end*, with respect unto faith and repentance, nor as unto *the degrees of sin*, with respect unto the aggravations, but as unto *the nature of them*; some of them being such (namely, those that are venial) as were capable of a purging expiation after this life, though men die without any repentance of them. And when this was done, they have cast almost all the sins that can be named under this order; and hereon this image is become an engine to disappoint the whole doctrine of the gospel, and to precipitate secure sinners into eternal ruin. And to strengthen this deceiving security, they have added another invention, of *a certain storehouse of ecclesiastical merits*, the keys whereof are committed to the pope, to make application of them, as he sees good, unto the ease and relief of them that are in this purgatory. For, whereas many of their church and communion have, as they say, done more good works than were needful for their salvation (which they have received upon a due balance of commutative justice), the *surplus age* is committed to the pope, to commute with it for the punishment of their sins who are sent into purgatory to suffer for them; —

than which they could have found out no engine more powerful to evacuate the efficacy of the blood of Christ, both as offered and as sprinkled, and therewith, the doctrine of the gospel concerning faith and repentance. Moreover, to give it farther countenance (as one lie must be thatched with another, or it will quickly rain through), they have fancied a separation to be made between *guilt and punishment*, so as that when the guilt is fully remitted and pardoned, yet there may punishment remain on the account of sin. For this is the case of them in purgatory; — their sins are pardoned, so as that the *guilt* of them shall not bind them over to eternal damnation, though “the wages of sin is death;” yet they must be variously *punished* for the sins that are forgiven. But as this is contradictory in itself, it being utterly impossible there should be any punishment properly so called but where there is guilt as the cause of it; so it is highly injurious both to the grace of God and blood of Christ, in procuring and giving out such a lame pardon of sins, as should leave room for punishment next to that which is eternal. These are some of the rotten props which they have fixed on the minds of persons credulous and superstitious, terrified with guilt and darkness, to support this tottering, *deformed image*, set up in the room of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, to purge the souls and consciences of believers from sin. But that whereby it is principally established and kept up is, *the darkness, ignorance, guilt, fear, terror of conscience*, accompanied with a love of sin, that the most among them are subject and obnoxious unto; being disquieted, perplexed, and tormented with these things, and utterly ignorant of the true and only way of their removal and deliverance from them, they greedily embrace this sorry provision for their present ease and relief, being accommodated unto the utmost that human or diabolical craft can extend unto, to abate their fear, ease their torments, and to give security unto their superstitious minds. And hereby it is become to be the life and soul of their religion, diffusing itself into all the parts and concerns of it, — more trusted unto than either God, or Christ, or the gospel.

*Spiritual light and experience*, with the consequents of them in *peace* with God, will safeguard the minds of believers from bowing down to this horrid image, though the acknowledgments of its divinity should be imposed on them with craft and force: otherwise it will not be done; for without this there will a strong inclination and disposition, arising from a mixture of superstitious fear and love of sin, possess the minds of men to close with this pretended relief and satisfaction. The foundation of our preservation herein lies in spiritual light, or an ability of mind, from supernatural illumination, to discern the beauty, glory, and efficacy of the purging of our sins by the blood of Christ. When the glory of the wisdom and grace of God, of the love and grace of Christ, of the power of the Holy Ghost herein, is made manifest unto us, we shall despise all the paintings of this invention, — Dagon will fall before the ark; and all these things do gloriously shine forth and manifest themselves unto believers in this mysterious way of purging all our sins by the blood of Christ. Hereon will ensue an experience of the efficacy of this heavenly truth in our own

souls. There is no man whose heart and ways are cleansed by the blood of Christ, through the effectual application of it by the Holy Spirit, in the ordinance of the gospel, but he hath, or may have, a refreshing experience of it in his own soul; and, by the power which is communicated therewith, he is stirred up unto all that exercise of faith, and all those duties of obedience, whereby the work of purifying and cleansing the whole person may be carried on toward perfection. See *2 Cor. vii. 1*; *1 Thess. v. 23*, *i. John iii. 3*. And he who is constantly engaged in that work with success, will see the folly and vanity of any other pretended way for the purging of sins, here or hereafter. The consequent of these things is, peace with God; for they are assured pledges of our justification and acceptance with him, and being justified by faith, we have peace with God. And where this is attained by the gospel, the whole fabric of purgatory falls to the ground; for it is built on these foundations, that no assurance of the love of God, or of a justified state, can be obtained in this life; — for if it may be so, there can be no use of purgatory. This, then, will assuredly keep the souls of believers in a contempt of that, which is nothing but a false relief for sinners, under disquietment of mind for want of peace with God.

*Sect. XI.* Some other instances of the same abomination I shall yet mention, but with more brevity, and sundry others must at present be passed over without a discovery. It is the known method of gospel faith and obedience, — the way of God's dealing with believers in the covenant of grace, — that, after their initiation and implantation into Christ, they *should labour to thrive and grow in grace, by its continual exercise, until they come to be strengthened and confirmed therein.*<sup>348</sup> And this, in the ordinary way of God's dealing with the church, they shall never fail of, unless it be through their own neglect: for there are many divine promises to this purpose, and it lies in the nature of the things themselves; for the seeds of grace are of that kind of habits which will be increased and strengthened by exercise. Wherefore, *this confirmation in grace* is that whereof believers have a blessed experience.

This truth, in general, of an implantation into Christ, and the ensuing confirmation in grace, is universally assented unto; none can deny it without denying the whole doctrine of the gospel. But the sense and experience of it was lost amongst them of whom we treat; yet would they not forego the profession of the principle itself, — which would have proclaimed them apostates from the grace of Christ. Wherefore they formed an image of it, or images of both its distinct parts, which they could manage unto their own ends, and such as the carnal minds of men could readily comply with and rest in. As in the other sacrament they turned the outward signs into the things signified, so in this of baptism, they make it to stand in the stead of the thing itself; which is to make it, if not an idol, yet an image of it.

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348 This section was first given in the folio edition of Owen's Sermons and Tracts, published in 1721. It does not appear in the sermon as printed in the "*Morning Exercises.*" — Ed.



The outward participation of that ordinance with them is regeneration and implantation into Christ, without any regard unto the internal grace that is signified thereby; so that which in itself is a sacred figure, is made an image to delude the souls of men.

And that which they would impose in the room of spiritual confirmation in grace is yet more strange. The image which they set up hereof is *episcopal imposition of hands*. When one that hath been baptized can answer some few questions out of a *catechism*, though he be very ignorant, and openly vicious in his conversation, by this laying on of hands he is confirmed in grace.

It may be some will say, there is no great matter, one way or other, in things of this sort; they may be suffered to pass at what rate they will in this world. I confess I am not so minded. If there be any thing in them but mere formality and custom, — if they are trusted unto as the things whose names they bear, — they are pernicious unto the souls of men. For if all that are outwardly baptized should thereon judge themselves implanted into Christ, without regard unto the internal washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; and all who have had this imposition of hands should, without more ado, suppose themselves confirmed in *grace*, — they are in the ready way to eternal ruin.

*Sect. XII.* It is granted among all Christians, that all *our helps, our relief, our deliverance from, sin, Satan, and the world, are from Christ alone.*

This is included in all his relations unto the church, — in all his offices, and the discharge of them; and is the express doctrine of the gospel. It is no less generally acknowledged, — at least the Scripture is no less clear and positive on it, that we receive and derive all our *supplies of relief from Christ by faith*: other ways of the participation of any thing from him, the Scripture knoweth not. Wherefore, it is our duty, on all occasions, to apply ourselves unto him by faith, for all supplies, reliefs, and deliverances: but these men can find no life nor power herein; at least, if they grant that somewhat might be done this way, yet they know not how to do it, being ignorant of the life of faith, and the due exercise of it. They must have a way more ready and easy, exposed to the *capacities* and abilities of all sorts of persons, good and bad; yea, that will serve the turn of the worst of men unto these ends. An image, therefore, must be set up for common use, instead of this spiritual application unto Christ for relief; and this is the making of the sign of the cross. *Let a man but make the sign of the cross on his forehead, his breast, or the like, — which he may as easily do as take up or cast away a straw, — and there is no more required to engage Christ unto his assistance at any time.* And the virtues which they ascribe hereunto are innumerable. But this also is an idol, a teacher of lies, invented and set up for no other end but to satisfy the carnal minds of men with a presumptuous supposition, in the neglect of the spiritually laborious exercise of faith. An experience of the work of faith, in the derivation of all supplies of spiritual life, grace, and strength, with deliverance and supplies, from Jesus Christ, will secure believers from giving heed unto this trifling deceit.

Sect. XIII. One thing more, amongst many others of the same sort, may be mentioned. It is a notion of truth, which derives from the light of nature, that *those who approach unto God in divine worship should be careful that they be pure and clean, without any offensive defilements.*

This the heathens themselves give testimony unto, and God confirmed it in the institutions of the law. But what are these defilements and pollutions which make us unmeet to approach unto the presence of God, — how and by what means we may be purified and cleansed from them, — the gospel alone declares. And it doth, in opposition unto all other ways and means of it, plainly reveal, that it is by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon our consciences, so to purge them from dead works, that we may serve the living God. See [Heb. ix. 14, x. 19–22](#). But this is a thing mysterious: nothing but spiritual light and saving faith can direct us herein. Men, destitute of them, could never attain an experience of purification in this way. Wherefore they retained the notion of truth itself, but made an image of it for their use, with a neglect of the thing itself. And this was the most ludicrous that could be imagined; namely, the *sprinkling of themselves and others with that they call holy water* when they go into the places of sacred worship; which yet also they borrowed from the Pagans. So stupid and sottish are the minds of men, so dark and ignorant of heavenly things, that they have suffered their souls to be deceived and ruined by such vain, superstitious trifles!

This discourse hath already proceeded unto a greater length than was at first intended; and would be so much more, should we look into all parts of this Chamber of Imagery, and expose to view all the abominations in it. I shall therefore put a close unto it, in one or two instances, wherein the Church of Rome doth boast itself as retaining the truth and power of the gospel in a peculiar manner, whereas in very deed they have destroyed them, and set up corrupt images of their own in their stead.

Sect. XIV. The first of these is, *the doctrine and grace of mortification.*

That this is not only an important evangelical duty, but also of indispensable necessity unto salvation, all who have any thing of Christian religion in themselves must acknowledge. It is also clearly determined in the Scripture, both what is *the nature of it*, with its causes, and in what acts and duties it doth consist; for it is frequently declared to be the crucifying of the body of sin, with all the lusts thereof. For mortification must be the bringing of something to death; and this is sin: and the dying of sin consists in the casting out of all vicious habits and inclinations, arising from the original depravation of nature. It is the weakening and graduate extirpation or destruction of them, in their roots, principles, and operations, whereby the soul is set at liberty to act universally from the contrary principle of spiritual life and grace. The means, on the part of Christ, whereby this is wrought and effected in believers, is the communication of his Spirit unto them, to make an effectual application of the virtue of his death unto the death of sin; for it is *by his Spirit* that we

mortify the deeds of the flesh, and the flesh itself, and that, as we are implanted by him into the likeness of the death of Christ. By virtue thereof we are *crucified*, and made dead unto sin; in the declaration of which things the Scripture doth abound. The means of it, on the part of believers, is the exercise of faith in Christ, as crucified; whereby they derive virtue from him for the crucifying of the body of death: and this exercise of faith is always accompanied with diligence and perseverance in all holy duties of prayer, with fasting, godly sorrow, daily-renewed repentance, with a continual watch against all the advantages of sin. Herein consists, principally, that spiritual warfare and conflict that believers are called unto. This is all *the killing work* which the gospel requires. *That of killing other men for religion* is of a later date, and another original. And there is nothing, in the way of their obedience, wherein they have more experience of the necessity, power, and efficacy of the graces of the gospel.

This principle of truth, concerning the necessity of mortification, is retained in the Church of Rome; yea, she pretends highly unto it, above any other Christian society. *The mortification of their devotionists* is one of the principal arguments which they plead, to draw unwary souls over unto their superstition. Yet, in the height of their pretences unto it, they have lost all experience of its nature, with the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ therein; and have, therefore, framed an image of it unto themselves For, —

1. They place the eminency and height of it in a *monastical life, and pretended retirement from the world*. But this may be, hath been, in all or the most, without the least real work of mortification in their souls; for there is nothing required in the strictest rules of these monastic votaries but may be complied withal, without the least effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in their minds, in the application of the virtue of the death of Christ unto them; besides, the whole course of life which they commend under this name, is neither appointed in, nor approved by, the gospel. And some of those who have been most renowned for their severities therein were men of blood, promoting the cruel slaughter of multitudes of Christians, upon the account of their profession of the gospel: in whom there could be no one evangelical grace; “*for no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*”

2. The ways and means which they prescribe and use for the attaining of it, are such as are no way directed by the divine wisdom of Christ in the Scripture; — such as multiplied *confessions* to priests, irregular, ridiculous *fastings, penances, self-macerations* of the body, unlawful *vows, self-devised rules of discipline and habits*, with the like trinkets innumerable. Hence, whatever their design be, they may say of it, in the issue, what Aaron said of his idol, “I cast the gold into the fire, and there came out this calf.” They have brought forth only an image of mortification, diverting the minds of men from seeking after that which is really and spiritually so. And under this pretence they have formed a state and condition of life that hath filled the world with all manner of sins and wickedness; and many of those who have attained unto some of the highest degrees of this mortification, on their principles,



and by the means designed unto that end, have been made ready thereby for all sorts of wickedness.

Wherefore, the mortification which they retain, and whereof they boast, is nothing but a wretched image of that which is truly so, substituted in its room, and embraced by such as had never attained any experience of the nature or power of gospel grace in the real mortification of sin.

*Sect. XV.* The same is to be said concerning *good works*, — the second evangelical duty whereof they boast.

The necessity of these good works unto salvation, according unto men's opportunities and abilities, is acknowledged by all; and the glory of our profession in this world consisteth in our abounding in them: but their principle, their nature, their motives, their use, their ends, are declared and limited in the Scripture; whereby they are distinguished from what may seem materially the same in those which may be wrought by unbelievers. In brief, they are the acts and duties of true believers only; and they are in them effects of divine grace, or the operation of the Holy Ghost; for they are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath ordained that they should walk in them." But the principal mystery of their glory, which the Scripture insists upon, is, that although they are necessary, as a means unto the salvation of believers, yet are they utterly excluded from any influence unto the *justification of sinners*; — so there was never any work, evangelically good, performed by any who were not before freely justified.

Unto these *good works* those with whom we have to do lay a vehement claim, as though they were the only patrons of them, and pleaders for them; but they have also excluded them out of Christian religion, and set up a deformed image of them, in defiance of God, of Christ, and the gospel. For the works they plead for are such as so far proceed from their own *free will*, as to render them *meritorious* in the sight of God. They have confined them partly unto acts of superstitious devotion, partly unto those of charity, and principally unto those that are not so; — such are the building of monasteries, nunneries, and such pretended religious houses, for the maintenance of swarms of monks and friars, filling the world with superstition and debauchery. They make them meritorious, satisfactory; yea, some of them, which they call of *supererogation*, above all that God requireth of us, and the causes of our justification before God. They ascribe unto them a condignity of the heavenly reward, making it of works, and so not of grace; with many other defiling imaginations. But whatever is done from these principles, and for these ends, is utterly foreign unto those good works which the gospel enjoineth as a part of our new or evangelical obedience. But having, as in other cases, lost all sense and experience of the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ, in working believers unto this duty of obedience, unto the glory of God and benefit of mankind, they have set up the image of them, in defiance of Christ, his grace, and his gospel.



These are some of the *abominations* which are portrayed on the walls of the Chamber of Imagery in the Church of Rome; and more will be added in the consideration of the *image of Jealousy* itself; which, God willing, shall ensue in another way. These are the *shadows* which they betake themselves unto, in the loss of spiritual light to discern the truth and glory of the mystery of the gospel, and the want of an experience of their power and efficacy, unto all the ends of the life of God in their own minds and souls. And although they are all of them expressly condemned in the letter of the Scripture, which is sufficient to secure the minds of true believers from the admission of them, yet their establishment, against all pleas, pretences, and force, for a compliance with them, depends on *their experience of the power of every gospel truth unto its proper end*, in communicating unto us the grace of God, and transforming our minds into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

Sermon XVI.

An humble testimony

unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations;  
or,

the only way to deliver a sinful nation from utter ruin by impendent judgments:  
in a discourse on the words of our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Luke xiii. 1-4.](#)

“Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” — [Isa. lviii. 1.](#)

“In publico discrimine omnis homo miles est.”



## **Prefatory note.**

In his own preface to the reader Dr Owen very briefly alludes to the circumstances which had induced him to deliver to “a private congregation” several discourses on [Luke xiii. 1–5](#), and afterwards to publish the substance of them in the following discourse. For obvious reasons, he evinces great caution in referring to passing events, which, about the time the discourse was published, excited “continual apprehensions of public calamities” in the minds of all the friends of liberty and order. The nation had been agitated with stormy discussions about the Exclusion Bill. The Whig party were bent on preventing the accession of James, the Duke of York, to the British throne on the demise of Charles II. In the agitation which shook the country in consequence of this attempt, “a whole year,” says Macaulay, “elapsed, — an eventful year, which has left lasting traces in our manners and language ... On the one side, it was maintained that the constitution and religion of the state would never be secure under a Popish king; — on the other, that the right of James to wear the crown in his turn was derived from God, and could not be annulled, even by the consent, of all the branches of the Legislature.”

The bill had been several times introduced into the House of Commons, — in 1679, in November 1680, a third time in the following January, and finally, in the Parliament which met at Oxford in March 1681, when the Whig measures were defeated by the dissolution of the Parliament only seven days after it had met.

Whatever judgment be formed as to the expediency of the Exclusion Bill, the strenuous exertions which the Whigs and Nonconformists made to secure the success of that measure, enable us to estimate the alarm and forebodings which filled their minds, when the power of the Court had triumphed.

Apart, however, from this defeat, there were other causes of anxiety and apprehension. Dissenters were subjected to severe and increasing oppression; and while the friends of the popular cause were disconcerted and baffled, a manifest reaction was taking place throughout England in favour of the Court. It was this change of public sentiment, and decay of patriotic zeal — arising in some degree from growing indifference to religious principle — that led our author to entertain, at this juncture, gloomy views in regard to the prospects of the nation, and to issue a solemn and urgent warning to his countrymen.

The discourse of Dr Owen is extremely suitable to the crisis which had elicited it. While he makes no reference to the proceedings of the government, he dwells upon evangelical truths and duties, in a strain peculiarly fitted to elevate his readers above unworthy fears, and to make the danger to which they might feel themselves exposed a motive to repentance and godliness. “The ‘Testimony,’” says Orme, “contains much of that practical wisdom which the Doctor had acquired from his long and deep study of the Word of God, and from



his extensive experience in the ways of Providence.” The discourse was published in the year 1681. — Ed.



## To the reader.

The ensuing discourse contains the substance of sundry sermons preached in a private congregation. Some who heard them, considering the subject-matter treated of, and the design in them with respect unto the present state of things in this nation, did judge that it might be convenient and seasonable to make them more public, for the use and benefit of others; but, knowing how remote I was from any such intention in their first composure, and how naked they were of all ornaments that might render them meet for public view, I was unwilling for a season to comply with their desires. Neither was it their importunity (which, as they did not use, so I should not in this case have valued), but their reasons, that prevailed with me, to consent that they might be published by any that had a mind thereunto; which is all my concernment therein. For they said, that whereas the land wherein we live is filled with sin, and various indications of God's displeasure thereon, yet there is an unexplained neglect in calling the inhabitants of it unto *repentance*, for the diverting of *independent judgments*. The very *heathen*, they said, upon less evidence of the approaches of divine vengeance than is now amongst us, did always solemnly apply themselves to their deities, for the turning it away. Wherefore, this *neglect* amongst us they supposed to be of such *ill abode*,<sup>349</sup> as that the weakest and meanest endeavour for relief under it might be of some use; and of that nature I cannot but esteem this discourse to be.

They added, moreover, that whereas, on various accounts, there are *continual apprehensions of public calamities*, all men's thoughts are exercised about the ways of *deliverance* from them; but whereas they fix themselves on various and opposite ways and means for this end, the conflict of their counsels and designs increaseth our danger, and is like to prove our ruin. And the great cause hereof is, a general ignorance and neglect of the only true way and means whereby this nation may be delivered from destruction under the displeasure of God. For if their thoughts did agree and centre therein, as it would insensibly work them off from their present *mutual destructive animosities*; so also it is of such a nature as would lead them into a *coalescency* in those counsels, whose fruit would be the establishment of truth, with righteousness and peace. Now, this way is no other but sincere *repentance*, and universal reformation in all sorts of persons throughout the nation.

That this is the only way for the saving of this nation from impending judgments and wasting desolations, — that this way will be effectual unto that end when all others shall fail, — is asserted and proved in this discourse, from the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, to confront the wisdom of politicians, who are otherwise minded, with a plain word of truth and power.

349 *Abode* is an old English word signifying omen or *prognostic*, — from “bode,” to portend. — Ed.

It was hoped also by them, that some intimation of their duty might be hereby given unto those who, having *the ministerial oversight* of the generality of the people, do divert their minds unto the petty differences and contests, whilst the fire of God's displeasure for sin is ready to devour their habitations. And the truth is, if they persist in their negligence, if they give not a public evidence, at this season, of their zeal for repentance and reformation of life among all sorts of persons, — going before them in their example and endeavours unto the promotion of them, — I understand not how they will give an account of their trust and duty to God or men.

And therefore, were I worthy to give advice to any of my brethren in the ministry, who are in the same condition with myself as unto outward circumstances, it should be this only, namely, that whilst others do seek to obstruct them in the whole discharge of their duty, and to deprive the church of the benefit of their labours, they would, by their own personal example, by peculiar endeavours in their congregations, among all that hear them, and on every occasion, so press the present calls of God unto repentance, and so promote the work of a visible reformation, as eminently to help in saving of the nation from approaching judgments, and therein of them also who design their trouble; — and I doubt not but most of them are already engaged and forward herein.

This shall be our testimony, and our peace, in whatever may befall us in this world.

Let us not satisfy ourselves, that our congregations are in so good a posture as that they may continue for our lives; and so be like ill tenants, who care not if their houses fall upon the expiration of the term of their interest in them. That reparation is required of us which may make them serve for succeeding generations.

And when any church is so unobservant of its own decays as to be negligent of endeavours for proportionable reformation, — if, after a while, any will deliver their own souls, it must be by a departure from them that *hate to be reformed*.

It is a fond imagination, that churches may render their communion useless and dangerous only by *heresy, tyranny, and false worship*; — *an evil*, worldly, corrupt conversation in the generality of their members, contrary to the doctrine of the gospel, not opposed and contradicted by a constant endeavour for sincere reformation, is no less ruinous unto the being of churches than any of these other evils.

On these and such like considerations, I was not unwilling that this plain discourse should be exposed to public view, hoping that it might stir up others of greater abilities and opportunities more effectually to pursue the same design. I do not think it needful to make any apology for the plainness both of the matter and style in this small treatise.

The least endeavour to attire a discourse of this nature with the ornaments of speech or language, is even ridiculous; it is more fit to bear the furrows of sighs and tears, than to be smoothed and flourished with the oily colours of elegance and rhetoric.

And as for the obvious plainness of the matter contained in it, it is suited, as I judge, unto them whose good is principally designed therein. Plain men have sinned as well as others, though it may be not unto so high a degree, nor in such an outrage of excess. However, on many considerations, they are likely first to suffer, unless impendent judgments are diverted by repentance.

I do but a little plead with every man for himself and in his own cause. Neither, however wise or learned men may be, is it meet, in this case, to treat them otherwise. It is to no purpose to make a fine speech unto such as are falling into a lethargy, nor to discourse learnedly of the art of navigation unto them that are ready to perish in a storm; they must be plain words and plain things that are forcible in this case. And those by whom they are despised, from any principle of self-elation, give but an uncomfortable indication of what will be the issue of their dangers.

Let, therefore, the reader but candidly excuse and pass by the trouble which he will be put unto by the frequent mistakes of the press, especially in mispointings, rendering the sense sometimes obscure and unobvious; and I have, on the behalf of the treatise itself, no more to desire of his forbearance.

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## Sermon XVI. An humble testimony unto the goodness and severity of God in his dealing with sinful churches and nations.

“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus, answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

— Luke xiii. 1–5.

It is a part and duty of spiritual wisdom, as also an evidence of a due reverence of God, to take notice of *extraordinary occurrences* in the dispensations of his providence; for they are instructive warnings, and of great importance in his government of the world. In them the “voice of the Lord crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see his name.” And there is a mark left on them, — as profligate persons, — who will not see when his hand is so lifted up. An example of this wisdom is given us here in our blessed Saviour, who, on the report that was made unto him of some severe providential accidents, then newly fallen out, gives an *exposition* of the mind of God in them, with an *application* of them unto the present duty of them that heard him, and *ours* therein.

Some things may be observed in general, to give light into the context, and the design of our Saviour in this holy discourse.

I. The *time* when the things mentioned did fall out, and wherein our Saviour passed his judgment on them.

1. It was a time of *great sin*, — of the abounding of all sorts of sins. The *nation* as such, in its rulers and rule; the *church* as such, in its officers, order, and worship; and the generality of the *people*, in their personal capacities, were all overwhelmed in provoking sins. Hypocrisy, oppression, cruelty, superstition, uncleanness, persecution, impenitency, and security, — all proceeding from unbelief, — had filled the land, and defiled it. We have a sufficient account of this state of things in the story of the gospel, so as that it needs no other confirmation. Yea, so wicked were the people, and so corrupt the church-state, and so impenitent were the generality of them therein, that it suited the righteousness and holiness of God to revenge on that generation, not only their own sins, but the sins also of all wicked persecutors from the foundation of the world; — a thing which he doth not do but on high provocations. Luke xi. 50, 51, “That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.”

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There is in this *commination* an appearance of severity beyond the rule established, [Exod. xx. 5](#). There, God declares that he is “a jealous God;” which title he assumes to himself with respect unto the highest provocations; — that he “will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the *third and fourth* generation of them that hate him.” But here, the vengeance and punishment due unto the sins of a *hundred* generations, is threatened to be inflicted on that which was present.

Something, in our passage, may be spoken for the vindication of divine justice herein, seeing we may be more concerned in that divine commination than the most are aware.

(1.) The *case* here is *particular*. That in the commandment respects the *common case* of all false worshippers and their posterity; but this respects persecution, unto blood and death, of the true worshippers of God. Now, though God be very much provoked with the sins of false worshippers, yet he can either bear with them, or pass over their sins with lesser punishments, or at least for a long season; but when they come to persecution, and the blood of them who worship him in spirit and in truth, in his appointed season he will not spare them; — their own, and the iniquities of their predecessors, shall be avenged on them; which will be the end of the anti-christian church-state after all its present triumph.

(2.) All those who, from the beginning of the world, suffered unto blood on the account of religion, suffered *in the cause of Christ*, for their faith in him, and confession of him; namely, as he was promised unto the church. Unto him and his office did Abel, by faith, bear testimony in the bloody sacrifice that he offered. So it is said that Moses, in his danger for killing the Egyptian, bare “the reproach of Christ,” because he did it in faith of the promised seed; which was Christ. They were, therefore, all slain in the cause of Christ. And whereas this generation was to *slay Christ himself*, and did so, they did, therein, approve of and justify all the blood that was shed in the same cause from the foundation of the world; and made themselves justly liable unto the punishment due unto it. Hence, our Saviour tells them, [Matt. xxiii. 35](#), that they, the men of that generation, slew Zechariah, who was actually slain many hundred years before.

(3.) Our blessed Saviour mentions Abel and Zechariah particularly. This Zechariah, called the son of Barachias, was undoubtedly the Zechariah mentioned, [2 Chron. xxiv. 20–22](#). For concerning those two alone it is observed, that the one dead, and the other dying, “cried for vengeance.” So God testifieth of the blood of Abel, [Gen. iv. 10](#). And Zechariah, when he died, said, “The Lord look upon it, and require it.” Hence the apostle affirms, that “Abel being dead, yet speaketh,” [Heb. xi. 4](#); that is, his blood did so, — it did so then, and it spake for vengeance, as he intimates, [chap. xii. 24](#). It did so before and until the destruction of Jerusalem: for in the rejection and absolute destruction of that *apostatized church* and people, the blood of all that suffered under the Old Testament was expiated. Abel’s blood cries no more; nor doth God look any more on the blood of Zechariah to require it.



But the mine voice and cry is now continued by another sort of men; namely, those who have suffered in the cause of Christ since his coming, according to the promise, [Rev. vi. 9, 10](#). And this cry shall be continued until the appointed time doth come for the utter destruction of the *antichristian, apostatized church-state*.

When a sinful church or people have passed the utmost bounds of divine patience and forbearance, they shall fall into such abominable, crying sins and provocations as shall render the utmost vengeance beneath their deserts. So Josephus affirms of this generation, after they had rejected and slain the Lord Christ, that they fell into such a hell of provoking abominations, that if the Romans had not come and destroyed them, God would have sent fire and brimstone upon them from heaven, as he did on Sodom.

And we may, by the way, observe from hence, —

*It is a dangerous thing to live in the times of declining churches, when they are hastening unto their fatal period in judgments; such as will inevitably befall them all and every one.*

And it is so for these three reasons:—

[1.] Because such times are *perilous* through temptations from *the abounding of the lusts of men* in all uncleanness and wickedness. So the apostle states it, [2 Tim. iii. 1–5](#). If any think they are free from danger, because as yet they feel no evil, whilst the lusts of men professing Christian religion visibly and openly abound and rage in the world, they will be mistaken.

[2.] Though destruction do not immediately befall them, yet, when they have passed the time of divine patience designing their reformation, they shall precipitate themselves into *bloody abominations*, as did the church of the Jews.

[3.] Judgment shall at length overtake them, and God will revenge on them the sins and provocations — especially the *persecutions and blood* — of them that went before them, and led them into their apostasy. So when he shall come to destroy mystical Babylon, or the antichristian church-state, it is said, that “in her was found the blood of the prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth,” [Rev. xviii. 24](#). Even the blood of saints that was shed by pagan Rome shall be avenged on antichristian Rome, after she hath espoused the cause and walked in the way of the other, justifying in her own practice what they had done.

2. It was *a time wherein judgments were near approaching*; — so our Saviour himself affirms it to have been, [Luke xix. 42–44](#), “If thou hadst known, ... in this thy day.” They had now but *a day*, and that now almost ready to expire, though they saw it not, nor would believe it. But the day of their desolation approached continually, and when the apostle wrote his Epistle to the Hebrews, was making its entrance upon them, [chap. x. 25](#), “Ye see the day approaching.” And we may hence learn, —

(1.) That *in the approaching of desolating judgments on a sinful, provoking church or nation, God is pleased to give previous intimations of his displeasure, as well in the works of*



providence as by the rule of his word. Such were those here so interpreted by our Saviour in such a season.

This, I say, is the ordinary process of divine Providence; and, it may be, no nation, heathen or Christian, ever utterly perished without divine warnings of their approaching desolation. Some, indeed, seem to be taken away with a sudden surprisal, as God threateneth, [Ps. lviii. 9–11](#).

But this is from their own security, and not for want of warnings. So the old world before the flood had warnings sufficient of their destruction, by the preaching of Noah, and the building of the ark, by which he “condemned the world,” [Heb. xi. 7](#), or left them inexcusable, to divine vengeance. Yet they took no notice of these things, but were surprised with the flood, as if they had never heard or seen any thing that should give them warning of it; as our Saviour declares, [Matt. xxiv. 38, 39](#). And when the time comes of the destruction of mystical Babylon, she shall say, in that very day wherein her judgments come upon her, “I sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow,” notwithstanding all her warnings in the pouring out of the vials of previous judgments, [Rev. xviii. 7, 8](#).

(2.) *It is the height of security, in such a time and season, either to neglect the consideration of extraordinary providences, or to misinterpret them, as any thing but tokens of approaching judgments, if not prevented.*

Nothing can be questioned herein without an arraignment of the divine wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the interpretation and application that he makes of these accidents. No doubt but they were neglected and despised by the most as common things; — to take any great notice of such occurrences is esteemed pusillanimity or superstition. So it is by many at this day, wherein all things, as we shall see afterward, are filled with tokens of divine displeasure; but things will come shortly unto another account. In the meantime, it is safe to follow this divine example, so as to find out sacred warnings in such providential occurrences.

II. The *providential accidents* spoken of are two, and of two sorts.

1. The first was that wherein *the bloody cruelty of men* had a hand, — “The Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” When this was done, on what occasion, and what was the number of the persons so slain, the Scripture is silent. However, it is certain that it was done at Jerusalem; for sacrifices might not be offered anywhere else. Thither came the Galileans with their sacrifices; — that is, either the beasts which they brought to the priests to offer for them, for they might not offer sacrifices themselves; or the paschal lamb, which they might slay themselves.

Whilst they were engaged in this work, Pilate, the bloody Roman governor (on what occasion or provocation is unknown), came upon them, and slew them in a cruel manner; intimated in that expression, that “he mingled their blood with their sacrifices.” And this providence is the more remarkable, in that it fell out whilst they were engaged in their sacred



worship; — which carries an indication of divine severity. And, it may be, there was, as it is in the ruin of mankind every day, occasion taken for it from the difference that was between two wicked governors, Pilate and Herod, unto whose jurisdiction these Galileans did belong, in whose blood Pilate thought to revenge himself on his enemy. However, they both combined at last in the killing of Christ, — as others use to do in the world; and so made themselves friends, leaving their example to their successors.

2. The other *was a mere effect of divine Providence*; — the death of eighteen men by the fall of a tower in Siloam; that is, a place of waters, and a running stream in Jerusalem itself. And our Lord Jesus Christ declares herein, not only that all such accidents are disposed by the providence of God, but that he speaks in them for our instruction.

Both these, as they were *warnings*, as we shall see, so they were *figures* of the approaching destruction of the city and people; for that, in the first place, is the perishing here intended, as is manifest in the ensuing parable, wherein the church-state of the Jews is compared unto a barren fig-tree, which was to be cut down and destroyed. And, accordingly, that destruction did befall them, partly by the bloody *cruelty of the Romans*, and partly by the *fall and ruin of the temple, towers, and walls of the city*; both included in the word, “likewise.” “Ye shall likewise perish,” or in like manner. But although they were of various kinds, and men might evade the consideration of them on several pretences, the one being nothing but the *tyrannical fury* of Pilate, the other only a somewhat *unusual accident*, — yet our Lord Jesus Christ finds out the hand and counsel of God in them both, and declares the same language to be spoken in them both. Signs of the same event are *doubled*, to show the certainty of it, like Pharaoh’s dreams.

And we may observe, —

First. *That all sorts of unusual accidents, or effects of Providence, in a season of sin and approaching judgments, are of the same indication, and ought to have the same interpretation.*

So is the same application made of both these different signs and warnings by our Saviour; — they have, saith he, the same language, the same signification. There was nothing at this time [that] more hardened the Jews unto their utter ruin, than the false application they made of providential signs and warnings, which were all multiplied among them, as boding their good and deliverance, when they were all tokens of their approaching ruin. For when such things are rejected as warnings, calling to repentance and reformation, as they were by them, on a presumption that they were signs of God’s appearance on their behalf, they became to be nothing but certain forerunners of greater judgments, and infallible tokens of destruction; and so they will be to them likewise by whom they are yet despised.

Secondly. *God is pleased sometimes to give warnings of approaching judgments, not only as unto the matter of them, that they shall be accompanied with severity, but also as unto the especial nature and manner of them.* So was it with these two signs, of *blood* by the sword, and *death* by the fall of the tower; representing as in a glass that common calamity which





was to befall the city and nation. And I pray God that the prodigious appearance of fiery meteors, like swords, armies, and arms, with other things of the like nature, may not be sent to point out the very kind and nature of the judgments which are coming on England, if not diverted; for as unto these signs not only the Scripture, but all heathen stories are filled with an account of them. Before the approach of desolating judgments, nature, the common parent of mankind, did always put itself forth in *irregular, unusual actings*, — in fiery meteors, comets, earthquakes, strange appearances in the air, voices heard, and the like.

The brute elements tremble at the approaches of God in his judgment against the inhabitants of the earth. So the prophet expresseth it, [Hab. iii. 10](#), “The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowings of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.”

They are, as it were, cast into a posture of trembling and supplication. And Æschylus, a heathen poet in Justin Martyr, [thus writes]:—

Τρέμει δ' ὄρη, καὶ γαῖα καὶ πελώριος  
 Βυθὸς θαλάσσης, κώρέων ὕψος μέγα,  
 Ὅταν ἐπιβλέψη γοργὸν ὄμμα δεσπότης.

“When the dreadful eye of God (in his providence) is lifted up,” all things tremble before it.

III. In the interpretation and application made of these severe accidents by our Saviour, in his divine wisdom, we may observe, —

1. *Especial judgments in such a season, befalling in any, do not prove an especial guilt or provocation in them.* This our Saviour expressly denies, and that with respect unto both the instances insisted on, and that distinctly, [verses 2, 4](#). I do not hence absolutely establish a general rule as unto all times and persons. For, — First, The observation is here confined and limited unto such a season as that under consideration; namely, a time of provoking sins in the generality of the people, and approaching judgments. In such a season, no assignation of especial guilt ought to be made on especial calamitous sufferings. Secondly, Some persons may be guilty of such *daring, presumptuous sins*, that if they are overtaken with especial judgments in this world, it is the height of impiety not to own the especial revenging hand of God in their destruction. Such was the death of Herod, [Acts xii. 22, 23](#).

2. *Judgments on private men in such a season are warnings to the public.* This is intimated by our Saviour in this place; namely, that God uses a sovereignty herein, by singling out whom he pleaseth, to make them examples unto others. This, saith he, was the sole reason, as far as you are concerned to judge or know, why God brought these sore destructions upon them; namely, that by these warnings he might call you to repentance. Yet, I judge, God doth not ordinarily exercise his sovereignty in this kind, unless it be when all have deserved to be destroyed: and then, as in the sedition and mutiny of military legions, they

decimated them, or slew some for an example and terror unto others; so God calls out of a guilty multitude whom he pleaseth, to make previous instances of approaching judgments.

3. *Those who first fall under judgments are not always the worst that judgments shall befall; nor are the first judgments usually the most severe; — so it is plain in these instances, And because we have instances of this nature amongst us, we should consider how to make a right judgment concerning them. And these three things we may safely determine:— 1. That those who suffered were sinners also, though they were not so only, or in an especial manner.*<sup>350</sup> This is necessary unto the vindication of the justice of God. 2. That he who hath made them warnings unto us, might have made us warnings unto them. Herein his sovereignty and mercy towards us who escape is manifest. 3. That we also have a hand in that guilt, forerunning such providences so far as there is any thing penal in them. For such private previous judgments are the effect of public provocations.

IV. Here is a sure rule given us of the interpretation of *severe providences* in such a season as that here intended; — such, I mean, as we have had amongst us, in *plague*, and *fire*, and *blood*; and such as we have the signs and tokens of at this time in heaven and earth. For three things we are here taught safely to conclude concerning them:— First, That they are *warnings* from God. This our Saviour plainly declares in the interpretation and application of these two instances. Secondly, That their voice and language is a call to *repentance and reformation*: “Except ye repent,” etc. Thirdly, When they are neglected as warnings, calling to repentance, they change their nature, and become certain *signs* of approaching destruction. And in the observation of these rules of interpretation of providential severities given us by our Saviour, we may be preserved from the excesses of neglecting, on the one hand, what is contained in them, and of rash judging of men or causes, on the other.

These things being premised for the opening of the words, the truth wherein we are instructed by them appears to be this:—

*When a land, a nation, a city, a church, is filled with sin, so as that God gives them warnings or indications of his displeasure by previous judgments, or other extraordinary signs, if they are not as warnings complied withal by repentance and reformation, they are tokens of approaching judgments, that shall not be avoided.*

This is the sacred truth which our Lord Jesus Christ doth here recommend to our observation. It is the great rule of divine Providence, with the especial seal of our Lord Christ annexed to it, “I tell you, Nay; but, unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” When warnings for instruction are not received, they are tokens of destruction. This is a truth which none almost deny, and none almost believe. Had it been believed, many desolating judgments in former ages had been prevented; nations and cities should have abode in prosperity, which are now sunk into ruin, yea, into hell. See [Luke xix. 41–44](#); [Matt. xi. 23](#).

350 These things were spoken on the burning of several persons to death in one of the late fires in London.

And were it believed in the days wherein we live, it would be the means of saving a poor nation from otherwise inevitable ruin. The state, is so with us, that, unless we repent, we shall perish. I do not prescribe unto the sovereignty of God in his providential administrations. He can, if he please, suffer all his warnings to be despised, all his calls neglected, yea, scoffed at, and yet exercise forbearance towards us, as unto a speedy execution of judgment. But woe unto them with whom he so deals; for it hath only this end, that they may have a space to fill up the measure of their iniquities, and so be fitted for eternal destruction, [Rom. ix. 22.](#)

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There is a threefold issue and event of the state we have described.

1. When a *sinful church or nation* so attend unto God's warnings in *previous judgments*, and other signs of his displeasure, as to comply with them by repentance and reformation. This is a blessed issue, which will certainly divert all impendent judgments; as shall be afterward declared.

2. When, by reason of the neglect of them, and want of compliance with them, God doth bring distress and calamities upon a people in general. This is a sad event. But, however, under it God doth often preserve a seed and remnant which, being brought through the fire, and thereby purged and purified, though but as a poor and afflicted people, yet they shall be preserved as a seed and reserve for a better state of the church. See [Zech. xiii. 8, 9](#); [Isa. vi. 11–13, xxiv. 6, 13](#); [Zeph. iii. 12](#); [Ezek. v. 2, 12.](#)

3. When God utterly forsakes a people, he will regard them no more, but give them up unto *idolatry, false worship, and all sorts* of wickedness. When he says, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more," — this is the sorest of judgments. "Woe also to them," saith the Lord, "when I depart from them!" [Hos. ix. 12.](#) Of such a people there shall be neither hope nor remnant, [Ezek. xlvi. 11.](#) Who would not rather see a nation suffering under some judgments, as the effects of God's displeasure for the neglect of his warnings, whereby it may be purged, and purified, and restored, than to be left under idolatry and all manner of wickedness forever?

But the way is here proposed for the avoidance of these evils. And these things will be more fully spoken unto afterward.

I shall first give some evidences of the truth laid down, and then the reason of it; which will make way for what I principally intend.

I shall not insist on the *especial kind* of warnings or signs here mentioned, but only on the *general nature* of divine warnings, by the word or otherwise, in such a season as wherein an abounding of sin is accompanied with great evidences of approaching judgments.

1. According unto this rule was the dealing of God with the *old world*; which is set forth unto us for an example. See [1 Pet. iii. 20](#); [2 Pet. ii. 5.](#)

The men of the *old world* were a sinful, provoking generation. God gave them warning of his displeasure by the preaching of Noah, and other ways. During his ministry, the long-

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suffering of God waited for their repentance and reformation; for this was the end both of the season and of the ministry granted unto them therein: but when it was not complied withal, he brought the flood on those ungodly men.

2. So he dealt with *the church under the Old Testament*. A summary account is given of it, [2 Chron. xxxvi. 15–17](#). After a contempt of all God’s previous warnings, with a neglect of repentance and reformation, the time came when there was no remedy, but the city and temple must be destroyed, and the people be partly slain, and partly carried into captivity. Accordingly, there is a general rule established for all times and seasons, [Prov. xxix. 1](#).

3. Neither have his dealings been otherwise with the *churches of the New Testament*. All those of the first plantation have been ruined and destroyed by the sword of God’s displeasure, for impenitency under divine calls and warnings.

4. God gave an eminent instance hereof in the *ministry of Jeremiah the prophet*. He gives him the law of his prophecy, [chap. xviii. 7, 8](#), “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Here is the whole of the truth laid down represented unto us. The nation and kingdom especially intended was that of the people and church of the Jews. Concerning them it is supposed that they were evil, — that sin abounded amongst them. In this state God gave them warning by the ministry of Jeremiah, as he did otherwise also. The voice of these warnings was, that they should repent them of their evil, and reform their ways. On a supposition whereof he promises to remove the judgments which they had deserved, and which were impendent over them: upon their failure herein, he declares that fearful desolation should befall them; as it did afterward, [verses 15–17](#). According to this rule, the prophet persisted in his ministry. The sum of his sermon was this: *It is a time of great sin and provocation; — these and these are your sins; — these are evident tokens of God’s displeasure against you, and of the near approaching of desolating judgments. In this state, repent, return, and reform your ways, and you shall be delivered:— in case you do not, utter destruction shall come upon you.*

But the princes, the priests, and generally all the people, set themselves against him herein, and would not believe his word.

And by three things they countenanced themselves in their unbelief and impenitency, that they should be delivered; although they did not *repent* nor *reform* their ways.

First. By *their privileges*; — that they were the only church and people of God, who had the temple and his worship amongst them: as if he should say, *The best reformed church in the world*. This they directly confront his ministry withal, [chap. vii. 3, 4](#). They fear none of his threatenings, they despise his counsel for their safety, approve their ways and their doings, because they were the church, and had the temple for their security.



Secondly. By their own *strength for war*, and their defence against all their enemies. They gloried in their wisdom, their might, and their riches; as he intimateth, [chap. ix. 23](#).

Thirdly. By the help and aid which they expected *from others, especially from Egypt*. And herein they thought once that they had prevailed against him, and utterly disproved his rule of safety by reformation only; for when the Chaldeans besieged the city, by whom the judgments he had threatened them withal were to be executed, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, coming up against them, they departed from Jerusalem for fear of his army, [chap. xxxvii. 5, 11](#). Hereon, no doubt, they triumphed against him, and were satisfied that their own way for deliverance was better than that troublesome way of repentance and reformation which he prescribed unto them. But he knew from whom he had his message, and what would be the event of the false hopes and joys which they had entertained. So he tells them, [verses 9, 10](#), “Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.” Which accordingly came to pass.

And so it will be with any other people, against all pleas and pretences to the contrary.

Let the case be stated according as it is laid down in the proposition, and explained in the instance of Jeremiah.

Suppose a church or people do abound *with provoking sins*; that, during the time of God’s patience towards them, and warning of them, there are signs and tokens of his displeasure and of impendent judgments; — let them feed themselves so long as they please with hopes of deliverance and safety, — unless they comply with the calls of God unto repentance and reformation, they will fall under desolating judgments, or be utterly forsaken of God forever.

The grounds and reasons of this rule and order in divine dispensations are many, plain and obvious; which I shall not at large insist upon.

I shall only at present mention some of them; because those of the most evidence and importance will accrue afterward unto our consideration:—

1. This rule of proceeding is suited unto *the righteousness of God in the government of the world*, in the inbred light of the minds of men. This notion, that *judgment or divine vengeance will overtake impenitent sinners, who have been previously warned of their sin*, is that which we are not taught, which we do not learn from one another, — which is not only the voice of divine revelation, but that which is born with us, which is inseparable from our nature; the light and conviction whereof, neither with respect unto ourselves or others, we can avoid. This is the voice of nature in mankind, *Impenitent sinners, incurable by warnings, are the proper objects of divine displeasure*. And the absolute impunity of such persons would be a great temptation unto atheism, as the suspension of deserved judgments on provoking sinners is with some at this day. But ordinarily and finally, God will not act contrary unto



the *inbred notions* of his righteousness in the government of the world, which he himself hath implanted in the minds of men. But as for the times, seasons, and ways of the execution of his judgments, he hath reserved them unto his own sovereignty.

2. It is needful unto *the vindication of the faithfulness of God in his threatenings*, given out by divine revelation. By this he hath always, from the beginning of the world, testified unto his own holiness and righteousness, whereof they are the most proper expressions. Those first recorded of them are in the prophecy of Enoch, [Jude 14, 15](#). And they have been since continued in all ages. But whereas the wisdom of God, acting in righteousness, hath been accompanied with patience and forbearance in the accomplishment of these threatenings, there have been, and yet are, mockers and scoffers at these divine threatenings, as though they were a mere noise, of no efficacy or signification. So the apostle declares the thoughts of the minds of men profane and ungodly, [2 Pet. iii. 3, 4](#). Wherefore, there is a condecency unto the divine excellencies, that God, in his own way and time, should vindicate his faithfulness in all his threatenings.

3. God hereby manifests himself to be a God hearing prayers, regarding the cries of his poor and distressed witnesses in the world. When the world abounds in provoking sins, especially in blood and persecution, there is a conjunct cry unto God of those that have suffered, and those that do suffer, in heaven and earth, for vengeance on obstinate, impenitent sinners. See [Luke xviii. 7, 8](#); [Rev. vi. 10](#). The voices of all those, I say, who have suffered unto death in foregoing ages, for the testimony of Jesus, and are now in heaven, in a state of expectancy of complete glory, with all those of them whose sighs and groans under their oppressors do at present ascend unto the throne of God, have the sense in them, by divine interpretation, that *punishment be inflicted on impenitent sinners*; as is plainly expressed by our Saviour in that place of the gospel affirming that he will avenge his elect speedily, who cry unto him day and night. Herein God will vindicate his glory, as the God that hears prayers.

4. A sense of this divine truth is a great and effectual means of God's rule in the hearts of men in the world, setting bounds to their lusts, and restraining that superfluity of wickedness and villainy which would otherwise take away the distinction, as to sin, between the earth and hell. If men can at any time free themselves from the terror and restraining power of this consideration, that *vengeance is always approaching towards impenitent sinners*, there is nothing so vile, so profane, so flagitious, as that they would not wholly give up themselves unto it, [Eccles. viii. 11](#), "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." And God knows, that if impunity in this world should always accompany provoking sinners, the temptation would be too strong and powerful for the faith of weak believers; which he will therefore relieve by frequent instances of his severity.

In a successive continuation of *previous judgments* on impenitent sinners, there is an uncontrollable evidence given of the certainty of that *final judgment* which all mankind shall be called unto. So the apostle proves it, and intimates that it is a foolish thing, the effect of obstinacy in sin, — if men do not learn the certain determination and approach of the eternal judgment, from the drowning of the old world, the conflagration of Sodom, with the like instances of divine severity, [2 Pet. iii. 3](#).

My present inquiry hereon is, What is our own concernment in these things, — what are we, for our own good, to learn by the *blessed instruction* given us by our Lord Jesus Christ, in his interpretation of the providential occurrences mentioned in the text?

And this I shall manifest by an impartial inquiry into the things ensuing:—

I. When doth a church, a nation, a people, or city, so abound in sin, as to be immediately and directly concerned in his divine warning; and what, in particular, is the case of the nation wherein we live, and our own therein?

II. Of what sort are those desolating judgments, which, in one way and sense or another, are impendent with respect unto such a church or nation, and, consequently, unto ourselves, at this season?

III. What warnings, calls, and indications of divine displeasure, and the approach of calamitous distresses, doth God usually grant, and what he hath given, and is giving unto us at present?

IV. What is the equity, and wherein it doth consist, of the divine constitution here at-tested by our blessed Saviour, that in such a case repentance and reformation, and nothing else, shall save and deliver a church, a people, a nation, from ruin?

V. Whereas this rule is so holy, just, and equal, whence is it that all sorts of men are so unwilling to comply with it, even in the utmost extremity, when all other hopes do fail and perish; and whence is it so amongst ourselves at this day?

VI. What is required unto that reformation which may save any nation — this wherein we live — from desolating calamities when they are deserved?

VII. From what causes at present such a reformation may be expected, and by what means it may be begun and accomplished, so as to prevent our utter ruin?

VIII. What is the duty, what ought to be the frame of mind in true believers, what their walk and work, in such a season, that, in case all means of delivery do fail, they may be found of Christ in peace at his coming; for it is but “yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry?”

These things are necessary to be inquired into, that we may help to beat out the paths of truth and peace, — the only ways that lead unto our deliverance. The nation is filled with complaints and fears: *mutual charges* on one party and another, as unto the causes of our present troubles and approaching dangers, — various designs and contrivances, with vain hopes and vehement desires of this or that way or means of help and deliverance, — cruel

hatred and animosities on differences in religion, designing no less than the extirpation of all that is good therein, — do abound in it, by all means rending itself in pieces, wearying itself in the *largeness of its ways*; and yet [it] says not that there is no hope. But for the most part, the true causes of all our troubles and dangers, with the only remedy of them, are utterly neglected. The world is filled, yea, the better sort of men in it, with other designs, other discourses; — we hear rarely of these things from the pulpits (which are filled with animosities about petty interests, and private difference in the approaches of public ruin), nor in the counsel of those who pretend to more wisdom. Some think they shall do great things by their wisdom and counsel, some by their authority and power, some by their number, some by owning the best cause, as they suppose; and with many such-like notions are the minds of men possessed. But the truth is, the land abounds in sin, — God is angry, and risen out of his holy place, — judgment lies at the door; and in vain shall we seek for remedy or healing any other way than that proposed. This, therefore, we shall inquire into.

The first thing supposed in the proposition before laid down was taken from *the circumstance of the time* wherein, and with reference whereunto, our Lord Jesus Christ delivered the rule of *the necessity of repentance and reformation, unto an escape from total destruction*; and this was a time when sin greatly abounded in the church and nation. And this supposition is the foundation of the truth of the whole assertion; for in other cases it may not always hold.

I. Our first inquiry must, therefore, be, — “When is a people or nation so filled with sin, or when doth sin so abound among them, as, in conjunction with the things afterward to be insisted on, to render their salvation or deliverance impossible, without repentance and reformation?” And it doth so, —

First. When *all sorts of sin abound in it*. I do not judge that every particular sin, or kind of sinning, that may be named, or may not be named, is required hereunto; nor is it so, that there should be the same outrage in public sins — for instance, in blood and oppression — as there hath been at some times, and in some places of the world, the dark places of the each being filled with habitations of cruelty; nor is it so, that sin doth reign at that height, and rage at that rate, as it did before the flood, or in Sodom, or before the final destruction of Jerusalem, or as it doth in the kingdom of Antichrist: for in that case there is no room or place either for repentance or reformation. God hides from them the things that concern their peace, that they may be utterly and irrecoverably destroyed. But this, I will grant, is required hereunto, — namely, that no *known sin* that is commonly passant in the world can be exempted from having a place in the public guilt of such a church or nation. If any such sin be omitted *in the roll of the indictment*, peace may yet dwell in the land. It would be too long, and not to my purpose, to draw up a catalogue of sins — from the highest *atheism*, through the vilest *uncleanness*, unto the lowest *oppression* that are found amongst us. I shall only say, on the other hand, that I know no *provoking sin*, condemned as such in the book





of God, whereof instances may not be found in this nation. Who dares make this a plea with God for it, namely, that yet it is free and innocent from such and such provoking sins? “Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob;” let us stand up, if we can, and plead for ourselves herein. But the only way whereby we may come to plead with God in this matter is fully described, *Isa. i. 16–20*. It must be repentance and reformation, laying a ground for pleading and arguing with God for pardon and mercy, that must save this nation, if it be saved, and not a plea for exemption from judgments on the account of our innocency. This is that which, of all things, God most abhorred in the people of old, and which all the prophets testified against in them.

But yet, to speak somewhat more particularly unto the first part of the proposition, in reference unto ourselves, — There are four sins, or four sorts of sins, or ways in sinning, which, unless God prevent, will be the ruin of this nation.

1. The first is *atheism*, — an abomination that these parts of the world were unacquainted withal until these latter ages. I do not speak concerning *speculative or opinionative atheism*, in them that deny the being of God, or, which is all one, his righteous government of the world; for it will not avail any man to believe that God is, unless withal he believe that “he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” — yet, of this sort it is to be feared that there are many amongst us; yea, some that make great advantages of religion, do live and talk as if they esteemed it all a fable. But I speak of that which is called *practical atheism*, — when men live and act as if they were influenced by prevalent thoughts that there is no God. Such the nation is replenished withal, and it exerts itself especially two ways:—

(1.) In *cursed oaths* and blasphemous execrations, whereby the highest contempt is cast on the divine name and being. The most excellent Thuanus,<sup>351</sup> giving an account of the Parisian massacre, with the horrible desolations that ensued thereon, ascribes it, in the first place, unto the anger of God revenging the horrid oaths and monstrous blasphemies which, from the court, had spread themselves over all the nation, *Hist., lib. liii*. Nor is it otherwise among us at present; though not generally amongst all, yet amongst many, and those unpunished.

(2.) *Boldness, confidence, and security in sinning*. Many are neither ashamed nor afraid to act, avow, yea, and boast of the vilest of sins. The awe that men have of the knowledge, conscience, and judgment of others, concerning their evil and filthy actions, is one means whereby God rules in the world for the restraint of sin. When the yoke hereof is utterly cast

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351 Jacques-Auguste de Thou, born at Paris in 1553, was made one of the presidents of the *Parlement de Paris* in 1594. The first eighteen books of his *History* were published in 1604. Though a Roman Catholic, he gives a candid and graphic description of the horrors of St Bartholomew’s day; on which account, and for other similar reasons, his work was placed on the “*Index Expurgatorius*,” in 1609. — Ed.

away, and men proclaim their sins like Sodom, it is the height of practical atheism. Nor, I think, did it ever more abound in any age than in that wherein we live.

2. *The loss of the power of that religion* whose outward form we do retain. We are all Protestants, and will abide to be of the Protestant religion. But wherein? In the *Confession*, and all the outward forms of the rule and worship of the church. But are men changed, renewed, converted to God, by the *doctrine of this religion* are they made humble, holy, zealous, fruitful in good works by it? — have they experience of the power of it in their own souls, in its transforming of them into the image of God? Without these things, it is of very little avail what religion men profess, This is that which is of evil abode to the professors of the Protestant religion at this day through the world. The glory, the power, the efficacy of it, are, if not lost and dead, yet greatly decayed; and an outward *carcase* of it, in articles of faith and forms of worship, doth only abide. Hence have the Reformed Churches, most of them, “a name to live,” but are dead; living only on a traditional knowledge, principles of education, advantages and interest; — in all which the Roman religion doth every way exceed them, and will carry the victory, when the contest is reduced unto such principles only. And unless God be pleased, by some renewed effusion of his blessed Spirit from above, to revive and reintroduce a spirit of life, holiness, zeal, readiness for the cross, conformity unto Christ, and contempt of the world, in and among the churches which profess the Protestant religion, he will ere long take away the hedge of his protecting providence, which now for some ages he hath kept about them, and leave them for a spoil unto their enemies. So he threateneth to do in the like case, [Isa. v. 5, 6](#). Such is the state described, [2 Tim. iii. 1–5](#).

3. *Open contempt and reproach, of the Spirit of God, in all his divine operations*, is another sin of the same dreadful abode. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, that he who “speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come,” [Matt. xii. 32](#); — that is, those who persist in opposing or reproaching the Holy Ghost, and his dispensation and operations under the New Testament, shall not escape vengeance and punishment even in this world; for so it befell that generation unto whom he spake. For continuing to do despite unto the Spirit of grace, wrath at length came upon them, even in this world, unto the utmost; which is the sense of the place. Now, scarcely, where the name of Christ was known, did this iniquity more abound than it doth at this day amongst us; for not only is *the divine person* of the Holy Spirit by some denied, and the substance of the preaching and writing of many is to oppose all his peculiar operations, but they are all made a scoff, a derision, and a reproach, openly and on all occasions, every day. Especially as he is a Spirit of *regeneration and supplication*, he is the object of multiplied sober blasphemies. This iniquity will be revenged.



4. *The abounding of uncleanness*, which, having broken forth from a corrupt fountain, hath overspread the land like a deluge. These sins, I say, among others, have such a *predominancy* among us, as to threaten perishing, without repentance.

Secondly. It is required, *that all sorts and degrees of persons are concerned in the guilt of some of these provoking sins*; for destruction is threatened unto all: “Ye shall all likewise perish;” — all, not universally, “*pro singulis generum;*” but generally, “*pro generibus singulorum.*” Therefore all must be, in some way, guilty of them. And this they may be three ways:—

1. *Personally*, in their own hearts, lives, and practices; which includes a great multitude.

2. By *not hindering* and preventing these sins in others, so far as their duty leads and their power enables them unto. What number of magistrates, of ministers, of parents, of masters of families are comprised herein, is evident unto all, especially ministers. See [Mal. ii. 7, 8](#); [Jer. xxiii. 14, 15](#).

3. By *not mourning for what they cannot help or remedy*; for it is such alone as shall be exempted from public calamities, [Ezek. ix.](#): and this, in some measure, takes us all in. And the due consideration hereof is necessary upon a double account:—

(1.) It is so unto the manifestation of the glory of God in public calamities and desolations, when the sword slays suddenly, and destroys the righteous with the wicked. One way or other, in one degree or another, we have all of us an access unto the guilt of those things whereby such judgments are procured. Who can say he is innocent? who can complain of his share and interest in the calamities that are coming upon us? who can plead that he ought to be exempted? There will be at last an eternal discrimination of persons; but as unto temporal judgments, we must own the righteousness of God if we also fall under them. And,

(2.) It is so, for the humbling of our souls under a sense of sin; which would better become some of us, than feeding on *the ashes of reserves* for exemption in the day of distress.

Some may suppose, that, by reason of their *personal freedom* from those public provoking sins which abound in the nation, — that on one account or other, by one means or other, they shall be safe, as in some high place, whence they may look down and behold others in distress and confusion. But it is to be feared their mistake will serve only to increase their surprisal and sorrow.

But yet farther; even the practice of provoking sins abounds among all sorts of persons. I do not say that all individuals amongst us are guilty of them; for were it so, our case were irreparable, like that of Sodom, when there were not ten righteous persons to be found in it, — that is, such as were free from the guilt of those sins whose cry came up to heaven; for then there would be no room for repentance or reformation. But whereas there are several sorts and degrees of persons, some high and some low, some rulers and some ruled, some rich and some poor, — there is no order, sort, or degree, in court, city, country, church, or

commonwealth, that are free from provoking sins Individuals of all sorts may be so, but no entire sort is so. And this farther entitles a nation unto the condition inquired after.

Thirdly. It is so when *the world is full of such sins as are its own, — as are proper to it; and the churches or professors, of such as are peculiar unto them.* If either of these were free from their several provocations, there might be yet room for patience and mercy. And these are distinct.

The sins of the world are, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” — sensuality, luxury, uncleanness, covetousness, ambition, oppression, and the like, with security. In these things the nation is fertile towards its own ruin.

The sins peculiar unto churches and professors are intimated by our blessed Saviour in his charge on the Asian churches, [Rev. ii. 3](#) — decays in grace, loss of faith and love, barrenness in good works, deadness, formality, coldness in profession, self-pleasing, pride, hypocrisy, want of zeal for God and delight in him, divisions among themselves, and conformity unto the world. And some of these things at present are so prevalent among us, that they can never be sufficiently bewailed.

It is no small evidence that the day of the Lord is nigh at hand, because *the virgins* are all slumbering. And it is not unlikely that judgment will begin at the house of God. All flesh hath corrupted its way; and therefore the end of all, as to its present condition, is at hand.

Fourthly. It is so when the sins of a people are *accompanied with the highest aggravations that they are capable of in this world;* and those arise from hence, — when they are committed against warnings, mercies, and patience. These comprise the ways and means which God in his goodness and wisdom useth to reclaim and recall men from their sins; and by whomsoever they are despised, they treasure up unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” [Rom. ii. 4, 5](#). What can save a people, by whom the only remedies of their relief are despised? What warnings and previous judgments we have had in this nation shall be afterward spoken unto. That there hath been no effect, no fruit of them, is evident unto all. Their language is, “Except ye repent, ye shall perish.” Who hath complied with the calls of God herein? what reformation hath been engaged in on this account? Have we not turned a deaf ear to the calls of God? Who hath mourned? who hath trembled? who hath sought for an entrance into the chambers of providence in the day of indignation? By some these warnings have been despised and scoffed at; by some, put off unto others, as their concernment, — not their own; by the most, neglected, or turned into matter of common discourse, without laying them to heart.

And as for mercies, the whole earth hath been turned into a stage for the consumption of them on the lusts of men. The nation hath been soaked with “showers of mercies,” enough to have made it very fruitful unto God; but, through a vicious, malignant humour in the hearts of men, there have been truly brought forth nothing but pride, vanity, gallantry, luxury, and security, in city and country, everywhere. The pestilent, deceitful art of sin, hath

turned the means of our conversion unto God into instruments of rebellion against God. How will England answer for abused mercies in the day of visitation And in all these things hath the patience also of God been abused, which hath been extended unto us beyond all thoughts and expectations. And yet, men of all sorts please themselves; as if that, were they over this or that difficulty, all would be well again, without any return unto God.

Fifthly. These things render impendent judgments inevitable, without repentance and reformation, when they are *committed in a land of light and knowledge*. Such the land hath been; and wherein yet there is any defect therein, it is a part of the sin and punishment of the nation. See [Isa. xxvi. 10](#). From the light that was in it, it might well be esteemed “a land of uprightness;” but how it hath been rebelled against, hated, opposed, maligned, and persecuted, in all the fruits of it, is rather (for the sake of some) to be bewailed than declared.

And thus much may suffice to be spoken unto the first supposition in our proposition concerning the sins of a church, nation, or people, which unavoidably expose them unto desolating judgments, when God gives indication of their approach, unless they are prevented by repentance; and we have seen a little, and but a little, of what is our concernment herein.

II. Our second inquiry is, “Of what sort those judgments are, which, in a time of great provocation, are to be looked on as impendent, and ready to seize on us?” And they are of three sorts:—

First. Such as are *absolute, decretory, and universal*.

There is mention in the Scripture of judgments threatened, which God hath, as it were, repented him of, and changed the actings of his providence, that they should not be inflicted. See [Amos vii. 3, 6](#). And there are judgments threatened, which have been diverted by the repentance of men; as it was in the case of Nineveh. But in this case, neither *will God repent*, nor *shall man repent*; but those judgments shall be universal and unavoidable. And of this sort we have three instances recorded in Scripture; — two are past, and one is yet for to come:—

1. The first is that of *the old world*. It is said that, upon their provocations, “God repented him that he had made man on the earth;” that is, he would deal with him as if he had done so, — which must be by a universal destruction. He would not repent of the evil he had determined; but positively declared that “the end of all flesh was come before him.” Nor did man repent; for, as our Saviour testifies, they continued in their security “until the day that Noah entered into the ark,” [Matt. xxiv. 38](#). Yet it may be observed, that, after things were come to that pass that there was no possibility of turning away the judgment threatened, yet God exercised forbearance towards them, and gave them the outward means of repentance and reformation, [1 Pet. iii. 20](#). They had amongst them the ministry of Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and that continued for a long season, in the patience of God.

[And let none please themselves, that they have *the outward means of the ministry* continued unto them; for notwithstanding that fruit of God’s patience, their destruction

may be inevitable. For as God may grant it unto them to satisfy his own goodness, and glorify his patience; so unto them it may have no other end but the hardening of them in their sin, and the aggravation of their sins, [Isa. vi. 9–12](#). And this example of the old world is frequently proposed, and that to Christians, to professors, to churches, to deliver them from security in a time of approaching judgments.]<sup>352</sup>

2. The second instance hereof was in the *Judaical church-state*; — the people, nation, temple, worship, and all that was valuable among them. This judgment also, in its approach, was such as with respect whereunto God would not repent, and man could not repent, although a day, a time and space, of repentance was granted unto them. So it is declared by our Lord Jesus Christ, [Luke xix. 41–44](#). They had a day, — it was theirs in a peculiar manner, — a day of patience and of the means of conversion, in the ministry of Christ and his apostles. Yet, saith he, the things of thy peace are now hid from thee; — so as that they must irrecoverably and eternally perish. So is their state described by the apostle, [1 Thess. ii. 14–16](#).

But it may be said, If their destruction was so absolutely determined that it was impossible it should be either longer suspended or diverted, unto what end did God grant them a day — such a day of grace and patience — which they could not make use of? I answer, He did it for the manifestation of the glory of his grace, righteousness, and severity; and that these two ways:—

(1.) In the calling, conversion, and gathering of his *elect* out of the perishing multitude of them that were hardened. During the continuance of that day of grace and patience among them, for about the space of forty years, all the elect of that generation were converted to God, and delivered from the curse that came upon the church and nation. For although I will not say but some of them might suffer, yea, fall, in the outward public calamities of that season; yet they were all delivered from the wrath of God in them, and saved eternally.

Hereof the apostle gives an account, [Rom. xi. 5–10](#). It is therefore, in a time of great provocations, no certain evidence that inevitable public judgments are not approaching, because the word and other means of grace are effectual to the conversion of some amongst us; for God may hereby be gathering of his own unto himself, that way may be made for the pouring out of his indignation on them that are hardened.

(2.) He did it that it might be *an aggravation of their sin*, and a space to fill up the measure of their iniquity; to the glory of his severity in their destruction, — “Towards them that fell, severity.” They had time to contract all the guilt mentioned by the apostle, [1 Thess. ii. 14–16](#); and were brought into the state and condition described by the same apostle, [Heb. x. 26–30](#). See [Isa. vi. 10–12](#).

352 These brackets occur in the original edition, and are retained as they seem to indicate the digressive character of the remark contained in the paragraph. — Ed.

Of this judgment and destruction, that of the old world was a precedent and token, which was despised by those obdurate sinners, [2 Pet. iii. 5–7](#).

3. The third instance of a judgment of this nature, which is yet to come, is in *the destruction of Antichrist*, and the idolatrous kingdom of the great adulteress and the persecuting beast. With respect hereunto, also, God will not repent, nor shall men do so; so that it is inevitable. So is it declared, [Rev. xviii. 8](#). This God hath determined, and it shall be accomplished in its appointed season; “for strong is the Lord God who judgeth” them, and none shall deliver them out of his hand, because of the improbability of it, because of the great power of Babylon in itself, and in its allies, the kings and merchants of the earth. The omnipotency of God is engaged to secure the church of its destruction; “strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” She also hath her day, wherein she *will not*, wherein she *shall not*, repent. When God begins to execute his plagues against her, none that belong unto her will repent of any of their abominations, [Rev. ix. 20, 21, xvi. 9, 11](#). Yet is there a day of patience continued unto this idolatrous, persecuting church; — partly that they may “fill up the measure of their iniquities;” and partly that God may, by the word and means of grace, gather out all his people from amongst them, according unto his call, [Rev. xviii. 4](#). And our slowness in coming forth from them is probably one means of prolonging the day of her desolation. And now the Lord Jesus Christ seems to say unto his people what the angel said unto Lot, when he led him out of Sodom, Make haste to escape, for I cannot do any thing until you are escaped, [Gen. xix. 22](#). And I hope the time is approaching wherein he will deal with his people as the angel dealt with Lot, [verse 16](#). They are apt to linger, and know not how to leave the outward accommodation of the Babylonish state, nor clear themselves of innumerable prejudices received therein; but he, being merciful unto them, will at length lay hold on them by the word of his power, and take them out of the city in a complete relinquishment of that cursed state.

Now, unto this sort of judgments there are two things concurring:—

1. That there is a *determinate decree* concerning them.

2. That there is a *judicial obduration* upon the people whom they are determined against, accompanying them; that no calls to repentance or reformation shall be complied withal so as to divert them. I am satisfied, upon such evidence as I shall give afterward, that this is not the condition of England; howbeit we have cause enough to tremble at the severest of divine judgments.

Secondly. The second sort of judgments are such as are *deservedly threatened* and determined, yet so as that no judicial hardness doth go along with them, to make utterly void the preceding day of grace and patience, and all reformation impossible.

They cannot, they shall not, be utterly removed, by a total deliverance from them; but yet they may have many alleviations and mitigations, and be sanctified unto them whom they do befall. A full instance hereof we have in the Babylonish captivity, as an account is

given us of it, [2 Kings xxiii. 25–27](#), “Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses: neither after him arose there any like him. Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked him withal. And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”

God had decreed and determined to cast off Judah and Jerusalem for their sin, — to bring a wasting desolation upon them. When this judgment was approaching, Josiah endeavours a thorough reformation of all things in the land, religious, civil, and moral; yet would not God revoke his sentence of a great calamity on the whole nation. The secret reason hereof was, that the body of the people was hypocritical in that reformation, and quickly returned unto their former abominations, [Jer. iii. 10](#), “Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord.” See [chap. iv. 18](#). Howbeit, this reformation of Josiah was accepted with God, and had its influence into the mitigation or sanctification of the ensuing desolation.

And this sort of judgment is very different from that before insisted on. For, —

1. It is but *partial*; there is a remnant always left among a people, that shall escape it. So was there in those days; there was an *escape* of it, a *remnant* whom God delivered and preserved; — which were as a blessing in the cluster, on the account whereof the whole was not utterly destroyed. This the Scripture very much insists on, [Isa. lxv. 6–8](#); [Zech. xiii. 8, 9](#); [Amos ix. 8, 9](#).

2. As it is not *total*, so it is not *final*. Even in the severity of his wrath, God designed the recovery of that people again in the appointed season, — giving promises thereof unto them that feared him. And so it came to pass, in the return of their captivity. See the history hereof, [Jer. xxxi. 32](#). God may have, for our sins, determined a desolating calamity on this nation; yet if there be not a judiciary hardness upon us, it may only be partial, and recoverable; — not as it was with Israel, [1 Kings xiv. 10](#). See [Jer. iv. 27, v. 18, xxx. to xxxii.](#)

3. It was *sanctified and blessed* unto them who were upright and sincere, and who endeavoured the removal of it by reformation, though they suffered in the outward calamity. The good figs, or those typed by them, were carried into captivity; but the dealing of God with them therein was in mercy, [Jer. xxiv. 6, 7](#), “I will,” saith God, “set mine eyes upon them for good: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” Whatever was their outward condition, those internal, spiritual mercies and privileges made it sweet and useful unto them. The third part was brought through the fire, [Zech. xiii. 8, 9](#).





4. God makes this sort of judgment a means fully to *reclaim and reform them*, as many of those who in general suffer under them. They are God's furnace, but not to burn; — they purify and cleanse as silver is tried, and do not bum up as stubble is consumed. So was that church by their captivity purged from their idols forever. And many other differences of the like nature might be assigned.

And in the consideration of this sort of judgments lies our concernment. Who knows but that God, for our horrible neglect and contempt of the gospel, with all the cursed immoralities and abominations which have ensued thereon, and the cold, dead frame of professors under various means of instruction, hath determined to bring a wasting calamity on this nation, and that he will not turn away from the fierceness of his wrath, but it shall overtake us? If there be a *judicial hardness* upon the land, so as that there is no repentance, no reformation endeavoured in this day of patience and forbearance which we yet enjoy, our desolation will be total, unsanctified, irrevocable; and though another people may be raised up to profess the gospel in the land, yet shall we be unconcerned in the mercy. So hath it been before in this nation, and in all the Christian nations of Europe. Woe unto us, if we thus betray the land of our nativity, — if we thus give it up to be a hissing and astonishment! Hearken not unto vain words; this or that way we shall be delivered: it is the day of our trial, and who knows what will be the evening thereof? But, on the other hand, although a public calamity should be determined irrevocably against us, if we use the day of forbearance unto the ends of it, — in repentance and returning unto God, — we shall at length have all the advantages before mentioned. It will be but *partial*; it will be but *for a time*; it will be *sanctified*; — it will *purify* the church, and restore it unto a more glorious state than ever before.

Thirdly. There are judgments which are *deserved* and *threatened*, but not *decreed* and *determined*, which may be absolutely diverted and escaped. This sort of judgments is frequently mentioned in the Scripture; and so also are frequent deliverances from them, by the ways and means of God's appointment.

And concerning them we may observe, —

1. That *this threatening of approaching judgments*, which yet may be averted, *is a declaration of the ordinary rule of divine justice, according whereunto a nation or people, without an interposition of sovereign mercy, ought to be destroyed.*

God doth not threaten, he doth not give warnings, signs, or indications of approaching judgments, but when they are deserved, and may righteously be executed; nor is there any known rule of the word to give an assurance of the contrary. All that can be said is, "Who knows but that the Lord may repent, and turn from the fierceness of his wrath?"

2. *The threatening of them is an ordinance of God, to call us unto the use of such means as whereby they may be prevented.*



He foretells our destruction, that we may not be destroyed; as it was in the case of Nineveh. And this is the only symptom whereby we find out and discern the nature of threatened impendent judgments. If the consideration of them be an ordinance of God, stirring us up to the diligent use of the means whereby they may be prevented, the design of God is to give in deliverance in the issue. If it doth not, they are inevitable. God holds the balance yet in his hand, and we know not which way we incline. The best prognostication we can take, is from the frame of our own hearts under the threatenings of them.

Here lies the trial of this poor land and nation at this day; judgment is deserved, judgment is threatened, judgment is approaching, — the clouds are the dust of his feet. If all sorts of men turn not to God by repentance, — if we are not humbled for our contempt of the gospel and outrage against it, — if we leave not our provoking sins, — evil will overtake us, and we shall not escape. And yet, on the other hand, by a due application unto him who holds the balance in his hand, mercy may glory against justice, and we may have deliverance.

Those great men who suppose all things pervious unto their wisdom, and conquerable by their industry, who have a thousand flattering contrivances for the safety of a nation, cannot more despise these things than I do all their counsels without them. And when they shall be at a loss, and shall find one disappointment following on the neck of another, those who attend unto the advice of God in this case shall find rest and peace in their own souls. And as for them who scoff at these things, and say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” — that is, in the way of judgment, — “for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the creation;” there needs no regard unto God in these things; trouble us not with the fooleries of your repentance and reformation; — God will “laugh at their calamity,” etc., [Prov. i. 26](#), to the end.

This is the second thing we were to insist on, for the clearing and confirmation of the general proposition before laid down.

III. Our third inquiry is, “What evidences we have at present, or what warnings we have had, of approaching judgments?” for this also belongs unto the indispensable necessity of repentance and reformation, upon the approaching of troubles. And they are the ordinances of God unto that end; which when they are despised, desolating judgments will ensue.

And we may, unto this end, observe these things:—

First, *Ordinarily, God doth not bring wasting, desolating judgments on any people, church, or nation, but that he gives them warnings of their approach.*

I say, he doth not *ordinarily* do so; for he may, if he please, surprise a wicked, provoking generation of men with the most dreadful destructions; as he did Sodom and Gomorrah of old. And very many daily are so surprised, as unto their own apprehensions; though, really, God had given them signs of what was coming upon them, but they regarded them not, and so perished as in a moment. But ordinarily, before he executes great and severe judgments, he gives such indications, signs, and warnings of their coming, as that men should be forced

to take notice of them, unless they be absolutely hardened and blinded. So he dealt with the old world, in the building of the ark, and the ministry of Noah; so he dealt with the church under the Old Testament, in and by the ministry of the prophets, — see [Amos iii. 6–8](#); and so he hath done with all others, who have had any knowledge of him or of his ways. They that are wise may discern these things, [Hos. xiv. 9](#); [Matt. xvi. 3](#); [Mic. vi. 9](#); [Dan. xii. 10](#). And in all heathen stories of the times that passed over them, we find remarks of strange indications of approaching desolations. And he doth it for two ends:—

1. For the satisfaction of his own *goodness and love to mankind* in the exercise of patience and forbearance unto the utmost, [Hos. vi. 4](#); as also for the manifestation of the glory of his justice, when he comes to execute the severity of his wrath. When men are surprised with public calamities, they shall not be able to say, Would none tell us of their approach? would none give us warning of them? — had we been told of the terror of the Lord in his judgments, we would have turned from our iniquities, that we might have escaped. In this case, it is usual with God in the Scripture to call heaven and earth to witness against men, that he did warn them, by various means, of what would befall them in the end. This is our principal reason why this weak but sincere “Testimony for God” is published. And this shall be an aggravation of their misery in the day of their distress, when they shall seriously reflect upon themselves as unto their folly, guilt, and obstinacy, in despising the warnings which they had received; — which is a great part of the punishment of the damned in hell, [Ezek. xxxix. 23, 24](#).

2. God doth it for the end under consideration; namely, that they may be *a means to call a poor guilty people unto* that repentance and reformation whereby impendent judgments may be diverted.

Secondly. There are five ways whereby God *giveth warning of the approach of desolating judgments* when a land is full of sin:—

1. He doth it by *lesser previous judgments and severities*. So was it in the instances in the text. The destruction of some by the sword and the fall of a tower, was a warning to the whole nation of the approach of a public calamity, unless they repented. As particular instances are given us hereof in the Scripture, so we have a general account of this method of divine Providence, [Amos vii. 1–9](#). First, God sent the judgment of the *grasshoppers*, which eat up all the grass of the land, and so occasioned a famine. This judgment being not improved unto repentance, he “called to contend by *fire*, which devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part,” or consumed their treasure, devouring a part of their substance. But when this also was neglected, then came the “plumb-line” of a levelling desolation.

2. He doth it by *extraordinary and preternatural* operations in the works of nature: such as are comets or blazing stars, fiery meteors, dreadful phantoms or appearances in the air,



voices, predictions of uncertain original, mighty winds, earthquakes, stopping the course of rivers, and the like. An account of these things, as they were to foretell and fore-signify the fatal destruction of Jerusalem, is given us by our Saviour, [Luke xxi. 25, 26](#). And the story of the event in Josephus is an admirable exposition of this prophecy of our blessed Saviour. See [Rev. vi. 13, 14](#). The frame of nature is, as it were, cast into a trembling disorder upon the approaches of God in his wrath and fury, and puts itself forth in extraordinary signs of its astonishment; trembling for the inhabitants of the earth, and calling on them to repent, before the wrath of the Terrible One do seize upon them. So in the Scripture, the seas and rivers, mountains and hills, are represented as mourning, shaking, trembling at the presence of God, when he comes to execute his judgments. See [Hab. iii. 6, 8, 10](#), “He drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea? The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.”

The mountains, hills, seas, rivers bowed, trembled, and lifted up their hands, as crying for compassion. See [Ps. xcvi. 2–6](#). By these signs and tokens in heaven and earth cloth God give warnings of his coming to judge the inhabitants of the earth. God doth not work these strange things in heaven above, and the earth beneath, that they should be gazed at only, and made a matter of talk; not that they should be subjects of some men’s curiosity, and of the scorn of others. There is a voice in them all, — a voice of God; and it will be to their hurt by whom it is not heard and understood.

3. He doth the same constantly, *by the light of his word*. The general rule of God’s ordinary dispensation of providence is fully laid down in the Scripture: “God hath magnified his word above all his name;” so as that no works of providence shall be unsuited to the rule of the word, much less contrary to it, or inconsistent with it. And if we were wise to make application of it unto present affairs and occasions, we should, in most instances, know in general what God is doing. Of old it was said, “Surely the Lord God will do nothing,” — that is, in the way of judgments, “but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets,” [Amos iii. 7](#). What they had by immediate revelation, we may have, in a measure, by the rule of the word, and the declaration which God hath made therein how he will deal with a sinful, provoking people. So, having threatened various sorts of judgments, the prophet adds, “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail,” [Isa. xxxiv. 16](#).

That this great means of divine warnings may be useful unto us, we are to consider, —

(1.) What are the stable rules given in the Scripture concerning sin, repentance, impenitence, and judgments. Such rules abound in it: and no dispensations of Providence shall interfere with them. God will not give such a temptation unto faith that any of his works should be contradictions unto his word. And if we will learn our present condition from these rules, it will be an *antidote* against security.



(2.) Consider the instances recorded therein of God’s dealings with sinful, provoking nations and churches. This God himself directed the people of old unto, when they boasted of their church privileges, sending them to Shiloh, which he had destroyed. And when we find a record in the book of God concerning his severity towards any nation in our circumstances, it is our duty to believe that he will deal so with us also in his time, unless we repent.

(3.) Always bear in mind our *infallible guidance* as unto God’s final dealing with impenitent sinners. This the whole Scripture constantly, equally, universally witnesses unto, that it shall be eternal destruction; and this will preserve us from distracting surprisals, when we find things fall out beyond our expectation in a way of severity.

(4.) Consider those signs, marks, and tokens of approaching judgments which are set up in the world; which whoso doth wisely consider, he will not fail in his prognostication of future events. Among these, *abounding in sin with security*, in such persons, nations, cities, and churches, as God is pleased by the gospel to take near unto himself in a peculiar manner, is the most eminent. For those signs are buoys, fixed to show where we shall certainly make shipwreck if we approach unto them. When these rules are observed, when they are diligently attended unto and complied withal, so as that we receive instruction from them, I shall say with some confidence, that every believer shall know what God is doing in a way of judgment, so far as is necessary unto his guidance in his own duty, wherein he shall find acceptance, and not provoke God in the neglect of it.

4. God hath appointed *the ministry of the word* unto the same end. The principal end of the ministry under the gospel is the dispensation of the word of *reconciliation*. But neither is yet this work of giving *warning of approaching judgments* exempted from that office and duty. Christ himself in his ministry preacheth here on this subject. They are watchmen and overseers; and their duty herein is graphically expressed, [Ezek. xxxiii. 2–9](#). When God placeth any as a watchman for a people, one part of his duty is to look diligently after the approach of dangers and evils, — such, I mean, as come on the account of sin; and thereon to awaken and stir up the people to take care of themselves that they be not destroyed. The shepherd is not only to provide good pasture for his sheep, but to keep them from danger. The watchman “hearkened diligently with much heed, and he cried, A lion,” [Isa. xxi. 7, 8](#). Having made a discovery of approaching danger, he cries out to the people, to warn them of it. But if the watchmen are slothful and sleepy; if they are dumb dogs, and cannot bark when evil cometh; if they are light and treacherous persons, blind guides that have no vision; if they also are under a spirit of slumber and security, so as that the people are not warned by them of their danger, — this is one of the most severe tokens of wrath approaching. It is a great warning, when God takes away the means of warning; — when he says unto a people, “I will warn you no more,” by giving them such watchmen as are neither faithful nor able to warn them, and by taking away those that are.



5. God gives warnings hereof, by bringing a people into such a posture, condition, and circumstances, as do in their own nature tend unto ruin. Such are cross interests among themselves, incurable divisions, contrary and unsteady counsels, weakness in spirit and courage, mutual distrusts, effeminacy through luxury, with one or other insuperable entanglement; which are the ways and means whereby nations precipitate themselves into a calamitous condition. In general, as unto this previous warning of approaching judgments, God threatens to send among a people who are tending towards ruin, a “moth,” and a “hornet.” The moth he threatens, [Isa. li. 8](#); [Hos. v. 12](#). Somewhat shall eat up and devour the strength and sinews of the counsels of a nation, as a moth devoureth a garment. Whilst it lies still, it seems, it may be, to be sound and firm; — hold it up to the light, and it appears full of holes, and is easily torn with the finger. So is it with a nation; — whatever outward peace it seems to enjoy, when it is decayed in the wisdom and strength of its counsels, it is easily torn in pieces. And in like manner he sends the hornet unto the same end, [Exod. xxiii. 28](#); [Deut. vii. 20](#); — that is, that which shall vex, disquiet, and torment them, that they shall be ready every one to strike himself, or the next that he meeteth withal. And many of these hornets are at present among us.

These are some of the ways whereby God warneth a people, church, or nation, of approaching judgments.

It concerneth us, now, to inquire how it is, how it hath been with us, with reference hereunto. And I say, —

1. It is *not necessary* that God should use all these ways of warning of a sinful people of approaching desolations, if not prevented by repentance. It is enough, unto the ends of this dispensation of divine wisdom and goodness, if he make use of some of them, or of any one of them in an eminent manner. Wherefore, if any of them have been wanting among us, yet if we have had others of them, it is sufficient to render us inexcusable if we repent not. But, —

2. The truth is, we have, upon the matter, *had them all, and* they have abounded amongst us.

We have had the *previous judgments* of plague, fire, and war.

Some may say they were *desolating judgments themselves*; and so indeed they were. But whereas sin still aboundeth, and no reformation ensued upon them in any places, among any sort of persons, they were but *warnings* of what is yet to come, if not prevented; and their language is, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

We have had *a multiplication of signs*, in the heaven above, and in the earth beneath; such as all mankind have ever esteemed forerunners of public calamities; and the more they are despised, the louder is their voice to the same purpose. God hath continued hitherto his word amongst us, wherein the ordinary rule of his providence in these things is openly declared. And if those unto whom the declaration of the word of God, in the dispensation of



it, is committed, have not faithfully warned the people of their danger, their blood may be found at their door. Herein, at present, lies our greatest strait. The *efficacy* of all other calls of God unto repentance depends much on the application of them unto the souls and consciences of men in the *preaching of the word*. But whilst by some this work is despised, at least counted unnecessary, by some it is neglected utterly; and others, by reason of their private capacities, whereby they are disabled to speak unto magistrates, cities, or the community of the people, think not themselves concerned therein, [and] it is almost wholly laid aside. For what, will some say, doth this speaking unto *a few* in a retirement signify, as unto a general reformation of the people of the land? But whereas we have all sinned in our measures, — churches, and all sorts of more strict professors of religion, — it is every one's duty to be pressing these warnings of God within his own bounds and precincts. And if each of us should prevail but with *one* to return effectually to God, it will be accepted with him, who, in such a season, seeks for a man to stand in the gap, to turn away his wrath, and will save a city for the *sake of ten*, if they be found therein. Let us not pretend that the repentance and reformation called for respect the public enormous sins of the nation, in atheism, profaneness, sensuality, luxury, pride, oppression, hatred of the truth, contempt of the ministry of the gospel, and the like. They do so, indeed, but not only; — they respect also the decays in faith, love, zeal, with love of the world, conformity unto it, lukewarmness, that are found amongst the most eminent professors of religion. This is our present wound; here lies our weakness, — namely, in the want of a quick, active, zealous ministry, to call and stir up magistrates and people to effectual repentance, and turning to God. Unless this be given unto us, I fear we cannot be saved. If it be otherwise, — if we have a ministry that really do attend unto their duty in this matter, — I beg their pardon for other apprehensions: but then I shall think it the most pregnant sign of approaching destruction; seeing it is apparent unto all that their endeavours have neither fruit nor success.

So far have we proceeded with our proposition, — namely, that *sin abounds amongst us; that judgments are approaching; that God hath giver, us manifold warnings of their so doing*.

IV. That which, in the next place, we are to speak unto is, “The equity of this divine constitution, — that, in the ordinary way of God's rule and dispensation of his providence, repentance and reformation shall turn away impendent judgments, and procure unto a people a blessed deliverance; and nothing else shall do it:” “Except ye repent, ye shall perish.”

That upon repentance they shall be saved and delivered, is intended in the same rule. This is the unalterable law of divine Providence; this shall do it, and nothing else shall do. The *wisdom and power of men* shall not do it; *fasting and prayer*, whilst we continue in our sins, shall not do it. *Repentance* alone is made the condition of deliverance in this state of things.

Upon this rule did God vindicate the equity of his ways against repining Israel, [Ezek. xviii. 29–32](#): Can any thing be more just and equal? Ruin and utter desolation are ready to fall upon the whole people. This you have deserved by your iniquities and multiplied provocations. In strict justice, they ought immediately to come upon you. But “my ways are equal;” I will not deal with you in a way of strict justice; I will do it in equity, which is a meet temperature of justice and mercy. And this I make evident unto you herein, in that, whilst the execution of judgment is only threatened and suspended, if you make unto yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, in sincere repentance, — if you cast away all your transgressions by thorough reformation of your lives, — iniquity shall not be your ruin. What can be more just, righteous, and equal? Who can complain if, after all this, evil should overtake you, and you shall not escape? The same he pleads again, [chap. xxxiii. 10, 11](#), as in many other places.

That this divine constitution (namely, that repentance and reformation shall save a church, people, or nation, in the state before described, and that nothing else shall do so, however men may please and pride themselves in their own imaginations) is equal, just, and good, — that it is meet it should be so, that it hath a condecency unto the divine excellencies, and the rule of righteousness in government, — is evident; for, —

First. The *notion of this rule* is inbred in mankind by nature, as was mentioned before. There is no man, unless he be atheistically profligate, but, when he apprehends that evil and ruin, especially as unto his life, is ready to overtake him, and seize upon him, but he reflects on his sins, and comes to some resolutions of forsaking them for the future, so he may be at present delivered from his deplorable condition. Now, all this ariseth from these indelible notions ingrafted on the minds of men:— that all evil of punishment is from God; that it is for sin; that there is no way to avoid it but by repentance and reformation. And those who will not improve this natural light with respect unto the public, will be found, as it were, whether they will or no, to comply with it when it comes to be their own case in particular. Herein lies a thousand testimonies unto the equity of this divine constitution.

Secondly. When this rule is complied withal, — when repentance and reformation do ensue upon divine warnings, whereby peace with God is in some measure attained, — it will give men trust and confidence in him, with expectation of divine relief in their distress; which is the most effectual means for men to be instrumental unto their own deliverance: and, on the other side, when it is neglected, when evil approaches, guilt and terror will haunt (the minds of men, and they shall not be able to entertain one thought of divine help; which will render them heartless, helpless, senseless, and betray them into cowardice and pusillanimity, however they may boast at present. If these two sorts are opposed, ten shall chase a hundred, and a hundred put a thousand to flight. And if any nation do openly refuse a compliance with this constitution, if God should send another to invade them, in a way of judgment, they would melt away before them as wax before the fire. When evils compass us about, and are ready to seize upon us, a reflection on the neglect of this rule will disturb





our counsels, distract our thoughts, distress our minds, weaken our confidence in God, and dishearten the stoutest of the sons of men, giving them up a prey to their enemies.

Thirdly. This rule or constitution hath an impression of all divine excellencies upon it; namely, of the goodness, patience, wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of God.

If, when judgments are approaching and deserved, men could divert them by their wisdom, courage, or diligence, it would reflect dishonour on God in the government of the world. See [Isa. xxii. 7–11](#). But in this way of the deliverance of any people, there is a salvo for the glory of all the divine excellencies, as is manifested unto all.

When, therefore, in this state, impendent judgments are not absolutely *determined*, yet so *deserved* as that, upon a supposition of continuance in those sins whereby they are deserved, the glory of divine justice cannot be vindicated in the absolute impunity; and whereas God hath now prepared all things, and made them ready for their execution, all means and instruments being girt unto the work, his sword is whetted, and his arrows are fixed in the bow, he will first give warning, then give space and time for repentance, and requires no more for the laying aside of all his preparations for destruction, — surely his ways are equal, kind, and full of mercy.

If men will look for, if they will expect deliverance, without a compliance with these good, holy, just, gracious, equal terms, they will find themselves, in the issue, wofully deceived. And if, after all this, we in this nation should be found in a neglect hereof, — if the nation should continue in its present frame, wherein, of all other means of safety, this seems to be least thought of or regarded, — what shall we plead for ourselves? who shall pity us in the day of distress? Most men now despise these things; but can their hearts endure, or can their hands be strong, in the day that the Lord shall deal with them? But, —

V. Whereas this way, this means of deliverance, is so just, so equal, so reasonable, manifesting itself to the consciences and reason of mankind, owned by the very heathens, and fully confirmed by divine revelation, our next inquiry must be, “Whence it is that there is such an unreadiness, such an unwillingness to comply with this duty as there is; that so many difficulties are esteemed to be in it, — so as that there is little hope it will be found among us in a prevalent degree?”

If men, especially such as are great, and esteem themselves to be wise, are told that this is the way to save and deliver the nation, they turn away in a wrath, as Naaman did when the prophet bid him wash and be clean, when he would have rather expected an injunction of some heroic exploits:— These are thoughts for weak and pusillanimous souls, who understand nothing of state affairs. But it will ere long appear who is wisest, — God or men. But a hard thing it is to prevail with any to think well of it, or to go about it, or to judge that it is the only balm for our wounds.



To find out the cause hereof, I shall briefly consider all sorts of persons who are concerned to plant this healing tree, whose root is repentance, and whose fruit is reformation of life. And they are of three sorts:— 1. *Magistrates*; 2. *Ministers*; 3. *The people themselves*.

Unless there be a concurrence of the endeavours of them all, in their several places and duties, there will be no such public work of repentance and reformation wrought as is suited unto the turning away of public calamities. But yet, though it be the express duty of them all, though it be their interest, though it cannot be omitted but at their utmost peril, as unto temporal and eternal events, yet it is a marvellous hard and difficult work to prevail with any of them to engage vigorously in it. Some do not think it necessary; — some, after conviction of its necessity, either know not how to go about it, or linger in its undertaking, or are quickly wearied; — some wish it were done, so as that they may not be at the trouble of it.

Let us consider them distinctly, —

First. As unto *magistrates*. When Jehoshaphat set himself to reform the church, or his kingdom, to escape the judgment that was denounced against them, he appointed for magistrates and judges men fearing God and hating covetousness. And his charge unto them was, “Let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it. Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart,” 2 Chron. xix. 7, 9. Without this there will be no public reformation; and therefore the first difficulty of it ariseth from this sort of persons, and that upon two accounts:—

1. That magistrates themselves do live in sin, and love it, and hate to be personally reformed; yea, take delight in them that openly live in sin also, — which is the height of wickedness, Rom. i. 32. When magistrates are profane swearers, or scoffers at the power of religion, or drunkards, or unclean persons, or covetous oppressors, a great obstruction must needs be laid in the way of public repentance and reformation; neither doth this difficulty at present arise merely from their personal sins and miscarriages, but also from the want of conviction, and a sense of their duty in their places, with the account which they must give thereof. For, —

2. They seem not to believe that *the attempting of this work* is any part of their duty, or that they are concerned therein. Let it, therefore, be never so reasonable, so equal, so important, so necessary unto the deliverance and salvation of any people, if those who should further it in the first place do obstruct and hinder it, it will be attended with difficulties. Ill examples and negligence have ruined this nation.

Wherefore, we may lay it down as an assured truth, which the text will confirm, —

That unless magistrates, who have the visible conduct of the people, are convinced that it is their duty to promote the work of repentance and reformation at this time, by their own example, and in the discharge of their offices, the case of this nation is deplorable, and not to be relieved but by sovereign grace and mercy. For what shall the people do, when



they see their guides, unto whose pattern they conform themselves, utterly regardless of any such thing? This is one means of the difficulty which is found among us, of affecting the minds of men with this equal constitution.

Secondly. Those who are principally concerned herein are *ministers*, or those who have the administration of the word and ordinances of the gospel committed unto them. Unto these is this work given in charge in an especial manner. They have the principal means of repentance and reformation committed to their management. From them is the beginning and carrying on of this work expected and required. Hereof, as unto their sincerity and diligence, they must give an account at the last day. And if this spring be stopped, whence should the refreshing waters of repentance and reformation arise? But yet herein the principal difficulty of the whole work doth consist. For, —

1. Some there are, pretending unto this office, in whom lies no small part of the *evil* that is to be reformed; — persons who labour among the most forward to fill up the measure of the iniquities of this nation; such as whose ignorance, negligence, profaneness, and debauchery, are, in all their effects, transfused and communicated unto all that are about them. Shall we expect that such persons will be instrumental in the reforming of others, who hate to be reformed themselves? [Jer. xxiii. 15](#). It was so of old. But, —

2. There are very few of this sort of persons who will be at *the charge of carrying on this work*. They may quickly find what it will cost them; for unless they are *exemplary* in it themselves, it is in vain once to attempt the pressing of it upon others. They cannot go about it without great retrenchings of that which they have esteemed their liberty in the course of their conversations. All compliance with unreformed persons, for secular ends; all conformity unto the course of the world, in jollities and pride of life; all ostentation of riches, wealth, and power; all self-seeking and self-pleasing; all lightness and carnal confidences, — must utterly be cast away. And not only so, but unless, by incessant prayers and supplications, with earnestness and perseverance, they labour for fresh anointings with the Spirit of grace in their own souls, that faith, and love, and zeal for God, and compassion for the souls of men, and readiness for the cross, may revive and flourish in them, — they will not be useful, nor instrumental in this work. And is it any wonder that the most of them think it better to suffer things to go on at the present rate, than to venture at that which will cost them so dear in its pursuit? The truth is, I know very few, if any, who are meet and fit to engage in this work in a visible eminent manner; — those who have the best, almost the only, opportunities for it, seem to be asleep.

3. Besides the *charge* they must be at themselves, they perceive the *opposition* they shall meet withal from others. They find that they shall not only disoblige and provoke all sorts of persons, and lose many of their useful friends, but also expose themselves unto obloquy, scorn, contempt, and reproach of all sorts. He is a lost man in this world, who, without respect of persons, will engage seriously in this work; every day he shall find one or other displeased,

if not provoked. This neither they nor their families can well bear withal. Indeed, the hardest and most difficult service that ever God called any of his ministers unto, excepting only Jesus Christ and his apostles, hath been in the endeavouring the reformation of backsliding or spiritually-decayed churches. These are the two witnesses which, in all ages, have prophesied in sackcloth. Such was the ministry of Elijah, which brought him unto that conclusion, and an earnest longing to be delivered by death from his work and ministry, [1 Kings xix. 4](#). So was that of Jeremiah, in the like season, whereof he so complains, [chap. xv. 10](#). John the Baptist, in the same work, lost first his liberty, then his life. And, in after ages, Chrysostom, for the same cause, was hated by the clergy, persecuted by the court, and at length driven into banishment, where he died. Most men care not how little a share they have in such a work as this, whose reward will reach them according to the proportion of their engagement in it. All churches, all persons almost, would willingly be let alone in the condition wherein they are; — they that would press them unto due reformation, ever were, and ever will be, looked on as their *troublers*.

Hence, then, it is that our wound is incurable:— Few of this sort, are convinced of the present necessity of this duty; they hope things are indifferently well with them and their flocks, — that they may endure their time well enough. Few are willing to undergo the charge and trouble of it, — to put all their present circumstances into disorder. Few have received an anointing for the work; many are able to dispute against any attempts of it; and not a few have expectations of strange deliverances without it. What is left us in this case shall afterward be declared.

Thirdly. It is difficult also on the account of the *people* that are to be reformed. It is hard to convince them of its necessity, — hard to persuade them to endeavour it, — hard to get them to persevere in attempts for it.

Some of the reasons hereof we may briefly consider; as, —

1. That *self-justification* and approbation of themselves which all sorts of persons, both by nature and by incurable prejudices, are inclined unto, lie at the bottom of this fatal negligence. When they see all things amiss, they will grant that there is some reformation necessary; but that it is so for others, and not for them. Those that are worse than they (as there are but few who do not think, on one pretence or other, that there are many worse than themselves), they suppose this duty is necessary unto, — but not unto them. And if there are none visibly so, yet they will make them, and judge them so to be. But whilst men have a form of godliness, though they deny the power thereof, they will justify themselves from all need of reformation. Churches will do so, and all sorts of professors of religion will do so, — especially if they have any peculiar notion or practice which they value themselves upon. So was it with the Jews of old, [Jer. vii. 9, 10](#); and with the Pharisees in the days of our Saviour, [John ix. 40](#). It is so at this day; and it is a rare thing to meet with any who will own themselves to stand in need of real laborious reformation.

Hence it is that *no churches would ever reform themselves*; which hath been the cause of all division and separation, whereby some have been saved from a general apostasy. They all approve themselves in their state and condition; which is come to that height in the papal church that they boast themselves infallible, and not *capable of reformation* in any thing. I pray God secure others from the like presumptions! It will be their ruin by whom they are entertained. Yet so it is at this day. Most churches think they need more *revenues*, more *honour*, more *freedom* from *opposition*, more *submission* of all men unto them; but they almost abhor the thought that they stand in need of any *reformation*.

2. *The nature of the work itself* renders it difficult; for it requires a general change of the course wherein men have been engaged; — a thing as difficult as to cause the streams of a mighty river to change their course and run backward. Vicious habits must be subdued, — inclinations riveted in the mind by long practice and custom be cast out, — ways of conversation promoted and strengthened by all sorts of circumstances changed; — which render the work unto some men impossible. So the prophet declares it, [Jer. xiii. 23](#), “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Men cannot easily unlearn what they have been so taught or accustomed unto. The mighty power of God on the souls of men, both as unto individual persons and whole societies, is required unto this change. So it may be wrought, and not otherwise, [Isa. xi. 6–9](#).

3. The advantage which many may make unto themselves by the present posture of things, and fear of alterations by reformation, is a mountain in the way, — a mighty obstacle against entertaining serious thoughts about it.

4. The Scripture most frequently casts the cause hereof on men’s *security* in their earthly enjoyments. This keeps them safe from hearing God’s calls, or taking notice of his warnings. And therefore it is laid down as the *cause and constant forerunner* of all desolating judgments. It is at large insisted upon by our Saviour himself, [Matt. xxiv. 37–39](#); [Luke xvii. 26–29](#).

Now, this security is like the disease in the body which is commonly called the scurvy; — it is not any single distemper or disease, but a complication or concurrence of many prevalent distempers. Security is not the name of any one vicious habit or inclination of the mind, but it is a concurrent complication of many; — spiritual stupidity and sloth, called a spirit of slumber, love of the world, carnal wisdom, groundless hopes of life, all proceeding from unbelief, do concur in its constitution. And if a practice in a course of sin have for some season ensued on these principles, whereby conscience comes to be *seared*, or is made senseless, the case of those in whom it is, is for the most part remediless. And not a few of this sort are amongst us.

And many other reasons there are rendering this work full of difficulty, though it be so necessary, so just and equal. As for those by whom all these things are despised, and even scoffed at, something shall be spoken afterward unto them, or concerning them.



But yet, this consideration ought not to deter any from endeavouring the discharge of their own duty herein. For, as we have seen it is indispensably necessary, that we and the nation may be saved from desolating judgments; so we shall see afterward how and by what means this difficulty may be surmounted, and those obstacles removed out of the way. However, happy will they be, be they never so few, never so poor, never so unknown to the world, whom God *shall find so doing*, when he ariseth out of his place to shake the earth terribly!

VI. I shall, therefore, in the next place, to bring all things nearer home, inquire, “What is the nature of that repentance and reformation which at this time God requires of us all, that we may not perish in his sore displeasure?”

After a devastation made of the treasure of the Roman empire by sundry tyrants successively, Vespasian coming to the government, acquainted the senate that there was need of so many millions of money, that the empire might stand; — not that it might flourish and grow vigorous, whereunto much more was required, but that it might be preserved from dissolution and ruin. And I shall propose, not what is requisite to render the church of God in this nation orderly, beautiful, and vigorous, but only what is necessary that it may stand and live, by a deliverance from desolating judgments. And, —

First. The repentance which, in any case, God requireth *absolutely*, is that which is internal and real, in sincere conversion unto himself, accompanied with fruits meet for such repentance. So is it declared, [Ezek. xviii. 30, 31](#), “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” A new heart and a new spirit, or real internal conversion unto God, by the grace of the covenant, is required in this repentance, as the renunciation and relinquishment of all iniquities must be the *fruit* of it. So also is it expressed, [Isa. i. 16, 17](#). Internal purification of the heart, with the practice of universal obedience, and abstinence from all sin, is that which God requires.

This is that repentance which was the subject of the ministry of John the Baptist; on the neglect whereof he threatened the people with final excision; which, accordingly, not long after befell them, [Matt. iii. 8–10](#). God doth not require a feigned repentance, or that which is merely outward and temporary. In this case, see [Joel ii. 12, 13](#). But, —

Secondly. Where there is repentance and reformation that are *real* in the *root* or cause of them, — which is an effectual conviction of sin, and sense of ensuing, approaching judgments, giving testimony of sincerity in its fruits, by an abstinence from open provoking sins, and the performance of known duties (unto its sincerity in both which a sense and reverence of God is owned), — though it be not in many, in the most, it may be in few, *ab-*



*solutely sincere and holy*, yet may it prevail to the turning away of threatened judgments, at least for a season.

These things, therefore, are required unto this repentance:—

1. *A real conviction of sin* in them that are called unto it, or do make profession of it. If this lie not in the foundation, no expression of repentance, no profession of reformation, is of any value in the sight of God; — yea, it is a mocking of him; which is the highest provocation. Men without this conviction may be driven to somewhat that *looks like repentance and reformation*, as the keeping of days of fasting or humiliation by outward force or compulsion of law; but there is nothing in what they do of what we inquire after. By such days and ways they shall never save the nation, [Jer. iii. 10](#).

2. *A real sense of God's displeasure, and the approach of desolating judgments*. It is not enough that we have a conviction and sense of our own sins, but we must have them also of the sins of the nation, whereby God is provoked to anger; and apprehensions of his displeasure are to influence our minds in all that we go about herein. Unless these abide and dwell in our minds, — unless they accompany us continually in all our ways and occasions, — rise and lie down with us, — we shall not cordially engage in this duty.

3. Real reformation, in an *abstinence from all known sin*, and the avowed fruits of a reformed conversation, are required hereunto, [Matt. iii. 10](#).

4. That it be *persisted in*, [Heb. vi. 1](#).

On these suppositions, that this repentance is useful unto the end proposed is made fully evident in the instances of Nineveh and of Ahab, [1 Kings xxi. 27–29](#). Ahab, in his repentance and humiliation, manifested a deep sense of the guilt of sin and divine displeasure. “Seest thou,” saith God to Elijah, “how he humbleth himself?” It might easily be known and taken notice of. There is a humiliation described by the prophet [Isa. viii. 1–5](#), which God abhorreth, and which shall be profitable for nothing. Such have been the humiliations among us, for the most part. But although it be the duty of every man to endeavour that his repentance and reformation do consist in a sincere, internal, cordial conversion unto God, — which the divine calls do intend, — without which it will not be of advantage unto his own soul, as unto his eternal condition; yet as unto the turning away of *temporal calamities*, at least as to the suspension of them, such a public repentance and reformation as evidence themselves in their fruits to proceed from a real sense of sin and judgment, may be useful and prevalent. In brief, the repentance which God requireth with respect to his covenant, that the souls of men may be saved, unto the glory of his grace by Jesus Christ, — is internal, spiritual, supernatural, whereby the whole soul is renewed, changed, and turned unto himself. But as God is the supreme governor of the world, in temporal things, with respect unto the dispensation of his providence in mercies and judgments, there may be a repentance and reformation wherein his glory is vindicated, in a visible compliance with his calls and warnings, and an acknowledgment of him in his righteous judgments, which may be of use



unto the end proposed. Besides, wherever there is a general reformation of life sincerely attempted, it is to be believed that in many it is spiritual and saving.

5. The repentance and reformation required must be suited unto *the state and condition of those who are called thereunto*. All are to consider what is amiss in them, as unto their own state and condition, *Isa. lv. 7*, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;” — every one his own way and thoughts in their present condition.

Wherefore the persons intended in this call are of two sorts:—

(1.) Such as are *wicked*, as unto their state and condition, — persons unconverted, unregenerate, — not born of God; and, (2.) Such as are *sincere believers*, really converted unto God.

The call of God is unto both sorts, — repentance and reformation are required of them both; and they are so in a suitableness unto their different conditions.

In each of these sorts there are *various degrees* of sin and provocation. Some of the first sort are openly flagitious, — public, habitual sinners, — such as whose sins “go beforehand unto judgment,” as the apostle speaks, *1 Tim. v. 24*; and some are more sober in their outward conversation. The call of God respects them in all their several degrees of sinning: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;” — those which are his own, which are proper to him. None doubts, unless it be themselves, that the first sort ought to reform themselves; — the generality of men cry out against them, and fear that for their sins, especially if they be persons in high places, the judgments of God will come upon the land.

But if those of the other sort also, who are apt to justify themselves because they run not out unto the same excess of riot with them, do not apply themselves unto the repentance and reformation which are proper unto their state and condition, the will of God is not answered in his warnings. Yet it is the impenitency of this sort of men that is the most dangerous symptom at this day in the nation. Their unshaken security keeps all that truly fear God in a trembling posture.

Thirdly. It is so with churches peculiarly reformed, and true believers in them; as also all other true believers who walk more at large. They also are called unto repentance and reformation, and that according to their state and their respective degrees therein; for some are *more guilty* than others in decays of faith, love, zeal, holiness, and fruitfulness in obedience, with conformity to the world. And if there should be a public reformation in the nation as to outward *provoking sins*, yet if these of this sort do not reform themselves, according as their condition doth require, the desired deliverance would scarcely be obtained. And woe be to such persons, if, through their neglect of their duty, the whole nation should be exposed to ruin! Wherefore, —

Fourthly. The reformation called for, as the condition of escaping of impendent judgments, must be *universal*, — at least *general*, — amongst all sorts and degrees, all orders and



estates of men. All sorts have sinned, all sorts are threatened; and therefore repentance is required of all, if we would not perish. It is so of magistrates and ministers, of nobles and common people, in city and country; and that to be evidenced by its fruits, so as that it may be said of us, See you not how they humble themselves?

But if this be so, some may be apt to say, It seems, if all do not set their hearts and hands unto this work, if all sorts do not engage in it, there is no good effect to be hoped or looked for; but when shall we see any such thing? when shall we see the generality of all sorts of men in this nation cordially to go about this work of repentance and reformation? — as good, therefore, let it alone as go about to attempt it.

I answer, — 1. If you can be *content to perish* with the impenitent and unreformed, you may choose to do as they do. If you would avoid their punishment, you must avoid their sin, especially their refusal to turn on the call of God.

2. Some must *begin this work*, and be exemplary unto others; — and blessed are they of the Lord who shall receive the grace and honour so to do. Let us not, then, sit looking on others, to see what they will do, but immediately engage unto our own duty.

3. The duty herein of *no one private person*, much less of whole churches, shall be lost, though the nation should not be reformed in general. For, —

(1.) They *shall deliver their own souls*; and if they be not saved (as I believe they would be in an eminent manner) from somewhat of the outward part of a public calamity, yet they should be from all the wrath and displeasure of God in it.

(2.) A *few* — for aught I know, *one man* — may sometimes prevail with God for the suspending, at least, of judgments threatened unto a whole nation. And hereby, —

(3.) They shall give unto others a farther *season of repentance*, which God can bless and make effectual unto them. — There are, therefore, blessed encouragements unto all churches, unto all individual persons, to endeavour a compliance with the present calls of God, though the body of the people should not be gathered.

VII. Our next inquiry is, “Whence or from what causes such a reformation may be expected as may be useful unto the turning away of impending judgments?” And these causes are either supreme or subordinate.

The *supreme* cause hereof must be the *sovereign grace of God*, in fresh effusions of his Spirit on the souls of men, to turn them unto himself. Without this, all other ways and means of attaining it will be in vain. This is everywhere in the Scripture attested unto as the only supreme, efficient cause of the conversion of men unto God. And unto that state are things come amongst us, that unless we are made partakers of it in a somewhat more than ordinary manner, our breaches cannot be healed. Whether we have grounds or no to expect any such thing, shall be afterward considered. At present there seems to be no other hopes of it, but only because it is a sovereign act of divine grace, which hath been exemplified in the church of old. There seems, indeed, rather, as yet, to be a withdrawing of the communications of

the Holy Spirit in effectually prevalent grace on the part of God, and a contempt of them on the part of men; but sovereignty can conquer all obstacles. This way did God heal and recover his church of old, when all other means, all mercies, afflictions, and judgments, failed, [Ezek. xxxvi. 22–28](#). And it may at present be for a lamentation, that this work of grace is so disregarded by the most, so despised by many, and so little cried for by the residue. But without it, in vain shall we use any other remedies; we shall not be healed. It is not the best projections of men for reformation by this or that order or state of things in church or state, that, without this, will be of advantage unto us.

The *subordinate* causes hereof must be the diligent discharge of their duty by magistrates and ministers.

I shall but name these things, that I give no place to complaints or indignation, though just, and almost necessary. And, —

First. As unto the furtherance of it by magistrates, it must consist in three things:—

1. By evidencing that the *promotion* of it is their interest. Unless it be understood so to be, whatever else they do in the countenance of it will be of no use nor advantage. For this is that which the generality will conform unto or comply withal. And if it be once understood that reformation is what they desire, what they design, what they place their chief interest in, — as it was with David, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others, — it will have an influence on the people, not inferior unto what the design of Jeroboam, in pursuit of his corrupt interest, had on the people of Israel to sin, All other means are dead, unless they are enlivened by an evidence of reality in the minds of magistrates, and a high concernment in the prosperity of their work Let them make what laws and orders they please, appoint what outward means they can devise, — unless it be made uncontrollably evident that it is their *cordial design*, and what they place their *chief interest* in, they will not be available. Add hereunto, —

2. The due execution of laws against *flagitious immoralities*. And, —

3. An *encouraging example in their own persons*; without which all things will grow worse and worse, whatever else be done. Men seem to be weary, in some measure, of the dismal effects of sin; but they seem not to be weary of sin. Unto this weariness they yet want motives, encouragements, and examples. And it is strange unto me, that, in all our fears and dangers, — in the divisions of our councils and confusions amongst all sorts of men, under a high profession of zeal for the Protestant religion in the nation, and the preservation of it, — that this only expedient for our relief and safety lies wholly neglected.

As unto *ministers*, the faithful discharge of their duty, in preaching, prayer, and example, is required hereunto. Should I stay to show the necessity hereof at this season; as also what is required thereunto, — what care, what diligence, what watchfulness, what compassion, what zeal, what exercise of all gospel grace, with the over-neglect of these things among many, — it would take up a volume, rather than become a place in this present inquiry.



But I proceed unto that which is more our immediate concernment. Wherefore, —

VIII. “What if all these means do fail? — what if all expectations from them be in vain? what is incumbent on them in particular who are really sensible of these things, — namely, of the abounding of provoking sins, and the near approach of deserved judgments?”

That which I design herein is, to give some directions as unto what *frame of heart* ought to be found in us, and the *practice of what duties* we ought to be found in at such a season as this is. It is no common, no easy thing, to wait for the Lord in the way of his judgments, [Isa. xxvi. 8, 9](#). There is inward soul-work night and day, as well as outward duties, required unto it. That God may be glorified in a due manner, that we may be “found in peace,” whatever be the event of things, — that we may be useful unto others, and in all serve the will of God in our generation, — are all expected from us in a way of duty.

Unto this end, the ensuing directions may be made use of:—

First. *Take heed of stout-heartedness, and a contempt or neglect thereby of divine warnings.* There is a generation who, either really or in pretence, are bold, fearless, stout-hearted, regardless of these things; they seem to provoke and dare God to do his utmost, — all that he seems to threaten. So they speak, [Isa. v. 19](#), “Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it.” Here is much talk, indeed, of the judgments of God, and of their near approach: When shall we see them? why do not they come? when shall he bring forth his work?

This hath been the great controversy between the church and the wicked world from the beginning of it. Those that truly feared God were always testifying that God would come, and take vengeance on them for their impieties and impenitency; but because these judgments were not speedily executed, the sinful world did always despise their warnings, and scoff at their message. So Enoch, the seventh from Adam, he preached and prophesied of these things, — namely, of the coming of God to take vengeance on ungodly men, [Jude 14, 15](#). And this message was scoffed at, as is evident, because no reformation ensued thereon, until the flood took them all away. So was it with Noah and his preaching; and so it hath been with all that fear God, in their several generations. And this was one especial thing that the pagans laughed and mocked at the primitive Christians about, — as is plain in Lucian’s “*Philopatris*.”<sup>353</sup> So the apostle Peter gives us an account both of what was past, and what would afterward come to pass, [2 Pet. iii. 3 unto the end](#).

353 The small piece entitled “*Philopatris*” has been ascribed to Lucian. It consists of a dialogue, in which Triepho and Critias discuss the respective merits of Paganism and Christianity, with a scoffing and sarcastic tone, indicating belief in neither. Reference is made by Critias to some predictions he had heard among the Christians, that disaster and ruin were speedily to overtake the Roman empire. As if in ridicule and confutation of the prophecy, no sooner has he ended than Cleolaus makes his appearance, with the announcement of success

And such as these abound amongst us. All the *warnings* of God have been turned into ridicule, previous judgments despised, and sin itself made a scoff of. But, of all others, God most abhorreth this sort of men. They are said to be “far from righteousness,” [Isa. xlvi. 12](#). Unto such he speaks in his wrath, “Hear, ye despisers; wonder, and perish.” Yea, the Scripture is full with the severest threatenings against this sort of men; nor shall any, in the appointed season, drink deeper of the cup of God’s indignation. See [Isa. xxviii. 14, 15](#); [Deut. xxix. 19, 20](#). Such secure despisers, such scoffers at approaching judgments, such deriders of the signs and tokens of them, God will deal withal. And some there are who, — it may be, not from the same spirit of open profaneness, but out of prejudices, corrupt arguings, pretended observations of things past, disbelief of all they do not feel, and such like effects of long security, — do utterly scorn and scoff at all these things. They account it a matter of weakness, pusillanimity, or superstition, to concern themselves in these warnings of Providence, or the explication of them by the word. But their judgment sleepeth not. And it may be observed, and will be found true, that when judgments do really approach, of all sorts of men they are the most cowardly, distracted, fearful, and void of counsel. For when God begins to deal with them, their hearts cannot endure, nor their hands be strong. He smites through their loins, and filleth them with a spirit of horror and fear, that they shall tremble like the leaves of the forest. In that day you may say unto them, as Zebul did to boasting Gaal, upon the approach of Abimelech, his enemy, “Where is now thy mouth wherewith thou saidst, Who is Abimelech?” Where is now your mouth and your vauntings with respect unto these judgments of God? So Micaiah the prophet told Zedekiah the false prophet, in his boasting and confidence of success, [1 Kings xxii. 25](#), With all thy confidence and boasting, thou shalt be one of the first that shall endeavour to fly and hide thyself. Yea, this sort of persons are commonly the most ridiculous and contemptible, when real danger overtakes them, of any sort of men in the world.

That which God requires of us, in such a season, is called in Scripture “trembling:” “They that tremble at my word.” This he regards, this he accepts, this he approveth of, [Isa. lxvi. 2, 5](#); [Jer. v. 22](#). It is not a weakening, an astonishing, heartless consternation of spirit that is intended; — not such a dread and terror as should obstruct us in the cheerful performance of duty, and preparation to comply with the will of God; such is that mentioned, [Deut. xxviii. 66, 67](#), — which is the most severe of judgments: but it is an awful reverence of the greatness and holiness of God, in the way of his judgments, casting out all carnal security, self-confid-




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and victory recently achieved by the Roman armies in the East. The dialogue concludes with a proposal to worship the unknown god of the Athenians. From the intimate knowledge evinced respecting the views and habits of the Christians, it has been inferred that Lucian must once have been a Christian himself; but, since the middle of last century, strong suspicions have been entertained that Lucian is not the author of this dialogue, but that it belongs to the time of Julian the apostate. — Ed.

ence, and contempt of divine warnings, so bringing the soul into a submissive compliance with the will of God in all things. But look well, in the first place, that this evil, on no pretences, do make any approach unto you.

If one evil seems to be diverted, do not say, with Agag, “Surely the bitterness of death is past” (which will prove an entrance into this evil frame), and so grow regardless of your duty. God expects other things from you. “The lion,” saith he, “hath roared, who will not fear?” [Amos iii. 8](#). There is the voice of a lion roaring for his prey in the present divine warnings: take heed that you despise not that which, when it comes to pass, you can neither abide nor avoid.

Secondly. Take heed of a frame of heart that is *regardless* of these things. We have a sort of men who, although they will not (they dare not) openly, as others, despise divine warnings, yet they see all things in such a light as suffers them not to take notice of any concernment of their own in them, [Ps. xxviii. 5](#); [Jer. xxxvi. 24](#). *The land is filled with sin; — it is true, but they are the sins of other men, not theirs. There are tokens and signs of God’s displeasure, in heaven above, and the earth beneath; — but men are not agreed whether these things be of any signification or no: some say Yea, and some Nay; but they are new and strange, and so are meet to be the subject of discourse. Previous judgments have been upon us; — they are but such accidents as fall out frequently in the world. But the divisions among ourselves, and contrivances of our adversaries, seem to threaten ruin to the nation; — it may be so, but these things belong unto our rulers; and men are divided about this also: some say one thing, and some another; some say there was a plot, and some say there was none. In the meantime they are filled with their own occasions, and will not be diverted from them unto any serious regard of God in his present dispensations; like the “wild ass in her occasion, who can turn her away?” [Jer. ii. 24](#). Of this frame the prophet complains, as that which God will surely avenge, [Isa. xxvi. 11](#), “Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see and be ashamed, for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.”*

Others look on all things in another light, and under another notion; for whereas it is part of our sin and punishment in this nation, an evident fruit of the evil of our ways, that we are divided into designing parties, the one seeking the ruin of the other, they consider all providences as relating unto such differences. This gives them a zealous concernment in them, and continued talk about them; but the will, work, and design of God in them, are not laid to heart.

Some are so well pleased with their present advantages, in promotions, dignities, and wealth, as their interest, that they cannot endure to think of these things. Whatever warnings are portended of approaching judgments, they look on them as the threatenings of such as have ill-will against them, and would have these things to portend their trouble. Guilt makes



them fearful and sensible, and they think it best to hide those things from themselves, which, if they are so, they cannot remedy.

To free us from this miscarriage also, this unanswerableness unto the mind of God in his present dispensation, we may consider, —

1. That a *deep consideration of, and inquiry into, the mind of God in such a season as we have described, is required of us in a way of duty.* It is our sin to neglect it, and that attended with many aggravations. It is not a thing that we may *attend* unto or *omit*, as it seems convenient; but it is required as a duty of us, without which we cannot glorify God in a due manner.

He that is not daily exercised with prevalent thoughts about the present ways of God in the approach of his judgments, lives in such a neglect of duty as will bring in a negligence and coldness in all other duties whatsoever; for this is certain, that when God calls unto any especial duty in an *extraordinary way* or manner, in any season, those by whom it is neglected are really cold, formal, and negligent in all other ordinary duties whatever. That grace which will not be excited unto especial duties on extraordinary occasions, is very lifeless in all other things. This is the best note to try, if not the truth, yet the power of grace. When it is in its vigour and due exercise, it makes the soul to be ready, inclinable, and disposed unto all intimations of the divine will and pleasure; as speaks the psalmist, “Thou shalt guide me by thine eye, and lead me with thy counsel.” He attended to each look and guidance of divine Providence, to comply with it, when others must be forced with strong curbs and bridles, like the horse and mule.

2. It is such a duty as whereunto real wisdom and diligence are required. We think it needful to use our wisdom about other things, — our own affairs; but in this it is most necessary. “The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name,” [Mic. vi. 9](#). Ordinary, slight, and transient thoughts will not answer this duty. Such all men that are sober cannot but have; and their discourse is answerable thereunto. But consideration, with diligence and prudence, is required of us. Let these testimonies be consulted to this purpose, [Ps. lxiv. 9](#); [Deut. xii. 30](#); [Hos. xiv. 9](#); [Ps. cvii. 43](#). Prayer, study, and meditation, are all diligently to be engaged herein.

Thirdly. Take heed of *vain confidences*. Men are apt, in such seasons, to fix on one thing or other, wherewith they relieve and support themselves; and there is not any thing that is more effectual to keep them off from this duty and the frame of spirit which is required in them. If you speak with any man almost, you may, with a little heed, discover wherein his confidence doth lie, and what it is that he trusts unto. But, saith the prophet unto such persons, “The Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them,” [Jer. ii. 37](#).

There are sundry sorts of vain confidences wherewith men are apt to relieve their minds in such a season, so as to countenance themselves in their security and a neglect of this es-



pecial duty. Two in particular I shall only mention, as I do only name the heads of things, which might be much enlarged:—

1. The first is some *certain privileges* whereon they trust for an exemption from common calamities; — they are the church, — they are the people of God, — they are separated from the world, and persecuted by it; and hence there is a secret reserve in their minds, that indeed they shall not be in trouble as other men. So was it with the Jews of old: when they were threatened with the judgments of God for their sins, and called thereon to repentance, they justified themselves in their ways, and despised all divine warnings, on a confidence they had in their church privileges. They cried against the prophet, “The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these,” and no evil shall come nigh us, [Jer. vii. 4](#). And in confidence hereof, — namely, that they were the church, and enjoyed the privileges belonging thereunto, and the solemn worship of God therein, — they gave themselves up unto all abominable immoralities, under an assurance of impunity by their privileges; as the prophet upbraids them, [verses 8–10](#), “Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and say you shall be delivered?”<sup>354</sup> At this day all sorts of men claim a refuge in their privileges. Those who design the ruin of the nation, and of all true religion therein, do it with confidence of success from hence, That they are the church, — that the temple of God is with them, — that all the privileges belonging unto the church are theirs, and so are the promises made unto it. And such is the infatuating efficacy of their prejudicate persuasion herein, that it hath had two marvellous effects; — the one against the light of nature, and the other against the fundamental principles of religion.

For, first, under the influence of this confidence they have engaged into as *vile immoralities* as ever were perpetrated under the sun; — murder, persecution, assassinations, dying in falsehoods, with a general design to pursue the same ways unto the utmost, in the destruction of multitudes of innocent persons, as they did formerly in Ireland. But what if they do all those abominations? yet they are *the church!* the promises and privileges of it are theirs! and all they do is accepted with God! — a principle tending directly to the vilest atheism. Again; although God, in a marvellous, yea, a miraculous manner, hath discovered and frustrated their hellish designs, and brought many of them into the pit they digged for others, yet they will accept of no rebuke from God, but go on in an obstinate presumption that they are the church, and shall prevail at last. And *that church* which shall prevail by these means, no doubt they are. Some, indeed, pretend highly to be the church; but they lay claim, so far as I can find, to no other advantages thereby but dignities and promotions. And others also

354 The last clause is not according to the authorized version, but seems another translation of the words, to which Owen was inclined. Blayney renders it, “And say, Deliver us,” etc. — Ed.

are apt to relieve themselves with this confidence, that they are *the people of God*, and shall have an especial interest in deliverance on that account. And I say, Far be it from me to weaken any persuasion of God's especial regard of those that are truly big God hath a peculiar people in the world, let the world scoff at it whilst they please, unto whom all the promises of the Scripture and all the privileges of the church do belong. These promises they ought to mix with faith, and plead before God continually; and they shall be all accomplished towards them, in the way and time of God's appointment. Nor do any sort of dissenting professions, as they are called, that I know of, appropriate this right and privilege unto themselves, unto the exclusion of others; but extend it to all who are sincere believers. But this is that which I say concerning all sorts of men, — That if an apprehension or persuasion that they are the church or people of God do keep them off from that duty of repentance and reformation which God calls unto, it is a confidence which God rejecteth, and in which they will not prosper. I desire to ask of any, Hath not the church sinned? have not professors sinned? are there not sins amongst us against the Lord our God proper unto our state, and according to our measure? If it be so, our being the people of God, any of us, if we are so, unless we repent, doth only, as unto these providential dispensations, expose us unto his just severity; for judgment must begin at the house of God, — it must begin at us. Take heed of this failing reserve. I have observed much security to arise from hence, and great negligence of known duties. If you are the people of God, you had the more need to tremble at his judgments, and at the tokens of his displeasure. Especially ought it to be so with you at this day, when God seems in a peculiar manner to be “displeased with the rivers,” as the prophet speaks, [Hab. iii. 8](#), — those who should send forth streams of refreshment unto the nation. To me, at present, all things appear in that condition, that there is no reserve left, as unto public judgments, but only in sovereign grace and mercy, to be waited for in a way of repentance and reformation. As unto our privileges, God speaks unto us as he did to the people of old concerning their ornaments, [Exod. xxxiii. 5](#), Put them off, “that I may know what to do unto thee.” We are to lay aside our pleas and pretences, betaking ourselves to sovereign grace and mercy alone.

2. Another ground of vain confidence may be, *an unjust expectation of an accomplishment of such Scripture promises, prophecies, and predictions, as are not applicable unto our present condition.*

It is undeniable, that there are such promises, prophecies, and predictions concerning the deliverance of the church, the ruin of its adversaries, the glory and beauty of the kingdom of Christ, as those intended. For although the most of that kind in the Old Testament are of a *spiritual interpretation*, and have their accomplishment in all the elect in every age, whatever be their outward state and condition; yet that there are such also as concern the state of the church in this world, and the ruin of all its antichristian enemies, with peace and glory ensuing thereon, cannot be denied.





And concerning them we may observe sundry things, that we may not abuse them into vain and groundless confidences in such a season as this is:—

(1.) That we ought to have a *firm faith* of their accomplishment in their proper season. The rule of them all is that of the prophet, “I the Lord will hasten it in his time,” [Isa. lx. 22](#); as it is also [Hab. ii. 2, 3](#). Though they seem to be prolonged, and tarry beyond their proper season, yet they have their fixed and determinate time, beyond which they shall not tarry. And two things I would offer on this occasion:—

[1.] That we are not only to *believe their accomplishment*, but to be in the actual exercise of faith about it; for without this, we shall want a great supportment of patient long-suffering in every time of trial. And by this faith do we take in the power and comfort of things promised, things not actually enjoyed; for “faith is the substance of things hoped for,” [Heb. xi. 1](#), — that which gives a previous subsistence in the mind and soul, as unto the benefit and comfort of them, of “the things hoped for.” And those whose minds are exercised unto these things do know what benefit they have by such a perception of them. They are carried sometimes, by a way of believing, into communion with them who lived in the old world, as they had with us in the expectation of what we enjoy; and into the same kind of communion with those who hereafter shall enjoy the accomplishment of those promises which may yet be afar off.

[2.] This faith ought to be most firm when all things seem to conspire in rendering the accomplishment of such promises not only improbable, but also impossible, as unto present outward causes; as in the state of things at this day in the world. There are no visible or appearing means of the fulfilling any of them, — yea, the whole world is joined in a conspiracy to defeat them; but true faith riseth against those oppositions, and is prevalent against them all.

For, having God alone — his power, faithfulness, and truth — for its object, it values not the opposition that men can make against them. That shall be done in this kind which God is able to do, let men do what they please. God laughs all their proud attempts to scorn; and so may the virgin daughter of Zion also.

(2.) It is our duty to *pray for the accomplishment of all the promises and predictions* that are on record in the book of God concerning the kingdom of Christ and his church in this world. God will do these things; yet for all of them he will be sought unto by the house of Israel. This hath been the practice of believers in all ages, both under the Old Testament and the New. Prayer for the accomplishment of promises hath been the life-breath of the church in all ages; and faith hereby brings in great refreshment unto the soul. And the greatest evidence of its approach will be a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, be they few or more at any time in the world, stirring them up and enabling them to pray effectually and fervently for their accomplishment; as in the example of [Dan. ix. 1–3](#). Wherefore, —



(3.) There are three things considerable in such promises and predictions:— [1.] The *grace* and *mercy* that is in them; [2.] The *suitableness* of that grace and mercy unto the state of believers at any time; [3.] The *literal accomplishment* of them in their outward circumstances. The two former belong unto us at all times, and we may plead with God in faith for the effects of them in all our trials and distresses.

With respect hereunto it is that the people of God have faith in him against the world, with all their enemies and oppressors, which they have been so reproached withal, as the Lord Christ was with his faith unto the same purpose, [Ps. xxii. 8](#). When things seem to go evil with them, when they are shut up in the hands of their enemies and oppressors, as the Lord Christ was upon the cross, the world is ready to reproach them with their confidence in God, and their owning themselves to be his people; but they faint not herein. However things may go for a season, they are secured of the grace and mercy which is in the promises; which are suited unto all their wants, all that they can desire absolutely, yea, their full deliverance, when it is best for them. But, —

(4.) Remember, that, as unto the *application* of the accomplishment of such promises and predictions, in their outward effects, unto certain times and seasons, many have been woefully mistaken; which hath been the ground and occasion of very scandalous miscarriages, The world hath scarce seen greater outrages of sin and wickedness than have been countenanced by this pretence, that such or such a time was now come, and that therein such and such things were to be done by those who made such interpretations and applications. For when such a conceit befalls the minds of men, it sets them loose from all rules but their own inclinations. And many have, from such apprehensions, fallen under sad and scandalous disappointments. Wherefore, —

(5.) *Such an expectation* or confidence of the events of promises, prophecies, and predictions, as hinders men from applying their minds thoroughly unto the present duties that God calls for, is heedfully to be watched against. I have heard many arguing and pleading for the strengthening of such confidences, but I never saw good effect of them. They please for the present; they profit not.

The story of the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah is applicable in this case, [Jer. xxviii](#). And it is certain that, before the final destruction of Jerusalem, that which principally hardened the people unto their utter ruin, so as they would hearken neither to the voice of God nor man for their safety, was a presumption they had, that at that time their Messiah would come and save them.

(6.) Few know of what sort that *day of the Lord* will be, which they desire, long for, and expect. We know how it proved unto the church of the Jews, [Mal. iii. 1, 2](#). A day may be coming which, although it may be a glorious issue, yet it may consume all the hopes that men have treasured up in their expectation of it. But I will not touch farther on these things:— my design is only to take us all off from such vain confidences as may obstruct us in a diligent

attendance unto those duties which God at this season calls us unto; which shall be declared immediately.

3. Some place their confidence in *secret reserves* which they have in themselves, that however it go with others, yet they shall escape well enough: They are rich, and they intend to be wise:— they intend not to be engaged in any thing, civil or religious, that should prejudice them in their possessions:— whilst things pass at the cheap rate of talking, they will be like unto others; but when trials come, they will make a safe retreat. We have their character and their doom, [Jer. xxviii. 15–17](#).

Fourthly. A fourth direction for our deportment in such a season is, that we diligently consider and search our own hearts and ways, to find out and understand how it is between God and our souls. This direction is given us, [Lam. iii. 39, 40](#), “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.” When trials and punishments draw nigh, or are upon us, it is not our business nor duty to lie complaining under them, but so to search and try our ways as to turn unto the Lord. This is the first word of the voice of God in approaching judgments, “Search yourselves, try your hearts and your ways, — try how it is with you.” At such a season, to pass by the consideration of ourselves, of our state, of our walk, of our actions, in an ordinary manner, or with slight or common thoughts, is to despise the voice of God. God speaks aloud: “The voice of God crieth unto the city.” He doth so by the ways before mentioned; — he speaks articulately, distinctly, so as that a man of wisdom may see his name, and know his mind; — he speaks unto us, and says, Search now yourselves.

And in this search, respect is to be had unto the things ensuing:—

1. In general, search into your *state and condition*. Try whether it be built on a good foundation; — on the rock, by faith; or on the sand, by profession only; — whether it will hold His trial who will bring it to the refiner’s fire: “He shall slay the hypocrite with the breath of his mouth.” And many dreadful discoveries will be made of the false and rotten states of men when the Lord’s day of trial shall come. This is one certain end of a fiery trial, namely, to discover and consume the profession of hypocrites; as hath been done in part already.

2. With respect unto those ways and sins which are the *peculiarly provoking sins* of churches and professors; — such as the Lord Christ testifieth his displeasure against in them, and which may have as great an influence into the procurement of temporal judgments as the more flagitious sins of open sinners: such are decays in love, zeal, and fruits of obedience; want of delight, warmth, and life in the ordinances of gospel worship; with pride, elation of mind, self-conceit, and barrenness in good works. If we would know what are the sins, in churches and professors, that the Lord Christ is so displeased with as to threaten his departing from them, we cannot better learn it than in the declaration of his mind which he makes unto the churches of Asia, [Rev. ii. 1, iii. 1](#) And these are the things which he chargeth on



them. For persons under the capacities of church members and professors, to content themselves with such a search of their outward actions and duties of all sorts, religious, moral, and civil, as none may justly cast blame upon them, it no way answers the search that God calls them unto. How is it as unto the inward frame of the heart? What is the vigour and power of faith and love in you? How do they act themselves? What is your real delight in the ways of God? Where is your fruitfulness in works of charity and mercy? Where is your readiness to forgive your enemies? Are there no failings, no decays in these things? Are there no indispositions, deadness, and coldness in duties grown upon you? How is it as unto constant meditation on spiritual things, and the fixing your affections on things that are above? With respect unto these things ought we to search ourselves diligently in such a day as this is; and if we find ourselves under decays in them, let us know of a truth that God calls us unto repentance, on pain of his highest displeasure.

For our parts, we cannot search into, we cannot judge, the hearts of others, any other way but by the *application* of the word unto their consciences; but I must needs say, that if men's outward actions be an indication of the inward frame of their minds, there is reason enough for the most of us to be jealous over ourselves herein.

3. With respect unto your *callings, circumstances, and inclinations*, and the sins that are peculiar unto them. There are sins which are very apt to insinuate themselves into the callings and circumstances of men, both of high and low degree, that do easily beset them; as, hardness, oppression, severity, and unmercifulness, in those that are great and have large possessions; and deceit, equivocations, over-reaching, in those of more ordinary employments. I speak not of these at present; they are of the number of those which “go beforehand unto judgment.” But these things — namely, men's callings, circumstances, and inclinations — are apt to influence their mind with vicious habits, and to render their ways crooked. Pride of life, self-conceit, negligence in holy duties, distempered passions and lusts, devouring cares, carnal fears, with other hurtful evils, do spring from these things, if not watched against. In reference unto them, therefore, are we called to search ourselves in a day wherein God is pleading with us. With respect unto them ought we to be exceeding jealous over ourselves; for verily they have rendered the ways and walkings of the generality of professors a great provocation unto Christ Jesus.

4. In an especial manner with a respect unto *love of the world*, and conformity thereunto. This is that which the Lord Jesus Christ will not always bear withal in his churches; for it lies in opposition unto the whole work of faith and all the precepts of the gospel. It is not against this or that command only, but it is against the whole design of the gospel, and the grace administered therein.



Now, at present, concerning our outward conformity unto the world, there needs no great search to be made. It is open and evident unto all; so that, as unto attire, fashions, manner of ordinary converse, misspense of time, feasting of rich ones, and jollities, there is little difference left between professors and the world; — which God will not long bear with them in; especially not in those who have increased their wealth in, and grown into conformity with, the world, whilst others, under the same profession, have been harassed, imprisoned, impoverished, and ruined by the world. And as for inordinate love unto the world, I have spoken so often to it, treated so much of it, that I shall not here again insist upon it. I shall only say, that when men grow proud, high-minded, and value themselves according to the increase of their earthly enjoyments, and think themselves wronged if others do not also so value them, it is in vain for them to pretend that their hearts do not inordinately cleave unto the world and the things of it.

This *self-searching* is the first duty we are at this season called unto; and if we are negligent or overly herein, we shall not answer the mind and will of God in any one duty or instance of any other kind. We are, therefore, herein to call in God and men unto our aid and assistance, as also to stir up ourselves unto it with diligence and perseverance. So the psalmist, lest he should not be able to make a diligent, effectual examination of himself and his ways, cries unto God to search and try him, that he might be known unto himself, especially with respect unto any evil way of sin or wickedness, [Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24](#). So we ought to cry for fresh communications of the Holy Spirit of God in his convincing efficacy, to acquaint us thoroughly with ourselves, and to deliver us from all self-deceivings in this matter. For when we go about this search, a thousand pretences and arguings will arise, to the concealment or countenance of self and sin against a discovery and pursuit. Nothing can remove and scatter them but the power of the Holy Spirit acting in his convincing efficacy. The whole deceit of the heart in such a season will be put forth, to hide, palliate, excuse, and countenance such frames and actings as ought to be seized on and brought to judgment. There is need of the “[candle of the Lord, to search the inward parts of the belly,](#)” [Prov. xx. 27](#); — of spiritual light, to look into the secret recesses of the mind and affections, to discover what is amiss in them. And there is need of spiritual strength, to cast down all the strongholds and fortifications of sin; which will be all set up at such a time, and will not be demolished or scattered without powerful actings of grace. This, therefore, in the first place, we are to apply ourselves unto, if we intend any success in this work of self-examination.

So also are we to pray that the word, in the preaching and dispensation of it, may be effectual unto the same end, — that we may find it quick and powerful, [Heb. iv. 12](#), — that it may so judge the secrets of our hearts, [1 Cor. xiv. 25](#), that we may fall down and judge ourselves also. To hide ourselves at such a season from the power of the word, is an open evidence of a ruining security.



This work, in the use of these means, is to be called over and persisted in, if we design a compliance with the present calls of God, or an endeavour to be found of him in peace when he cometh.

Fifthly. To be deeply *humbled before the Lord* for our own sins, with a relinquishment of them all thereon, is the principal part of our duty in this season. This the whole Scripture testifieth unto, speaking of these things. Without this, all that we do, or can do, signifies nothing, as unto a compliance with the calls of God. This is the end of the search before insisted on. We are to find out, to know every one the plague, the stroke, the disease of his own heart, so as to be humbled before the Lord for it.

And unto this humiliation it is required, —

1. That it be *internal* and *sincere*. There is a humiliation commonly expressing itself in the observation of days of fasting and prayer; which oftentimes is but the hanging down of the head like a bulrush for a day. However, it may be so carried, sometimes, as to divert or prolong the execution of threatened judgments; but that which God requireth of us is to be in the fixed affections of the heart. When the Lord Christ comes to enjoin repentance and reformation, he gives himself that title, “I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts,” [Rev. ii. 23](#). It is an internal, hidden work which he looks after, in our humiliation for sin. So saith David in the same case, “Thou requirest truth in the inward parts,” [Ps. li](#). Truth or sincerity in the affections is that which God regards in our humiliation; which answers the charge in the prophet, “Rend your hearts, and not your garments;” — inward power, not outward signs, are accepted with God in this matter. Let us every one take it on our own souls, every one charge his own conscience in private, with the performance of this duty. God will bear no longer with pretences; no outward appearances or evanid affections, in a temporary humiliation for *a day*, though in the observation of the most solemn duties required on such a day, will answer the mind of God herein. For, —

2. It must be *extraordinary*. Humiliation for our own sins is a duty constantly incumbent on us. To walk humbly with God is the principal thing that he requires of us in this world, [Mic. vi. 8](#). Hereof self-abasement, in a sense of sin, is the life and soul; the principle of all other acts and duties belonging thereunto. But when the calls of God are extraordinary, as they are at this day, it is necessary that we attend hereunto in an extraordinary manner. Failing in the necessary degrees of a duty renders it ineffectual and unacceptable. If, as unto times and seasons, ways, means, and manner, of this duty, we do not apply ourselves unto it with more than ordinary diligence, and with great intention of mind, we fail in what is expected from us. To deal with God on extraordinary occasions in an ordinary frame of spirit, is to despise him; or argues, at least, no due reverence of him in his judgments, nor a due apprehension of our own concerns in them.

3. It is required that humiliation for sin be accompanied with a *relinquishment of sin*: “He that confesseth his sins, and forsaketh them, shall find mercy.” Confession is grown a

cheap and easy labour, whether it be read out of a book, or discharged by virtue of spiritual gifts. Humiliation may be pretended when it is not, and expressed when it is transitory; — no way answering the mind and will of God. But the real relinquishment of sinful frames, sinful ways, sinful neglects, can neither be pretended nor represented better than it is. He that thinks he hath nothing to forsake, — no evil way, no sinful negligence, no frame of heart, — will be awakened to a better knowledge of himself when it is too late. This we may, therefore, evidently try ourselves by:— What real change hath there been in us, in compliance with the calls of God? what have we relinquished in our ways, frames, or actings? what vain thoughts are utterly excluded, whereunto we have given entertainment? what passions or affections have been reduced into order, which have exceeded their due bounds and measures? what vain communication, formerly accustomed unto, hath been watched against and prevented? what dissimulation in love hath been cured or cast out? what irregular actings, in our persons, families, or occasions of life, have been forsaken? An inquiry into these things will give us real, sensible evidence whether our humiliation for our own sins be compliant with the present calls of God.

Sixthly. Another duty of the season is, that *we mourn for the sins of others*, — of those especially in whom we are providentially concerned; as relations, churches, the whole people of the land of our nativity, with whom we are engaged by manifold bonds and means of conjunction. It is well known that this sincere mourning for the sins of the places and times wherein we live, of the people and churches whereunto we do belong, is eminently approved of God, and a token unto themselves in whom that sense is of deliverance in a day of calamity, [Ezek. ix. 4–6](#). To have minds careless and regardless of the sins of other men, is a great evidence of want of sincerity in our profession of the detestation of sin. Many pretences there are of it; — as, that they will not hear us; — we are not concerned in them; — that they are wicked enemies of God, and the worse they are, the more will their destruction be hastened. By such pretences do men deceive their souls into a neglect of this duty, yea, unto provoking sin, such as this is.

It is a matter of sorrow unto them that truly fear God, and have any concernment in his glory, or the honour of Christ, that the whole world, so far as we know, is filled with all abominable, provoking sins. It lies under a deluge of sin, as it lay of old under a flood of waters; — only here and there appeareth an ark, that is carried above it. Atheism, antiscipiturism, disbelief of gospel mysteries, contempt of the religion which they themselves profess, amongst all sorts of Christians, — the loss of all public faith and trust, with a litter of unclean lusts, ambition, pride, covetousness, in many who have the outward conduct of the church, — have spread themselves over the face of the earth. When God thus deals with the world, when he gives it up unto this open profligate excess which now abounds in it, it becomes, unto all that truly fear him, a place of darkness and sorrow, which calls for a mourning frame of heart.



It is so, much more as unto the *land of our nativity*. From a conjunction with this people in blood, language, manners, laws, civil interests, relations, arising from the common law of nativity, in a place limited and bounded by Providence unto especial ends, we cannot but have a great concernment in their good or evil. It is greater from hence, that the same true religion hath been professed in the whole nation, with innumerable privileges accompanying it.

On these and the like considerations, the whole nation is laid under the same law of providence for good or evil.

In the *sin*, therefore, of this people, we are in a peculiar manner concerned; and shall be so in their *sufferings*.

Whether sin abound in the land at present, we have already made inquiry; and nothing spoken before shall be repeated. If we have not a sense of these provocations, — if we endeavour not to affect our hearts with them, and mourn over them, — we are very remote from that frame which God calls unto.

And this mourning for the sins of others ariseth from a double spring:— 1. *Zeal for the glory of God*; 2. *Compassion for the souls of men*, — yea, for the woeful, *calamitous state and condition* which is coming upon them even in this world.

Surely, those who are true believers cannot but be concerned in all the concerns of the glory of God. If in all our afflictions he is afflicted, in all the sufferings of his glory we ought to suffer. In the blessed direction given us for our prayers, as unto what we ought to pray for, that which in the first place is prescribed, as that which principally and eminently we ought to insist on, is the glory of God in the sanctification of his name, the progressive coming of the kingdom of Christ, and the accomplishment of his will by the obedience of men in the world. If we are sincere herein, if we are fervent in these supplications, is it nothing unto us, when all these things are quite contrary amongst us? When the name of God is blasphemed, and all things whereon he hath placed his name are derided; — when the whole internal interest and kingdom of Christ are opposed, and the outward court of the temple given everywhere to be trodden down of the Gentiles; — when all manner of sins abound, in opposition unto the will and commands of God; — when the earth is almost as unlike unto heaven as hell itself; — is there nothing to be mourned for herein? We are for the most part selfish; and so it may go well with ourselves, according to the extent of our relations and circumstances, we are not greatly moved with what befalls others. There is evil enough herein; but shall we be, moreover, so minded towards Jesus Christ, that whilst we are in safety, we care not though his concernments are in the utmost hazard? Do we love the name of God, the ways of God, the glory of God in his kingdom and rule? — we cannot but be deeply affected with the suffering of them all in these days.

The other *spring of this mourning frame*, is compassion for the souls of sinners, and their persons also, in the approach of calamitous desolations.





I am hastening to an end, and cannot insist on these things: this only I shall say, he that can take a prospect of the eternally miserable condition of multitudes among whom we live, and the approaching miseries which, without repentance and reformation, will not be avoided, and not spend some tears on them, hath a heart like a flint or adamant, that is capable of no impression.

Seventhly. It is a season wherein we are called to a diligent, heedful attendance unto the *duties of our stations, places, and callings*; — duties in our church relations, duties in our families, duties in our callings and manner of conversation in the world. This is the advice given by the apostle, with respect unto such a season, [2 Pet. iii. 11, 14](#), “Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness? Wherefore, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” Without a sacred diligence in all these duties, we cannot be found in peace of the Lord Christ when he comes to judge the world, and purify his church with a fiery trial.

Negligence, coldness, and sloth in these things, are tokens of approaching judgments. And of some of them at this day the generality of professors seem to be almost weary, and to attend unto them in a very indifferent and overly manner. But we may know assuredly, that if we thrive not in our diligence in these things, if the vigour of our spirits in watchfulness be not engaged in them, we are not compliant with the present calls of God.

Eighthly. It is required of us that we cry earnestly, continually, with perseverance, for *such an effusion of the Holy Spirit from above*, as may dispose and work the inhabitants of the land unto repentance and reformation.

That this is the only way, the only means of relief, of a sanctified deliverance from desolating judgments, hath been declared. And this is the only way which some of us have to help and assist the nation in its distress. Wherefore, by a constant continuance in supplication for such effusions of the Holy Spirit, we shall have a threefold advantage:—

1. We shall hereby *discharge the duty we owe unto the land of our nativity* in such a way as none can deny or hinder.

We owe a duty unto it on all good accounts, — moral, political, spiritual. We are, for the most of us, shut up from giving any other assistance unto it, by advice, counsel, or action. This is that which none can hinder, — wherein the poorest may be as useful and serviceable as the mighty. And if it be diligently attended unto, it will be far above whatever can be contributed by wisdom, wealth, or strength, unto the same end. For by this means we shall be saved, or perish.

2. It will preserve our own hearts in *the best frame* for what we ourselves may be called unto. He that is earnest and sincere in his supplications for the communication of the Spirit unto others, shall not want blessed supplies of him in his own soul. He will not withdraw from them, as unto themselves, who so esteem, prize, and value his work towards others.



3. We shall hereby give *testimony unto God* and his grace against the cursed profaneness of the world, who reject and despise this only means of relief and deliverance; for when all other remedies fail, if God will not utterly forsake a church or people, he doth constantly assign this as the only means of their safety. See *Jer. xxxi. 31–33; Ezek. xi. 17–19, xxxvi. 25–27*. This way the world despiseth, regardeth not; wherefore we can in nothing give a greater testimony unto God than by insisting on this way with faith and patience, contemning the reproaches of the world on the account of it.

Ninthly. Let us labour ourselves to be *exemplary in reformation*, thereby to promote it among others. Let us plead and exhort what we will, unless we give an evidence in our own persons of the necessity which we judge that there is of present reformation, we shall be of little use unto the promotion of it.

Many retrenchments of liberty in conversation may be made among the best of us; many duties may be attended with more diligence; many causes of offence avoided; many evidences given of a deep sense of deserved judgments, and of our reverence of the name of God therein; — much fruitfulness in charity and good works be declared.

I have heard that in the country, where a man is looked on to be a wise man and a *good husbandman* among his neighbours, they will note the times of his ploughing, sowing, and manuring his ground, and not undertake any thing until they find him going before them in it. And if men are looked on in a peculiar manner as professors of religion at such a time as this, under calls and warnings from God for repentance and reformation, the eyes of other men will be towards them, to see what they do on this occasion. And if they find them, as unto all outward appearance, careless and negligent, they will judge themselves unconcerned, and abide in their security. Wherefore, so far as I know, if such persons be not exemplary, not only in repentance, but also in the evidence and demonstration of it by its outward fruits, they may be, and are, the great obstructers of the reformation of the cities, towns, and places wherein they do inhabit; nor can any contract the guilt of a greater sin. And if God should bring an overflowing scourge on the inhabitants of this land, because they have not turned unto him at his calls, it is most righteous that they should share in the judgment also who were an occasion of their continuance in security, — a matter we have all just cause to tremble at.

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Posthumous sermons

Part i.

A sermon published MDCXC.



## Prefatory note.

The following is the first of Owen's posthumous Sermons. It was preached on the occasion of a fast, December 22, 1681; and was published separately, in 1690, with the subjoined quaint preface by Daniel Burgess. The latter was the son of an excellent Nonconformist minister, Daniel Burgess, who was ejected from Collinburn, Wiltshire, under the Bartholomew Act, 1662. The son was a somewhat eccentric but celebrated and much-respected preacher in London, — a kind of Latimer among the Nonconformists of his time. He died in 1713, and his funeral sermon was preached by Matthew Henry:—

“To the Reader — Upon the desire of some interested in the publication of this sermon, I have perused it, and do communicate these my thoughts concerning it.

“There appear unto me in it those two things, which do above all others commend any sermon, or any other book, — namely, most weighty and seasonable argument, with very judicious and methodical management.

“If I am able to judge, the management speaks *arma virumque*, the man and his furniture; and it is, like its great author, well known to this age, and like to be so unto future ones by his writings, in more than one language. There is a favour due unto all posthumous pieces, — of which sort this is; but there is little need that this piece seems to have of it.

“As for its argument, it is very salvation; and that not merely personal or domestical, but national. This, if any thing, will be acknowledged momentous; and now, if ever, it must be acknowledged seasonable; — now, in this our day, ‘known only to the Lord;’ — nay, now, that it is neither day nor night, as the prophet speaks; — now, that city and country are crying, ‘Watchman, what of the night? watchman, what of the night?’ — now, that the three frightful signs of approaching night are so upon us; I mean, shadows growing long, labourers going apace home, and wild beasts going boldly abroad. ‘*Quis talia fando temperet à lachrymis?*’

“In a word, here is that which will sufficiently recommend itself to all serious readers. It is the complaint of many, that our booksellers' shops are become heaps of dry sand, in which many a rich stone is lost: but it is known to all, that diamonds will be found out by their own lustre; and I make no great question but so this sermon will be. That it may be so, and may go much abroad, and do good wherever it comes, is the prayer of

“Thy servant in Christ Jesus,

“D. Burgess”

“*From my house in Bridges Street, in Covent Garden, Aug. 7, 1690.*”



Posthumous sermons.



## Sermon. Seasonable words for English protestants.

“For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” — [Jer. li. 5.](#)

[This chapter](#) and [the foregoing](#) are an eminent prophecy and prediction of the destruction of Babylon and of the land of the Chaldeans, — of the metropolitical city of the empire and of the nation itself. There is a double occasion for the inserting of these words. The first is, to declare the grounds and reasons why God would bring that destruction upon Babylon, and upon the land of the Chaldeans. The words of [verse 4](#) are, “The slain shall fall in the land of the Chaldeans, and they that are thrust through in her streets.” Why so? “For,” saith he, “Israel hath not been forsaken.” The reason why God will destroy the empire of Babylon is, because he will remember Israel, and what they have done against him. This lies in store for another Babylon, in God’s appointed time. The second reason is, that it may be for the comfort, for the supportment of Israel and Judah under that distress which was then befalling them, upon the entrance of this Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans. “Notwithstanding all,” saith he, “yet ‘Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah of his God.’ ”

We are called this day to join our cries with the nation in the behalf of the land of our nativity. And though it hath been, as most of you know, my constant course, on such solemn days as these are, to treat in particular about our own sins, our own decays, our own means of recovery; yet, upon this occasion, I shall, as God shall help me, from these words, represent unto you the state of the nation wherein we live, and the only way and means for our deliverance from universal destruction. To declare our interest herein, some things must be observed concerning this Babylon, whose destruction is so solemnly prophesied of in this and the foregoing chapter; and I must observe three things concerning it:—

First, That *Babylon was the original of apostasy from the natural worship of God unto idolatry in the whole world.* There was great iniquity before the flood, but no mention of any idolatry. There was a natural worship of God throughout the world that was not corrupted with idolatry. There is no mention of it until the building of Babel; there it began. The tower which they built they turned into a temple of Belus, whom they had made a god, and laid his image in the top of it. There was the original. You shall see immediately how we are concerned. There was the original of apostasy from natural worship unto idolatry.

Secondly. Their *idolatry.* The idolatry that there began consisted in image-worship, in the worshipping of graven images; which was their idolatry that they set up with respect unto men departed, whom they worshipped by them. Four times in this prophecy doth God say he will “take vengeance on their graven images.” And from [Isa. xl.](#) to the end of you have a description of the idolatry of Babylon, — that it all consisted in making carved idols and graven images. The rest of the world, especially of the eastern, nations, fell into the worship-



ping of the sun, which they called Baal, and Moloch, and Chemosh, — all names of the sun; and the worship of the *moon*, which they called Ashtaroth and the queen of heaven; but the idolatry of Babylon was by graven images and idols.

Thirdly. *They were*, so far as appears upon record, *the first state in the world that ever persecuted for religion*, that oppressed the true worshippers of God, as such; as being “mad upon their idols,” as the prophet saith they were, — they were inflamed upon them. They were the first that oppressed the church because of its worshipping of God, and destroyed that worship among them. Hence the church prays in this chapter, “The vengeance of the Lord and of his temple be upon Babylon:” — not only the vengeance of the Lord for destroying of his people, but the vengeance of his temple, for destroying of his worship, be upon Babylon, — “shall Zion say.” “Others have afflicted me,” saith he in the same chapter; “but this Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, hath broken my bones.” They were the great oppressors of the church.

Upon these three accounts (which is that I would observe), the name of Babylon, and all that is spoken of it in the Old Testament, is transferred to the apostate Church of Rome in the New, and all applied unto it, in the Book of the Revelation; and that upon this great analogy, which I shall now briefly show:—

Why doth God call the apostate state of the church, under the New Testament, “Babylon, Babylon the Mystery?” For these three reasons:—

First. As old Babylon was the rise and spring of apostasy from natural worship in the world unto idolatry, so this new Babylon was the rise and spring of apostasy from evangelical worship in the world unto idolatry. Mark the analogy. Hence she is called “The mother of harlots;” that is, she that had brought forth all the idolatrous churches and worship that were in the world. Did Babylon begin to apostatize into idolatry from natural worship? so Rome began to apostatize into idolatry from spiritual, evangelical worship. Therefore the Holy Ghost calls her Babylon.

Secondly. The peculiar idolatry of Babylon consisted in image-worship, — the worshipping of men departed under images made to their likeness. And the peculiar idolatry of Rome consists in image-worship, — the worshipping of saints departed; which is a great part of their idolatry. And therein they are Babylon also.

Thirdly. As Babylon was the spring of all persecution against, and oppression of, the church of God under the Old Testament, so Rome hath been the spring of all persecution and oppression of the church of God, since the apostasy, under the New Testament.

On these accounts hath the Holy Ghost, in infinite wisdom, transferred over the name, and state, and other things spoken of Babylon from the old unto the new.

I have mentioned this, that you may see the interest of England in this text of Scripture. So far as the truth of religion is owned in this nation, so far as there is a testimony given against idolatry, we are to God as Israel and Judah, though the land be filled with sin. At the

time of this prophecy, Israel and Judah were in danger of present destruction and desolation from the old Babylon; and if we do not mock God in all we do, we are under apprehensions that England, and the church of God in England, is under danger of the same desolation and destruction from new Babylon, upon the same account and principle. If we do not mock God, this is that we profess at this day. Wherefore the parallel runs thus far equal. Such as was Babylon of old, such is that at present; such as was the danger of Israel and Judah from them at that day, such is the danger of England from the new at this present. This is spoken in general.

For the opening of the words, observe these three things:—

First. That there is in them a *reduplication of the names or titles of God*. He is in [this verse](#) called by the name of “The Lord of hosts,” and by the name of “The Holy One of Israel.” Where there are such reduplications of the name of God or any of his titles, the Holy Ghost would have us take notice that it is a matter of great importance whereof he speaks.

Secondly. *There is a distribution and application of these names of God unto distinct occasions, suitable unto them.*

1. There is in it mentioned an intimation of a surprisal with some protection or deliverance. Whom shall it be done by? “The Lord of hosts,” saith he, “the Lord his God.” And he doth not in vain add immediately, “The Lord of hosts,” that title of God, — he who hath the host above and the host below in his sovereign disposal. God’s host above are all the holy angels, and all the heavenly bodies in their influences. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera; and he hath lately hung forth among us a flag or ensign of his host above, intimating that he is arising in his indignation, as “the Lord of hosts,” and hath hung forth an ensign before his coming, full of dread and terror. And he is “the Lord of hosts” here below, of all men and of all creatures, disposing of them as seems good unto him. The prophet adds this name of God, because of the unspeakable greatness of the thing he mentions; namely, that Israel should not be forsaken, nor Judah, while the land was so filled with sin, and the whole interest of Babylon so coming upon them.

2. The other title of God is, “The Holy One of Israel.” This is applied peculiarly unto their sin: “The land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” It is the greatest, it is the highest aggravation of sin, that it is against the holiness of God, “who is a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” So hath the wisdom of the Holy Ghost applied these two distinct titles of God unto the two distinct considerations of the people; — first, of their protection, that he is “The Lord of hosts;” secondly, as of their sin, that he is “The Holy One of Israel.”

Thirdly. The third thing is this:— That *in this woeful state there is yet an intimation made of a covenant-interest of Judah in God, and that God did yet own them as his in covenant*: “Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God.” Brethren! no man, I think, hath less of faith than I, — no man doth more despond; but if I could see these two things in concurrence, “His God,” and “The Lord of hosts,” (that is, sovereign grace, according to his covenant;





and sovereign power, according to his providence,) — there is ground for any man's faith to build upon: "His God, the Lord of hosts." Nothing but sovereign grace and sovereign power can preserve a people, when their land is full of sin against the Holy One of Israel, and destruction seems to encompass them, from the interest of Babylon.

I shall speak yet a little more particularly. You may consider in the words, —

1. That which is mentioned in the last place; — *the state of the people* at this time: "Their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel."

2. An intimation of approaching, deserved destruction on that account: "Though the land;" — it is in that condition that it ought to look for nothing but destruction.

3. A strange and wonderful surprisal, notwithstanding this, in sovereign grace and power: "Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, the Lord of hosts."

What I shall speak to is this:—

When a land is filled with sin against the Lord, let men's hopes and expectations be what they will, they are in danger of utter destruction, and cannot be saved but by the actings of sovereign grace and power.

I shall for the handling hereof (at least I design to) do these three things:— I. Show when a land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. II. Gather up what evidences we have that England is not yet utterly forsaken of God. III. Manifest what is indispensably required of us, that we may not be given up unto that utter desolation and destruction that lieth at the door.

I do believe that I am not in my thoughts far from your case, — far from the case of the nation. I do not search for things to speak to; I shall speak only those that are compliant with the common reason and understanding of all sober persons.

I. There are three ways whereby a land may be said to be filled with sin:—

1. When the sins of a land or nation are come to the full, to the utmost measure that God hath allotted to them in his patience. There is such an allotment of patience to every nation under heaven, and when it comes to its appointed issue, no means under heaven can defer or delay their destruction one day. Thus saith God before the flood, "The land is filled with sin, the whole earth with violence; — a flood shall take them away." The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah came up to God; they had filled up their measure; — God sent fire and brimstone to destroy them. "You shall not yet go into Canaan." Why? "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." There is a time appointed, wherein the iniquity of the Amorites shall come up to its full measure, beyond which their destruction shall not be delayed. This was not now the case of Israel and Judah. It proved afterward to be their case, as the apostle describes it, [1 Thess. ii. 15, 16](#), "Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." How come? They have filled their measure, reached to



their bounds; — “wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” I hope, I pray, that this is not, that this may not be, the state of England; — that our land is not so filled with sin, as that God’s decree of absolute and universal desolation should be gone forth against us.

2. A land may be said to be filled with sin, when it is come to that degree and measure, as that God will not pass it by without some severe, desolating judgment. He will not utterly forsake it, he will not utterly destroy it; but let all mankind do what they will, he will not pass it by without some severe, desolating judgment. Such was their case even at this time; — you may see in [2 Chron. xxxvi. 16](#), “But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” It was impossible that the judgment of God should be turned away from them. In this state God saith, “Pray not for this people; my heart shall not be toward them,” (until he had brought his judgment upon them;) — “though Moses and Samuel stood before me, I will not hear them.”<sup>355</sup> Ay, but what if reformation come in? “Nay, nay,” saith he, “it is determined against them; — reformation shall not save them.” See [2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26](#), where there is an account given of the greatest reformation that ever was wrought in Judah, by Josiah. So it is said, “Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him,” — having reformed the whole nation. Then, sure, all will be well. See the next words, “Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah... And the Loan said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight.” There is a time and season when God, although he will not utterly destroy and forsake a nation for ever, yet he will not pass them by, until he hath brought a severe, destructive scourge upon them. Whether this be the state of England at this day, or no, God only knows, and of mankind not one. Whether we are come to that state wherein there is no remedy, wherein nothing we do shall prevent desolating judgments, I say, God only knows, and of men not one.

3. A land is filled with sin, when it is come to such a degree and measure, as that there is no rule of the word, nor any prognostic from Providence, nor any conjecture from the state of things, that can give any determination what will be the issue. Judgment is deserved; and there is nothing remains but to look upon the balance as it is held in the hand of sovereignty: which way it will turn God only knows. The decree is not yet gone forth. In this your state, God doth not say, “Pray not for this people;” God doth not say, “Though you reform, I will not turn from the fierceness of my wrath:” but God saith, “Who knows if God will return and leave a blessing? who knows if God will be entreated, and have mercy?” He leaves it upon the absolute pleasure of sovereignty, to give us encouragement to wait upon him. Because I take this — yea, and I take it in the best of my hopes — to be that wherein we are

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355 [See [Jer. vii. 16, xi. 14, xv. 1.](#)]



concerned, pray take these two things along with you, before I go to show it in particular:— The first is, that, in this state, if God gives time and space, there is encouragement enough left to make our applications to him for the removal of impending judgments. Methinks sometimes I see by faith the Lord high lift up upon his throne, and his train filling the temple with his glory, and holding the balance of this nation in his hand, and [that he] can turn it to mercy or judgment, as seems good unto him. While it is so, — while though the woman be put into the ephah, yet the talent of lead is not laid upon her, [*Zech. v. 7.*] — there is time for intercession, yet time for the interposition of God. And, secondly, I say, — and do you take it as you see good, but I will tell you my persuasion, — that if there be not a compliance with the calls of God unto this nation, upon this suspension and arrest of judgment that we are under, we shall as certainly perish as if we were in either of the two former conditions. If the Chaldeans were all wounded men, — if there was no hope, no strength, no relief, in the papal cause, — they shall rise up and smite, as in the day wherein “Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel,” and “the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children,” *Hos. x. 14*; — unless there be a compliance with the calls of God in the days wherein we live.

Let us, then, a little, as God will give strength, inquire when a nation is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel as certainly to put the balance into the hands of sovereignty, and to take off all rules and prognostics (which, with great grief, I have heard sometimes insisted, upon), and reduce us merely to the hand of sovereignty. When is it that a land is so filled with sin?

(1.) A land is so filled with sin, when all sorts of provoking sins do abound in it; — when there is no exception to be put into the indictment; — when there is no provoking sin that can be thought on that is not in the nation. For if there be but one provoking sin absolutely excluded, there is room for mercy to dwell. Who now shall plead for England? who shall put in an exception for England into this indictment? Oh, poor England! among all thy lovers thou hast not one to plead for thee this day! From the height of profaneness and atheism, through the filthiness of sensuality and uncleanness, down to the lowest oppression and cheating, the land is filled with all sorts of sin. If there be any that can put in an exception as to any provoking sin that is not among us, let them stand forth and plead the cause of this nation. I profess my mouth is stopped. “The land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.” It is to no purpose to enumerate our sins, — the roll is too long to be read at this time; and I am sorry it hath been cut, and thrown into the fire, when it hath been spoken of, contemned, and despised, as Jeremiah’s was by Jehoiakim. But so it is.

(2.) A land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel, when all sorts of persons in a land are guilty of provoking sins. Pray, mistake me not; I do not say all persons of all sorts. God forbid. If it had been so, we had long since been like unto Sodom and Gomorrah. “If the Lord of hosts had not left us a small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah,” *Isa. i. 9*. But, whereas there are many sorts of



persons, — rulers, and them that are ruled; high and low, rich and poor; in court, in city, in country; I say, all sorts of persons have been guilty of these provoking sins, — we, and our princes, as Daniel speaks, and our rulers, and the people, the inhabitants of the land of all sorts, — who shall plead here for England? who shall bring forth a sort of persons? Nay, it is not so in the throne; — nay, it is not so at court; — nay, it is not so among the clergy; — nay, it is not so in the city; — nay, it is not so in the country; — it is not so with the rich; it is not so with the poor. Let any one that can, bring in a plea for this poor nation, that we may not conclude the land is filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel.

But you will say, “Here lies an exception: There are many persons, many churches, free from these flagitious and provoking sins; — there is a sort of persons, churches, and professors, who walk in the fear of God, and are free from all these sins: and, therefore, it doth not extend to all sorts.”

Brethren, you know my mind full well in this matter. I have been for these three last years upon all occasions inculcating it upon you. I acknowledge, the churches in this nation are not guilty of those sins whereby God is provoked against the nation to bring on national judgments; but I do say, that churches and professors in this nation are guilty of those sins for which Christ will bring correcting judgments upon churches and professors: so that we are all in the same way and bottom, though not all upon the same account. The land is filled with sin. How are your thoughts concerned in these things, brethren? I confess to you I speak my heart, my conscience, as in the presence of God, and as that which you are concerned to consider.

I have given you two evidences that this land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. I will give you two more.

(3.) When the sins of a land have upon them the greatest aggravations that national sins are capable of. What are they? They are plain:— they are against warnings, and against mercies; all sorts of sins in all sorts of persons, against all sorts of warnings and against all sorts of mercies. God hath not left this land without warnings in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Was there no warning given us in the wasting, *desolating plague*?<sup>356</sup> no warning in the consuming, *raging fire*?<sup>357</sup> no warning in the *bloody war*<sup>358</sup> that ensued thereon? no warning in all the *prodigious appearances* in heaven above that we have had? — none in that<sup>359</sup> which at present hangs over us, as an ensign of God’s supernal host? I acknowledge

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356 The plague in 1665, which cut off 68,596 of the population, according to the London bills of mortality.

357 The fire which destroyed a large part of London in 1666.

358 Most probably the war with the Dutch, which had begun in 1665, and in the course of which the Dutch fleet sailed up the Thames, and destroyed the ships of war at Chatham.

359 Probably the celebrated comet of 1680–81, known by the name of Halley’s comet. The observations made by Halley and Flamsteed on this body are partly the basis, on which Newton, from the theory of gravitation,

there hath been, I fear, a weakness in one kind of warning, — by the public dispensation of the word. But God hath not left himself without witness: he hath multiplied warnings, and they have not been complied withal. Have they, brethren? “Were they at all afraid,” saith Jeremiah, “when the roll was read? or, did they rend their clothes?” [Jer. xxxvi. 24](#). No, not at all. Have these warnings of God been complied withal? Hath the voice of God in them been heard? Hath the nation been afraid? Have they rent their clothes and returned to the Lord? They have not. We yet continue, God help us! in a state of sin against warnings. And as for mercies, — the mercies of peace and plenty have been the food of lust, of covetousness and sensuality, and have pampered us in wantonness, to the rending and tearing one another.

(4.) When, in the secret workings of God’s providence, there is an inclination in a sinful people unto a compliance with them [those] from whom their destruction is like to proceed, it is a sign that God is withdrawn from them, and that the land is so filled with sin. When Israel was to be destroyed by the Assyrian, when Israel saw his sickness, he sent to the king of Assyria, applied himself to the king of Assyria, by whom he was to be destroyed, [Hos. v. 13](#). When Judah saw his sickness, all his inclinations and applications were unto the Babylonians and Chaldeans, by whom he was to be destroyed. The prophet Ezekiel hath a whole chapter to tell you of the fondness of that people upon the Babylonians before their destruction. [Ezek. xxiii.](#), “They were all like princes and mighty men, and thou wast in love with them, and committedst adultery with them;” that is, partookest and compliedst with their idolatry. When it is so, it is evident that God is greatly withdrawn from such a people, and that they are nigh unto their desolation.

What shall we plead for England in this matter? Is it not known what wretched and vile compliances we have had with a neighbour nation, the French, — following their manners, imitating their customs, promoting their interest, advancing their reputation, when every man almost among us talked of nothing but that we should be destroyed by the French? — an eminent token of the hand of God upon us, and that the land is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Nay, go farther; — whence is it (for we bear ourselves herein not only upon the truth of the thing itself, but also upon the proclamation inviting us upon this day), whence is it that we fear the judgments of God? whence do we fear desolation, confusion, destruction upon this nation, — to our religion, to our liberties, to our lives? Is it not from the papal interest? There is it stated by our rulers, and in the thoughts of all sober persons. And had we been wise, we might have seen it many years ago. But what have we been doing for some ages? Deserting our principles, forsaking the foundation we stood upon



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proved the orbit of comets. It was visible for a considerable time, and shone with great brilliance. Some knowledge of the facts alluded to is needed, to appreciate the force and pertinence of Owen’s appeals; though, in the progress of science, a different inference would now be drawn from such celestial phenomena as the comet and the meteor. — Ed.

against the Papacy, foregoing those avowed principles of the first reformers, pleading for compliance, pleading for a possibility of reconciliation, — avowing them to be a true church. And, in one word, if the power of the protestant religion had not been preserved in the body of the people, it had, by some, been long ago given up to the papal interest, and this working effectually among us at a time when we were in dread (all that were wise and considerate) that there would from thence arise the desolation and destruction of this church.

I have given you these evidences that this land of ours is so filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel; — and if they can answer it, and disprove it, no man shall more rejoice in it than myself.

I should, in the next place, show the danger that land is in when things lie in this equal balance. For, I pray, observe, I have not given these things to prove the land hath filled up its measure of iniquity, and must certainly be destroyed; I have not given them to prove absolutely that there is a decreed judgment that cannot be diverted, — that there is no remedy, — that, notwithstanding reformation, God will say, “I will not turn away the fierceness of mine anger;” — but I have given them only to prove, that we are in that state and condition wherein there is no certain rule of the word, no indication of Providence, no rational consideration of the state of things that can give us any security of protection or deliverance; but that we are absolutely resolved upon sovereign grace and mercy: and without relief from thence, I shall only say, as to the proof of the proposition, what the prophet saith, [Isa. xxxiv. 16](#), “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these things shall fail.”

To omit all the considerations and all the proof I intended, that sovereign grace and mercy must be our relief, if ever we be relieved, I proceed unto the second thing; which is,

II. To give in evidences that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God, the Lord of hosts, though the land be thus filled with sin. So that there is ground of encouragement yet remaining to apply ourselves to God. And, in truth, I will tell you the best I can think of:—

1. *The large and wonderful discovery of the horrible plot, of the horrible Popish plot,<sup>360</sup> laid for the ruin, destruction, and desolation of the nation, is an evidence that England is not*

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360 The allusion is to the Popish Plot which Titus Oates was thought to have discovered. He was a clergyman of infamous character. Expelled from his benefice in the Church of England, he had entered the Jesuit college of St Omer. Thence he returned to England, and in 1678 lodged information before Sir Edmondsbury Godfrey that the Roman Catholics were busy with a scheme for burning London, landing a French army in Ireland, and assassinating the king. Sir E. Godfrey, who, as justice of the peace, had received the depositions of Oates, was shortly afterwards found dead in a field near London; and it was evident that he had been murdered. Papers were found on Edward Coleman, a Roman Catholic emissary, which afforded some corroboration to the story of Oates. These facts secured universal credit at the time for the allegations of Oates. The importance which Dr

yet, I say, utterly forsaken of the Lord its God. It was not discovered by our rulers, from whom it was hid. It was not discovered by the severe indagation and watchfulness of ministers of state from foreign intelligence, — the usual way of discovering such plots. It was not discovered by persons of authority and interest, to warrant the discovery. It was not so in a time when the nation was awake, and looked about them, and were jealous of such things; but in the deepest security. It hath admitted, — it hath met with all the endeavours of hell and men for the covering of it; yet, through the conduct of the holy providence of God, it hath broke forth to that discovery, as that it is publicly proclaimed to all the nation. I say, with the wife of Manoah, ” If God would have destroyed us, he would not have showed us this thing.” If he had utterly forsaken us, he would have left us to have been swallowed up, when we should not have had leisure to have cried, Alas! To me, I say, it is an evidence that England is not yet utterly forsaken.

2. That God hath stirred up some, at least, of the nobles and our rulers to follow on this discovery, to bring it forth to light, and to pursue them to condign punishment who were the contrivers, authors, abettors, and carriers on of that bloody design. I will not speak one word or syllable to their dishonour or disrespect who deserve both honour and respect from us: but this I will say, that if I know them, or any thing of them, this is not from themselves; this is from the clothing of the Spirit of God, and anointing to this very work, and is not from themselves, nor their own principles, nor their own inclinations, but the hand of God in them and upon them. Add hereunto the strange and wonderful quiet disposure of the magistracy of this city into the hand of persons prudent, diligent, and watchful, whom we have reason to pray for, and bless God for. And it is strengthened by the stirring up of a spirit in the common people unto an unheard-of heat and earnestness in bearing witness and testimony against Popery and all their abominations, in such a manner as hath not fallen out in any nation under heaven; and this acted above and beyond their spirits and principles. These things, to me, are some evidences that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God, though the land be full of sin.

3. I could instance in the *embroilments of foreign nations abroad*. At this time they are all quiet; but who is there that doth not know that they all stand as it were on the tiptoe, looking who shall first begin to cut throats and kill men? Even all the nations in Europe are in this posture at this day. Though they are quiet this cold weather, yet, “Who shall begin first? who shall make the attack? and who shall defend?” is the talk of all Europe, — whereby some of them may have been hindered from a public contributing to the ruin of this poor nation.

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Owen attaches to this plot must evidently be understood in the light of the prevailing and universal impression among British Protestants at the time when the sermon was delivered. — Ed.

4. It is an evidence that England is not yet forsaken, in that *a secret, efficacious influence of divine Providence hath preserved the body politic of the nation in its being and union, when all the ligaments of law and mutual trust have been broken.* There hath been such a dissolution of mutual trust, and all ordinary ligaments of the politic union of a nation, that if God had not powerfully grasped the whole in his hand, we had long since been in confusion, and every man's sword had been in the side of his brother and his neighbour. But to this day we are preserved in peace, by a secret, influential power of divine wisdom and providence, — whose footsteps I would adore more and more; which is so much the more excellent, in that it is not visible, and by outward force, but merely upon the minds of men. This is, to me, another evidence that England is not yet forsaken of its God, the Lord of hosts.

5. My last is this, — *That after God hath, by so many ways and so many means, declared unto us his displeasure against our sin, having declared the sentence in his word, yet he hath visibly granted an arrest of judgment.* “The sentence shall not be put in execution,” saith God, “while I give this people a time, and space, and season of repentance and reformation.” Alas! if God had utterly forsaken us, he would have taken us off in the midst of our security; evil would have risen, and we should have known the morning of it; destruction would presently have overtaken us. But now God hath given us various calls, various warnings, and leaves us a space, as yet, to see what we will do, and what will become of us. “I will give them a trial,” saith God; “the decree shall not yet go forth, — judgment shall not yet come forth to execution; I will give them a space for repentance.” And this consideration hath a double corroboration of this blessed space and season God hath given us, for to apply ourselves so far to his call as to remove his judgments that are impending over us.

(1.) The first is, that he *hath reserved a remnant among us that do make use of this space and season to apply themselves unto the throne of grace, and to cry mightily for mercy.* God hath not taken his Holy Spirit from us. God hath not said, by any open work or secret intimation of providence, “Pray no more for this people; my heart shall not be toward them.” He hath not said so; and, therefore, there are yet among us precious souls who do lift up prayers to God night and day, not only for themselves and families, not only for the church of God, but for this poor land of our nativity, that, if it were the will of God, we may not see it soaked in blood; — that God would not come forth to destroy it with a curse; — that God would pity, and spare, and have mercy upon it; — that he would not make it an “Aceldama,” — a field of blood. There are many cries to God to this purpose. So that there are some by whom this space and season God hath given us is made use of.

(2.) It hath strength from this, that *there is an invitation and encouragement given to the whole nation to join together in their cries to God this day for the same end and purpose.* I confess to you (give me leave to speak it), I am afraid the body of the nation, considering their conduct in this sort of duty, will make no great work of it, towards the averting of judgments in such a day as this is. And I am afraid, also, that the approaching carnival, or





time of feasting, will quickly blot out all impressions that ought to be in the minds of men from such a day as this is. This is all I can say, — God is publicly acknowledged; and what influence that may have in a farther suspension of judgment, till the nation be better prepared to seek unto him, I know not.

Methinks these are evidences (to me they are) that England is not yet utterly forsaken of the Lord its God:— The miraculous discovery of the plot for our destruction; — the pursuit of it by some of our rulers, and the body of the nation; — the embroilment of foreign nations in their own concerns; — the preservation of the political interest and body, when all the ligaments of law, and love, and trust were dissolved; — the space and season that God gives us (that we are not immediately hurried into blood and confusion), attended with a spirit of prayer in some of God's own people, and with a public acknowledgment of God in this day in the nation.

III. I should now proceed to my last thing, — to show you, that in this state, wherein a land is so filled with sin as absolutely to put the determination of all things into the hand of sovereignty, and where yet there remains some evidences that God hath not utterly forsaken us, what is required of us, what is expected from us, that may be a means to turn away the wrath and displeasure of God from this poor land and nation.

I should have spoken to the following things:—

1. That whatsoever be the language of God's calls, unless there be a general compliance with them, this land cannot be saved.

2. I should have shown you, that all the diligence, and the courage, and the watchfulness of the rulers, shall not be able to preserve us from that destruction which we have deserved; — unless something else be done ere long, their hearts will faint, and their hands fail, and their thoughts be divided. For that alone will not do.

3. Prayer will not do in this case; though that be necessary and required, it will not do it. God doth not cry to us merely that we should cry to him. "Why criest thou?" said God to Joshua; "there is an accursed thing. Why dost thou lie upon thy face, and cry, and pray, when judgment is coming upon you? There is an accursed thing got among you." It is so with us.

4. To speak very plain in a plain case; — the state of this nation is such, let our expectation and our hopes be what they will, and prognostics be multiplied, God can multiply upon another hand; — the case of this nation is such, that without repentance evidenced, and universal reformation sincerely endeavoured, England cannot be saved, — will not be saved; — God will forsake it, — destruction from the Lord will overtake us.

5. I should have told you, also, what I judge indispensably necessary, that any such reformation may be obtained in this nation; as, —



(1.) That there be, *through the providence of God, provided another manner of administration of the word throughout the nation than at present there is; which is the only means of conviction, and conversion unto God.*

Signs, and wonders, and judgments, terrify; — it is the word that must reform, and turn to God. And if the state of things continue so, that some who are able and wise for the work are forbid, and others, that engross all to themselves, are either unable or negligent in it, — I have no great hopes of seeing reformation in this land.

(2.) *Unless the generality of magistrates be better principled for, and better instructed in, their office, than as yet they seem to be, a reformation will not be carried through this nation.* And, —

(3.) Which is the principal, — *That those who have been examples in sinning, and in drawing others to sin, become examples in repenting, and reforming, and turning to God.*

(4.) Lastly, *That the whole nation be stirred up, and do not faint in the pursuit of it.*

I have scarce been able to speak the heads of these things unto you. I wish I had strength to speak all that is in my thoughts and heart upon this matter unto this whole nation; for hereon, and not on any thing else, depends the deliverance and safety of it.

Posthumous sermons

Part ii.

Sermons published MDCCXXI.



### **Prefatory note.**

Under the second division of the Posthumous Sermons of Owen are included all the previously unpublished discourses which appeared in the folio edition of his Sermons and Tracts, 1721. The editors of that volume state, after alluding to his sermons formerly printed, — “With these are printed a considerable number of sermons and other tracts never before published, which we do assure the public are genuine, — a great part of them having been transcribed from his own copies, and the rest taken from his mouth by a gentleman of honour and known integrity.”

The gentleman referred to was Sir John Hartopp. Dr Isaac Watts, on the death of that baronet, preached a well-known and beautiful sermon on “The Happiness of Separate Spirits.” “When I name Sir John Hartopp,” said the preacher, “all that knew him will agree that I name a gentleman, a scholar, and a Christian.” In the course of the tribute he pays to the memory of the deceased, he alludes to the cordial friendship that long subsisted between Sir John and “that great and venerable man, Dr Owen;” and mentions that he had supplied Asty with important information for his brief memoir of our author. Sir John Hartopp deserved the warm eulogy of Dr Watts. He was a good man, and the friend of good men. He was thrice elected Member of Parliament for Leicestershire, at the time when the attempt was made to exclude the Duke of York from the crown. He attended the ministry of Owen in London, and was in the habit of taking notes in short-hand of his sermons, which he afterwards transcribed in full. From these manuscripts most of the posthumous sermons of our author have been derived. He died in 1722, after the publication of the folio edition of Owen’s Sermons; and his name, therefore, is a voucher for the genuineness of all the discourses contained in this division.

Two discourses on “The Strength of Faith” are here given first, because connected with one on the same text in the preceding volume, — vol. viii. p. 207. The discourses which bear no date follow. The subsequent discourses in this division are arranged according to the years in which it has been ascertained that they were preached. — Ed.



Posthumous sermons.



## Sermon I. The strength of faith.

“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. — [Rom. iv. 20.](#)”

In [this chapter](#) the apostle singleth out a signal example, to make good the conclusion which, by sundry convincing demonstrations, he had proved in [the foregoing chapter](#); namely, that the justification of a sinner could by no means be brought about nor accomplished but by the righteousness of faith in Christ. This, I say, in the example of Abraham, and from the testimonies given concerning him, and the way whereby he was justified before God, the apostle proves from [the beginning of the chapter to the end of verse 17.](#) From [thence to the end of verse 22](#) he describes that faith of Abraham whereby he obtained acceptance with God; that in all things he might propose him as an example and an encouragement unto us.

Among the many excellencies which are given in, in the description of this faith of his, arising from its cause, object, matter, and manner, not now to be insisted on, this is none of the least which is mentioned in my text, “He staggered not.”

There is a *μείωσις* in the words, wherein, by a negation, the contrary to what is denied is strongly asserted: “He staggered, not by unbelief;” that is, he was steadfast in believing, or, as it is expounded in the close of the verse, “he was strong in faith.”

The words may yield us these two observations:—

*Observation 1.* All staggering at the promises of God is through unbelief.

Saith the apostle, “He staggered not through unbelief.” Men are apt to pretend many other reasons, and do use other pleas; but the truth is, all our staggering is through unbelief. But this proposition from these words I have long since, in another way, proved, evinced, and applied.<sup>361</sup> There is another proposition lies in the text, and that I shall now apply myself unto, which is this:—

*Obs. 2.* Steadfastness in believing the promises is exceeding acceptable unto God.

In treating upon this subject, I shall do these two things:— I. Explain the terms of the proposition. II. Give the proof of it.

I. As to the former of these, —

1. There is the object concerning which the affirmation is laid down: “The promises,” the promises of God. The promises of God are the declaration of the purposes of his grace towards his elect, according to the tenor of the covenant. That pointed unto in my text was the old great promise of Christ, which contains in it all others; because “in him all the promises of God are yea and amen,” [2 Cor. i. 20.](#) So that although I shall speak nothing but what will be true with reference to every promise of God whatever, yet I shall bear a chief

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361 See the sermon on this text, vol. viii. p. 207.

respect to the promises that exhibit Christ and the free grace of God in him unto sinners; — steadfastness in believing these promises.

2. There is the act that is exercised about this object; and that is, *believing*. It is steadfastness in believing we speak of.

I shall not make it my design to insist much on the nature of faith, and to debate the differences that are among men about it. Only so much must be spoken concerning it as may give us an acquaintance with that whereof we are treating.

How many have been the disputes of men about the nature of faith — the subject, proper object, formal reason of it — all know. And how little the church of God is beholding to men, who have made it their business to involve things of general duty, and absolute necessity unto all believers, in intricate disputes, — men that will duly weigh it may easily know. By some men's too much understanding, others are brought to understand nothing at all. He that would have the things of his own spiritual experience and daily duty made unintelligible to him, let him consider them as stated in men's philosophical disputes about them. Thus, some place faith in one distinct faculty of the soul, some in another, and some say there are no such things as distinct faculties in the soul. Some place it in both the chief, — the understanding and the will; and some say, it is impossible that one habit should have its residence in two faculties.

For my part, my intention principally is, to speak to such as God chooseth, — the poor and foolish of the world. And the means whereby he will bring them to himself are not, I am sure, above that understanding which the Son of God hath given them, [1 John v. 20](#). And whereas the general way, in treating of faith, is, for the most part, to use strictness of expression, that so it may be delivered in a philosophical exactness; the constant way of the Holy Ghost is, by metaphorical expressions, accommodations of it to things of sense and daily usage in the meanest, to give a relish and perception of it to all that are interested in it. And so shall I labour to speak, that every one that doth believe may know what it is to believe.

Only observe this, by the way, — that I speak of believing and of faith in respect of that end, and to that purpose only, in reference whereunto Paul here treats of it; that is, in respect of justification and our acceptation with God. I say, then, —

(1.) That faith, or *believing*, in this restrained sense, doth not consist solely in the assent of the mind to the truth of the promises, or of any promise. When one affirms any thing to us, and we say we believe him, — that is, that the thing he speaks is true, — then there is this assent of the mind. Without this there is no faith. But this alone is not the faith we speak of. This alone and solitary the devils have, and cannot choose but have it, [James ii. 19](#). They believe that which makes them tremble, on the authority of God who revealeth it.



But you will say, “The devil believes, only the threats of God, — that which makes him tremble; and so his belief is not a general assent, but partial; — and is thereby distinguished from our assent; which is to all that God hath revealed, and especially the promises.”

I answer, The devil believes the promises no less than he doth the threats of God; that is, that they are true, and shall be accomplished. It is part of his misery, that he cannot but believe them. And the promises of God are as much suited to make him tremble as his threatenings. The first promise to us was couched in a threatening to him, [Gen. iii. 15](#). And there is no promise wherein a threatening to him is not couched. Every word concerning Christ, or grace by him, speaks his downfall and ruin. Indeed, his destruction lies more in promises than threats. Promises are what weakens him daily, and gives him a continual foretaste of his approaching destruction.

On this consideration it is evident, that believing, or faith, cannot be solely an assent to the truth of these promises upon the fidelity of the promiser; but this it is also, or originally. Hence it is called, “the receiving the testimony of God,” and, therein, “setting to our seal that God is true,” [John iii. 33](#). But yet, I think there is somewhat more in receiving of the testimony of God, and setting our seal to it (agreeing, as in contracts, that so it is, and so it shall be), than the bare assent of the mind to the truth of the promises; although, in ordinary speech, to receive a man’s testimony, is no more than to believe [that] what he saith, of that concerning which he speaks, is true. But there seems, moreover, in the annexed expression of “setting to our seal,” that that is included which he speaks of to Job, [Job v. 27](#), “Hear it, and know it for thy good.” There is a receiving of it for ourselves, in those expressions; which adds much to a bare assent. I say, then, this assent is of faith, though it be not faith. And in saying it is not justifying faith, we do not deny it, but affirm it to be faith in general. The addition of a peculiar assent destroys not the nature of a thing. Now, faith in general is such an assent as hath been described.

(2.) It is not in the sole consent of the will to close with the promise, as containing that which is good and suitable. There is the matter of the promise to be considered in believing, as well as the promise itself. Christ, with his righteousness and benefits, is, as it were, tendered unto us therein. Whence, by believing we are said to accept of, to “receive the atonement,” [Rom. v. 11](#). Now, to consent that the matter of the promise — that which is exhibited in the word of it — is good and desirable, and [that it is] so to us, and to choose it on that account, is required to believing also; and it is properly the receiving of Christ, [John i. 12](#). But yet it is not only precisely and exclusively this. Sarah’s faith, [Heb. xi. 11](#), is described by this, that she “judged him faithful who had promised.” And this is of the nature of faith, as was said before, the judging him faithful that promiseth, and assenting to the truth of his promises on that account. Now, the first of these may be without the second, — our assent may be without the consent of the will; but the latter cannot be without the former. But yet, there is such an assent as will certainly produce this choice also.



(3.) I suppose I need not say, it doth not entirely consist in the good-liking of the affections, and embracing the things promised. The stony ground received the word presently, and with joy, [Matt. xiii. 20](#). It is said, [verse 5](#), that the seed sprung up immediately, because it had not depth of earth. Where men have warm affections, but not thoroughly-prepared minds and hearts, they presently run away with the word, and profess great matters from it; but where it is laid in deep, it is longer commonly before it appears. When a man receives the word only in the affections, the first touch of them cannot be hid; instantly he will be speaking of it, melt under it, and declare how he is affected with it: "Oh, this sermon hath done me good indeed!" But yet this is not faith, when it is alone. They receive the word with joy, but have not root in themselves, [verses 20, 21](#). When Christ promised "the bread of life," — that is, himself, — [John vi.](#), how many were instantly affected with it, and carried out to strong desires of it! "Lord," say they, "evermore give us this bread," [verse 34](#). They like it, they desire it, at that season; their affections are taken with it: but yet they were but πρόσκαιροι, "temporary," not true believers; for after a season "they went back, and walked no more with Christ," [verse 66](#). Those "who have a taste of the heavenly gift," [Heb. vi. 4](#), do you not think they like the taste, and are affected with it? There are, indeed, innumerable deceits in this business. I might show on how many false and corrupt accounts, on what sandy foundations, many men's affections may be exceedingly taken with the word of promise, preached or considered; so that there is no concluding of believing to lie in any such thing. When affections go before believing, they are little worth; but when they follow it, they are exceeding acceptable and precious in the sight of God.

(4.) It is not solely "fiducia," — a *trust*, affiance, or confidence. There is a twofold fiducial trust; — one whereby we trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin; which you may call adherence. It is such a cleaving to Christ, as that we trust in him for the forgiveness of sins, and acceptance with God. And so much as we trust, so much we adhere, and no more. There is also a trust that our sins are forgiven us; we trust or rest upon it. Now, it cannot be that either of these should be faith entirely, and that the whole of it should be included in them. There is something more in believing than in trusting; and something more in trusting than is absolutely necessary to preserve the entire notion of believing; for we may believe that wherein we do not trust. But yet this I grant, that where there is believing in Christ, there will be trusting in him, more or less. And when faith is increased to some good height, strength, and steadfastness, it is mainly taken up in trust and confidence, [John xiv. 1](#). So to believe as to free our hearts from trouble and disquietment, upon any account whatever, is to trust properly; and that doubting, and staggering, and fear, which in Scripture we find condemned as opposite to faith, are indeed directly opposite to this fiducial reposing our souls on Christ. So the apostle describes his faith or believing, [2 Tim. i. 12](#). So to believe as to be persuaded that God is able to keep what we commit to him, is to put our trust in him.

(5.) Having spoken thus much of these particulars, waiving all the arbitrary determinations of the schools, and exactness of words, as to philosophical rules and terms, I shall give you such a general description of faith, or believing, as may answer in some measure the proper and metaphorical expressions of it in the Scriptures; where it is termed, *looking or seeing, hearing, tasting, resting, rolling ourselves, flying for refuge, trusting*, and the like.

[1.] There must be, what I spake of in the first place, an assent to the whole truth of the promises of God, upon this ground and bottom, — that he is able and faithful to accomplish them. This certainly is in, if it be not all, our *receiving the testimony* or witness of God, [John iii. 33](#). Sarah, of whom we spake before, received the testimony of God. How did she do it? She “judged him faithful who had promised,” [Heb. xi. 11](#). This God proposes to us in the first place. Eternal life is promised by God, who cannot lie, [Tit. i. 2](#); that is, who is so faithful, as that it is utterly impossible he should deceive any. So [Heb. vi. 17, 18](#), “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” The design of God is, that we may receive encouragement in our flying for refuge to the hope set before us, — that is, in believing. What doth he propose to this end? Why, his own faithfulness and immutability, on the account of the engagement of his word and oath. Abraham’s faith spoken of, [Rom. iv.](#), compriseth this, — yea, is commended from it, [verse 21](#).

The Scripture, indeed, mentions sundry properties of God, on the credit whereof, if I may so speak, our souls are to assent to the truth of his promises, and to acquiesce therein. Two especially are usually named:—

1<sup>st</sup>. His power: “He is able.” So [Rom. iv. 21, xi. 23](#).

2<sup>dly</sup>. His faithfulness: as in the places before mentioned, and sundry others.

The sum is, that on the account of God’s faithfulness and power, this we are to do, if we will believe; — we are to assent to the truth of his promises, and the certainty of their accomplishment. If this be not done, it is in vain to go forward. Let, then, those who intend any advantage by what shall afterward be spoken, stay here a little, and consider how they have laid this foundation. Many there are who never come to any stability all their days, and yet are never able to fix on any certain cause of their shaking and staggering. The foundation was laid disorderly. This first closing with the faithfulness and power of God in the promises, was never distinctly acted over in and by their souls. And if the foundation be weak, let the building be never so glorious, it will totter, if not fall. Look, then, to this beginning of your confidence, that this fail you not. And when all other holds fail, this will support you from utter sinking, if at any time you are reduced to that condition that you have nothing else.

[2.] Over and above this, faith, in the Scripture, is expressed (and we find it by experience) to be the will’s consent unto, and acceptance of, the Lord Jesus Christ as mediator, — he

that accomplished his work as the only way of going to the Father, as the sole and sufficient cause of our acceptation with him, as our only righteousness before him.

It hath been said, that faith is the receiving of Christ as a priest, and a lord, to be saved by him, and ruled by him. This sounds excellent well. Who is so vile that, endeavouring to believe, is not willing to be ruled by Christ, as well as saved by him? A faith that would not have Christ to be Lord to rule us, is that faith alone which James rejects. He that would be saved by Christ, and not ruled by him, shall not be saved by him at all. We are to receive a whole Christ, not by halves; — in regard of all his offices, not one or another.

This sounds well, makes a fair show, and there is, in some regard, truth in what is spoken; but “*Latet anguis in herba,*” — Let men explain themselves, and it is this: The receiving of Christ as a king, is the yielding obedience to him. But that subjection is not a fruit of the faith whereby we are justified, but an essential part of it; so that there is no difference between faith and works or obedience, in the business of justification, both being alike a condition of it.

When I lately read one saying, “That this was one principle that the Church of England went on, in the Reformation, that faith and works have the same consideration in the business of justification,” I could not but stand amazed, and conclude that either he or I had been asleep ever since we were born; or that there were two Churches of England, — one that I never knew, and another that he never knew; or else that prejudice is powerful, and makes men confident. Is that the doctrine of the Church of England, as they call it? When, where, by whom was it taught, but by Papists and Socinians, until within a very few years, in England? What place hath it in confessions, homilies, liturgies, controversy writers, or any else of repute for learning and religion in England? But this is no place for contest.

Others at length mince the matter, and say, that faith and works have the same respects to our justification that shall be public and solemn at the last day, at the day of judgment. And is this all that they have intended? How they will justify themselves at the day of judgment for troubling the peace of the saints of God, and shaking the great fundamental articles of the Reformation, I know not; but it is no news, for men loving novelties to dispute themselves they know not whither, and to recoil or retire unhandsomely.

It is true, then, we acknowledge, that faith receives Christ as a lord, as a king; and it is no true faith that will not, doth not do so, and put the soul upon all that obedience which he, as the captain of our salvation, requires at our hands. But faith, as it justifies (in its concurrence, whatever it be, thereunto), closeth with Christ for righteousness and acceptation with God only. And, give me leave to say, it is in that act no less exclusive of good works than of sin. It closeth with Christ in and for that, on the account whereof he is our righteousness, and for and by which we are justified.

But you will say, “This makes you Solifidians;<sup>362</sup> and are you not justly so accounted?”

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362 A name derived from two Latin words, signifying *faith alone*. — Ed.

I say, So was Paul a Solifidian, whose epistles will confute all the formalists and self-justiciaries in the world. We are Solifidians as to justification:— Christ, grace, and faith are all. We are not Solifidians as to salvation nor gospel conversation, nor the declaration of the efficacy of our believing. Such Solifidians as exclude every thing from an influence in our justification but our acceptation by the grace of God, on faith's receiving of Christ for righteousness and salvation, were all the apostles of Jesus Christ. Such Solifidians as exclude or deny the necessity of works and gospel obedience to him that is justified, — or that say, a true and justifying faith may consist without holiness, works, and obedience, — are condemned by all the apostles, and James in particular.

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This, then, I say, is required to faith, or believing, — that we thus receive Christ. [John i. 11](#), “His own received him not.” The not receiving of Christ for such purposes as he is sent unto us by the Father, is properly unbelief; and therefore, as it follows, the so receiving him is properly faith, or believing, [verse 12](#). Thus, in preaching the gospel, we are said to make a tender or proffer of Christ, as the Scripture doth, [Rev. xxii. 17](#). Now, that which answers a tender or proffer, is the acceptance of it. So that the soul's willing acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ for our righteousness before God, being tendered to us in the promises of the gospel for that end and purpose, from the love of the Father, is the main of that believing which is so acceptable unto God.

[3.] Add hereunto that which I cannot say is absolutely of the nature of faith, but in some degree or other (secret or more known to the soul) a necessary concomitant of it; and that is, the soul's resting and quieting itself, and satisfying its affections, in its interest in and enjoyment of a sweet, desirable Saviour. This is called, “cleaving unto the Lord,” [Joshua, Josh. xxiii. 8](#), — the fixing and fastening our affections on God, as ours in covenant. This is the soul's resting in God, its affiance and trusting in him.

And in these three things, which are intelligible to the meanest soul, and written evidently in the words of the Scripture, and in the experience of those who have to do with God in Christ, do I place the believing which is so acceptable to God.

3. There is, next, the qualification of this believing, as laid down in the proposition; and that is, steadfastness, — steadfastness in believing. This is included in the negative. It is said of Abraham that “he staggered not;” that is, he was steadfast. To clear this up a little, take these few observations:—

(1.) Faith, or believing, consists in such an habitual frame of heart, and such actings of the soul, as are capable of degrees of straitening or enlargement, of strength and weakness. Hence there is mention in the Scripture of great faith, “O woman, great is thy faith;” and of little faith, “O ye of little faith;” — of strong faith, Abraham “was strong in faith;” and of weak faith, or being weak in faith, “him that is weak in the faith receive;” — of faith with doubting, “O ye of little faith, why did ye doubt?” and of faith excluding doubting, “Being strong in faith, he staggered” or “doubted not.”

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(2.) That faith in every respect is equal as unto sincerity, and differs only in degrees; yea, it is equal in respect of the main effects and advance of it, — in justification, perseverance, and salvation. A little faith is no less faith than a great faith; yea, a little faith will carry a man as safely to heaven, though not so comfortably, nor so fruitfully, as a great faith. Now, —

(3.) Steadfastness respects those different degrees of faith. It is not of the nature of faith, but bespeaks such a degree of it as is acceptable to God that we should have, and every way advantageous to ourselves. It is mentioned by Peter, [2 Pet. iii. 17](#), “Beware lest ye fall from your own steadfastness,” or decline from that stability in believing which you have attained; and by Paul, [Col. ii. 5](#). So that, —

(4.) There may be a true faith, that yet may have many troublesome, perplexing doubtings accompanying it, many sinful staggerings and waverings attending it; and yet not be overthrown, but continue true faith still. Men may be true believers, and yet not strong believers. A child that eats milk hath as truly the nature of a man, as he that, being grown up, lives on strong meat. Now, steadfastness denotes stability in believing, in respect of the three things before mentioned, and by it faith is denominated strong and effectual. And it argues, —

[1.] A well-grounded, firm, unshaken assent to the truth of the promises; and so it is opposed to wavering, [James i. 5, 6](#).

[2.] A resolved, clear consent to receive and close with Christ, as tendered in the promise, for life; and so it is opposed to doubting, — that is, troublesome, disquieting, perplexing doubts.

[3.] The settled acquiescence of the soul in the choice made and the close consented unto; and so it is opposed to abiding trouble, [John xiv. 1](#).

This steadfastness in believing doth not exclude all temptations from without. When we say a tree is firmly rooted, we do not say that the wind never blows upon it. The house that is built on the rock is not free from assaults and storms. The Captain of our salvation, the beginner and ender of our faith, was tempted; and we shall be so, if we follow him. Nor doth it exclude all doubting from within. So long as we have flesh, though faith be steadfast, we shall have unbelief; and that bitter root will bring forth some fruit, more or less, according as Satan gets advantage to water it. But it excludes a falling under temptation, and consequently that trouble and disquietness which ensues thereon: as likewise abiding perplexing doubts, which make us stagger to and fro between hope and fear, questioning whether we close with Christ or not, — have any interest in the promise or not; and is attended with disconsolation and dejectedness of spirit, with real uncertainty of the event.

This, then, is that which I intend by *steadfastness in believing*, — the establishment of our hearts in the receiving of Christ, as tendered by the love of the Father, to the peace and settlement of our souls and consciences. And that our hearts should be thus fixed, settled,

and established, — that we should live in the sense and power of it, — is, I say, exceeding acceptable unto God.

There is a twofold evil and miscarriage among us, in the great foundation business of closing with Christ in the promise. Some spend all their days in much darkness and desolateness, — disputing it to and fro in their own thoughts, whether their portion and interest lie therein or not. They are off and on, living and dying, hoping and fearing, and commonly fear most when they have best hold, — for that is the nature of doubting. When they are quite cast down, then they set themselves a-work to get up; and when they are up to any comfortable persuasion, instantly they fear that all is not well and right, — it is not so with them as it should be: and thus they stagger to and fro all their lives, to the grief of the Spirit of God, and the discomfort of their own souls.

Others, beginning a serious closing with Christ, upon abiding grounds, and finding it a work of difficulty and tediousness to flesh and blood, relapse into generals, inquire no more, but take it for granted that as much is done as they can accomplish; and so grow formal and secure.

To obviate both these evils, I shall confirm the proposition laid down; but before I proceed to that, I shall draw some corollaries that arise from what hath been spoken in the explication of the proposition already insisted on:—

*Corollary 1. Though a little weak faith, where steadfastness is wanting, will carry a man to Christ in heaven, yet it will never carry him comfortably nor pleasantly thither.*

He who hath but a weak faith shall be put to many desperate plunges; every blast of temptation shall cast him down from his consolation, if not turn him aside from his obedience. At best, he is like a man bound in a chain on the top of a high tower; though he cannot fall, yet he cannot but fear. However, it will have a good issue.

*Corol. 2. The least true faith will do its work safely, though not so sweetly.*

True faith in the least degree, gives the soul a share in the first resurrection. It is of the vital principle which we receive when we are quickened. Now, be it never so weak a life we have, yet it is a life that shall never fail. It is of the seed of God, which abideth, — incorruptible seed, that dieth not. A believer is spirit, — is quickened from the dead; be he never so young, never so sick, never so weak, he is still alive, and the second death shall have no power over him. A little faith gives a whole Christ. He that hath the least faith hath as true an interest, though not so clear an interest, in the righteousness of Christ as the most steadfast believer. Others may be more holy than he, but not one in the world is more righteous than he; for he is righteous with the righteousness of Christ. He cannot but be low in sanctification, for a little faith will bring forth but little or low obedience; if the root be weak, the fruit will not be great. But he is beneath none in justification. The most imperfect faith will give present justification, because it interests the soul in a present Christ. The lowest degree of true faith gives the highest completeness of righteousness, [Col. ii. 10](#). You, who have but a weak faith,

have yet a strong Christ. So that, though all the world should set itself against your little faith, it should not prevail. Sin cannot do it; Satan cannot do it; — hell cannot do it, Though you take but weak and faint hold on Christ, he takes sure, strong, and unconquerable hold on you. Have you not often wondered, that this spark of heavenly fire should be kept alive in the midst of the sea? It is everlasting; a spark that cannot be quenched, — a drop of that fountain that can never be wholly dried up. Jesus Christ takes special care of them that are weak in faith, [Isa. xl. 11](#). On what account soever they are sick, and weak, and unable, this good Shepherd takes care of them. He shall rule, and they shall abide, [Mic. v. 4](#).

*Corol.* 3. There may be faith, a little faith, where there wants steadfastness, and [where there] is much doubting.

Steadfastness is an eminent qualification, that all attain not to; so that there may be faith where there is doubting, though I do not say there must be. Doubtings in themselves are opposite to believing. They are, if I may so say, unbelieving. A man can hardly believe all his days, and never doubt; but a man may doubt all his days, and never believe. If I see a field overgrown with thistles and weeds, I can say, There may be corn there; but yet the thistles and weeds are not corn. I speak this, because some have no better bottom for their quiet, than that they have been disquieted, — that they have doubted. Doubting may be where faith is; but we cannot conclude that where there is doubting, there is faith; for it may rise against presumption and security as well as against believing. Yet observe, there is a twofold doubting:—

(1.) Of the end. Men question what will become of them in the close; they fluctuate about what will be their latter end. Did not Balaam do so when he cried, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his”? That wretched man was tossed up and down between hopes and fears. This is common to the vilest person in the world. It is but the shaking of their security, if they be alone.

(2.) About the means. The soul doubts whether it loves Christ, and whether Christ loves it or not. This is far more genuine than the former. It discovers, at least, that such a soul is convinced of the excellency and usefulness of Christ, and that it hath a valuation for him; yea, perhaps this may be jealousy from fervency of love sometimes, and not always from weakness of faith. But, however, with these doubtings, faith, at least a little faith, may consist. So was it with the poor man who cried out, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” There is believing and unbelieving, faith and doubting, both at work at the same time in the same person, — Jacob and Esau struggling in the same womb.

*Use.* Let not men from their doubting conclude to their believing. He that satisfies himself that his field hath corn because it hath thistles, may come short of a harvest. If thy fears be more about the end than the means, — more about future happiness than present communion with God, — thou canst scarce have a clearer argument of a false, corrupt frame of heart. Some flatter themselves with this, that they have doubted and trembled; but now

they thank God they are quiet and at rest. How they came to be so, they cannot tell; only, whereas they were disquieted and troubled, now all is well with them. How many of this sort have I known, who, whilst convictions have been warm upon them, have had many perplexing thoughts about their state and condition; after a while, their convictions have worn off, and their doubtings thence arising departed, and they have sunk down into a cold, lifeless frame! This is a miserable bottom of quiet. If there were no way of casting out doubts and fears but by believing, this were somewhat; but presumption and security will do it also, at least for a season.

But these things fall in only by the way, in reference to what was spoken before.

II. I proceed now to confirm the proposition laid down, according to the explanation given of it before:—

1. And this I shall do first from Scripture testimonies:—

(1.) Take the text itself: “He was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” All that God requires of any of the sons of men is, his glory; — that he will not give unto another, [Isa. xlii. 8](#). Let God have his glory, and we may take freely whatever we will; — take Christ, take grace, take heaven, — take all. The great glory which he will give to us, consists in giving him his glory, and beholding of it. Now, if this be the great thing, the only thing, that God requires at our hands, — if this be the all which he hath reserved to himself, that he be glorified as God, as our God, — he that gives him that, gives him what is acceptable to him. Thus Abraham pleased God by being strong or steadfast in believing. He was strong in faith, and gave glory to God.

The glory of God is spoken of in various senses in the Scripture:—

[1.] The Hebrew word כְּבוֹד, signifies “pondus,” or “weight;” whereunto the apostle alludes when he speaks of “an eternal weight of glory,” [2 Cor. iv. 17](#). This is the glory of the thing itself. It likewise signifies splendour, or brightness, where the apostle, in like manner, speaks of “the brightness of glory,” [Heb. i. 3](#); which is the greatness and excellency of beauty in all perfections. In this sense, the infinite excellency of God, in his inconceivable perfections, raised up in such brightness as utterly exceeds all our apprehensions, is called his “glory.” And so he is “The God of glory,” [Acts vii. 2](#), or, the most glorious God; and our Saviour is called “The Lord of glory,” [1 Cor. ii. 8](#), in the same sense. In this respect we can give no glory to God; we can add nothing to his excellencies, nor the infinite, inconceivable brightness of them, by any thing we do.

[2.] Glory relates not only to the thing itself that is glorious, but to the estimation and opinion we have of it, — that is, δόξα; when that which is in itself glorious is esteemed so. The philosopher saith, “Gloria est frequens de aliquo fama cum laude;” or, “Consentiens laus bonorum, incorrupta vox bene judicantium de excellenti virtute.” And, in this respect, that which is infinitely glorious in itself, may be more or less glorious in its manifestation





and the estimation of it. So glory is not any of God's excellencies or perfections; but it is the esteem and manifestation of them amongst and unto others.

This God declares to be his glory, [Exod. xxxiii. 19](#). Moses desires to see the "glory" of God. This God calls his "face;" that is, the glory of God in itself. "This," saith God, "thou canst not see: 'Thou canst not see my face,' — or, the brightness of my essential glory, the splendour of my excellencies and perfections." Well, what then? shall he have no acquaintance with it? After this God places him in a rock, and tells him, there he will show him his glory. And this he doth under the name of his "back parts;" that is, he will declare to him wherein and how his glory is manifested. Now, this Rock that followed them was Christ, [1 Cor. x. 4](#). The Lord places Moses in that rock to show him his glory; intimating that there is no glimpse of it to be obtained but only by them who are placed in Christ Jesus. Now, what is this glory of God which he thus showed to Moses? That he declares, [Exod. xxxiv. 6](#); — causing his majesty, or some visible signs of his presence, "to pass before him," he proclaims the name of God, with many gracious properties of his nature and blessedness. As if he should say, "Moses, wouldst thou see my glory? This is it, that I may be known to be 'the Lord, the Load God, merciful and gracious;' — let me be known to be this, and thus, and this is the glory I aim at from the sons of men."

See, now, how steadfastness in believing gives glory to God. It advanceth and magnifieth all these properties of God, and gives all his attributes their due exaltation. An excellent estimation of them is included in it. Might I here descend to particulars, I could manifest that there is not any property of God, whereby he hath made himself known to us, but steadfastness in believing gives it the glory which in some measure is due unto it; and that all doubting arises from our calling some divine attribute into question. It were easy to show how this gives God the glory of his faithfulness, truth, power, righteousness, grace, mercy, goodness, love, patience, and whatever else God hath revealed himself to be.

This, then, is the force of this first testimony: If the glory of God be all that he requires at our hands, and this steadfastness in believing gives him this glory, and this alone doth so, it must needs be acceptable unto him.

(2.) A testimony of the same importance<sup>363</sup> is [Heb. vi. 17, 18](#). "The heirs of the promise," those to whom it is made (the great promise of Christ), are believers; these are said here, "to fly for refuge," καταφυγόντες, "the fliers with speed." The expression is evidently metaphorical. The allusion, say some, is taken from those who ran in a race for a prize. This, they say, the word κρατῆσαι that follows, (which signifies "to take fast hold on") doth import. Men that run in a race, when they attain the end, seize on, and lay fast hold of the prize.

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363 *Importance* sometimes occurs in the writings of Owen, under a signification attached to it by some old English writers, and according to which it is equivalent to *import, meaning, signification*. — Ed.

Our translators, by rendering the word “flying for refuge,” manifest that they had respect to the manslayers flying to the city of refuge under the Old Testament: and this way go sundry interpreters. And I am inclined to this acceptation of the metaphor upon a double account:—

[1.] Because I think the apostle would more willingly allude to a Hebrew custom, writing to the Hebrews touching an institution of God, and that directly typical of the matter he had in hand, than to a custom of the Greeks and Romans in their races, which hath not so much light in it, as to the business in hand, as the other.

[2.] Because the design of the place doth evidently hold out a flying from something, as well as a flying to something; in which regard it is said, that there is “consolation” provided for them; namely, in their deliverance from the evil which they feared and fled from. Now, in a race there is indeed a prize proposed, but there is no evil avoided. It was otherwise with him that fled for refuge; for as he had a city of safety before him, so he had the avenger of blood behind him; and he fled with speed and diligence to the one, that he might avoid the other, Now, these cities of refuge were provided for the manslayer, who, having slain a man at unawares, and being thereby surprised with an apprehension of danger — it being lawful for the avenger of blood to slay him — fled with all his strength to one of those cities, where he was to enjoy immunity and safety.

Thus a poor sinner, finding himself in a condition of guilt, surprised with a sense of it, seeing death and destruction ready to seize upon him, flies with all his strength to the bosom of the Lord Jesus, — the only city of refuge from the avenging justice of God and curse of the law. Now, this *flying* to the bosom of Christ, — the hope set before us for relief and safety, — is believing. It is here called *flying* by the Holy Ghost, to express the nature of it to the spiritual sense of believers. What, now; doth he declare himself to be affected with their “flying for refuge,” — that is, their believing? Why, he hath taken all means possible to show himself abundantly willing to receive them. He hath engaged his word and promise, that they may not in the least doubt or stagger, but know that he is ready to receive them, and give them “strong consolation.” And what is this consolation? Whence may it appear to arise? Whence did consolation arise to him who, having slain a man at unawares, should fly to a city of refuge? Must it not be from hence, — the gates of the city would certainly be open to him, that he should find protection there, and be safe-guarded from the revenger? Whence, then, must be our strong consolation, if we thus fly for refuge by believing? Must it not be from hence, that God is freely ready to receive us, — that he will in no wise shut us out, but that we shall be welcome to him; and with the more speed we come, the more welcome we shall be? This he convinces us of, by the engagement of his word and oath to that purpose. And what farther testimony would we have that our believing is acceptable to him?



It is said, [Heb. x. 38](#), “If any man draw back, my soul [the Lord’s] shall have no pleasure in him.” What is it to draw back? It is to decline from his steadfastness of believing. So the apostle interprets it, [verse 39](#), “We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe.” Drawing back is opposed to believing. In these drawers-back that come not up to steadfastness in believing, nor labour so to do, the Lord’s “soul hath no pleasure; — that is, he exceedingly abhors and abominates them; which is the force of that expression. His delight is in those who are steadfast in adhering to the promises; in them his soul takes pleasure.

When the Jews treated with our Saviour about salvation, they ask him, “What shall we do, that we might work the work of God?” [John vi. 28](#), — that work of God by which, they might come to be accepted with him; which is the cry of all convinced persons. Our Saviour’s answer is, [verse 29](#), “This is the work of God, that ye believe.” “Will ye know the great work, wherein God is so delighted?” “It is this,” saith he, “that ye ‘believe,’ and be steadfast therein.”

Hence, also, are many exhortations that are given us by the Holy Ghost to come up hereunto; as [Heb. xii. 12](#); [Isa. xxxv](#). But I shall not farther insist on testimonies, which exceedingly abound to this purpose. The farther demonstrations of the point ensue:—

2. The next shall consist in the farther improvement of the first testimony concerning the glory of God, arising from our being steadfast in believing.

This is granted by all, that God’s ultimate end in all things he doth himself, and in all that he requires us to do, is his own glory. It cannot be otherwise, if he be the first, only independent being, and prime cause of all things, and their chiefest good. God having, then, placed his glory in that which cannot be attained and brought about without believing, in answer to his present constitution of things, it must needs be acceptable to him; as is a suitable means to a designed end to any one’s acting in wisdom and righteousness.

Bear in mind, I pray, what it is that I mean by believing. Though the word be general and large, yet in my intendment it is restrained to the particulars insisted on, — namely, the constant establishment of our souls in receiving the Lord Jesus, tendered unto us in the truth and from the love of the Father, for the pardon of sins, and acceptance of our persons before God. This, I say, according to God’s constitution of things in the covenant of grace, is necessary to bring about that end of glory to himself which he aims at. Hence he sums up his whole design to be “the praise of his glorious grace,” [Eph. i. 6](#).

In [Prov. xxv. 2](#), if I mistake not, this is clearly asserted, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,” or “to cover a matter.” I told you before what is the glory of God. It is not the splendour and majesty of his infinite and excellent perfections, which arise not from any thing he doth, but from what he is; but it is the exaltation, manifestation, and essence of those excellencies. When God is received, believed, known to be such as he declares himself, — therein is he glorified; that is his glory. This glory, saith the Holy Ghost, arises from the covering a matter.

What matter is this? It is not the glory of God to cover every matter, all things whatever; yea, it is his glory to “bring to light the hidden things of darkness.” The manifestation of his own works “declares his glory,” [Ps. xix. 1](#). So doth the manifestation of the good works of his people, [Matt. v. 16](#). It is, then, things of some peculiar kind that are here intended. The following opposition discovers this, “The honour of kings is to search out a matter.” What matter is it that it is the glory of the king to find out? Is it not faults and offences against the law? Is it not the glory of magistrates to find out transgressions, that the transgressors may be punished? This is the glory of the magistrate, to inquire, find out, and punish offences, transgressions of the law. It is, then, in answer hereunto, a sinful thing, sin itself, that is the matter or thing which it is the glory of God to cover. But what is it to cover a sinful matter? It is that which is opposed to the magistrate’s finding it out; — what that is, we have a full description in [Job xxix. 16, 17](#), “The cause I knew not, I searched out, and I brake the jaws of the wicked.” It is to make judicial inquisition after, to find out hidden transgressions, that the offenders may be brought to condign punishment; so that God’s concealing a matter is his not searching, with an intention of punishment, into sins and sinners, to make them naked to the stroke of the law. It is his hiding of sin from the condemning power of the law.

The word here used is the same with that of David, [Ps. xxxii. 1](#), “Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.” And in sundry other places is it used to the same purpose; which is expressed, [Mic. vii. 19](#), by “casting all our sins into the bottom of the sea.” That which is so disposed of is utterly covered from the sight of men. So doth God express the covering of the sins of his people, as to their not appearance to their condemnation, — they shall be “cast into the bottom of the sea.” Hence are our sins, in the New Testament, said ἀφιέναι which we translate “forgiven,” and “to forgive;” and ἄφεσις, “forgiveness,” in twenty places. The word signifies properly to “remove” or “dismiss” one; ἀμαρτήματα ἀφιέναι, is “peccata missa facere,” — “to send or remove away our sins out of sight;” the same in substance with that which is here called “to cover.” And so is the word used in another business, [Matt. xxiii. 23](#), Ἀφήκατε τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου, — “You have omitted the weightier things of the law;” that is, you have laid them aside, as it were, out of sight, taking no care of them. Now, the bottom of all these expressions of *removing*, *hiding*, *covering*, and *concealing* sin, which gives life and significancy to them, making them import forgiveness of sin, is the allusion that is in them to the mercy-seat under the law. The making and use of it we have, [Exod. xxv. 17, 18](#). It was a plate of pure gold, lying on the ark, called כַּפֹּרֶת, or “a covering.” In the ark was the law, written on tables of stone. Over the mercy-seat, between the cherubims, was the oracle representing the presence of God. By which the Holy Ghost does signify, that the mercy-seat was to cover the law, and the condemning power of it, as it were, from the eye

of God's justice, that we be not consumed. Hence is God said to cover sin, because by the mercy-seat he hides that which is the strength and power of sin, as to its guilt and tendency unto punishment. The apostle calls this "mercy-seat," τὸ ἱλαστήριον, [Heb. ix. 5](#). That word is used but once more in the New Testament, and then Christ is called so, [Rom. iii. 25](#), or ὃν προέθετο ὁ ἱλαστήριον, — "whom God hath proposed as a mercy-seat." Christ alone is that mercy-seat by whom sin, and the law from whence sin hath its rigour, is hidden. And from that typical institution is that expression in the Old Testament, "Hide me under thy wings," — the wings of the cherubims, where the mercy-seat was; that is, in the bosom of Christ.

Now, saith the Holy Ghost, thus to hide, to cover, to pardon sin by Christ, is the glory of God, wherein he will be exalted and admired, and for which he will be praised. Give him this, and you give him his great aim and design. Let him be believed in, trusted on, as God in Christ pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, — so reconciling the world to himself, and manifesting his glorious properties therein, — and he hath his end.

Should I now proceed to show what God hath done, what he doth, and will do, to set up his glory, it would make it evident, indeed, that he aimed at it. His eternal electing love lies at the bottom of this design. This is the tendency of it, — that God may be glorified in the forgiveness of sin. The sending of his Son, — a mystery of wisdom, goodness, and righteousness past finding out, — with all that, by his authority and commission, he did; suffered, and doth, was, that his name might be glorified in this thing. Hath the new covenant of grace any other end? Did not God on purpose propose, make, and establish that covenant in the blood of his Son; that whereas he had, by his works of creation and providence, by the old covenant and law, given glory to himself in other respects, he might by this glorify himself in the hiding of iniquity? The dispensation of the Spirit for the conversion of sinners, with all the mighty works ensuing thereupon, is to the same and no other purpose. Wherefore doth God exercise patience, forbearance, long-suffering towards us, — such as he will be admired for to eternity, — such as our souls stand amazed to think of? It is only that he may bring about this glory of his, — the covering of iniquity and pardoning of sin.

Now, what is it that on our part is required, that this great design of God for his glory may be accomplished in and towards us? Is it not our believing, and steadfastness therein? I need not stay to manifest it; nor yet give farther light or strength to our inference from what hath been spoken, — namely, that if these things are so, then our believing and steadfastness therein is exceeding acceptable to God.

3. For the last demonstration of the point, I shall add the consideration of one particular that God useth in the pursuit of his glory, before mentioned; and that is, his institution and command of preaching the gospel to all nations, and the great care he hath taken to provide instruments for the propagation of it, and promulgation therein of the word of his grace, [Matt. xxviii. 19](#), "Go preach the gospel to 'all nations;' — 'to every creature,'" [Mark xvi. 15](#).

What is this gospel, which he will have preached and declared? Is it any thing but a declaration of his mind and will concerning his gracious acceptation of believing, and steadfastness therein? This God declares of his purpose, his eternal, unchangeable will, — that there is, by his appointment, an infallible, an inviolable connection between believing on Jesus Christ, the receiving of him, and the everlasting fruition of himself. This he declares to all; but his purpose to bestow faith effectually relates only to some: they “believe who are ordained to eternal life.” But this purpose of his will — that believing in Christ shall have the end mentioned, righteousness and salvation in the enjoyment of himself — concerns all alike. Now, to what end hath the Lord taken care that this gospel shall be so preached and declared, and that to the consummation of the world, but that indeed our believing is acceptable to him?

But I shall desist from the pursuit of this demonstration, wherein so many things offer themselves to consideration, as that the naming of them must needs detain me longer from my principal aim than I am willing.

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## Sermon II.

The use of the point insisted on is, to encourage to the duty so commended and exalted; or, it contains motives unto steadfastness in believing the promises. Amongst the many that are usually insisted on to this purpose, I shall choose out some few that seem to be most effectual thereunto:—

Use 1. We shall begin with the consideration of God himself, even the Father; and that declaration of his love, kindness, tenderness, readiness, and willingness to receive poor believers, which he hath made of himself in Christ Jesus. According as our apprehensions are of him, and his heart towards us, so will the settlement of our souls in cleaving to him by believing be. We are, amongst men, free and easy with them whom we know to be of a kind, loving, compassionate disposition; but full of doubts, fears, and jealousies, when we have to deal with those who are morose, peevish, and froward. Entertaining hard thoughts of God, ends perpetually in contrivances to fly and keep at a distance from him, and to employ ourselves about any thing in the world rather than to be treating and conversing with him. What delight can any one take in him whom he conceives to be always furious, wrathful, ready to destroy? or, what comfortable expectation can any one have from such a one? Consider, then, in some particulars, what God declares of himself, and try, in the exercising of your thoughts thereon, whether it be not effectual to engage your hearts to steadfastness in believing the promises, and closing with the Son of his love tendered in them:—

(1.) He gives us his name for our support, [Isa. l. 10](#). He speaks to poor, dejected, bewildered, fainting sinners: “Give not over; let not go your hold; though you be in darkness to all other means of support and consolation, yet ‘trust in the name of the Lord.’ And,” saith he, “in case you do so, this name shall be a strong tower unto you,” [Prov. xviii. 10](#).

And what this name of God, which is such a stay and safe defence, is, is declared at large, [Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7](#). This name of his, is that glory which he promised to show to Moses, [chap. xxxiii](#). To be known by this name is that great glory of God which he aims to be exalted in; yea, and God is so fully known by his name, and the whole of the obedience he requireth of us is so ordered and disposed in the revelation thereof, that when our Saviour had made him and his whole will known from his bosom, he sums up his whole work in this, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world,” [John xvii. 6](#). The manifestation of the name of God to the elect was the great work of Christ on the earth, as he was the prophet and teacher of his church. He declared the name of God, — his gracious, loving, tender nature, — his blessed properties, that were fit to encourage poor creatures to come to him, and to trust in him. This, then, is his name with whom we have to do in this matter; — the name he hath given himself for us to know him and call him by, — that we may deal with him as such, as his name bespeaks him to be. He is gracious, loving, ready to pity, help, receive us; delighting in our good, rejoicing in our approach to him. This

he hath proclaimed of himself, — this his only Son hath revealed him to be. He is not called Apollyon, a destroyer; but, the Saviour of men. Who would not venture on him, in and by the way which himself hath appointed and approved?

(2.) As is his name, so is his nature. Saith he of himself, [Isa. xxvii. 4](#), “Fury is not in me.” He speaks with reference to his church, to believers, of whom we are speaking. There is no such thing as that anger and wrath in God in reference to thee whereof thou art afraid. Hast thou had hard thoughts of him? Hast thou nothing but entertained affrighting reports concerning him, as though he were a devouring fire and endless burnings? “Be not,” saith he, “mistaken; ‘fury is not in me.’” He hath not one wrathful, revengeful thought towards thee. No; take hold of his strength, and you shall have peace, [verse 5](#). Nay, he is “love,” [1 John iv. 8, 16](#); — of an infinitely loving and tender nature, — all love. There is nothing in him that is inconsistent with love itself. We see how a little love, that is but a weak affection in the nature of a man, will carry a tender father towards a child. How did it melt, soften, reconcile the father of the prodigal in the parable! “O my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee!” saith David, a poor father in distress for the death of a rebellious child. How will a child bear himself above dread and terror, under many miscarriages, upon the account of the love of a tender father! What, then, shall we say or think of Him who is love in the abstract, — whose nature is love? May we not conclude that certainly he “is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy,” as the psalmist speaks? [Ps. cxiii. 8](#). According as we are, by degrees, led into an acquaintance with God in his properties (for we are led into it by degrees and steps, not being able at once to bear all the glory which he is pleased here to shine upon us with), so are we amazed with his several excellencies. Experience of any property of God as engaged in Christ, and exercising itself for our good, is greatly conquering to the soul; but none so much as this, — his being love, and ready to forgive on that account. Such is the frame of the church, [Mic. vii. 18](#), “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by transgression?” Can it enter into the heart of man? O who is like to him! Is it possible he should be thus to sinners! This discovery overwhelms the soul, and strengthens it in faith and trust in him.

There is a general compassion in God, by which he proceeds in the dispensation of his providence, that is too hard for the apprehensions of men when they come to be concerned in it. Poor Jonah was angry that he was so merciful, [Jonah iv. 2](#), “I knew that thou wast not one for me to deal with: thou art so gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of such kindness, and repentest thee of the evil, that it is not for me, with any credit or reputation, to be engaged and employed in thy work and service.” And if God be thus full of compassion to the world, which to-day is, and to-morrow shall be cast into the fire, is he not much more loving and tender unto you, “O ye of little faith?” Suit, then, the thoughts of your hearts, in your dealing with God, to this revelation which he hath made of his own nature. He is good, — love and kindness itself; fury is not in him, — he is ready to forgive, accept, embrace. And, —



(3.) According to his name and nature, so are his dealings with us, and his actings towards us. From him who is so called, so disposed, we may expect that what he doth in a suitableness thereunto he will do with great readiness and cheerfulness, that so he may answer his name, and express his nature. “How, then, will he show and manifest these things?” See [Isa. iv. 7](#), He will have mercy: he is love, — he will have mercy; yea, “he will abundantly pardon.” “But how will he do it?” [Verse 8](#), Alas you cannot think how: his thoughts are not as your thoughts. You have poor, low, mean thoughts of God’s way of pardoning; you can by no means reach to it, or comprehend it: raise your apprehensions to the utmost, yet you come not near it. [Verse 9](#), “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” “But doth not God, then, pardon as we do? — come hardly to it, through many persuasions, and at length do it ἐκὼν ἀέκοντι γε θυμῷ, — ‘with an unwilling kind of willingness,’ that ingenuous spirits had almost as willingly have our wrath as our pardon?” No such thing. What he doth, he doth with his whole heart, and his whole soul, [Jer. xxxii. 41](#); and rejoices in the doing of it, [Zeph. iii. 17](#). He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon; he will do it with his whole soul; he will rejoice in his so doing, and rest in his love. I know not what we can desire more, to assure us of free acceptance with him. You will say, perhaps, that this is but sometimes; and it is well if we can come nigh him in that season. Nay, but he is acting, herein suitably to his name and nature; his whole soul and his whole heart is in it: and therefore he will take a course for the accomplishing of it. [Isa. xxx. 18](#), He will wait to be gracious. His heart is set upon it, and he will take advantage to accomplish his desire and design. And if our stubbornness and folly be such as to be ready to wear out his patience, — to make him weary, as he complains, [Isa. xliii. 24](#), and to cause him to serve beyond the limits of his patience, — he will be exalted, take to himself his great power for the removal of our stubbornness, that he may be merciful unto us. One way or other he will accomplish the desire of his heart, the design of his grace.

For the farther clearing of this truth, take along with you these few considerations of God’s dealing with us, and his condescension therein, that he may act suitably to his own nature and name:—

[1.] His comparing himself to creatures of the most tender and boundless affection, [Isa. xlix. 15, 16](#). This is as high as we can go. The affection of a mother to a sucking child, the child of her womb, is the utmost instance that we can give of love, tenderness, and affection. “This,” says God, “you cannot think, you ought not to imagine, that a tender, loving mother, should not have compassion on ‘a sucking child, the son of her womb.’ Things will act according to their natures, — even tigers love their own offspring; and shall ‘a woman forget her sucking child?’ But yet,” saith God, “raise up your apprehensions to this, take it for granted that she may do so, — which yet, without offering violence to nature, cannot be



imagined, — ‘yet I will not forget you;’ — this will not reach my love, nay affection.” Were we as secure of the love of God to us, as we are of the love of a good, gracious mother to her sucking child, whom we see embracing of it, and rejoicing over it all the day long, we would think our estate very comfortable and secure. But, alas! what is this to the love of God to the meanest saint on the earth! What is a drop to the ocean! what is a little dying, decaying affection, to an infiniteness, an eternity of love! See the working of this love in God, [Hos. xi. 8, 9](#); [Jer. xxxi. 20](#).

[2.] His condescension to entreat us that it may be so, — that he may exercise pity, pardon, goodness, kindness, mercy towards us. He is so full, that he is, as it were, pained until he can get us to himself, that he may communicate of his love unto us. “We pray you,” says the apostle, “in Christ’s stead, as if God by us did beseech you.” What to do? what is he so earnest about? what would God have of us? Some great thing, some difficult service assuredly. “No,” says he, “but, ‘be reconciled to God,’ ” [2 Cor. v. 20](#). Says God, “O ye sons of men, ‘why will ye die?’ I beseech you, be friends with me; let us agree; — accept of the atonement. I have love for you; take mercy, take pardon; do not destroy your own souls.” “This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing,” [Isa. xxviii. 12](#). Remember how the Scripture abounds with exhortations and entreaties to this purpose.

[3.] In condescension to our weakness, he hath added his oath to this purpose. Will we not yet believe him? will we not yet venture upon him? Are we afraid that if we put ourselves upon him, into his hand, he will kill us, we shall die? He gives us this last possible relief against such misgiving thoughts. “Swear unto me that I shall not die, is the utmost that any one requires, when, with the greatest ground of mistrust, he gives up himself to him that is mightier than he. “Now, ‘as I live, saith the Lord,’ I would not the death of a sinner,” [Ezek. xxxiii. 11](#). Methinks this should put an end to all strife. We have his promise and oath, [Heb. vi. 18](#), and what would we have more? He is of an infinite loving and tender nature; he entreats us to come to him, and swears we shall not suffer by our so doing. Innumerable other instances of the like kind might be given, to evidence the actings of God towards us to be suitable to his name and nature, before insisted on.

Now the end aimed at, as you know, in these considerations, is, by them to encourage our hearts in the belief of the promises. It is God with whom therein we have to do. The things we receive by our believing are excellent, desirable, what alone we want, and which will do us good to eternity. The difficulties of believing arise from our unworthiness, and the terror of him with whom we have to do. To disentangle our souls from under the power of such fears and considerations, this, in the first place, is proposed, — the tender, gracious, loving nature of Him with whom herein we have to do. Fill your hearts, then, with such thoughts of God as these; exercise your minds with such apprehensions of him. The psalmist tells you what will be the issue of it, [Ps. ix. 10](#), “They that know thy name will put

their trust in thee;” — establishment in believing will ensue. If we know the name of God, as by himself revealed, — know the love and kindness wrapped up therein, — we cannot but trust him. Let us be always thinking of God, with a clear persuasion that so it is; that he is gracious, loving, ready to receive us, delighting, rejoicing to embrace us, to do us good, to give us mercy and glory, — whatever he hath promised in Christ; and it will exceedingly tend to the establishment of our hearts.

But now, concerning the things that have been spoken, great caution is to be used. It is not a general notion of the nature of God that I have been insisting on; but the goodness and love of God to his in Christ Jesus. Wherefore, farther, to clear this whole business, and that a sure foundation may be laid of this great thing, I desire to add the following observations:—

1st. I acknowledge that all that can be said, by all or any of the sons of men, concerning the goodness, loveliness, kindness of God in his own blessed nature, is inconceivably, infinitely below what it is in itself. What a little portion is it that we all know of his goodness! Though we have all his works and his whole word to teach us, yet, as we have no affections large enough to entertain it, so no faculty to receive or apprehend it. Admiration which is the soul’s “nonplus,” its doing it knows not what, the winding of it up until it stands still, ready to break — is all that we can arrive unto in the consideration hereof. His excellencies and perfections in this kind are sufficient, superabundant, for the engagement of the love and obedience of all rational creatures; and when they can go no farther, they may, with the psalmist, call in all their fellow-creatures to the work. Nor can any man exercise himself in a more noble contemplation than that of the beauty and loveliness of God. “How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!” They who have nothing but horrid, harsh apprehensions of the nature of God, — that he is insupportably severe and wrathful, — know him not. To have thoughts of him as cruel and sanguinary; to make use of his greatness and infinite excellencies only to frighten, terrify, and destroy the work of his hands, who is good, and doth good, — who made all things good, in beauty and order, and who loves all the things he hath made, — who hath filled all that we see or can think on with the fruits of his goodness, — is unreasonable, unjust, and wicked. Consider God and his works together as he made them, and in the order by him assigned to them; — there is nothing in his nature towards you but kindness, benignity, goodness, power (exerted to continue to you the goodness first parted), grace, and bounty, in daily, continual additions of more.

But, alas! they are sinners of whom we speak. It is true, in God, as he is by nature, there is an abundant excellency and beauty, a ravishing goodness and love, for the endearing of his creatures. As he made them, they could desire no more: the not loving him above all for his loveliness, for the suitableness of his excellencies to bind their hearts to him as their chiefest and only good, was the sin of some of them; but now the whole state of things is changed, upon supposition of the entrance of sin. God, indeed, is not changed; — his excel-

lencies and perfections are the same from eternity to eternity: but the creature is changed; and what was desirable and amiable before to him, ceases to be so to him, though it continue to be so in itself. He who, whilst he stood in the law of his creation, had boldness with God, — was neither afraid nor ashamed, — after he had sinned, trembled at the hearing of his voice; yea, endeavoured to part with him for ever, and to hide himself from him. What property of God was more endearing to his creatures than his holiness? How is he glorious, lovely, desirable above all, to them who abide in his image and likeness! But as for sinners, they cannot serve him, because of his holiness, [Josh. xxiv. 19](#). In the revelation of God to sinners, together with the discovery of the excellencies before mentioned, — of his goodness, kindness, graciousness, — there is also a vision given of his justice, wrath, anger, severity, and indignation, against sin. These unconquerably interpose between the sinner and all emanations and fruits of goodness and love. Whence, instead of being endeared to God, their contrivance is that of [Mic. vi. 6, 7](#); and upon a conviction of the successlessness of any such attempts, they cry out, “Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” [Isa. xxxiii. 14](#). A desire to avoid him to all eternity is all that a sinner’s most choice consideration of God, in his own essential excellencies, can lead him to. For who will set the thorns in battle against him? who will bring the stubble that is fully dry to a consuming fire? And therefore it is that those who propose general grace, from a natural goodness in God, as a ground of consolation to sinners, when they come to answer that objection, “Yea, but God is just, as well as merciful,” do, with many good words, take away with one hand just as much as they give with the other. “Apprehend,” say they, “God’s gracious nature; he is good to all; trust upon it: believe not them that say otherwise.” But he is just also, and will not let any sin go unpunished; and therefore cannot but punish sin according to its demerit. Where is now the consolation spoken of? Wherefore observe, —

*2dly.* That since the entrance of sin, there is no apprehension — I mean for sinners — of a goodness, love, and kindness in God, as flowing from his natural properties, but upon an account of the interposition of his sovereign will and pleasure. It is most false which by some is said, — that special grace flows from that which they call general grace, and special mercy from general mercy. There is a whole nest of mistakes in that conception. God’s sovereign, distinguishing will is the fountain of all special grace and mercy. “I will,” saith he, “cause all my glory to pass before thee;” and, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” [Exod. xxxiii. 19](#); [Rom. ix. 15](#). Here is the fountain of mercy, even the will of God. He is of a merciful and gracious nature; but dispenses mercy and grace by his sovereign will. It is electing love that is at the bottom of all special grace, all special kindness; whence the election obtains, when the rest are hardened, [Rom. xi. 7](#) [margin]. He blesseth us with spiritual blessings, according as he hath chosen us, [Eph. i. 3, 4](#). God having made all things good, and imparted of the fruits of his goodness to them, might, without the least injury to, or restraint of, his own goodness, have given over all them who sinned, and came short of his



glory, to an everlasting separation from him. That he deals otherwise with any of them, is not from any propensity in his nature and goodness towards their relief; but from his sovereign, wise, gracious will, wherein he most freely purposed in himself to do them good by Christ, Eph. i. 9.

This I say, then, all considerations of the goodness and mercifulness of the nature of God, and of general grace on that account, are so balanced in the soul of a sinner by those of his justice and severity, — so weakened by the experience all men have of the not exerting those properties effectually for the good of all that are pretended to have a right thereunto, — that they are no ground, as so considered, of consolation to sinners. And if any one should venture to draw nigh unto God on the account of such general grace, he would meet the sword of justice before he would lay hold upon Him. So that, —

*3dly.* Where there is mention in the Scripture made of the goodness of God, by which he reveals himself to be love, to be gracious and tender, it is not upon the general account of his perfections considered in himself, but on the new and special account of the free engagement of his attributes in Christ with regard to his elect. Such expressions, as far as they have a spiritual tendency, and are not restrained to the law of providence, belong to the covenant of grace, and God manifested in Christ. And this is that which is intended by our divines, who say that it is not naturally from the goodness of God that he doth good to sinners, but from his gracious will; for were it not for that, all communications of the other unto sinners would be everlastingly shut up.

This, then, is that which we are to close withal, — the gracious nature of God, even the Father, as manifested in Christ, on the ground of the atonement made for sin. This is he whom the poor, weak believer hath to do withal. This is he who invites us to the acceptance of Christ in the promises, — he with whom we have principally to do in all this affair. He is love, — ready, willing to receive and embrace those who come to him by Christ. Be convinced of his goodwill and kindness, his patience to us-ward, and we cannot but be established in closing with his faithfulness in his promises.

*4thly.* Observe who it is of whom I am speaking. It is believers, those who are interested in God by Christ. Let others, then (such as are not so), take heed lest they abuse and wrest the doctrine of the grace of God to their own destruction. I know nothing is more common with men of vain and light spirits, formalists, yea, and open presumptuous sinners, than to say and think, “God is merciful; there is yet good hopes on that account. He made not men to damn them; and whatever preachers say, it will, at least it may, be well with us at last.” But, poor creatures! even this God of whom we have been speaking, “is a consuming fire; — a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;” — a God that will not let the least sin go unpunished. And the greater is his love, his goodness, his condescension to those who come in unto him upon his own terms by Christ; the greater will be his wrath and indignation against those who refuse his tender of love in his own way, and yet “add drunkenness to



thirst, and say they shall have peace, though they walk in the imaginations of their own hearts.”

*Use 2.* Let a second motive be taken from the excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom, by believing, we do close with and receive. Now, the excellencies of his person are such, as not only may engage us to come to him to attain them, but they are all suited to encourage us in our coming, — to support us, and make us steadfast in our believing.<sup>364</sup>

*Use 3.* We may likewise to the same purpose consider the promises of God, wherein both his love and the excellency and suitableness of the Lord Jesus Christ are signally and eminently expressed. Many things to very good purpose are usually spoken of the promises; — their nature, stability, preciousness, efficacy, centring all in one covenant, their confirmation in Christ, are usually insisted on; being those in particular which the soul in believing closes withal. I shall at present pitch on these two things:— (1.) The infinite condescension the Lord useth in them for the obviating [of] all the objections and fears of our unbelieving hearts. (2.) The manifestation of his wisdom and love, in suiting them to the most pressing wants, troubles, disquietments, and fears of our souls, [so] that we must needs see his intention in them to do us good.

(1.) The first of these might be evinced by sundry sorts of instances. I shall insist on one only, — and that is, the unexpected relief that is laid up in them for us, exhibiting grace and mercy when any thing in the world might rather be looked for. This, with the use of it, I shall manifest by an induction of some particular promises which are generally known to all:—

*Isa. xliii. 22–26.* Here are persons guilty of sundry sinful follies. The Lord chargeth them home upon their consciences, to their trouble and disquietment; he makes them go with wounds and blows upon that account. They had neglected his worship, and not called on his name. And whereas they could not utterly cast off all performance of duties, yet what they did abide in the performance of was exceeding burdensome to them; they were weary of it, — yea, weary of God therein, and of all spiritual communion and converse with him:— “Thou hast been weary of me.” Their convictions compelled them to do God some service; but it was, as we say, a death to them; — they were weary of it; and most things, either as to the matter or manner that God required, they utterly neglected. What, then, says God of himself in reference to this state of theirs? “Notwithstanding all my patience, thou hast made me weary of thee; like one that hath a hard service, that cannot abide in it. It is a bondage,” says God, “for me to have any thing to do with thee.” Suppose we now a poor soul, fully convinced that thus is the state and condition with him, — so powerful is his unbelief and corruption, that he is weary of God and his ways: it may be he would faintly have it otherwise,

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364 Upon this head, in its several branches, see his book, “*Of Communion with God;*” part ii., chap. iii., digression 1, in the Doctrinal Division of his works, vol. ii.

and therefore binds himself to the performance of duties, if so be that God thereby may be flattered; — but withal, because of his innumerable follies, God also is weary of him, that he can bear the bondage of him no longer; he is “weary of serving.” What can such a one conclude with himself, but that everlasting separation from God will be the close of this dispensation? He is weary of God, and God is weary of him; surely, then, they must part, and that for ever. What remedy is there, or can there be? Poor soul! lie down in darkness.

But see, now, what God says in this case, and what an unexpected condescension there is in the word of promise. Is it, Be gone? Take a bill of divorce? Take thine own course, and I will take mine against thee? No; says God, “This is an estate and condition whereof I am weary, and thou art weary; — I am weary of thy multiplying the guilt of sin; thou art wearied in serving the power of thy sin. I will put an end to this state of things; we will have peace again between us. I will blot out thy sins, and remember thine iniquities no more. I, even I, will do it.” He redoubles the word passionately, emphatically, to call to mind who he is with whom in this condition we have to do: “‘I, even I,’ — who am God, and not man; I, — whose thoughts are not as your thoughts; I, — who am great in mercy, and who will abundantly pardon; — I will do it.”

Yea, but saith the poor convinced soul, “I know no reason why thou shouldst do so, — I cannot believe it; for I know not upon what account I should be so dealt withal.” Says God, “I know full well that there is nothing in thee upon the account whereof I should thus deal with thee; there is nothing in thee, but for what thou deservest to be everlastingly cut off; but quiet thy heart, I will do it for my own sake I have deeper engagements on my own account for this than thou canst look into.”

Doubtless, such a word as this, coming in when God and the soul are at the point of giving over and parting fellowship, — when the soul is ready to do so indeed, and hath great cause to think that God will be first therein, — then, contrary to all expectation, and above all hopes, — must needs constrain it to cry out, as Thomas, upon sight of the wounds of Christ, “My Lord and my God.” Let the soul that cannot get itself unto any steadfastness in closing with Christ in the promises — that staggers, and is tossed to and fro between hopes and fears, being filled with a sense of sin and unworthiness, — dwell a while upon the consideration of this unexpected surprisal, and give up itself to the power of it.

Isa. lvii. 17, 18, gives me another instance to the same purpose. This seems to be the description of a man totally rejected of God. The most dejected sinner can hardly make a more deplorable description of his condition, though ready enough to speak all the evil of himself that he can think of. Let us see how things are disposed. There is an iniquity found in him and upon him, that the soul of God abhors. In this evil there is a continuance, until God manifest himself to take notice of it, and to be provoked with it: “I was wroth,” saith God [according to the sense of the text quoted], “and took a course to let him know so. I laid my hand upon him, and smote him in some outward dispensation, that he could not



but take notice that I was wroth. Upon this smiting it may be he begins to seek and pray, but I am not found of him; I hid me, — I let him pray, but took no notice of him, but hid myself in wrath. Surely this will do, he will now leave his iniquity and return to me. Nay,” saith God, “he grows worse than ever; neglecting my smiting, hiding, wrath, he goes on frowardly in the ways of his own heart.”

God had appointed in the law, that when a son was rebellious against his parents, and grown incorrigible therein, he should be “stoned with stones.” What shall be done, then, with this person, who is thus incorrigible under the hand of God? Says God, “ ‘I have seen his ways,’ — it will not be better. Shall I destroy him, consume him, make him as Admah and Zeboim? Ah! ‘my bowels are turned in me; my repentings are kindled together: I will heal him.’ If he goes on thus, and no outward means will do him good, he must perish; but ‘I will heal him.’ He wounded his soul; I also wounded him in the blows I gave him when I was wroth. Is he not ‘my dear son? ... Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him,’ ” [Jer. xxxi. 20](#), He shall have wine and oil, grace and pardon, for all his wounds. But, alas! he is not able to go one step in God’s ways, he is so wonted to his own. “Leave that to me,” saith God; “ ‘I will lead him;’ I will give him strength, guidance, and direction to go in my way, ‘I will lead him, yea, and give him comfort’ also.”

Now, if any one cannot in some measure bring his condition within the verge and compass of this promise, it is hard with him indeed. And as I know the necessity of that duty, and usefulness of searching our hearts for the fruits of the Spirit in us, whereby we are made meet for communion with God, — which are all evidences of our acceptance with God, and pardon of sin thereon; so, I dare say, these are promises that will sufficiently warrant a perplexed soul to close with Christ, as tendered from the love of the Father, even when it can find in itself no other qualifications or conditions, but only such as render it every way unworthy to be accepted. We do not say to a poor, naked, hungry, harbourless man, “Go, get thee clothes, get thee food, get thee a habitation, and then I will give thee an alms: no, but, “Because thou wantest all these, therefore I will give thee an alms.” “Because thou art poor, blind, polluted, guilty, sinful, I will give thee mercy,” says God.

Yea, but at least a man’s sense of his state and condition, with his acknowledgment of it, is needful to precede his closing with the promise. It is so as to his receiving of it, — this oftentimes being the fruit and work of the promise as given itself. But as to the tender of the promise, and Christ in the promise, unto us, it is not so. When did God give the great promise of Christ to Adam? was it when he was sorrowing, repenting, qualifying his soul? No; but when he was flying, hiding, and had no thoughts but of separation from God. Clod calls him forth, and at once tells him what he had deserved, pronounces the curse, and gives him the blessing, “I raised thee up,” saith Christ, “under the apple-tree; there thy mother brought thee forth [Cant. viii. 5](#). From the very place of sin Christ raiseth up the soul. So [Isa.](#)



xlvi. 12, "Hearken to me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness." Here are two notable qualifications, stout-heartedness, and remoteness from righteousness. What saith God to them? Verse 13, He discourses to them of mercy and salvation; and, chap. lv. 1, "Buy," saith he, "wine and milk." "Yea, but I have nothing to buy withal, and these things require a price." Indeed, so they do; but take them "without money, and without price." "But he calls on them only who are 'thirsty.'" True; but it is a thirst of indigency and total want, not a thirst of spiritual desires; for in whomsoever that is, they have already tasted of this wine and milk, and are blessed, Matt. v. Nay, we may go one step farther. Prov. ix. 4, 5, Christ invites them to his bread and wine who have no heart [לֵב-לֹא]. This, commonly, is the last objection that an unbelieving heart makes against itself, — it hath no mind to Christ. Indeed he hath no heart for Christ. "But yet," saith Christ, "thou shalt not thus go off, — I will not admit of this excuse; you that have no heart, 'turn in hither.'" "

Now, I say, this obviating of all objections by unexpected appearances of love, mercy, and compassion in the promises, is a strong inducement unto steadfastness in believing. When a soul shall find that God takes for granted that all is true which it can charge itself withal; that its sin, folly, unbelief, heartlessness, is so as he apprehends it, and unconceivably worse than he can think; that he takes for granted all the aggravations of his sins, that lie so dismally in his eye, — his backsliding, frowardness, greatness of sin, impotency, coldness at the present, not answering in affection to the convictions that are upon him; and notwithstanding all this, yet [says,] "Come, let us agree; accept of peace, close with Christ, receive him from my love;" — surely it cannot but in some measure engage it into a rest and acquiescence in the word of promise.

(2.) The second part of this motive is taken from the suitability of the promises to every real distress and cause of staggering whatever. My meaning is, that whereas we are exercised with great variety of doubts and fears, of pressures and perplexities, God hath tempered his love and mercy in Christ, as prepared in the promises, unto every one of these wants and straits whatever. Had God only declared himself to us as God almighty, God all-sufficient, he might justly require and expect that we should act faith on him in every condition. But, moreover, he hath, as it were, drawn out his own all-sufficiency in Christ into numberless streams, flowing in upon all our particular wants, distresses, and temptations whatever. When God gave manna in the wilderness, it was to be gathered and ground in mills, or beat in mortars, and fried in pans, before it could be eaten, Num. xi. 8; but the bread which came from heaven, the manna in the promises, is already ground, beaten, baked, ready for every one's hunger. It is useful, if you have a well about your house, whither you may repair to draw water; but when you have several pipes from a fountain, that convey water to every room, for every particular business, you are greatly to blame if your occasions are not supplied. We have not only a well of salvation to draw water from, but also innumerable streams flowing from that well into every empty vessel.

I shall give one or two instances of this kind:—

[Isa. xxxii. 2](#): Here are four pressures and troubles mentioned, whereunto we may be exposed:— [1.] The *wind*; [2.] A *tempest*; [3.] *Dearth*; [4.] *Weariness*.

And unto all these is the man in the promise — the Lord Jesus Christ, the King that “reigns in righteousness,” [verse 1](#) — suited as a supply in them, or against them.

[1.] The first proposed evil is the *wind*; — and in respect hereof Christ is a “hiding-place.” He that was ready to be cast from the top of a rock with a strong wind, would desire nothing more than a hiding-place until the strong blast were over. When fierce winds have driven a vessel at sea from all its anchors, so that it hath nothing to keep it from splitting on the next rock whereunto it is driven, a safe harbour, a hiding-place, is the great desire and expectation of the poor creatures that are in it. Our Saviour tells us what this wind is, [Matt. vii. 25](#). The wind that blows upon and casts down false professors to the ground, is the wind of strong and urging temptations. Is this the condition of the soul? [do] strong temptations beat upon it, which are ready to hurry it down into sin and folly, — that it hath no rest from them, one blast immediately succeeding another, — that the soul begins to faint, to be weary, give over, and say, “I shall perish; I cannot hold out to the end?” Is this thy condition? See the Lord Christ suited unto it, and the relief that is in him in this promise, — he is “a hiding-place.” Saith he, “These temptations seek thy life; but with me thou shalt be safe.” Fly to his bosom, retreat into his arms, expect relief by faith from him, and thou shalt be safe.

[2.] There is a *tempest*; — in reference whereunto Christ is here said to be “a covert.” A tempest, in the Scripture, represents the wrath of God for sin. “He breaketh me,” saith Job, “with a tempest,” [chap. ix. 17](#), when he lay under a sense of the displeasure and indignation of God. He threatens to rain upon the wicked “an horrible tempest,” [Ps. xi. 6](#). A tempest is a violent mixture of wind, rain, hail, thunder, darkness, and the like. Those who have been at sea will tell you what a tempest means. Such was that in Egypt, [Exod. ix. 23](#). There was thunder and hail, and fire running upon the ground; fire or dreadful lightning, mingled with hail, [verse 24](#). What did men now do, upon the apprehension of this tempest? They made their servants and cattle flee into the houses, [verse 20](#); got them into safe covert, that they might not be destroyed; — and they were safe, accordingly.

Suppose a poor creature to be under this tempest, full of sad and dreadful thoughts and apprehensions of the wrath of God; behind, before, round about, he can see nothing but hailstones and coals of fire; heaven is dark and dismal over him; he hath not seen sun, moon, or stars, in many days, — not one glimpse of light from above, or hopes of an end. “I shall perish; the earth shakes under me; the pit is opening for me. Is there no hope?” Why, see how Christ is suited in this distress also. He is “a covert” from this tempest; get into him, and thou shalt be safe. He hath borne all this storm, as far as thou art concerned; abide with him, and not one hurtful drop shall fall upon thee, — not one hair of thy head shall be singed



with this fire. Hast thou fears? hast thou a sense of the wrath of God for sin? dost thou fear it will one day fall upon thee, and be thy portion? Behold a covert, a sure defence, is here provided.

[3.] There is *drought*, causing barrenness, making the heart as a dry place, as a heath or a parched wilderness; — in reference whereunto Christ is a river of water, abundantly, plentifully flowing for its refreshment. Drought in the Scripture denotes almost all manner of evil, it being the great, distressing punishment of those countries. When God threatens sinners, he says they “shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good” (or water) “cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,” [Jer. xvii. 6](#); he shall be left to barrenness and want of all refreshment. And David complains, in his great distress, that his “moisture was turned into the drought of summer,” [Ps. xxxii. 4](#).

Two things are evidently in this drought; — want of grace or moisture, to make the soul fruitful; and want of rain or consolation, to make it joyful. Barrenness and sorrow, or disconsolation, are in this dry place. Let us, then, suppose this condition also. Doth the soul find itself like the parched ground? It hath no moisture to enable it to bring forth fruit, but is dry, sapless; all the fruits of the Spirit seem to be withered; — faith, love, zeal, delight in God, not one of them flourishes; yea, it thinks they are quite dead; it hath no showers, not any drop of consolation, no refreshment, but pines away under barrenness and sorrow. What would now best suit such a condition? Why, turn in a stream of water upon this parched ground. Let there be springs in this thirsty place, let “water break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert,” as [Isa. xxxv. 6](#), and how will all things be changed! Those things that hung their heads, and had no beauty, will flourish again; and the things that are ready to die will be revived. Why, in this condition Jesus Christ will be water, and that in abundance, — rivers of water, that there shall be no want. He will, by his Spirit, give supplies of grace to make the soul fruitful; he will give in consolation to make it joyful.

[4.] There is *weariness*; — and in respect hereof Christ is said to be “*the shadow of a great rock*.” Weariness of travel and labour, through heat and drought, is insupportable. He that is to travel in a thirsty land, dry and hungry, the sun beating on his head, will be ready, with Jonah in such a condition, to wish he were dead, to be freed of his misery. Oh, how welcome will “the shadow of a great rock” be to such a poor creature! If Jonah rejoiced in “the shade of a gourd,” how much better is “the shadow of a great rock!” Many a poor soul, exercised with temptations, hindered in duties, scorched with a sense of sin, is weary in his journeying towards Canaan, in his course of obedience; and thinks with himself, it were better for him even to die than to live, having no hopes to come to his journey’s end. Let now this poor soul lie down and repose himself a little under the shadow and safe-guarding protection of this Rock of ages, the Lord Jesus Christ, — how will his strength and resolution come to him again!



Thus, I say, is Christ in the promises peculiarly suited to all the several distresses that we may at any time fall into. I might multiply instances to this purpose; but this one may suffice to make good the consideration proposed, for the encouraging of us to believe, from the suiting of the grace in the promises to all our wants.

Two things, then, may hence be deducted:—

1st. The willingness of God that we should be established in believing. To what end should the Lord thus obviate all objections that can possibly arise in a misgiving heart, and accommodate grace in Christ to all perplexities and troubles we at any time lie under, were he not willing we should lay hold on that grace, own it, accept it, and give him the praise of it? If I should go to a poor man, and tell him, “Thou art poor, but see, here are riches; thou art naked, but here is clothing; thou art hungry and thirsty, here is food and refreshment; thou art wounded, but I have the most precious balm in the world:” — if I have no intent to have him partake of these riches, food, raiment, medicine, do not I egregiously mock and deride the man’s misery and sorrow? Will a wise or good man do thus? Though many will deafen their ears to the cries of the poor, yet who almost is so desperately wicked as to delight himself in sporting at their misery, and increasing their sorrow? And shall we think that the God of heaven, “the Father of mercy, and God of all consolation,” who is all goodness, sweetness, and truth (as hath been declared), when he doth so suit and temper his fulness to our wants, and suits his grace in Christ to all our fears and troubles for their removal, doth it to increase our misery, and mock our calamity? I speak of the heirs of promise, to whom they are made and do belong. Is it not time for you to leave disputing and questioning the sincerity and faithfulness of God in all these engagements? What farther, what greater security can we expect or desire? So that, —

2dly. All unbelief must needs be at length totally resolved into the stubbornness of the will. “Ye will not come unto me,” saith our Saviour, “that ye may have life.” When all a man’s objections are prevented and answered, — when all his wants are suited, — when a ground is laid that all his fears may be removed, and yet he keeps off and closes not, — what can it be but a mere perverseness of will that rules him? Doth not such an one say, “Let the Lord do what he will, say what he can, though my mouth be stopped, that I have nothing wherewith to wrangle or contend any more, yet I will believe”? Let this, then, be another motive or encouragement, which, added to what was spoken before concerning God, even the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, is all I shall insist upon.

### **Sermon III. The nature and beauty of gospel worship.**

“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” [Eph. ii. 18.](#)

In the foregoing verses the apostle makes mention of a double reconciliation, wrought by the blood of the cross, — the one, of the Jews and Gentiles unto God; the other, of the same persons one to another. There were two things in the law:— First, Worship instituted under it; Secondly, The curse annexed unto it. The first of these being appropriated to the Jews, with an exclusion of the Gentiles, was the cause of unspeakable enmity and hatred between them. The latter, or the curse, falling upon both, was a cause of enmity between God and both of them. The Lord Jesus Christ, in his death removing both these, wrought and effected the twofold reconciliation mentioned. First, He brake down “the middle wall of partition between us,” [verse 14](#), and so “made both one;” that is, “between us,” — the Jews and Gentiles. He hath taken away all cause of difference that should hinder us to be one in him. And how hath he done this? By taking away “the law of commandments contained in ordinances,” [verse 15](#); — that is, by abolishing that way of worship which was the Jews’ privilege and burden, from which the Gentiles were excluded; so breaking down that wall of partition. Secondly, By the cross at his death he slew the enmity, or took away the curse of the law; so reconciling both Jews and Gentiles unto God; as [verse 16](#). By bearing the curse of the law, he reconciled both unto God; — by taking away and abolishing the worship of the law, he took away all grounds of difference amongst them.

Upon this reconciliation ensueth a twofold advantage or privilege; — an access into the favour of God, who before was at enmity with them; and a new and more glorious way of approaching unto God in his worship than that shout which they were before at difference among themselves.

The first of these is mentioned, [Rom. v. 2](#). And that which there called, an “access into this grace wherein we stand,” may in the text be called, an “access unto the Father;” that is, the favour and acceptance with God which we do enjoy. Thus our access unto God is our sense of acceptance with him upon the reconciliation made for us by Jesus Christ. But this seems not to me to be the special intendment of the text; for that access unto God here mentioned seems to be the effect of the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles among themselves, by the abolishing of the ceremonial worship; — a new and more glorious way of worship being now provided for them both in common, is there expressed. Before the reconciliation made, one party alone had the privilege of the carnal worship then instituted; but now both parties have in common such a way of worship, wherein they have immediate access unto God; — in which the apostle asserts the beauty and glory of the gospel worship of Jews and Gentiles above that which, enjoyed by the Jews, was a matter of separation and division between them. And this appears to be the intendment of the words from [verse 17](#).



That which is here asserted, is not an immediate effect of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ on the cross, but of his preaching peace unto, and calling both Jews and Gentiles, — gathering them unto himself, and so to the worship of God. Being called by the word of peace, both the one and the other, as to our worship, we have this access.

And [the following words, to the end of the chapter](#), do make it more plain and evident. Sundry things doth the apostle, upon the account of this their access unto God, speak of the Gentiles.

First, Negatively, — that they are no more “strangers and foreigners,” [verse 19](#); that is, that they are not so in respect of the worship of God, as in that state and condition wherein they were before their calling, through a participation of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ. The apostle had declared, [verses 11, 12](#), they were the uncircumcision, aliens, foreigners; that is, men who had no share in, nor admittance unto, the solemn worship of God, which was impaled in the commonwealth of Israel. “But now,” says he, “ye are so no more;” that is, you have a portion and interest in that worship wherewith God is well pleased.

Secondly, Positively, the apostle affirms two things of them:— first, That they are “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God,” [verse 19](#); secondly, That they were built up to be “an holy temple,” or “an habitation to God,” [verses 20–22](#). Both which relate to the solemn worship of God under the gospel. The first asserts them to be now members of the church; — the latter, that by and among them God was worshipped with that divine service which came in the room of that which was appointed in the temple, now by Christ removed and taken away.

This being the design of the Holy Ghost in this place, I shall present it in this one proposition unto you:—

*That it is an eminent effect and fruit of our reconciliation unto God and among ourselves, by the blood of Christ, that believers enjoy the privileges of the excellent, glorious, spiritual worship of God in Christ, revealed and required in the gospel.*

I shall, in the prosecution of this subject, — I. Briefly prove that we obtain this privilege as a fruit, and upon the account of the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ. II. Show that the worship of the gospel is indeed so beautiful, glorious, and excellent, that the enjoyment of it is an eminent privilege: which I shall principally manifest from the text; and, in so doing, open the several parts of it.

I. That believers enjoy this privilege as a fruit and effect of the death and blood of Jesus Christ, I shall confirm only with one or two places of Scripture, [Heb. ix. 8](#), compared with [chap. x. 19–22](#). Whilst the first tabernacle was standing, before Christ by his death had removed it, and the worship that accompanied it, — which was the partition-wall mentioned that he brake down, — there was no immediate admission unto God; — the way into the holiest not made with hands, which we now make use of in the gospel worship, was not yet laid open, but the worshippers were kept at a great distance, making their application unto



God by outward, carnal ordinances. The tabernacle being removed, now a way is made, and an entrance is given to the worshippers, into the holiest, in their worship. How is that obtained? by what means? Chap. x. 19–22, It is “by the blood of Jesus Christ,” — by the rending of his flesh. This privilege of entering into the holiest, which is a true expressing of all gospel, worship, could no otherwise be obtained for nor granted unto believers, but by the blood of Christ. We “enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,” by which he prepared, perfected, or “consecrated for us a new and living way” into it. Peter also gives us the same account of the rise of this privilege, 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. That which is ascribed unto believers is, that they offer up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ.” That is the worship whereof we speak. To fit them for, and enable them hereunto, they are “made a spiritual house, a holy priesthood;” — they are both the temple wherein God dwells by his Spirit, and they are the priests that offer acceptable sacrifices unto him. By what means, then, do they attain this honour? By their “coming unto Christ,” and that as he was “disallowed of men, and chosen of God.” Herein the apostle includes the whole mystery of his death and bloodshedding, wherein he was most openly rejected of men, and most eminently owned of God in his accomplishment of the work of reconciliation.

I shall not farther confirm the first part of the proposition, but proceed to evidence, —  
II. That the worship of God under the gospel is so excellent, beautiful, and glorious, that it may well be esteemed a privilege, purchased by the blood of Christ, which no man can truly and really be made partaker of but by virtue of an interest in the reconciliation by him wrought. For “through him we have an access by one Spirit unto God.”

This, as I said, I shall evince two ways:— First, *Absolutely*. Secondly, *Comparatively*, in reference unto any other way of worship whatever.

And the first I shall do from the text.

It is a principle deeply fixed in the minds of men, yea, ingrafted into them by nature, that the worship of God ought to be orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious. Hence men in all ages, who have thought it incumbent on them to imagine, find out, and frame the worship of God, or any thing thereunto belonging, have made it constantly their design to fix on things, either in themselves or in the manner of their performance (to their judgment), beautiful, orderly, comely, and glorious. And, indeed, that worship may be well suspected not to be according to the mind of God, which comes short in these properties of order and beauty, comeliness and glory. I shall add unto this only this reasonable assertion, which no man can well deny, — viz., that what is so in his worship and service, God himself is the most proper judge. If, then, we evince not that spiritual gospel worship, in its own naked simplicity, without any other external adventitious helper or countenance, is most orderly, comely, beautiful, and glorious (the Holy Ghost in the Scripture being judge), we shall be content to seek for these things where else, as it is pretended, they may be found. To this end, —

1. The first thing in general observable from these words is, that in the spiritual worship of the gospel the whole blessed Trinity, and each person therein distinctly, do in that economy and dispensation wherein they act severally and peculiarly in the work of our redemption, afford distinct communion with themselves unto the souls of the worshippers. So are they all here distinctly mentioned: “Through him” (that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God) “we have access by one Spirit” (that good and holy Spirit the Holy Ghost) unto God, that is the Father;” for so is that name to be taken ὑποστατικῶς, “personally,” when it is mentioned in distinction from the Son and Spirit. There is no act, part, or duty of gospel worship, wherein the worshippers have not this distinct communion with each person in the blessed Trinity. The particulars shall be afterward spoken unto.

This is the general order of gospel worship, the great rubric of our service. Here in general lieth its decency, that it respects the mediation of the Son, through whom we have access, and the supplies and assistance of the Spirit, and a regard unto God as a Father. He that fails in any one of these, he breaks all order in gospel worship. If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or in it go not unto God as a Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship. This is the great canon, which if it be neglected, there is no decency in whatever else is done in this way. And this, in general, is the glory of it. Worship is certainly an act of the soul, [Matt. xxii. 37](#). The body hath its share by concomitancy and subserviency to the direction of the mind. The acts of the mind and soul receive their advancements and glory from the object about which they are conversant. Now that, in this gospel worship, is God himself in his Son and Holy Ghost, and none else. Acting faith on Christ for admission; and on the Holy Ghost for his assistance (so going on in his strength); and on God, even the Father, for acceptance, — is the work of the soul in this worship. That it hath any thing more glorious to be conversant about, I am as yet to learn. But these things will be handled apart afterward. This, in general, is the order and glory of that worship of which we speak.

2. The same is evident from the general nature of it, — that it is an access unto God. “Through him we have an access to God.” There are two things herein that set forth the excellency, order, and glory of it:— (1.) It brings an access; (2.) The manner of that access, intimated in the word here used; it is προσαγωγή.

(1.) It is an access, an approach, a drawing nigh unto God; so the apostle calls it a “drawing near,” [Heb. x. 22](#), “Let us draw near with a true heart;” that is, unto God, in “the holiest,” [verse 19](#). In the first, giving out of the law, and instituting the legal worship, the people were commanded to keep at a distance; and they were not, on pain of death, so much as to touch the mount where the presence of God was, [Exod. xix. 12](#). And, accordingly, they stood afar off, whilst Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was, [chap. xx. 21](#).





So, not only when the high priest went into the most holy place once a-year with blood (of which afterward), but when the priests in their courses went into the holy place to burn incense daily, the people were kept without, as [Luke i. 10](#). But this gospel worship is our access or drawing nigh to God; no interposition of veils, or any other carnal, ordinance whatever. All is made open, and a new and living way of access given unto us, [Heb. x. 20](#). And what, in general, can be added to set forth the glory of this worship, to a soul that knows what it is to draw nigh to God, I know not. The heathens of old derided the Egyptians, who, through many stately edifices, and with most pompous ceremonies, brought their worshippers to the image of an ape. I say no more; but let them look to it, how they will acquit themselves who frame much of their worship in a ceremonious access to an altar or an image. The plea of referring unto God at the last hath been common to all idolaters, of what sort soever, from the foundation of the world.

(2.) It is a προσαγωγή that we have in this worship; — a manuduction unto God, in order, and with much glory. It is such an access as men have to the presence of a king, when they are handed in by some favourite or great person. This, in this worship, is done by Christ. He takes the worshippers by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God; there presenting them (as we shall see), saying, “Behold I and the children which God hath given me,” [Heb. ii. 13](#). This is the access of believers; thus do they enter into the presence of God. Some, it may be, will be ready to say, that a man may be ashamed to speak such great things as these of poor worms, who have neither order in their way, nor eloquence in their words, nor comeliness in their worship. Let such men know that they must yet hear greater things of them: and it is meet, indeed, they should be in all things conformable unto Christ; and, therefore, have neither form, nor comeliness, nor beauty in themselves, their way, or their worship, to the eyes of the world, as [Isa. liii. 2](#). And “the world knows not them” and their ways, because “it knew not him” nor his ways, [1 John iii. 1](#). But if God may be allowed to judge in his own matters, the spiritual worship of the saints is glorious, since in it they have such an access, such a manuduction unto God.

3. From the immediate object of this worship; and that is God. We have an access to God. It is, as I said, the Father who is here peculiarly intended. God, as God, — he who is the beginning and end of all, whose nature is attended with infinite perfection, — he from whom a sovereignty over all doth proceed, — is the formal object of all divine and religious worship. Hence, divine worship respects, as its object, each person of the blessed Trinity equally, not as this or that person, but as this or that person is God; that is the formal reason of all divine worship. But yet, as the second person is considered as vested with his office of mediation, and the Holy Ghost as the comforter and sanctifier of his saints; so God the Father is in peculiar manner the object of our faith, and love, and worship. So Peter tells us, [1 Epist. i. 21](#), that through Christ we “believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory.” Christ being considered as mediator, God that raised him from the dead

— that is, the Father — is regarded as the ultimate object of our worship; though worshipping him who is the Father as God, the other persons are in the same nature worshipped. This whole matter is declared, [Gal. iv. 6](#) (which I cannot now particularly open), with this explanation, that in our access unto God, Christ being considered as the mediator, and the Holy Ghost as our comforter, advocate, and assister, the saints have a peculiar respect unto the person of the Father.

There are two things that hence arise, evidencing the order, decency, and glory of gospel worship:— (1.) That we have in it a direct and immediate access unto God; (2.) That we have access unto God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ours in him.

(1.) This is no small part of the glory of this worship, that our access is unto *God himself*. When outward worship was in its height and glory, the access of the worshippers immediately was but unto some visible sign and pledge of God's presence. Such was the temple itself; such was the ark and the mercy-seat. So Paul, describing the tabernacle and temple worshippers, [Heb. x. 1](#), calls them *προσερχομένους*, “the comers unto sacrifices.” There was, as it were, a stop upon their access, in the visible representations of God's majesty and presence to which they did approach. But now, in this spiritual worship of the gospel, the saints have direct and immediate access unto God, — “the way into the holiest,” not made with hands, being laid open unto them all. And where they are enjoined the use of any outward signs, as in the sacraments, it is not, as it were, to stop them there from entering into heaven, but to help them forward in their entrance; as all know who are acquainted with their true nature and use. I do not say that any of the worship of old was limited in the sensible pledge and tokens of God's presence; but only that the spirit of the worshippers was kept in subjection, so as to approach unto God only as he exhibited himself to their faith in those signs, and not immediately, as we do under the gospel.

(2.) We have in this spiritual worship of the gospel access unto God *as a Father*. I showed, in the opening of the words, that God is distinctly proposed here as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him our God and Father. Hence are we said to come “to the throne of grace,” [Heb. iv. 16](#); that is, unto God as he is gloriously exalted in the dispensation of grace, in kindness, love, mercy, — in a word, as a Father. God on the throne of grace, and God as a Father, is all one consideration; for, as a Father, he is all love, grace, and mercy to his children in Christ. When God came of old to institute his worship in giving of the law, he did it with the dreadful and terrible representation of his majesty, that the people chose not to come near, but went and “stood afar off, and said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die,” [Exod. xx. 18, 19](#). And by this dreadful representation of the majesty of God, as the object of that worship, were they kept in fear and bondage all their days. But now are the saints encouraged to make their approach unto God as a Father; the glory whereof the apostle excellently expresseth, [Rom. viii. 14, 15](#). That fear and bondage wherein men were kept under the law is now removed, and in the

place thereof a spirit of children, with reverent boldness going to their father, is given unto us. This, I say, adds to the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship. There is not the meanest believer but, with his most broken prayers and supplications, hath an immediate access unto God, and that as a Father; nor the most despised church of saints on the earth but it comes with its worship into the glorious presence of God himself. And this I shall add, by the way, — that men's attempting to worship God who are not interested in this privilege of access unto him, is the ground of all the superstitious idolatry that is in the world. I shall instance in two things, which are the springs of all others:—

[1.] Having not experience of the excellency of this privilege, nor being satisfied with the use of it, men have turned aside to the worship of saints and angels in heaven. This is the very substance of all the reasons that the Papists plead in the justification of that superstition: "To have access to God! It is too great a boldness to come to him immediately; and so it becomes us humbly to make use of the favourites of the court of heaven, of saints and angels, to desire them to entreat with God for us." Now, not to speak of their unacquaintedness with the mediation of Christ herein, which is plain infidelity, what is this but directly saying, "We understand nothing of gospel worship (wherein believers by Christ have a direct 'access with boldness' to God himself); and therefore it is that we had rather fix on this 'voluntary humility,' as the apostle calls it, [Col. ii. 18](#), than venture on this access unto God"? This, I say, is the reasoning of men unacquainted with this part of the glory of gospel worship.

[2.] Hence are they forced to invent outward, visible pledges and signs of God's presence, as they imagine, to which they may have access; seeing they are unacquainted with that which is directly unto God himself. Hence images and pictures, altars and the *east*, must be regarded in worship; with which they can have an immediate conversation, — have an access in their thoughts to them, and, as they think, by them unto God. And on the same account must the sacraments be changed, and that which was appointed to assist us in our entrance unto God be made a god, that men may have an easy access unto him. Carnal men, that know nothing of the other, souls are not at all moulded or affected by any pure act of faith, are here stirred by their senses, and act by them in their worship. And this is the ground wherein all their pompous rites, invented by men in the worship of God, do grow; — even a design and engine to afford carnally-minded men somewhat to be conversant about in their worship, who have no principle to enable them to use this privilege of approaching unto God himself. It is true, they will say it is God alone whom they worship, and whom they intend to draw nigh unto; but I must needs say, that if they knew what it were to do so immediately by Christ, they would be satisfied therewith, and not seek such outward helps in their way as they do.

4. It appears from the principal procuring cause and means of this our access to God; which is Jesus Christ, — through him we have this access. This is a new spring of beauty and glory, which we must consider in the particulars of it. That access which the people of

God had to the outward pledge of his presence, was by their high priest; and that not in his own person, but barely in his representation of them; and that but once a year: but in the worship of the gospel, the saints have an access through Christ unto God himself in their own persons, and that continually. Now, we have this access through Christ upon many accounts:—

(1.) Because he hath purchased and procured this favour for us, that we should so approach unto God, and find acceptance with him. We are “accepted in the Beloved,” [Eph. i. 6](#). I must not stay to show how, by paying a ransom for us, and “bearing our iniquities,” he hath answered the law, removed the curse, reconciled us to God, pacified his anger, satisfied justice, procured for us eternal redemption; all which belongs to his procuring for us this favour of acceptance with God. The apostle gives us the sum of it, [Heb. ii. 17](#), He hath, as a high priest, “made reconciliation for the sins of the people;” on the account whereof they have an “access by faith into this grace,” [Rom. v. 1, 2](#). In this sense have we our access unto God through Christ. He hath purchased it for us. It is no small portion of the price of his blood. Nothing else could procure it; — not all the wealth of the world, not all the worth of angels in heaven: none could do it but himself. Go into the most pompous, stately place of outward worship upon the earth, — consider all the wealth and glory of its structure and ornaments; it is an easy thing for a wise man to guess what it all cost, and what is the charge of it. However, none so foolish, but can tell you it is all the price of money; it was bought with “silver and gold,” and “corruptible things;” it is the “thick clay:” and he that hath most money may render that kind of worship most beauteous and glorious. But now the gospel worship of believers is the price of the “blood of the Son of God.” Access to God for sinners could no other way be obtained. Let men, as the prophet speaks, “lavish gold out of their bags” ([Isa. xlv. 6](#)) upon their idols; their self-invented worship shall come as short, in true glory and beauty, of the meanest prayers of poor saints, as the purchase of corruptible things doth of the fruit of the blood and death of the Son of God, [1 Pet. i. 18, 19](#).

(2.) We have this access from Christ, inasmuch as he hath opened, prepared, and dedicated a way for us to enter into the presence of God. Favour being procured, a way of entrance is also to be provided; otherwise poor souls might say, “There is water, indeed, in the well; but the well is deep, and we have not wherewith to draw. There is an acceptance purchased for us in the presence of God; but by what way shall we come unto him?” I say, he hath provided for us also a way whereby we may enter, [Heb. x. 19, 20](#), — “By a new and living way.” The way into the holiest, of old, was through the vail that hung always before; which the apostle calls “the second vail,” [chap. ix. 3](#). The form and use thereof you have, [Exod. xxvi. 31, 32](#), etc. Through this vail the high priest entered into the holy place. Instead hereof, for an entrance into the presence of God in the holy place not made with hands, Christ hath provided and dedicated a “new and living way” for us. This way is himself; as he telleth Thomas, [John xiv. 6](#), “I am the way.” It is by him alone that any can obtain an access unto



God. But as to our constant approach in worship, there is a peculiar respect had unto his suffering for us in the flesh. We enter “by his blood,” and “through his flesh.” How is that? As men being to go to some great potentate or general in an army have, it may be, some word or token which they show, declare, or make use of, if by any they are hindered in their address, — so it is with believers. The law would stop them in their access to God; so would sin and Satan: but their being “sprinkled with the blood of Christ” is the token that lays all open unto them, and removes all obstacles out of the way; — and when they come into the presence of God, it is the suffering of Christ in the flesh that they insist on as to their acceptance with him. They go to God through him, in his name, “making mention of his righteousness, death, and blood-shedding, pleading for acceptance on his account. This is their “new and living way” of going unto God; — this path they tread, this entrance they use; and no man can obtain an access unto God but by an interest herein. I wonder not at all that men who know not this way — who have no share, nor ever took one step in it — do fix on any kind of worship whatever, rather than once make trial what it is to place the glory of their worship in an access unto God, seeing they have no interest in this way, without which all attempts after it would be altogether fruitless and vain. Now, this adds to the order, and increaseth the glory and beauty, of the spiritual worship of the gospel. Go to the mass-book and the rubric of it; — you will see how many instructions and directions they give priests about the way of going into their sanctum and to their altars; — how they must bow and bend themselves, sometimes one way sometimes another; sometimes kneel, sometimes stand; sometimes go backwards, sometimes forward. This is their way to the breaden god; this they call order, and beauty, and glory; and with such like things are poor, simple sots deluded, and carnal wretches, enemies to Christ and his Spirit, blinded to their eternal ruin. Surely, methinks, this way of gospel access to God is far more comely and glorious:— it is in and by Christ, — a way dedicated by himself on purpose; it is sprinkled with his blood; it is opened by his suffering in the flesh, and abides “new and living” for ever. Were not blindness come on men to the utmost, — were it not evident that they can see nothing afar off, — that they are wholly carnal and unspiritual, “savoring not the things of God,” — it were impossible that they should reject these pearls of the gospel for the husks of swine, such things as they shall never be able to vie with the old heathen in. This only may be said in their excuse, that they cast away and reject what they had no share in, for that which is most properly their own.

(3.) We have this access through Christ, in that he is entered before us into the presence of God, to make way for our access unto him, and our acceptance with him. So the apostle, [Heb. iv. 14](#), “We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” He is gone already into the presence of God to that purpose. The same apostle tells us, [chap. vi. 19, 20](#), “Let us look to ‘that within the vail, whither Jesus the forerunner is for us entered,’ ” — *πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν*. The words are better rendered, “The

forerunner for us is entered.” He is a forerunner for us, — one that is gone into the presence of God to declare that all his saints are coming to him, coming into his presence with their solemn worship and oblations; — he is entered into heaven himself, to carry, as it were, tidings, and make way for the entrance of his saints. This is no small encouragement to follow him: he is gone before for us, and is in continual expectation of the coming of them whose forerunner he is; as is the manner of those who take that office. And this also adds to the glory of gospel worship, with them to whom Christ is precious and honourable: with them by whom he is despised, it is no wonder if his ways be so also. This belongs also to the rubric, and adds to the order of gospel worship. It is an access to God, even the Father, in the holy place not made with hands, on the account of the atonement made, and favour and acceptance purchased, by Jesus Christ, being sprinkled with his blood, and following him, as one that is gone before to provide admittance for us. Here is order and beauty too, if we have either faith or eyes to apprehend or perceive what is so.

(4.) We have this access through Christ, as he is “the high priest over the house of God.” This the apostle at large declares, and much insists upon, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. One or two places shall suffice to instance in. [Chap. iv. 14–16](#): The inference which the apostle makes from this consideration, that Christ is our high priest entered into heaven, is, that we should draw nigh unto the throne of grace; and, because he is such a holy priest as he there describes, that we should draw nigh with boldness, or spiritual confidence of our acceptance with God. And this the apostle manageth at large throughout that epistle; — that notwithstanding all the outward glory and splendour of the legal worship, yet that which is appointed in the gospel is far to be preferred before it, inasmuch as the High Priest of this is unspeakably above the high priest by whom that was principally administered. And again, [chap. x. 21, 22](#), the encouragement to draw nigh to God is taken from this, that we have a “high priest over the house of God.” And it is also considerable, what the Holy Ghost requireth in them who should come nigh to worship God under the guidance and conduct of this blessed and merciful high priest. Is it that they have such vestments and ornaments in their admission? No; but faith, and sanctification, and holiness, are the three great qualifications of these worshippers. “Let us draw nigh,” saith he, “in full assurance of faith,” etc., “and our bodies washed with pure water;” — that is, purified with the blood of Christ, typified in the water of baptism; or else, it may be, effectually cleansed in soul and body by the Holy Ghost, who is frequently compared to water the work of purifying and sanctifying the souls of believers.

Upon this general head I might make a long stand, to evidence the beauty, order, and glory of the spiritual worship of God, in that it our access to God through Christ, “as the great high priest over the house of God.” This, indeed, is so great, that the apostle makes it the sum of his whole dispute about the excellency of the gospel, and our coming to God thereby, [Heb. viii. 1, 2](#). “This is,” saith he, “upon the matter, the sum of all: Those with whom

we have to do, they had a high priest, in whom, and the administration by him performed, consisted the glory of all their worship. We also," saith he, "have a high priest no less than they had; but herein there is no comparison between them and us, that we have such a high priest," — whom he describes; — first, from his own dignity, honour, and glory; he is "set on the right hand of the Majesty of heaven;" — secondly, from his office or ministry, — namely, that he ministers not in a tabernacle, such as was that of Moses, and Solomon's temple, but in heaven itself, the place of the glorious presence and immediate manifestation of God's glory; — which he calls "the tabernacle which the Lord pitched;" that is, which he appointed for the place of worship to his saints under the ministry of Christ, their high priest. And though other places are necessary here on earth for their assemblies, as they are men clothed with flesh and infirmities, yet there is none pitched, appointed, or consecrated for the holy and solemn acceptance of their service, but heaven itself; where the High Priest is always ready to administer it before God. And as to the assemblies here below, all places are now alike. And what can be more glorious than this, — namely, that the whole spiritual worship of the gospel, performed here on earth by the saints, is administered in heaven by such a holy Priest, who is at the right hand of the throne of the majesty of God! and yet under his conduct we have by faith an entrance into the presence of God.

Go to, now, you by whom the spiritual worship of the gospel is despised; [you] that — unless it be adorned, as you say (or rather defiled), with the rites and ceremonies of your own invention — think there is no order, comeliness, or beauty in it! set yourselves to find out whatever pleaseth your imaginations; borrow this of the Jews, that of the Pagans, all of the Papists that you think conducing to that end and purpose; lavish gold out of the bag for the beautifying of it; — will it compare with this glory of the worship of the gospel, that is all carried on under the conduct and administration of this glorious High Priest? It may be they will say that they have that too, and that ornaments do not hinder but that they have also their worship attended with that glory relating to the holy Priest. But do they think so indeed? and do they no more value it than it seems they do? Why are they not contented with it, but they must find out many inventions of their own to help to set it off? Surely it is impossible that men, thoroughly convinced of its spiritual excellency, should fall into that fond conceit of making additions of their own unto it. Nor do they seem rightly to weigh that the holy God doth, all along, oppose this spiritual excellency of gospel worship to the outward splendour of rites and ordinances, instituted by himself for a time; so that what men seek to make up in these things doth but absolutely derogate from the other; and all will one day know, whether it be for want of excellency in the spiritual administration of the gospel worship, under and by the glorious High Priest, or for want of minds enlightened to discern it, and hearts quickened to experience it, that some do lay all the weight of the beauty of gospel worship on matters that they either find out themselves, or borrow from

others who were confessedly blind as to all spiritual communion with God in Christ. But if any man list to contend, “we have no such custom, neither the church of God;” only I hope it will not be accounted a crime, that any please themselves and are contented with that glory and beauty, in their worshipping of God, which is given unto it from hence, that they have in it an access to God by Jesus Christ, as the great high priest of their profession and service. However, I am sure this is, and may well be, an unspeakable encouragement and comfort in the duty of drawing nigh unto God, to all the saints, whether in their persons, families, or assemblies, — that Jesus Christ is the great high priest that admits them to the presence of God; who is the minister of that heavenly tabernacle where God is worshipped by them. If we are but able, as the apostle speaks, to look to the things that are not seen, [2 Cor. iv. 18](#), — that is, with eyes of faith, — we shall find that glory that will give us rest and satisfaction; and for others, we may pray, as Elisha for his servant, that the Lord would open their eyes, and they would quickly see the naked, poor places of the saints’ assemblies not only attended with horses and chariots of fire, but also Christ walking in the midst of them, in the glory wherewith he is described, [Rev. i. 13–16](#); which surely their painted or carved images will be found to come short of. And if the Lord Jesus Christ be pleased, in his unspeakable love, to call his churches and ministers his “glory,” as he doth, [2 Cor. viii. 23](#), surely these may be contented to make him their only glory. To which purpose we may observe, —

[1.] Our Saviour Christ warns us of some who thought to be heard for their heathenish “vain repetitions” and “much babbling,” [Matt. vi. 7](#). I will not make application of it unto any; but this I say, that men will not be a little mistaken, if they think to be heard for any carnal self-invented furtherance of their devotion. But here lies the joy and confidence of the poor saints, — they have a merciful High Priest over the house of God, by whom they are encouraged to draw nigh with boldness to the throne of grace. He takes them by the hand, and leads them into the presence of God; where, through his means, they obtain a favourable acceptance.

[2.] Nor need they be solicitous about their outward estate and condition. This was the misery of the Jews of old, — that when they were driven from Jerusalem, and carried into captivity, they were deprived of all the solemn worship of God; they had no high priest, no sacrifice, no altar, tabernacle, or solemn assemblies, — which were all tied to that place. Hence we find how bitterly David complains, when, by the persecution of Saul, he was for a season driven from the place of God’s holy and solemn worship: he saw not the glorious ornaments of the high priest, nor the beautiful structure of the tabernacle, nor the order of the Levites and priests in worship. It is now otherwise with the people of God, be they never so poor, and destitute of all outward accommodations. Are their assemblies in the mountains, in the caves and dens of the earth? — Christ, according to his promise, is in the midst of them as their high priest, and they have in their worship all the order, glory, and beauty (I



mean, observing gospel rules) that in any place under heaven they can enjoy and be made partakers of. All depends on the presence of Christ, and their access to God by him; and he is excluded from no place, but thinks any place adorned sufficiently for him which his saints are met in or driven unto. Let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and feeble knees be strengthened; — whatever their outward, distressed condition may be, here is order, beauty, and glory, in the worship of God, above all that the world can pretend unto!

[3.] Here lies encouragement to them upon a spiritual account, as to the state of things between God and their own souls. They have discoveries made unto them of the glory, majesty, and holiness of God. They know that he is “a consuming fire;” — they have visions of his excellencies, which the world is not acquainted with. They are also sensible of their own poverty, wretchedness, sin, weakness, — how unfit, how unable to approach unto him, or to have to do with him in his holy worship; — they are ashamed of their own prayers and supplications, and could oftentimes, when they are gone through, wish them undone again, considering how unanswerable they are to the greatness and holiness of God. In this condition there is a plentiful relief tendered to faith from the consideration of this High Priest. That this may be more evident, and that the beauty and glory of gospel worship may be by them farther discovered, I shall particularly insist on some parts of it:—

First. Our High Priest bears and takes away all the sinfulness and failings that are in or do accompany the holy worship of his saints. The world is apt to despise the worship of the saints, as mean and contemptible, — unmeet for the majesty of God. This puts them on the inventing of what they suppose more glorious and beautiful, though God abhors it. But the saints themselves know that of their defects, wants, and failings in their worship, that the world know not of, and how unfit it is and unsuited to the holy majesty of God, with whom they have to do. They know how the bitter root of unbelief in their hearts springs up and defiles them and their duties; — how effectually vanity works in their minds, and a secret loathness in their wills, in their best duties and most solemn acts of worship; besides innumerable other sinful distempers, that oftentimes get ground and place in their hearts. These, they know, are the things that, in and of themselves, are enough to defile, pollute, and render abominable all their worship; yea, and if God should “mark what is amiss,” the guilt of their holy worship is enough to make both it and them that perform it to be for ever rejected. But now, here is their relief; here beauty, glory, and order, is recovered to their worship; — Christ, as their high priest, takes away all the evil, filth, and iniquity of their holy things, that they may be presented pure, and holy, and glorious before God. So did Aaron typically of old, [Exod. xxviii. 38](#). Thus doth Christ, our high priest, really answer for all that is amiss. All failings, all miscarriages in his saints, them he takes on his own score; and what is from his Spirit, that enters into the presence of the holy God. So, [Eph. v. 25–27](#), he presents it to himself, and by him it is presented unto God. By this means doth the Lord Christ preserve

the glory and beauty of gospel worship, notwithstanding all the defects, and failings, and defilements, that, from the weakness and sins of his saints, do seem to cleave unto it.

Secondly. This is not enough. Besides the weakness, sinfulness, and imperfections that attend their duties, for which they may be justly rejected, there is not any thing of worth in them for which they may be accepted; — nothing that should yield a sweet savour unto God. Wherefore Christ, as the high priest by whom all believers have their access unto God, takes their duties and prayers, and adds incense unto them, that they may have a sweet savour in heaven, [Rev. viii. 3](#). The altar is the place for the priests offering their sacrifices of prayers; and our altar is in heaven: other men may appoint theirs elsewhere. The Lord Christ, the high priest in the temple of God in heaven, and in the holy place not made with hands, is the angel that stands at the altar before the Lord, — the golden altar of incense before the throne; — not the altar for sacrifice, which he hath finished already, but only the altar of incense or intercession, remains. On this golden altar are the prayers of all saints offered. But how came they to be acceptable unto the Lord? Why, this high priest hath much incense, a bottomless store and treasure of righteousness that he adds unto them; which is the only sweet perfume in the presence of the Lord. This makes all their worship glorious indeed. Christ, the high priest, takes away the iniquity and failings of them, he adds his own righteousness unto it; and so in his own person offers it on the golden altar (that is, his own self) before the throne of God continually.

Now, as this tends exceedingly to the consolation of believers, so it stains the glory of all the outward pompous worship that some are so delighted in. For believers, what can more tend to their comfort and encouragement, than that the Lord Christ takes their poor weak prayers, which themselves are oftentimes ashamed of and humbled for, and are ready to cry out against themselves by reason of them; and what by taking away the evil of them, what by adding the incense of his own righteousness, makes them acceptable at the throne of grace! They little know what beauty and glory those very duties which they perform and are troubled at are clothed withal: and for the beauty and glory of gospel worship, in comparison of all the self-invented rites of men, how will one thought of faith about this administration of Christ in heaven with the prayers of the saints, cast contempt and shame upon them! What is all their gaudy preparation, in comparison of the high priest of the saints offering up their prayers on the golden altar before the throne of God! This is order, comeliness, and beauty.

Thirdly. Christ, as the high priest of the saints, presents both their persons and their duties in the presence of and before the Lord. This is that which was signified of old in the high priest's precious stones set in gold on his breast and shoulders, with the names of the children of Israel in them, [Exod. xxviii. 21](#). Christ, our high priest, is entered into the holy place for us, and there presents all his saints and their worship before the Lord, being “not

ashamed to call them brethren,” and saying of them, “Behold I and the children which the Lord hath given me.”

And this is the fourth thing in the words, manifesting the excellency and glory of gospel worship, taken from the principal procuring cause:— It is an access to God, *through Christ*.

## Sermon IV.

5. This also adds greatly to the glory and excellency of evangelical worship, that we have in it an access unto God, “in one Spirit,” or “by one Spirit.”

I shall show in brief, — (1.) How we have it “by the Spirit;” (2.) How “in one,” or “by one Spirit.”

(1.) That by the Spirit the Holy Ghost is here intended, is not questioned by any. He is that “one Spirit” who works in these things, and “divideth to every one as he pleaseth,” [1 Cor. xii. 11](#). I shall not here handle the whole work of the Holy Ghost in and upon the souls of the saints, in and for the performance of all the duties of worship wherein they draw nigh unto God by Christ and obtain communion with him, as absolutely considered; but only so far as his work renders the worship we speak of beautiful and comely; which is the matter we have in hand. And that I shall do in some few considerations:—

[1.] The Lord Jesus Christ hath promised to send his Spirit to believers, to enable them, both for matter and manner, in the performance of every duty required in the word, [Isa. lix. 21](#). He will give his word and Spirit. The promise of the one and the other is of equal extent and latitude. Whatever God proposeth in his word to be believed, or requireth to be done, — that he gives his Spirit to enable to believe and do accordingly. There is neither promise nor precept, but the Spirit is given to enable believers to answer the mind of God in them; nor is the Spirit given to enable unto any duty, but what is in the word required. The Spirit and the word, in their several places, have an equal latitude; the one as a *moral rule*, the other as a *real principle of efficiency*. Hence they who require duties which the word enjoins not, have need of other assistances than what the Spirit of grace will afford them; and those who pretend to be led by the Spirit beyond the bounds of the word, had need provide themselves of another gospel. Now, with promises hereof doth the gospel abound. He shall “lead us into all truth;” — he shall “teach us all things;” — he shall “abide with us for ever.” Having given his disciples precepts for their whole duty to God and himself, he promiseth them his Spirit to abide with them, to enable them for the accomplishment of them.

[2.] There are *three* things that are needful for the right performance of gospel worship:— *1st. Light and knowledge*, that we may be acquainted with the mind and will of God in it, — what it is that he accepteth and approveth, and is appointed by him; that we may know “how to choose the good and refuse the evil,” — like the sheep of Christ, hearing his voice and following him, not hearkening to the voice of a stranger. *2dly. Grace* in the heart, so that there may be, in this access unto God, a true, real, spiritual, saving communion, obtained with him in those acts of faith, love, delight, and obedience, which he requireth; without which it is in any thing “impossible to please God.” *3dly. Ability* for the performance of the duties that God requireth in his worship, in such a manner as he may be glorified, and those



who are called to his worship edified in their most holy faith. Where these three concur, there the worship of God is performed in a due manner, according to his own mind and will; and so, consequently, is excellent, beautiful, and glorious, — God himself being judge. Now, all these do believers receive by and from the Spirit of Christ; and, consequently, have by him their access to the Father; that is, are enabled unto, and carried on in, the worship which God requireth at their hands.

1st. It is he who enables them to discover the mind of God, and his will concerning his worship, that they may embrace what he hath appointed, and refuse the thing whereof he will say at the last day, “Who hath required this at your hand?” He is promised to “lead them into all truth,” as the Spirit of truth, [John xvi. 13](#); and is the blessed “unction” that teacheth them all things, [1 John ii. 27](#), — all things for the glory of God, and their own consolation. It is he that speaks the word, which sounds in the ears, “This is the way; walk in it.” And when Paul prays for the guidance of the saints, he doth it by praying that God would give them the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” in Christ, [Eph. i. 17](#). Now, this he doth two ways:—

(1st.) By causing them diligently to attend unto the word, the voice of Christ, for their direction, and to that only. This is the great work of the Spirit. So [John xvi. 13](#), it is said, “He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak;” — that is, he shall reveal and declare nothing but what is the mind of Christ manifested in the word; and that he shall call men to attend unto. “To the law and to the testimony” (to the word), — that is his constant voice. If men turn to any other teaching, they go out of the compass of his commission, — that direction which the Father began from heaven, “This is my beloved Son; hear him.” He is the only master and teacher that the Spirit carries all believers unto. He still cries, “Hear him; attend unto him speaking in the word.” It is true, in point of practice, according to the rule for the remedying of scandals and disorders, we are commanded to “hear the church,” or obey the wholesome directions of it, and to walk according to the gospel; but as to the worship of God, both as to the matter and rules in the appointment of it, we are called continually by the Spirit to hear Christ always; — and that spirit is not of Christ which sends us to any else.

(2dly.) By revealing the mind of Christ unto us in the word. This is his work, which he undertakes and performs. I confess that, notwithstanding the assistance that he is ready to give unto them, there are many mistakes, even amongst the saints themselves, in their apprehensions in and about the worship of God. They are many times careless in attending to his directions; negligent in praying for his assistance; slight and overly in the use of the means by him appointed for the discovery of truths; regardless of dispossessing their minds of prejudices and temptations, hindering them in the discovery of the mind of God. It is, therefore, no wonder they are left to be corrected under their own mistakes and miscarriages. But this hinders not but that the Spirit may be said to give the knowledge of the worship of



God in the word unto believers; and that because it is not, nor can be, profitably and savingly attained any other way. As “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Spirit,” — so no man can know the way of God’s house and worship but by the Spirit; — and we see by experience, that those that despise his assistance, rather trust to themselves and other men for the worship of God than to the word. This he does, ordinarily, in the use of means, — at least so far, that though in some particulars there may be amongst them mistakes, yet not usually such but that their performances are accepted of God in Christ. And in those things wherein they are at any time “otherwise minded” than according to truth, if they continue waiting, that also shall be revealed unto them from the word by the Spirit. The worship of God is not of man’s finding out, but of his designation who is “the wisdom of God.” It is not taught by human wisdom, nor is it attainable by human industry; but by the wisdom and revelation of the Spirit of God. It is every way divine and heavenly in its rise, in its discovery; and so becoming the greatness and holiness of God. For what doth please God, God himself is the sole judge. If any thing else set up itself in competition with it, for beauty and glory, it will be found, to be engaged in a very unequal contest at the last day.

2dly. Believers have this access by the Spirit, inasmuch as he enables them to approach unto God in a spiritual manner, *with grace in their hearts*, as he is the Spirit of grace and supplication. This is one special end for which the Spirit is promised unto believers, — namely, that he may be in them “a Spirit of grace and supplication,” enabling them to draw nigh unto God in a gracious and acceptable manner, [Zech. xii. 10, 11](#). And this is one part of the work that he doth perform, when he is bestowed on them according to the promise. [Rom. viii. 26, 27](#): Let men do their best and utmost, they know not so much as what they ought to pray for; but the Spirit of Christ alone enables them to the whole work. If all the men in the world should lay their heads together to compose one prayer for the use of any one saint but for one day, they were not able to do it so as that it should answer his wants and conditions; nor can any man do it for himself, without the help and assistance of the Spirit, whose proper work this is.

It were a long work, to show what the Holy Ghost, as a Spirit of grace in the hearts of believers, doth to this end, that they may have, in their access unto God, a saving, spiritual communion with him in Christ; wherein, indeed, consists the chiefest head of all the glory and beauty that is in the worship of God. Should I handle it, I must insist upon all these particulars:—

(1st.) That the Holy Spirit discovers their wants unto them, their state and condition, with all the spiritual concernments of their souls; with which, without his effectual working, no man can come to a saving acquaintance spiritually. Men may think it an easy thing to know what they want; but he that knows the difficulty of obedience, the deceitfulness of the heart, the wiles of Satan, the crafts and sleights of indwelling sin, will not think so, but will grant that it is alone to be discovered by the Spirit of grace.

(2dly.) It is he alone which really affecteth the heart and soul with their wants, when they are discovered unto us. We are of ourselves dull and stupid in spiritual things; and when matters of the most inexpressible concernment are proposed, we can pass them by without being affected in any proportion to their weight and importance. The Holy Ghost deeply affects the heart with its spiritual concernments, works sorrow, fear, desire, answerable to the wants that are discerned, making “intercession with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered.”

(3dly.) It is he alone that can reveal the saving relief and supplies that God hath provided in the promises of the gospel for all the wants of the saints; so enabling them to make their supplications according to the mind of God. It is not the consideration of the letter of the promises that will discover savingly unto us the glorious relief that is provided in them for our wants; but it is revealed unto the saints effectually by the Spirit, as provided by the love of the Father, and purchased by the blood of the Son, and stored up for us in the covenant of grace, that we may make our requests for our portions according to the will of God.

(4thly.) It is the Holy Ghost that works in believers faith, love, delight, fervency, watchfulness, perseverance, — all, those graces that give the soul communion with God in his worship, — and in Christ renders their prayers effectual. He doth this radically, by begetting, creating, ingenerating them in the hearts of believers, in the first infusion of the new, spiritual, vital principle with which they are endued when they are born of him; as also by acting, exciting, and stirring them up in every duty of the worship of God that they are called unto; so enabling them to act according to the mind of God.

By these hath the soul spiritual communion with God in the duties of his worship; and these, with sundry other things, should be handled, if we aimed to set out the work of the Spirit in the worship of the gospel as he is a Spirit of grace and supplication. But the mentioning of them in general is sufficient for the end proposed, — namely, to discover the beauty and the glory of the worship that is thus carried on. Herein lies that which all the beauty of the world fades before, and becomes as a thing of nought, — which brings all the outward pomp of ceremonious worship into contempt; — I mean the glory and excellency that lies in the spiritual communion of the soul with God, by the grace of the Holy Ghost, in that heavenly intercourse which is between God and his saints in their worship, by this means. The Holy Ghost is essentially God himself, blessed for ever in his own person. He comes upon the hearts of the elect, and communicates of his own grace unto them. These graces he enables them to act, exert, and put forth in their worship of God. These God delights in, as coming from himself, as of his own workmanship in us; — he seeth a return of himself to himself, of his grace to his glory: and by these do the saints approach into his presence, speak to him, treat with him, and hear from him. It is the language of faith and love alone, and the like graces of his Spirit, that God hears in his worship. Other voices, cries, and noises he regards not; yea, at least, if not some of them in themselves, yet all of them when these

are wanting, are an abomination unto him. However, this is the beauty and the glory of the worship of the gospel, — the beauty and glory that God sees in it. Where this work of the Spirit of God is in his worship, there faith, love, delight, and fervency are in a saving and spiritual manner exercised. He is an atheist, who will deny that they are acceptable to God, — that this worship is glorious, beautiful, and comely: and he is no better, who thinks that any outward solemnity can render worship so, when these are wanting. So that they are the things on which the whole doth turn.

3dly. As always from the foundation of the world, so in the New Testament, the solemn worship of God is to be performed in the assemblies of his saints and people. Now, where the same worship is to be performed by many, the very law of nature and reason requireth that some one or more, according as there is necessity, should go before the rest of the assembly in the worship which they have to perform, and be as the hand, or mouth, or eyes to the whole body or assembly. And so, also, hath our Lord ordained, — namely, that in all the public and solemn worship of gospel assemblies, there should be some appointed to go before them in the performance of the duties of the worship that he requireth of them, be they what they will. Now, as the things themselves, wherein these persons are to minister before the Lord in their assemblies, are all of them prescribed by God himself; so, as to the manner of their performance, there are these two marks or guides to direct the whole:— first, it must be so performed as to tend to the *glory* of God; and, secondly, to the *edification* of the assembly itself. It would be too long for me to show you what is required to this one thing, that the worship of God be carried on in the assembly to the edification of the saints; which is, that all the ordinances of God may have their proper work in them, and effects towards them, for the increase of their faith and graces, and carrying them on in their course of obedience and communion with God. The consideration of this work made the apostle say, Πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἰκανός; In a word, so far as possible it may be done, their state and condition is to be spread before the Lord in prayer, according as they experience it in their own souls, — their desires to be drawn forth and expressed, — their pleas for mercy and grace to be managed, with the like ends of prayer; their condition to be suited, in instruction, consolation, and exhortation, and the like, in preaching the word. So of all other ordinances; they are to be managed and administered so as may best tend to the edification of the assembly. Now, this is supposed by the third benefit that the saints receive by the Spirit, as to their approach unto God: he gives gifts and abilities, spiritual gifts unto them whom he calleth unto this work of going before the assemblies in the worship of God, that they may perform all things to the glory of God and the edification of the body. I shall not so much as once mention the supplies that are invented and found out by men for this end and purpose. There is not a soul that hath the least communion with God, but knows their emptiness and utter insufficiency for that which they pretend unto.



Now, that the Holy Ghost furnisheth men with gifts for this end and purpose, we have abundant testimonies in the Scripture; and, blessed be God, we have evidence of it abundantly in and from those who are endued with them, [1 Cor. xii. 4, 7, 8, 11](#). The design of the apostle in that chapter is to treat of the worship of God, as it is to be carried on and performed in the gospel assemblies of saints; of which he gives an instance in the Church of Corinth. For the right performance hereof, he lays down, in [the first verse](#), that spiritual gifts are bestowed. Being to treat of the public worship of God, he begins with spiritual gifts, whereby men are enabled thereunto. The author of all those gifts, he informs us in [the fourth verse](#), is the Holy Ghost; he is sent by Christ to this very end and purpose, to, bestow them on his churches. The end of the collation, he informs, us, is the profit and edification of the whole body, [verse 7](#). Every one that receives them, doth it to this purpose, — that he may use them to the good and benefit of the whole. To this end are they bestowed in great variety, as [verse 8](#), — that by them the use of the body may be supplied, and church edification may be carried on. And having thus showed their nature, end, and distribution, he again asserts their author to be the Holy Ghost, [verse 11](#). And we have direction, upon this foundation, given for the exercise and use of those gifts, in sundry places; as [1 Pet. iv. 10, 11](#).

This then, also, as to the more solemn and public worship of God, is performed by that Spirit in whom we have an access unto the Father:— he gives spiritual gifts unto men, enabling them to perform it in a holy, evangelical manner, so as God may be glorified, and the assemblies of the saints edified, in the administration of all ordinances, according to what they are appointed unto. He enables men to pray, so as that the souls of the saints may be drawn forth thereby unto communion with God, according unto all their wants and desires; — he enables them to preach or speak as the “oracles of God,” so as that the saints may receive instruction suitable to their condition, as to all the ends of the good word of God, whose dispensation is committed unto them; — he enables men to administer the seals of the covenant so, that the faith of the saints may be excited and stirred up to act and exert itself in a way suitable to the nature of each ordinance. And all those gifts are bestowed on men on purpose for the good and edification of others; they are never exercised in a due manner, but they have a farther reach and efficacy in and upon the souls of the saints, than he that is intrusted with them was able to take a prospect of. He little knows how many of his words and expressions are, in the infinite wisdom of the Holy Ghost, suited in an unspeakable variety to the conditions of his saints; — here one, there another, is wrought upon, affected, humbled, melted, lifted up, rejoiced by them; the Holy Ghost making them effectual to the ends for which he hath given out the gifts from whence they do proceed. I might mention sundry other advantages which we have that belong to our access unto God by one Spirit; but because it were endless to enumerate all particulars, and they may be reduced to some one of these general heads, I shall mention no more of them. This, then, is the first, evidence that we have in the words, given unto the glory, beauty, and excellency of gospel worship:

In it we have an access unto the Father in the Spirit; which relates unto the things before mentioned, or rather touched on. Here is order: The Spirit reveals the mind of God as to the worship that is acceptable unto him; — he furnishes the souls of the saints with all those graces whereby and wherein they have communion with God in his worship; — he gives gifts unto some, enabling them to go before the assemblies in the worship of God, according to his mind, and unto their edification. Blessed order, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against! Order, proceeding from the God of order; — his own project and appointment! Here is beauty, decency, loveliness. It is all the work of the glorious and holy Spirit, which is like himself, — holy, glorious, and beautiful; and to set up any thing of any man's finding out in competition with it, is that which the Lord's soul abhors.

(2.) As the saints in the gospel have access unto God *in the Spirit*, so they have all their access *in one Spirit*; and this is the spring of all the uniformity which God requires. So the apostle tells us, that, as to the gifts themselves, there are diversities of them, and difference in them, [1 Cor. xii. 4–6](#). But where, then, is uniformity? If one man have better and greater gifts than another; — one man be more eminent in one kind, another in another; — one excelling in prayer, another in prophesying and preaching, — what confusion must this needs breed! Where is, then, any uniformity in all this? The apostle answereth, [verse 11](#). Here lies the uniformity of gospel worship, — that though the gifts bestowed on men for the public performance of it be various, and there is great diversity among them, yet it is *one Spirit* that bestows them all among them, and that in the order before mentioned. One and the same Spirit discovers the will and worship of God to them all; — one and the same Spirit works the same graces for their kind in the hearts of them all; — one and the same Spirit bestows the gifts that are necessary for the carrying on of gospel worship in the public assemblies to them who are called to that work. And what if he be pleased to give out his gifts in some variously, as to particulars, “dividing to every one severally, as he will?” yet this hindereth not but that, as to the saints mentioned, they all approach unto God by one Spirit; and so have uniformity in their worship throughout the world. This is a *catholic uniformity*; when whatever is invented by men under that name reaches but to the next hedge, and, as might be easily proved and evinced, is the greatest principle of deformity and disorder in the world. This, then, is the uniformity of gospel worship:— all the saints, everywhere, have their access in it unto God in one Spirit, who worketh alike in the general in them all, though he gives out diversities of gifts, serving to the edification of the whole.

And these are the evidences that are directly and “in terminis” given to the proposition of the beauty, excellency, order, and uniformity, of gospel worship in the text, as we consider it absolutely in itself. Before I come to consider its glory comparatively, in reference to the outward solemn worship of the temple of old, I shall add but one consideration more, which is necessary for the preventing of some objections, as well as for the farther clearing of the truth insisted on; and that is taken from the place where spiritual worship is performed.



Much of the beauty and glory of the old worship, according to carnal ordinances, consisted in the excellency of the place wherein it was performed; — first, the tabernacle of Moses; then the temple of Solomon, of whose glory and beauty we shall speak afterward. Answerable hereunto, do some imagine there must be a beauty in the place where men assemble for gospel worship; which they labour to paint and adorn accordingly. But they “err, not knowing the Scriptures.” There is nothing spoken of the place and seat of gospel worship, but it is referred to one of these three heads, — all which render it glorious:—

1. It is performed in heaven. Though they who perform it are on earth, yet they do it, by faith, in heaven. The apostle saith that believers, in their worship, do “enter into the holiest;” which he exhorts them to draw nigh unto, [Heb. x. 19, 22](#). What is the “holiest,” whereinto they enter with their worship? It is that whereinto Jesus Christ is entered as their forerunner, [Heb. vi. 20](#). It is into heaven itself, [chap. ix. 24](#). You will say, “How can these things be, that men should enter into heaven while they are here below?” I say, Are men “masters in Israel,” and ask this question? They who have an access unto the immediate presence of God, and to the throne of grace, enter into heaven itself. And this adds to the glory we treat of. What poor low thoughts have men of God and his ways, who think there lies an acceptable glory and beauty in a little paint and varnish! Heaven itself, the place of God’s glorious residence, where he is attended with all his holy angels, is the state [place?] of this worship. Hence is that glorious description given of it, [Rev. iv.](#) throughout; where it is expressly said to be “in heaven,” though it is only the worship of the church that is described. It were easy from hence to manifest the glory we have spoken of, in the several parts of it. But I do but point out the heads of things.

2. The second thing mentioned, in reference to the place of this worship, is the persons of the saints; these are said to be the “temple of the Lord,” [1 Cor. vi. 19](#), “Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God.” [Chap. iii. 16](#), “Know ye not” ([verse 17](#)) “the temple of God is holy?” God hath now no material temple; but he hath chosen this spiritual one, — the hearts and souls of his saints: and beautiful temples they are, being washed with the blood of Christ, beautified with the graces of the Spirit, adorned for communion with him; hence “the King’s daughter” is said to be “all glorious within,” [Ps. xlv.](#)

Whatever men may think, God, that knoweth his own graces in the hearts of his, and in whose eyes nothing is beautiful or of price but grace, knows and judges that this place of his worship, this temple that he hath chosen, is full of beauty and glory. Let who will be judge, that pretends to be a Christian, whether is more beautiful in the sight of God, — “a living stone,” adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, a heart full of the grace of Christ, — or a dead stone cut out of the quarries, though graven into the similitude of a man?

3. The assemblies of the saints are spoken of as God’s temple, and the seat and place of public, solemn, gospel worship, [Eph. ii. 21, 22](#). Here are many living stones framed into an

holy house in the Lord, an habitation for God by his Spirit. God dwells here. As he dwelt in the temple of old, by some outward, carnal pledges of his presence; so, in the assemblies of his saints, which are his habitation, he dwells unspeakably in a more glorious manner by his Spirit. Here, according to his promise, is his habitation. Now, the saints' assemblies, according to the order of the gospel, are "a building fitly framed together:" as the tabernacle and temple were of old in their outward structure, whereby they were raised; so they in their spiritual union in and under Christ their head. And they are a temple, a holy temple, — holy with the "holiness of truth," as the apostle speaks, [chap. iv. 24](#); — not a typical, relative, but a real holiness, and such as the Lord's soul delighteth in. I know some can see no beauty in the assemblies of the saints, unless there be an outward beauty and splendour in the fabric and building wherein they convene. But that is not at all the thing in question, what some men can see, or cannot see. Christ himself had unto some "no form nor comeliness that he should be desired;" — no more have his saints, his ways, his worship. That is not it which we inquire after; but what is beautiful, comely, and of price in the eyes and judgment of God. Neither is that the matter in question, whether these or those are saints of God, or no? But only, whether an assembly of saints, as such, which are the temple of God, and being called together according to the order of the gospel, be not a glorious seat of worship? God saith it is so; and if men say otherwise, those that are not enchanted with what I shall not name, will easily know what to give credit to.

Secondly.<sup>365</sup> Proceed we now, in the next place, to set forth the glory and beauty of this worship of the gospel *comparatively*, with reference to the solemn outward worship which, by God's own appointment, was used under the Old Testament; which, as we shall show, was far more excellent on many accounts than any thing of the like kind, — that is, as to outward splendour and beauty, — that was ever found out by men. And I shall do this the more willingly, because the Holy Ghost doth so much and so frequently — and that not without many great and weighty causes — insist upon it in the New Testament, having intimated it beforehand in many places of the Old. To the right understanding of what is gospel, and delivered in Scripture on this account, some things are previously to be considered:—

1. As the whole worship of the old church, so the whole manner of it, with all its rites, ceremonies, and ornaments, both in the tabernacle and temple, were of God's own appointment. There was not the least part of the fabric wherein his worship was celebrated, nor any ornament of it, — not one rite or ceremony that did attend it, — but it was all of it wholly of God's own designation and command. This is known and confessed. Moses made all things "according to the pattern showed him in the mount;" and at the finishing of the whole work, it is in one chapter ten [eight?] times repeated, that he did as the Lord commanded

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365 See the division as announced, p. 56.

him, [Exod. xl](#). Now, surely this gave it a beauty, order, and glory incomparably above whatever the wisest of the sons of men are able to invent. “Let the potsherd contend with the potsherds of the earth; but woe unto him that contends with his Maker!” The worship of the pope and his invention may possibly outdo the beauty and order of the worship of the Turk and his invention; but I hope they will not compare with God, nor make themselves equal with him. But why should I say I hope it, when the contrary is evident? For doth he not undertake to assign new rules of his own in the worship of God? and doth he not therein make himself equal with God, whose prerogative it is to be the only lawgiver to his people’s consciences, and the only prescriber of his own worship? But this I may yet hope, that men will not nakedly aver, that what is of their appointment is equal unto, and comparable with, what God appoints. Take their institutions and God’s together, and the former, surely, will have great disadvantage in respect of the authors. This, in general, I suppose, will be granted, though men be very apt practically to make void the commands of God by their traditions and institutions, laying more weight upon some one of them than on all the commands of Jesus Christ.

“But, it may be, though God appointed that worship of old, and all the concernments of it, he intended not to make that beautiful and glorious, but plain and homely; so that it doth not follow that it is beautiful and excellent because it was by him appointed.” Answer, Though we may well and safely abide by this general proposition, that what God hath appointed in his own worship is therefore beautiful and glorious, excellent, orderly, and comely, because he hath appointed it; yet I add, —

2. That it was God’s intendment to make, appoint, and dispose of all things so, that the solemnity of his worship might be very beautiful and glorious. He appoints the high priest’s garments to be made expressly “for glory and for beauty,” [Exod. xxviii. 2](#), — such as might be specious and goodly to look upon; and speaking of the church-state, when he had formed and fashioned it by his institution, he saith, her renown went forth among the heathen for beauty, for it was perfect through the comeliness he had put upon her, [Ezek. xvi. 14](#). There was in her ways of worship a renowned beauty, a perfect comeliness; whence, saith the prophet, “A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary,” [Jer. xvii. 12](#). But I shall not need to multiply testimonies to this purpose. Who knows not what things are spoken of the tabernacle, the temple, and all the worship belonging to them, everywhere in the Scripture? As God appointed, so it came to pass; — it was the most beautiful solemnity that ever the sun shone upon. Mosaical worship, I say, as celebrated in Solomon’s temple, outdid all the glory and splendour that ever the world, in any place, in any age from the foundation of it, ever enjoyed. Should all the princes of Europe lay their treasures together, they were not able to build a fabric of that charge, magnificence, and glory, as was Solomon’s temple. It were endless to go over particulars. The garments of the high priest were such as

rendered him so awful and glorious, that Alexander the Great, that famous conqueror of the east, fell down before him with a prostrate reverence. The order of the house, and all the worship in it, — who can fix his mind upon it without admiration! How glorious was it when the house of Solomon stood in its greatest order and beauty, all overlaid with gold, — thousands of priests and Levites ministering in their orders, with all the most solemn musical instruments that David found out, and the great congregation assembled of hundreds of thousands, all singing praises to God! Let any man in his thoughts a little compare the greatest, most solemn, pompous, and costly worship that any of the sons of men have in these latter days invented and brought into the Christian Church, with this of the Judaical, and he shall quickly find that it holds no proportion with it, — that it is all a toy, a thing of nought in comparison of it. Take the Cathedral of Peter in Rome: bring in the pope and all his cardinals in all their vestments, habiliments, and ornaments; fill their choir with the best singers they can get; set out and adorn their images and pictures to the utmost that their treasures and superstition will reach to; — then compare it to Solomon's Temple and the worship thereof; and, — without the help of the consideration that the one was from heaven, the other is of men, — the very nature of the things themselves will manifest how vain the present pretences are to glory and beauty. How much more may this be spoken of such underling pretenders as some are!

These things being premised, we say now, that, notwithstanding this whole worship, and all the concernments of it, was appointed by God himself; notwithstanding it was designed by him to be beautiful and glorious, and that indeed it was the very top of what external beauty and splendour could reach unto; — yet that it was no way comparable to the beauty and glory of this spiritual worship of the New Testament; yea, had no glory in comparison of it. This, then, I shall briefly demonstrate:— (1.) In general; and then, (2.) By an induction of some particular instances.

For the former, I need go no farther than that place where the apostle doth expressly handle this comparison, viz., [2 Cor. iii. 7–10](#). He doth here on set purpose compare the ministration of the law in the letter, with all its outward legal worship, rites, and ceremonies, with the administration of the gospel in the Spirit, and the worship of God attending thereon. And first, he acknowledgeth that the old ministration was very glorious; which he either gives an instance of, or proves it by that of Moses' face shining when he came down from the mount, when he had received the law, and the pattern of all that worship which he was to appoint unto that church. It seems that God left that shining on the face of Moses — which was such that the people could not bear the brightness of it — to testify how glorious that was about which he had received revelation; so that, indeed, saith the apostle, “That ministration was glorious, very glorious, — yea, glory in the abstract,” [verse 9](#). Nothing was there ever in the world to be compared with it. We will, then, compare it now with the ministration of the Spirit, and the worship of God under the gospel. It may be he will say,

“It is not all out so glorious, indeed.” Nay, but he goes farther, and tells us that this doth so excel in glory, comeliness, and excellency, that, in respect unto it, the other had *no glory* at all. What, then, may be said of any thing invented by men in the worship of God for glory and beauty? I dare not say what the apostle saith of that which God himself appointed, — that it hath any glory and beauty in itself. But yet, suppose it hath so; let men esteem it as glorious and beautiful as they can possibly fancy it to be, — yet, unless the same veil be on their minds in reading the Gospel which is on the Jews’ in reading Moses, they cannot but see and acknowledge that it hath no glory in comparison of that spiritual worship which we have described.

Some particular instances will make the general comparison more evident. I shall only name these three, which — being the principal spring of all the beauty, glory, and order of the worship of old — are peculiarly considered by the apostle to this very purpose, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he sets out the excellency of the evangelical administrations of the covenant and worship of God above and beyond the legal:—

1. The first of these was the temple, the seat of all the solemn outward worship of the old church. The beauty and glory of it were in part spoken to before; nor shall I insist on any particular description of it. It may suffice, that it was the principal state [place] of the beauty and order of the Judaical worship, and which rendered all exceeding glorious; — so far, that the people idolized it, and put their trust in it; — that upon the account of it they should be assuredly preserved, notwithstanding their presumptuous sins: and, indeed, it had such blessings and promises annexed unto it, that if there were at this day any place or house in the world that had the like, I should desire to be among the first that should enter into a pilgrimage of going to it, though it were as far beyond Jerusalem as it is thither. But yet, notwithstanding all this, Solomon himself, in his prayer at the dedication of that house, [1 Kings viii. 27](#), seems to intimate that there was some check upon his spirit, considering the unanswerableness of the house to the great majesty of God. It was a house on the earth, — a house that he did build with his hands; intimating that he looked farther to a more glorious house than that. And what is it, if it be compared with the temple of gospel worship? Whatever is called the temple now of the people of God, is as much beyond that of old as spiritual things are beyond carnal, as heavenly beyond earthly, as eternal beyond temporal. First, In some sense the body of Christ is our temple, as himself called it, speaking of the temple of his body as being prefigured by it, — as having the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, typified by the presence of God in the old temple, and being the centre wherein all his people meet with their worship of God, as those of old did in the temple.

And surely there is no comparison, for beauty and excellency, between the house that Solomon built and the Son of God, “who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” Again, The persons and the assemblies of the saints, as I showed before, are a temple to God under the gospel. They are his body, [Eph. i. 23](#); and his house, [Heb. iii. 6](#).

Nor is the old temple, made of wood and stones, gold and silver, to be compared with this living house, washed with the blood of Christ, adorned with the real graces of the Spirit, and garnished with all the choice jewels of God's eternal love. They are God's delight, "the first-fruits of the creature" to him, the spouse of Christ, — through his graces altogether lovely. The Lord Jesus sees more beauty and glory in the weakest assemblies of his saints, coming together in his name, and acted and guided in his worship and ways by his Spirit, than ever was in all the worship of Solomon's temple when it was in its glory. Thirdly, Heaven itself, the holy place not made with hands, is also the saints' temple under the gospel. Believers have in their worship an open way into the holiest made for them by Christ, who entered into it as the forerunner, [Heb. vi. 20](#); opening it to them, also giving admission into it, [Heb. x. 19–21](#). And how exceedingly doth this exalt the excellency of the spiritual worship of the gospel! What was the glory of Solomon's temple to the glory of the meanest star in heaven! How much less was it, then, in comparison of the glorious presence of God in the highest heavens, whither believers enter with all their worship, even where Christ sits at the right hand of God!

2. The second spring of the beauty of the old worship — which was, indeed, the hinge upon which the whole turned — was the priesthood of Aaron, with all the administrations committed to his charge. The pomp, state, and ceremonies, that the Papists have invented in their outward worship, or that heap which they have, in several parcels, borrowed of the Heathen and Jews, is a toy in comparison of the magnificence of the Aaronical administrations. The high priest under the gospel is Christ alone. Now, I shall spare the pains of comparing these together; — partly, because it will be by all confessed that Christ is incomparably more excellent and glorious; and partly, because the apostle, on set purpose, handles this comparison in sundry instances in the Epistle to the Hebrews; where any one may run and read it, it being the main subject-matter of that most excellent epistle.

3. The order, glory, number, significancy, of their sacrifices, was another part of their glory. And, indeed, he that shall seriously consider that one solemn anniversary sacrifice of expiation and atonement, which is instituted, [Lev. xvi.](#), will quickly see that there was very much glory and solemnity in the outward ceremony of it. "But now," saith the apostle, "*we have a better sacrifice,*" [Heb. ix. 23](#). We have him who is the high priest, and altar, and sacrifice, — all himself; of worth, value, glory, beauty, — upon the account of his own person, the efficacy of his oblation, the real effect of it, — more than a whole creation, if it might have been all offered up at one sacrifice. This is the standing sacrifice of the saints, offered "once for all;" — as effectual now any day as if offered every day: and other sacrifices, properly so called, they have none. I might mention other particulars; but I suppose, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have in some measure manifested the excellency, beauty, order, and uniformity, of the spiritual worship of the gospel; and that both absolutely in itself, and in comparison with any other way of worship whatever. From all which it will



be easily made to appear, that this may well be reckoned among the unspeakable privileges that are purchased for us by the death of Christ; — which was the thing first proposed to consideration.

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## **Sermon V. Of walking humbly with God.**

“And to walk humbly with thy God.” — *Mic. vi. 8.*

The beginning of this chapter contains a most pathetic expostulation of God, by the prophet, with his people, about their sins and unworthy walking before him. Having, with an apostrophe to the mountains and hills, [verses 1, 2](#), stirred up their attention, and raised them to the consideration of his plea with them in [verses 3–5](#), he emphatically presses them with the mercies he had of old bestowed upon them, with the patience and love toward them which he showed and exercised in his dealings with them.

The conviction being effectual to awaken them, and fill them with a sense of their horrible ingratitude and rebellions, [verses 6, 7](#), they begin to make inquiry, according as is the custom of persons under the power of conviction, what course they shall take to avoid the wrath of God, which they could not but acknowledge was due to them. And here, as God speaks, [Hos. vii. 1](#), when he would heal them, their iniquity and wickedness is discovered more and more; they discover the wretched principles whereon they were acted, in all that they had to do with God.

Indeed convictions, on what account soever, made effectual upon the soul, draw out its inward principles; which are not otherwise to be discovered. Many there are who have, in notion, received the doctrine of free justification by the blood of Christ, whom, while they are secure in their ways, without trouble or distress, it is impossible to persuade that they do not live and act upon that principle, and walk before God in the strength of it. Let any great conviction, from the word or by any imminent or pressing danger, befall these men, — then their hearts are laid open, — then all their hopes are in their repentance, amendment of life, performance of duties in a better manner; and the iniquity of their self-righteousness is discovered.

Thus was it with these Jews. Their sins being charged home upon them by the prophet, so that they are not able to stand under their weight and burden, he now discovers the bottom of all their principles in dealing with God; and that is this, that having provoked him, something they must do whereby to appease him and atone his anger.

In their contrivance to this purpose, they fix on two general heads. First, They propose things which God himself had appointed, [verses 6, 7](#); — secondly, Things of their own finding out, which they supposed might have a farther and better efficacy to the end aimed at than any thing appointed of God himself, [verse 7](#).

First. They look to sacrifices and burnt-offerings for help; — they consider whether by them, and on their account, they may not come before the Lord, and bow themselves before the high God; that is, perform such a worship for which they may be acquitted from the guilt of their sins.



Sacrifices were a part of the worship of God appointed by himself, and acceptable to him when offered in faith, according to his mind; yet we find God frequently rejecting them in the Old Testament, whilst yet their institution was in force, and themselves good in their kind. Now, this rejection of them was not absolute, but with respect to somewhat that vitiated the service in them. Among these, two were most eminent:—

1. When they were rested in, as the matter and cause of their justification and acceptance with God, beyond their typical virtue.

2. When they were relied on to countenance men in the neglect of moral duties, or to continue in any way of sin.

Both these evils attended this appeal of the Jews unto their sacrifices. They did it first to please God, or appease God, — that on their account they might be freed from the guilt of sin, and be accepted: and then to countenance themselves in their immoralities and wickedness; as is evident from the prophet's reply, [verse 7](#), calling them from their vain confidence in sacrifices, to justice, judgment, mercy, and humble walking with God. But,

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Secondly, They find this will not do; conscience will not be satisfied nor peace be obtained by any performance of these ordinary duties, though they should engage in them in an extraordinary manner; no, though they could bring thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil. Though men attempt never so vigorously, in never so extraordinary a manner, to quiet their souls, terrified with the guilt of sin, by any duties whatever, it will not do, — the work will not be accomplished; therefore they will make farther attempts. If nothing that God hath appointed will reach the end they aim at, because they were never appointed by him for that end, they will invent or use some way of their own that may appear to be of more efficacy than the other: "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression?"

The rise and occasion of such sacrifices as here are mentioned, — the sacrificing of men, of men's sacrificing their own children; the use of such sacrifices throughout the world, among all nations; the craft and cruelty of Satan in imposing them on poor, sinful, guilty creatures, with the advantages which he had so to do, — I have elsewhere declared. For the present, I shall only observe two things in the state and condition of convinced persons, when pressed with their sins, and a sense of the guilt of them, who are ignorant of the righteousness of God in Christ:—

1. They have a better opinion of their own ways and endeavours, for the pleasing of God and quieting their consciences, than of any thing of God's institution, or the way by him appointed for that end. This is the height that they rise to, when they have fixed on what is most glorious in their own eyes. Tell a Papist who is convinced of sin, of the blood of Christ, — it is folly to him. Penances, satisfaction, purgatory, intercession of the church in the mass, have much more desirableness in them:— these Eliabs must wear the crown. The case is the same with innumerable poor souls at present, who hope to find more relief in their own



duties and amendment of life than in the blood of Christ, as to the appeasing of God and obtaining of peace.

2. There is nothing so horrid, desperate, irksome, or wicked, that convinced persons will not engage to do under their pressure on the account of the guilt of sin. They will burn their children in the fire, whilst the cries of their conscience outcry the lamentation of their miserable infants: which, as it argues the desperate blindness that is in man by nature, choosing such abominations rather than that way which is the wisdom of God; so also the terrors that possess poor souls convinced of sin, that are unacquainted with the only remedy.

This being the state and condition of these poor creatures, the prophet discovers to them their mistake and desperate folly in [the verse of my text](#).

Two things are contained in [this verse](#); — the one is implied, the other expressed in words:—

First. Here is something implied; and that is, a reproof of the error and mistake of the Jews. They thought sacrifices were appointed for the appeasing of God by their performance of them; and that this was their business in their worship, — by their duty in performance of them, to make satisfaction for the guilt of sin. This the prophet calls them from, telling them that is not their business, their duty: God hath provided another way to make reconciliation and atonement; it is a thing above their power. Their business is to walk with God in holiness; for the matter of atonement, that lies on another hand. “He hath showed thee, O man, what he requireth of thee:” he expects not satisfaction at thy hands, but obedience on the account of peace made.

Secondly. What is expressed is this, — that God prefers moral worship, in the way of obedience, to all sacrifices whatever; according to the determination afterward approved by our Saviour, [Mark xii. 33](#), “What doth the Lord require of thee?”

Now, this moral obedience he refers to three heads:— Doing justly; loving mercy; and walking humbly with God.

How the two first are comprehensive of our whole duty in respect of men, containing in them the sum and substance of the second table, I shall not stay to declare.

It is the third head that I have fixed on, which peculiarly regards the first table and the moral duties thereof.

Concerning this I shall do these three things:— I. I shall show what it is to walk with God. II. What it is to walk humbly with God. III. Prove this proposition: Humble walking with God, as our God in covenant, is the great duty and most valuable concernment of believers.

I. As to our walking with God, some things are required to it, and some things are required in it:—

1. Some things are required to it; as, —



(1.) Peace and agreement. [Amos iii. 3](#), “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” And he tells us, that walking with God, when there is no peace with him, is like walking in a forest where and when the lion roareth, [verse 8](#), — when a man can have no thoughts but what are full of expectation of his immediately being torn asunder and devoured. So God threateneth to deal with them that pretend to walk with him, and yet are not at peace with him, [Ps. l. 22](#), “Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” Who are these? Those to whom he speaks, [verse 16](#), “But unto the wicked, God saith:” the exceptive “but,” distinguishes them from those of whom he spoke before, [verse 5](#), who had made a covenant with him by sacrifice, and so obtained peace in the blood of Christ. When Cain and Abel went into the field together, and were not agreed, the issue was, that the one slew the other. When Joram met Jehu in the field, he cried, “Is it peace?” and finding by his answer that they were not agreed, he instantly flew, and cried out for his life. “ ‘Agree,’ saith our Saviour, ‘with thine adversary whiles thou art in the way,’ lest the issue be sad to thee.”

You know at what enmity God and man do stand, whilst he is in the state of nature. They are alienated from God by wicked works, — are enemies; and their carnal mind is enmity to him, [Rom. viii. 7](#); and his wrath abideth on them, [John iii. 36](#); — they are children of his wrath, [Eph. ii. 3](#). Were I to pursue this head in particulars, I could manifest from the rise and first breach, from the consideration of the parties at variance, the various ways of managing of it, and its issue, that this is the saddest enmity that can possibly be apprehended. You know, also, what our peace and agreement with God is, and whence it doth arise. Christ is “our peace,” [Eph. ii. 14](#). He hath made an end of the difference about sin, [Dan. ix. 24](#). He hath made peace for us with God; and by our interest in him, we, who were afar off, are made nigh, and obtain peace, [Rom. v. 1](#); [Eph. ii. 14, 15](#).

This, then, I say, in the first place, is required to our walking with God, — that we are at peace with him, and agreement in the blood of Christ; — that we are by faith actually interested in the atonement; — that our persons are accepted, as the foundation of the acceptance of our duties. Without this, every attempt for walking with God in obedience, or the performance of any duties, is, —

[1.] Fruitless. All that men do is lost. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;” their holy things are dung, which God will remove. In all their duties they labour in the fire; not any of their works shall turn to their eternal account. God looks on all their duties as the gifts of enemies, that are selfish, deceitful, and, of all things, to be abhorred. Such men may have their reward in this life; but as to what they aim at, their pains are lost, their hearing is lost, their alms are lost, — all is fruitless.

[2.] Presumptuous. They put themselves upon the company of God, who hates them, and is hated by them. [Ps. l. 16](#), “But unto the wicked saith God” (this is God’s language to them in their duties), “Thou bold, presumptuous rebel, what hast thou to do to take my

name in thy mouth? Why dost thou howl thus before me, and offer swine's blood in my presence? How camest thou hither, not having a wedding garment? I hate thy most solemn oblations." Indeed, it will be found at the issue, that intolerable presumption lies at the bottom of all unregenerate men's attempts to walk with God. They count it a slight thing to do so; — they deal with him as one that took very little notice how he is dealt withal.

This, I say, is the first thing required to our walking with God, — that we be at peace and agreement with him in the blood of Christ. And, as the psalmist says, "Consider this, ye that know not God," who have not made a covenant with him, in and by the sacrifice of his Son. You meet him in the field, — you put yourselves upon his company, — you pretend to walk with him in these duties, and those other, which custom, education, conviction, or self-righteousness, puts you upon; — in every one of them you provoke him to his face to destroy you. You seem to flatter him that you are agreed, when he declares that you are at enmity. Let a man deal thus with his ruler:— conspire against his crown and dignity, attempt his death, despise his authority, reproach his reputation; and then, when he is proclaimed rebel and traitor, and condemned to die, let him come into his presence, as in former days, and deal with him as a good subject, — offer him gifts and presents; — shall he think to escape? Will he not be seized on, and delivered over to punishment?

Every man, in his natural estate, is a rebel against God. Thou hast rejected his authority, conspired his ruin, the ruin of his kingdom, — art proclaimed by him a traitor and rebel, — art sentenced to eternal death: is it for thee now to meet him, — to go and flatter him with thy mouth, and fawn upon him in thy other duties? Will he not remember thy rebellions, despise thy offering, command thee out of his presence into bonds and prison, — abhor thy gifts? What canst thou else expect at his hands? This is the best and utmost of their condition, in their obedience, who are not interested in Christ; and the more earnest and zealous you are, the more ready in the performance of duties, the more do you put yourselves on him and his company who hates you upon the justest grounds in the world, and is ready to destroy you.

(2.) The second previous thing is, oneness of design. For persons occasionally to fall into the company of one another, and so to pass on together for a little season, doth not suffice for them to be said to walk together. Oneness of aim and design is required to it.

The aim of God, in general, is his own glory; he makes all things for himself, [Prov. xvi. 4](#); [Rev. iv. 11](#); — in particular, as to the business of our walking with him, it is the praise of his glorious grace, [Eph. i. 6](#).

Now, in this aim of God to exalt his glorious grace, two things are considerable:— First, That all which is to be looked for at the hand of God, is upon the account of mere grace and mercy, [Tit. iii. 4, 5](#). God aims at the exalting of his glory in this, — that he may be known, believed, magnified, as a God pardoning iniquity and sin. And, secondly, That the enjoyment of himself, in this way of mercy and grace, is that great reward of him that walks with him.

So God tells Abraham, when he calls him to walk before him, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,” [Gen. xv. 1](#). The enjoyment of God in covenant, and the good things therein freely promised and bestowed by him, is the exceeding great reward of them that walk with God. This also, then, is required of him that will walk with God, — that he hath the same design in his so doing as God hath; — that he aims in all his obedience at the glory of God’s grace; and the enjoyment of him as his exceeding great reward.

Now, according to what was before said of the design of God, this may be referred unto three heads:—

[1.] In general:— that the design of the person be the glory of God. “Whatever we do,” saith the apostle (that is, in our worship of God, and walking with him), “let all be done to his glory.” Men who, in their obedience, have base, low, unworthy ends, walk as contrary to God in their obedience as in their sins. Some serve him for custom; some for an increase of corn, wine, or oil, or the satisfying of some low earthly end; some aim at self and reputation. All is lost; — it is not walking with God, but warring against him.

[2.] To exalt the glory of God’s grace. This is one part of the ministry of the gospel, — that in obedience we should seek to exalt the glory of grace. The first natural tendency of obedience was, to exalt the glory of God’s justice. The new covenant hath put another end upon our obedience: it is to exalt free grace; — grace given in Christ, enabling us to obey; grace accepting our obedience, being unworthy; grace constituting this way of walking with God; and grace crowning its performance.

[3.] Aiming at the enjoyment of God, as our reward. And this cuts off the obedience of many from being a walking with God. They perform duties, indeed; but what sincerity is there in their aims for the glory of God? Is it almost once taken into their thoughts? Is not the satisfaction of conscience, the escape of hell and wrath, the sole aim they have in their obedience? Is it of concernment to them that the glory of God be exalted? Do they care, indeed, what becomes of his name or ways, so they may be saved? Especially, how little is the glory of his grace aimed at! Men are destroyed by a self-righteousness, and have nothing of a gospel obedience in them. Look on the praying and preaching of some men: is it not evident that they walk not with God therein, seek not his glory, have no zeal for it, no care for his name; but rest in the discharge of the duty itself?

(3.) That a man may walk with another, it is required that he have a living principle in him, to enable him thereunto. Dead men cannot walk; or if they do, acted by any thing but their own vital principle and essential form, they are a terror to their companions, — not a comfort in their communion. For a dead carcase, or a trunk, to be moved up and down, is not walking. Hence this is everywhere laid down as the principle of our obedience, — that we “who were dead are quickened;” that “the law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death,” [Rom. viii. 2](#). That we may walk with God, a principle of a new life is required; that we may have power for it, and be pressed to it from that which is within us.



Had not a man rather walk alone, than have a dead carcase, taken out of a grave, and acted by an external force and power, to accompany him?

This, I say, is a third consideration. The matter of our walking with God consists, as shall be showed, in our obedience, — in our performance of duties required. In this, we are all more or less engaged; yea, so far, that perhaps it is hard to discover who walks fastest, and with most appearance of strength and vigour. But, alas! how many dead souls have we walking amongst us!

[1.] Are there none who are utter strangers to a new spiritual life — a life from above, hid with Christ in God, a life of God — that mock almost at these things; at least, that can give no account of any such life in them; — that think it strange it should be required of them that they should give any account of this life, or of being begotten again by the Spirit; yea, that make it a most ridiculous thing? “What, then, is it they will yet plead for themselves? Why do they not walk with God? Is not their conversation good and blameless? Who can charge them with any thing? Do they not perform the duties required of them?” But, friend, would it be acceptable to thee to have a dead man taken out of his grave, and carried along with thee in thy way? All thy services, thy company, is no other to God; he smells nothing but a noisome steam from thy presence with him: thy hearing, praying, duties, meditations, they are on this account all an abomination to him. Tell me not of thy conversation. If it be from a pure conscience (that is, a conscience purified in the blood of Christ), and faith unfeigned, which is the life, or a fruit of it, whereof we are speaking, — it is glorious and commendable; if from other principles, the Lord abhors it.

[2.] Are there none who are acted, in their obedience and duties, not from inward principles, and spiritualized faculties, but merely from outward considerations, and external impressions? The apostle tells us how believers “grow,” and “go on to perfection,” [Eph. iv. 16](#); [Col. i. 19](#). Christ is the head; from him, by the Spirit, into every joint and sinew is derived an influence of life, that the body may thereby and therewith go on towards perfection. How is it with sundry others? They are set upon their feet by custom or conviction: one joint is supplied by repute, another by fear and shame, a third by self-righteousness, a fourth by the lash of conscience; and so they are driven on by a mere external impress. And these are the principles of the obedience of many. By such things as these are they acted in their walking with God. Do you suppose you shall be accepted, or that peace will be your latter end? I fear many that hear me this day may be in this condition. Pardon me if I am jealous with a godly jealousy. What means else that hatred of the power of godliness, that darkness in the mystery of the gospel, that cursed formality, that enmity to the Spirit of God, — that hatred of reformation, that is found amongst us?

*Use.* If there be so many things required to walking with God, to fit men for it; and many who do strive to walk with him are yet lost from a defect of them, in the midst of their obedience and performance of duties, — what will become of them, where shall they appear,



who never once attempted to walk with him, — who are wrought upon by no considerations to make it their business so to do? I speak not only of those amongst us, young and old, whose pride, folly, idleness, debauchery, profaneness, hatred of the ways of God, testify to their faces, to all the world, to the shame and danger of the places wherein they live, that they are servants to sin, and walk contrary to God, — who also will walk contrary unto them, until they are no more. I speak not, I say, of such as these, who are judged of all; nor yet only of those who are kept to outward observances merely on the account of the discipline of the place, and the hopes which they have laid up in it for their outward good, with such other carnal aims; — but of some also who ought to be leaders of others, and examples to that flock that is amongst us. What endeavours to walk with God are found upon them, or seen in their ways? Vanity, pride in themselves, families, and relations, yea, scoffing at religion and the ways of God, are the examples some give. I wish worldliness, selfishness, hardness, and straitness of bowels, with open vanity, do not eat up all humble walking with God, as to the power of it, in others.

The vanity of the highest profession, without this humble walking, which is another deceit, shall be afterward spoken unto.

For the present, let me speak to them of whom I have spoken somewhat already. If many shall cry, “Lord, Lord,” and not be heard; if “many shall strive to enter,” and shall not; what will be their lot and portion? Poor creatures! you know not the condition of your souls; you cry “Peace, and sudden destruction is at hand.” Take heed, lest the multitude of sermons and exhortations you have, make you not, like the men that dwell by the falls of mills, deaf with their continual noise. God sends his messengers sometimes to make men deaf, [Isa. vi. 10](#). If that be your portion, it will be sad with you. Give me leave to ask you two or three questions, and I have done:—

1. Do you not please yourselves, some of you, in your ways, and that with contempt of others? Do you not think they are fools, or envious, or hypocrites, or factious, that reprove you; and scorn them in your hearts? Do you not rather love, honour, imitate, such as never pressed you (nor will) to this business of a new life, — to walk with God; and so suppose the times ruined, since this new-fangled preaching came up amongst you; — desiring to hear things finely spoken, and fopperies of men ignorant of God and themselves? Or, —

2. Do you not relieve yourselves, with the help of profligate souls, that you will be better, — you will repent when the season is better suited for it, and your present condition is changed? Or, —

3. Do not some of you labour to put far from you all thoughts of these things? “*Amici, dum vivimus, vivamus;*” — “It will be well enough with us, though we add drunkenness to thirst.” Do not, I say, one or all of these rotten, corrupted principles lie at the bottom of your loose walking with God? Take heed, I beseech you, lest the Lord tear you in pieces!

## Sermon VI.

Having told you what things are previously required to our walking with God, —

2. Our next inquiry is, as to the matter or thing itself; — what it is to walk with God.

The expression itself is very frequent in Scripture, both as to the examples of them that did so, and as to precepts for others so to do.

It is said of Enoch, that he “walked with God,” [Gen. v. 24](#). And “Noah walked with God,” [Gen. vi. 9](#). Hezekiah:” walked before God,” [Isa. xxxviii. 3](#). Abraham is commanded to walk with God, [Gen. xvii. 1](#); yea, and the same thing is almost a hundred times in the Scriptures, with some little variation, so expressed. Sometimes we are said to “walk with God;” sometimes to “walk before him;” sometimes to “follow after him,” to “follow hard after him;” sometimes “to walk in his ways;” — all to the same purpose.

The expression, you know, is metaphorical; by an allusion taken from things natural, spiritual things are expressed therein.

Not to press the metaphor beyond its principal intention, nor to insist on all particulars wherein any thing of allusion may be found, nor yet insist on the proof of that which is owned and acknowledged, — walking with God, in general, consisteth in the performance of that obedience, for matter and manner, which God, in the covenant of grace, requires at our hands.

I shall only manifest unto you some few of the chief concernments of this obedience, which give life and significancy to the metaphor, and so pass on:—

(1.) That our obedience be walking with God, it is required that we be in covenant with him, and that the obedience be required in the tenor of that covenant.

This, as to the matter of it, was spoken to before, under the head of what was required to this walking with God, — namely, that we have peace and agreement with him. Here it is formally considered — from that expression, “with God “— as the spring and rule of our obedience. Therefore this expression is comprehensive of the whole duty of the covenant on our part. As, [Gen. xvii. 1](#), “I am God Almighty,” or “All-sufficient,” — that is, unto thee I will be so, — as this is comprehensive of the whole of the covenant on the part of God, — that he will be unto us an all-sufficient God; so the words that follow are comprehensive of the whole of our duty, — “Walk before me;” which are exegetically explained in the next words, “and be thou perfect.” The covenant, — the agreement that is between God and us in Christ, wherein he promises to be our God, and we give up ourselves to be his people, — is the bottom and spring of that obedience which is walking with God; that is, at an agreement with him, in covenant with him, — with whom, out of covenant, we have no commerce.

(2.) It is an obedience according to the tenor of that covenant wherein we are agreed with God. Walking with God according to the tenor of the covenant of works was, “Do this,



and live.” The state is now changed. The rule now is that of [Gen. xvii. 1](#), “ ‘Be thou perfect,’ or upright, ‘before me,’ in all the obedience I require at thy hands.”

Now, there are sundry things required to our walking with God in obedience, so that it may answer the tenor of the covenant wherein we are agreed.

[1.] That it proceed from faith in God, by Christ the mediator. Faith in God, in general, is, and must be, the principle of all obedience, in what covenant soever, [Heb. xi. 6](#); but faith in God, through Christ the mediator, is the principle of that obedience which, according to the tenor of the new covenant, is accepted. Hence it is called “The obedience of faith,” [Rom. i. 5](#); that is, of faith in God by Christ, as the foregoing and following words evince. His blood is the blood of this covenant, [Heb. ix. 15, x. 29](#). The covenant itself is confirmed and ratified, thereby; and by the blood of that covenant do we receive what we receive from God, [Zech. ix. 11](#). Hence, whenever God makes mention of the covenant to Abraham, and stirs him up to the obedience that is required in it, he still mentions the “seed;” “which is Christ,” saith the apostle, [Gal. iii. 16](#). As it is said, in general, that “he that comes to God must believe that he is;” so, in particular, as to the new covenant, Christ says of himself, “I am the way:” there is no going to the Father but by him, [John xiv. 6](#). They who have believed in God, must be careful to maintain good works, [Tit. iii. 8](#); that is, they who have believed in God through Christ. If, in our obedience, we walk with God according to the tenor of the new covenant, that obedience ariseth from justifying faith; that is, faith in God through Christ.

[2.] That it be perfect; that is, that the person be perfect or upright therein: “Walk before me, and be thou perfect,” [Gen. xvii. 1](#). It was said of Noah, that he was “perfect in his generations,” [Gen. vi. 9](#); as it is also said of many others. David bids us “mark the perfect man,” [Ps. xxxvii. 37](#); that is, the man that walketh with God according to the tenor of the new covenant. And our Saviour, calling for this obedience, commands us to “be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect,” [Matt. v. 48](#).

Now there is a twofold perfection:—

*1st.* There is a τελείωσις, — a consummation in righteousness. So it is said of the law, that it “made nothing perfect,” [Heb. vii. 19](#), or brought nothing to perfect righteousness. And the sacrifices made not the comers unto God by them perfect, [Heb. x. 1](#). They could not τελειῶσαι, consummate the work of righteousness, which was aimed at. In this sense we are said to be perfect, “complete” in Christ, [Col. ii. 10](#); and, as it is said in another case, [Ezek. xvi. 14](#), our beauty is “perfect” through his comeliness. This is the perfection of justification; whereof we speak not.

*2dly.* There is a perfection within us. Now this also is twofold:— A complete perfection of enjoyment; and a perfection of tendency towards enjoyment:—

(*1st.*) In respect of the first, Paul says he was not made perfect, [Phil. iii. 12](#); and tells us where and by whom it is obtained, [Heb. xii. 23](#), “The spirits of just men made perfect.” Just men are not thus made perfect until their spirits be brought into the presence of God. This

perfection is the aim of Christ's redemption, Eph. v. 25, 26; and of all their obedience, Eph. iv. 14. But this is not the perfection which the covenant requires, but which it tends and brings to, whilst by the promise of it we are carried on in the work of "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Cor. vii. 1. See Job ix. 20.

(2dly.) There is also a perfection of tendency to this end. So Noah is said to be perfect, and Job perfect; and God commands Abraham to be perfect; and David describes the happy condition of the perfect man. Concerning this, observe, —

[1st.] There is no word in the Scripture whereby this perfection, and being perfect, is expressed, that in its use is restrained to such an absolute perfection as should admit of no mixture of failing or defect. The word used concerning Noah, and in the terms of the covenant to Abraham, is פְּרָמִים, of פָּרָם, from פָּרַם; which hath various significations. When spoken in the abstract, as פָּרָם is often used, it signifies "simplicity of manners," without craft; which, in the New Testament, is ἀκακία ἄκακος, Rom. xvi. 18]. So Jacob is said to be פָּרָם אִישׁ, Gen. xxv. 27, which we have rendered, "a plain man;" that is, plain-hearted, without guile, — as Christ speaks of Nathanael. Of this sense of the word you have a notable example, 1 Kings xxii. 34, where the man that slew Ahab is said to draw a bow לְפָרְתָּמוֹ, "in his simplicity," which we have rendered, "at a venture;" that is, without any pernicious design in particular. So, Job ix. 21, פָּרָם is opposed to רָשָׁע that is, to him that is "unquiet, malicious," and "perverse." Such a man in the New Testament is said to be ἀνέγκλητος and ἄμωμος, — that is, "one that cannot be justly blamed," or reprov'd, "for dealing perversely." Many other instances might be given. The word יָשָׁר, which we have commonly rendered "upright," is used also to this purpose; but it is so known that this word in its use in the Scripture goes no farther than "integrity," nor reaches to an absolute perfection, that I shall not need to insist on it.

The words used in the New Testament are chiefly τέλειος and ἄρτιος, neither of which in their use is restrained to this perfection. Hence James saith, he is τέλειος, who bridles his tongue, James iii. 2. The word is but once used positively of any man in an indefinite sense; and that is, 1 Cor. ii. 6, where it evidently denotes only men of some growth in the knowledge of the mystery of the gospel. But I shall not farther pursue the words.

[2dly.] Two things are contained in this perfection of obedience that is required in our walking with God in the new covenant. The first whereof regards our obedience; the second, the persons obeying.

1st. The perfection that respects the obedience itself, or our objective perfection, is that of parts, or the whole of the will and counsel of God as to our obedience. The law or will of God concerning our obedience is perfect; it hath an integrity in it; and we must have respect



to all the parts of it that are revealed to us. So David, "I have a respect unto all thy commandments," [Ps. cxix. 6](#). See [James ii. 10](#).

2dly. Subjective perfection, in respect of the person obeying, is his sincerity and freedom from guile, — the uprightness of his heart in his obedience. And this is that which is mainly intended in that expression of being "perfect," — being upright, without guile, hypocrisy, false or selfish ends, — in singleness and simplicity of heart doing the whole will of God.

This, then, I say, is that perfection of obedience which makes it walking with God. Whatever comes short of this, — if the heart be not upright, without guile, free from hypocrisy and self-ends, — if the obedience be not universal, it is not walking with God. This is a perfection in a tendency to that which is complete; which Paul wished for the Corinthians, [2 Cor. xiii. 9](#); and which he exhorted the Hebrews to, [Heb. vi. 1](#). If we fail in this, or come short of this perfection, by any guile of our hearts, by voluntary retaining any sweet morsel under our tongue, by keeping a knee for Baal, or a bow for Rimmon, — we walk not with God. It is sad to think how many lose all they do or have wrought by coming short in this perfection. One vile lust or other, — love of the world, pride, ambition, idleness, hardheartedness, — may lose all, spoil all; and men walk contrary to God when they think they walk most with him.

(3.) That our obedience may be walking with God, it is required that it be a constant, progressive motion towards a mark before us. Walking is a constant progress. He that is walking towards a place that he hath in his eye may stumble sometimes, yea, perhaps, and fall also; but yet, whilst his design and endeavour lies towards the place aimed at, — whilst he lies not still when he falls, but gets up again and presses forward, — he is still, from the chief aim of his acting, said to walk that way. But now, let this man sit down, or lie down in the way, you cannot say he is walking; much less can you say that he is walking that way, if he walk quite contrary. So is it in that obedience which is walking with God. "I press forward," saith the apostle, "to the mark," [Phil. iii. 14](#); "I follow after it," [chap. iii. 12](#). And he bids us "so run that we may obtain." There is a constant pressing forwards required in our obedience. Saith David, "I follow hard after God." The enjoyment of God in Christ is the mark before us; our walking is a constant pressing towards it. To fall into, yea, perhaps, fall under, a temptation, hinders not but that a man may still be said to be walking, though he makes no great speed, and though he defiles himself by his fall. It is not every omission of a duty, it is not every commission of sin, that utterly cuts off in the performance of the duty; but to sit down and give over, — to engage in a way, a course of sin, — this is that which is called walking contrary to God, not with him.

(4.) Walking with God, is to walk always as under the eye of God. Hence it is called "walking before him," before his face, in his sight. The performance of all duties of obedience as under the eye of God, is required unto this walking with him.

Now, there are two ways whereby a man may do all things as under the eye of God:—

[1.] By a general apprehension of God's omniscience and presence, as "all things are open and naked before him," [Heb. iv. 12](#); on this consideration, that he knows all things, — that his understanding is infinite, — that nothing can be hid from him, — that there is no flying out of his presence, [Ps. cxxxix. 7](#), nor hiding from him, the darkness being light to him. Men may have a general persuasion that they are under the eye of God: and this is in the thoughts of all; — I do not say actually, but in respect of the principle of it that lies in them; which, if it may freely act itself, will make them know it and consider it, [Ps. xciv. 9](#); [Job xxiv. 23](#); [Prov. xv. 3](#).

[2.] There is a performance of obedience under the eye of God, as one that is peculiarly concerned in that obedience. God says to David, [Ps. xxxii. 8](#), "I will guide thee with mine eye." The consideration of mine eye being upon thee, shall instruct thee, or teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. Mine eye is on thee, as concerned in thy ways and obedience." This is to walk before God, — to consider him as looking on us, as one deeply concerned in all our ways, walking, and obedience.

Now, we consider the Lord as thus concerned, as one from whom we receive, — 1st, *Direction*; 2dly, *Protection*; 3dly, *Examination and trial*.

1st. *Direction*. So before, — "I will guide thee with mine eye." Consideration of the eye of God on us, sends us to him for counsel and direction in the whole course of our obedience. If a child walk in any way with his father looking on him, if he be at a loss at any time which way he ought to go, will he not inquire of him who knows, who looks on him in all his ways? Are we at any loss in our way? know we not what to do, or how to steer our course? — [Let us] look to Him whose eye is upon us, and we shall have direction, [Prov. xxii. 12](#).

2dly. *Protection* in our walking in our obedience: [Ps. xxxiv. 15](#), His eyes are so upon them, that his ears are open to them, to give them protection and deliverance: so fully, [2 Chron. xvi. 9](#). This is one end why the eyes of God are upon his and their ways, — that he may show himself strong in their behalf. "I have seen it," he lays at the bottom of all their deliverance.

3dly. For *trial and examination*: [Ps. xi. 4, 5](#), His eyes are upon us, for to search and try if there be, as David speaks, any way of wickedness in us. This use he makes of the consideration of the omnipresence and omniscience of God, [Ps. cxxxix. 7–18](#). Having set forth God's intimate knowledge of and acquaintance with him, and all his ways, [verses 23, 24](#), he makes use of it, by appealing to him about his integrity in his obedience. So saith Job to God, "Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?" [chap. x. 4](#); that is, thou dost not. And what is this spoken in reference unto? Even his trying the paths and obedience of the sons of men, [verse 6](#). When our Saviour comes to try, examine, and search the obedience of his churches, he is said to have "eyes of fire," [Rev. i. 14](#). And, in pursuit of it, he still tells his churches, "I know thy works;" — or, "I have not found thee perfect; I have something against thee:" — all arguing a trial and examination of their obedience.

This, I say, is to walk before God, or under his eye, — to consider him looking on us peculiarly, as one concerned in our ways, walking, and obedience; that we may constantly take counsel of him, fly to him for protection, and consider that he weighs and tries all our ways and works, whether they are perfect according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

Now, there are two things that will certainly follow this consideration of our walking with God, being under his eye and control:—

(1st.) Reverential thoughts of him. This God, who is a consuming fire, is nigh to us; his eyes are always on us. “Let us,” saith the apostle, “have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably,” [Heb. xii. 28, 29](#). If men order their deportment and carriage, at least, unto a reverential appearance before their rulers or governors, who see only their outside, shall we not have a regard of Him who always hath his eye upon us, searches our hearts, and tries our reins, — the most secret reserve of our souls? But of this afterward.

(2dly.) Self-abasement under a sense of our great vileness, and the imperfection of all our services. But both these belong properly to the next consideration, — of what it is to walk humbly with God.

(5.) Our walking with God in our obedience, argues complacency and delight therein, and that we are bound unto God in his ways with the cords of love. He that goes unwillingly, by compulsion, with another, when every step is wearisome and burdensome to him, and his whole heart desires to be discharged of his company, can very improperly be said to walk with him, and no farther than as the mere motion of the body may be so expressed. The Lord walketh with us, and he rejoiceth over us, and in us, [Zeph. iii. 17](#); as also he expresseth his delight in the particular service that we yield unto him, [Cant. ii. 14](#). So also saith the Son and Wisdom of God, [Prov. viii. 31](#); his joy and his delight is in the obedience of the sons of men. Hence are those longing expressions of God after the obedience of his people, “ ‘O that there were such an heart in thee, that thou wouldst fear me! Turn ye, turn ye; when shall it once be! What have you seen in me, that you are gone away?’ ” And our Saviour, the husband of the church, carries this to the greatest height imaginable, [Cant. iv. 9–16](#). He speaks as one transported by a delight not to be borne, which he receives from the love and obedience of his spouse, — comparing it with things of the highest natural delight, and preferring them far before them.

Now, surely, if God hath this delight in us in our walking before him, is it not expected that our delight should be in him in our obedience? It suits not my present business to go over the testimonies of Scripture, wherein either we are required to delight in the Lord, or have the example of the saints, who did so to the height proposed to us; or to insist on the nature of the delight I speak of. Job makes it a sure mark of a hypocrite, that he “will not,” notwithstanding all his obedience, “delight himself in the Almighty,” [Job xxvii. 10](#). Only take notice that there is a twofold delight in this matter:— [1.] A delight in the obedience itself, and the duties of it; [2.] A delight in God in that obedience.



[1.] There may be a delight in the duties of obedience, upon some foreign respect, when there is no delight in God in them. A man may delight to go along with another in the way, on the account of some pleasantness in the way, or other occasions which he hath to draw him that way, though he hath no delight at all in the company of him with whom he walks. God tells us of a hypocritical people, that sought him daily, and delighted to know his ways, and took delight in approaching to God, [Isa. lviii. 2](#). And it is said of some, that Ezekiel's ministry was to them as "a cheerful song of one that had a pleasant voice;" wherefore they came and heard and attended on it, when their hearts went after their sins, [Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32](#). There may be something in the administration of the ordinances of God, in the person administering, in the things administered, which may take the minds of hypocrites, so that they may run after them, and attend to them with great delight and greediness. John "was a burning and a shining light," saith our Saviour to the wicked Jews; and "they were willing for a season to rejoice" (or delight) "in his light," [John v. 35](#). How many have we seen running after sermons, pressing with the multitude, finding sweetness and contentment in the word, who yet have nothing but novelty, or the ability of the preacher, or some outward consideration, for the bottom of their delight!

[2.] There is a delight in God in our obedience, — "Delight thyself in the Lord," saith the psalmist, [Ps. xxxvii. 4](#); — and a delight in obedience and duties, because it is his will, and his ways. When a person aims in every duty to meet with God, to have converse with him, to communicate his soul to him, and to receive refreshment from him; when on this account our duties and all our ways of obedience are sweet and pleasant to us; — then do we in them walk with God. Let not men think, who perform duties with a bondage-frame of spirit; to whom they are weariness and burdensome, but that they dare not omit them; who never examine their hearts whether they meet with God in their duties, or have any delight in so doing; — let them not think, I say, whatever they do, that at all they walk with God.

I shall not insist on more particulars.

*Use 1.* Of direction. Know that it is a great thing to walk with God as we ought. We heard before how many things were required to render it acceptable; now, some of the things that it consists in. Who, almost, hath prepared his heart to walk with God as he ought? who considers whether his walking be such as it ought to be? Believe me, friends, a formal performance of duties, in a course or a round, from one day, one week to another, both in private and public, may possibly come exceeding short of this walking with God. Men content themselves with a very slight and formal course. So they pray morning and evening; so they take part with some of the people of God against open profane persons; so they keep themselves from such sins as would wound a natural conscience, — all is well with them. Be not deceived, walking with God must have, —



(1.) All the strength and vigour of the soul laid out in it. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” The soul and heart of a man is to be in the work; his design and contrivance about it; his contending in it. Form and a course will not do it.

(2.) It is to have the perfection of the new covenant in universality, and sincerity attending it. It is not the doing of this or that thing, but the doing of all things by Christ commanded; not a loving of friends only, but of enemies; not a denial of the ways of ungodly men only, but a denial of self and the world; not a doing hurt to none only, but a doing good to all; not a hatred to evil men’s ways only, but a love to their persons; not praying and hearing only, — but giving alms, communicating, showing mercy, exercising loving-kindness in the earth; not a mortification of pride and vanity only, especially if as to others in any outward appearance, — but of envy, wrath, discontent. In a word, it is “perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord” that is required. If men professing religion, who are almost devoured by world, or flesh, or envy, or faction, or idleness, or uselessness in their generation, would but lay their hearts to the rules we have considered, they would find they had but little cause to hug themselves in their ways and walking.

I might here go over all the particulars that have been insisted on, and try our obedience by them. But, —

*Use 2.* For others, I shall only ask over the heads of what have been delivered. Would you be thought to walk with God? —

(1.) What evidence have you that you are in covenant with him? that your covenant with hell and death is broken, and that you are taken into the bond of the covenant of grace? What account can you give to God, others, or your own souls, of this your covenant state and condition? How many are at a loss as to this foundation of all walking with God!

(2.) Is your obedience from faith? What evidence have you thereof? Go over all the causes, effects, and adjuncts of a justifying faith, and try whether you have this principle of all acceptable obedience. How hath it been wrought in you? What work of the Spirit have you had upon you? What have been your conviction, humiliation, and conversion? When, how, by what means wrought? Are your hearts purified by it, and are you by it baptized into one Spirit with the people of God? or are you still enemies to them?

(3.) Is your walking universal and perfect, according to the tenor of the covenant? Have you no sweet morsel under your tongue, no beloved lust that is indulged to, that you cannot as yet thoroughly part with? no allowed reserve for sin?

(4.) Do you delight in God in that obedience you yield? or are his ways a burden unto you, that you are scarce able to bear them, — weary of private prayer, of Sabbaths, of all the worship of God? I leave these things with your consciences.



## Sermon VII.

What it is to walk with God hath been declared.

II. What is added thereunto of duty, in this qualification, comes nextly to be considered.

Amongst the many eminent qualifications of the obedience of believers, we shall find, in the issue, this to stand in the forefront, among the chiefest (the words in the original are, **לְהִיָּחַדֵּשׁ לַיהוָה**): To “humble thyself in walking,” or, to “walk with God.”

A man would think that it is such an honour and advancement, that a poor sinful creature should be taken into the company of the great God, to walk with him, that he had need be exhorted to take upon him great thoughts of himself, that he may be prepared for it. “Is it a light matter,” says David, “to be son-in-law to a king?” “Is it a light matter to walk with God? How had the heart of a man need to be lifted up, which hath such apprehensions of its condition!” The matter is quite otherwise. He that would have his heart exalted up to God, must bring it down in itself. There is a pride in every man’s heart by nature, lifting him up, and swelling him until he is too high and big for God to walk with.

Now, whereas there are two things in our walking with God considerable:— first, The inward power of it; and, secondly, The outward privilege of it, in an orderly admittance to the duties of it; — the former alone is that which edifieth us in this duty; the latter puffeth up. These Jews here, and their successors the Pharisees, having the privilege of performing the outward duty of walking with God, were, as Capernaum, lifted up unto heaven; and, trusting in themselves that they were righteous, they despised others; — of all men, therefore, they were most abhorred of God. This is that which the Holy Ghost beats them from, — resting in the privilege to come up to the power. God tells us of the prince of Tyrus, that he set his heart as the heart of God, [Ezek. xxviii. 6](#); — he would be on even terms with him, independent, the author of his own good, fearless. So, in some measure, is the heart of every man by nature; which, indeed, is not to be like God, but the devil.

To prevent this evil, I shall inquire, what it is that is here required of us, under these two heads:— 1. What it is in reference whereunto we are to humble ourselves in walking with God; 2. How we are to do it:—

1. There are two things that we are to humble ourselves unto in our walking with God:— (1.) The law of his grace? (2.) The law of his providence:—

(1.) In all our walking with God, we are to humble ourselves in bowing to the law and rule of his grace; which is the way that he hath revealed wherein he will walk with sinners. The apostle tells us of the Jews in sundry places, that they had a mind to walk with God; they had “a zeal for God.” So he had himself in his Pharisaism, [Phil. iii. 6](#). He “was zealous towards God,” [Acts xxii. 3](#); and so were the Jews, [Rom. x. 2](#), “I bear them record, they have a zeal of God.” And they followed after righteousness, “the law of righteousness,” [chap. ix. 31](#); they took pains to “establish their righteousness,” [chap. x. 3](#). What can be more required

to walking with God than a zeal for him, — for his laws and ways, and a diligent endeavour to attain a righteousness before him? How few do we see attain thus much! What repute have they in the world that do so? But yet, saith the apostle, they did not attain to walk with God, nor the righteousness they sought after, [chap. ix. 31](#). But what is the reason of it? Why, in their attempt to walk with God, they did not bow themselves to the law of his grace. So [chap. x. 3](#); they went about to establish their own righteousness, and did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. What righteousness is that? Why, “the righteousness of faith,” according to the law of grace, [Rom. i. 17](#). “They sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law,” [chap. ix. 32](#). And the ground of all this is discovered, [verse 33](#). Behold, here are two effects of Christ towards several persons: some stumble at him, and so are not able to walk on with God. Who are they? He tells you, [verse 32](#). Some are not ashamed. Who are they? They that believe, and so submit to the law of God’s grace. It is evident, then, that men may labour to walk with God, and yet stumble and fall, for want of this humbling themselves to the law of his grace.

Let us see, then, how that may be done, and what is required thereunto. It is, then, required, —

[1.] That the bottom of all a man’s obedience lie in this, — that in himself he is a lost, undone creature, an object of wrath, and that whatever he have of God in any kind, he must have it in a way of mere mercy and grace. To this apprehension of himself must proud man, that would fain have something of his own, humble himself. God abhors every one that he sees coming towards him on any other account. Our Saviour Christ lets men know what they are, and what they must be, if they will come to God by him. “I came,” saith he, “to save that which was lost,” [Matt. xviii. 11](#). “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” [Matt. ix. 13](#). [Verse 12](#), “The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.” “I came into the world,” says he, “that they that are blind may see, and that they which see might be made blind,” [John ix. 39](#). This is the sum: “If you intend to have any thing to do with God by me, know yourselves to be lost sinners, blind, sick, — dead; so that whatever you have, you must have it in a way of mere grace.”

And how was this direction followed by Paul? Will you see the foundation of his obedience? You have it, [1 Tim. i. 13–15](#), “I was thus and thus: I am the chief of sinners; ‘but I obtained mercy.’ It is mere mercy and grace upon the account whereof I have any thing from God:” — which principle he improves to the height, [Phil. iii. 7–9](#), “All loss, all dung; Christ is all in all.” This the proud Pharisees could not submit unto. It is the subject of much of their disputes with our Saviour. To be lost, blind, nothing, — they could not endure to hear. Were they not children of Abraham? Did they not do so and so? To tell them that they are lost and nothing, is but to speak out of envy. And on this rock do thousands split themselves, in the days wherein we live. When they are overpowered by any conviction to an apprehension of a necessity of walking with God (as more or less, at one time or other,

by one means or other, most men are), they then set themselves on the performance of the duties they have neglected, and of the obedience which they think acceptable, abiding in that course whilst their conviction abides; but never humbling themselves to this part of the law of God's grace, — to be vile, miserable, lost, cursed, hopeless in themselves; — never making thorough work of it. They lay the foundation of their obedience in a quagmire, whose bottom should have been digged into; and stumble at the stumbling-stone, in their first attempt to walk with God.

Now, there are two evils attending the mere performance of this duty, which utterly disappoint all men's attempts for walking with God:—

1st. That men without it will go forth, somewhat, at least, in their own strength, to walk with God. "Why," say the Pharisees, "can we do nothing? 'Are we blind also?'" Acting in the power of self will cleave to such a one, so as not to be separated; it will steal upon him in every duty he goes about. Now, nothing is more universally opposite to the whole nature of gospel obedience than this, that a man should perform the least of it in his own strength, without an actual influence of life and power from God in Christ. "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing," [John xv. 5](#). All that is done without strength from him, is nothing. God works in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure," [Phil. ii. 13](#). Whatever a man doth, which God works not in him, which he receives not strength for from Christ, is all lost, all perishing. Now, our fetching in of strength from Christ for every duty, is founded wholly in that subjection to the law of grace whereof we speak.

2dly. His obedience will build him up in that state wherein he is, or edify him towards hell and destruction:— of which more afterward.

[2.] The second thing that we are to humble ourselves unto in the law of grace is, a firm persuasion, exerting itself effectually in all our obedience, that there is not a righteousness to be obtained before God by the performance of any duties or obedience of ours whatever. That this lies in the law of the grace of God, the apostle disputes at large, [Rom. iv. 13–15](#), "If," saith he, "righteousness be by the law," — that is, by our obedience to God according to the law, — "then faith and the promise serve to no purpose;" there is an inconsistency between the law of grace (that is, of faith and the promise) and the obtaining of a righteousness before God by our obedience. So [Gal. ii. 21](#), "If righteousness were by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." "You would walk with God according to his mind; you would please him in Jesus Christ. What do you do? You strive to perform the duties required at your hand, that on their account you may be accepted as righteous with God. I tell you," saith the apostle, "if this be the state of things, 'Christ is dead in vain:' if this be a righteousness before God to be obtained by any thing you can do, the gospel is to no purpose."

And this, also, is the proud heart of man to humble himself to, if he will walk with God; — he must obey, he must perform duties, he must be holy, he must abstain from every sin; and that, all, under a quick, living, energetical persuasion, that by these things a righteousness

before God is not to be obtained. This is to influence all your duties, to steer you in your whole course of obedience, and to accompany you in every act of it. How few are influenced with this persuasion in their walking with God! Do not most men proceed on other practical principles? “Is not their great reserve for their appearance before God hewed out of their own obedience? God knows they walk not with him.

[3.] In the midst of all our obedience which is our own, we must believe and accept of a righteousness which is not our own, nor at all wrought or procured by us; of which we have no assurance that there is any such thing, but by the faith we have in the promise of God: and thereupon, renouncing all that is in or of ourselves, we must merely and solely rest on that for righteousness and acceptance with God. This the apostle affirms his heart to be humbled unto, [Phil. iii. 7–9](#), the place before mentioned. He reckons up all his own duties, — is encompassed with them, — sees them lying in great abundance on every hand; every one of them offering its assistance, perhaps painting its face, and crying that it is “gain;” but saith the apostle, “‘You are all loss and dung;’ I look for another righteousness than any you can give me.”

Man sees and knows his own duty, his own righteousness and walking with God; he seeth what it costs and stands him in; he knows what pains he hath taken about it; what waiting, fasting, labouring, praying it hath cost him; how he hath cut himself short of his natural desires, and mortified his flesh in abstinence from sin. These are the things of a man, wrought in him, performed by him; and the spirit of a man knows them; and they will promise fair to the heart of a man that hath been sincere in them, for any end and purpose that he shall use them. But now, for the righteousness of Christ, — that is without him; he seeth it not, experiences it not; the spirit that is within him knows nothing of it; he hath no acquaintance with it, but merely as it is revealed and proposed in the promises, wherein yet it is nowhere said to him, in particular, that it is his, and was provided for him, but only that it is so, to and for believers. Now, for a man to cast away that which he hath seen, for that which he hath not seen; to refuse that which promises to give him a fair entertainment and supportment in the presence of God, and which he is sure is his own, and cannot be taken from him, for that which he must venture on upon the word of promise, against ten thousand doubts, and fears, and temptations that it belongs not to him; — this requires humbling of the soul before God; and this the heart of a man is not easily brought unto. Every man must make a venture for his future state and condition. The question only is, upon what he shall venture it? Our own obedience is at hand, and promises fairly to give assistance and help: for a man, therefore, wholly to cast it aside upon the naked promise of God to receive him in Christ, is a thing that the heart of man must be humbled unto. There is nothing in a man that will not dispute against this captivity of itself: innumerable proud reasonings and imaginations are set up against it; and when the mind and discursive, notional part of the soul is overpowered with the truth, yet the practical principle of the will and the affections will

exceedingly tumultuate against it. But this is the law of God's grace, which must be submitted unto, if we will walk with him; — the most holy, wise, and zealous, who have yielded the most constant obedience unto God, — whose good works and godly conversation have shone as lights in the world, — must cast down all these crowns at the foot of Jesus, renounce all for him, and the righteousness that he hath wrought out for us. All must be sold for the pearl; — all parted with for Christ. In the strictest course of exactest obedience in us, we are to look for a righteousness wholly without us.

[4.] We must humble ourselves to place our obedience on a new foot of account, and yet to pursue it with no less diligence than if it stood upon the old. [Eph. ii. 8–10](#), “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” “If not of works, then what need of works any more? The first end appointed to our obedience was, that, we might be saved. This end, it seems, is taken away: our works and duties are excluded from any efficiency in compassing of that end; for if it be of works, ‘then grace is no more grace,’ [Gal. ii. 21](#). Then let us lay all works and obedience aside, and sin, that grace may abound.” That many did, that many do, make this use of the grace of God, is most evident; so turning it into lasciviousness. “But,” saith the apostle, “there is more to be said about works than so. Their legal end is changed, and the old foundation they stood upon is taken away. But there is a new constitution making them necessary, — a new obligation, requiring them no less exactly of us than the former did, before it was disannulled.” So [Eph. ii. 10](#), “ ‘We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.’ God saving us by grace, hath, on that account, appointed that we should walk in obedience. There is this difference:— before, I was to perform good works because I was to be saved by them; now, because I am saved without them.” God saving us in Christ, by grace, hath appointed that we shall perform that in a way of acknowledgment of our free salvation, which before we were to do to be saved. Though works left no room at all for grace, yet grace leaves room for works, though not the same they had before grace came. This, then, are we to humble ourselves to, — to be as diligent in good works, and all duties of obedience, because we are saved without them, as we could be to be saved by them. He that walks with God must humble his soul to place all his obedience on this foot of account. He hath saved us freely; only let our conversation be as beseemeth the gospel. How this principle is effectual in believers, as to the crucifying of all sin, Paul declares, [Rom. vi. 14](#), “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” The argument to carnal reason would lie quite contrary. “If we are not under the law, — that is, the condemning power of the law, — then let sin have its dominion, power, sway. Did not the law forbid sin, under pain of damnation? — ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not,’ etc. Did not the law command obedience with the promise of salvation? — ‘The man that doth the things of it shall live therein.’ If, then, the law be

taken away from having power over us to these ends and purposes, as to forbid sin with terror of damnation, and command obedience for righteousness and salvation, what need we perform the one or avoid the other? “Why, upon this account,” saith the apostle, “that we are under grace; which, with new ends, and on new motives and considerations, requires the one and forbids the other.”

Have we now, or do we constantly humble ourselves to this part of the law of God’s grace, — that we build up and establish our obedience on grace, and not on the law; on motives of love, not fear; from what God hath done for us in Christ, rather than from what we expect, — because” eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord?”

[5.] We are to humble ourselves to this, — that we address ourselves to the performance of the greatest duties, being fully persuaded that we have no strength for the least. This is that which lies so cross to flesh and blood, that our souls must be humbled to it if ever we are brought to it; and yet without this there is no walking with God. There are great and mighty duties to be performed in our walking with God in a way of gospel obedience: there is cutting off right hands, plucking out right eyes; denying, yea, comparatively, hating father, mother, and all relations; dying for Christ, laying down our lives for the brethren; crucifying the flesh, cutting short all earthly desires, keeping the body in subjection, bearing the cross, self-denial, and the like; — which, when they come to be put in practice, will be found to be great and mighty duties. This is required in the law of grace, — that we undertake and go through with these all our days, with a full assurance and persuasion that we have not strength of ourselves, or in ourselves, to perform the least of them. “We are not sufficient of ourselves,” saith the apostle, [2 Cor. iii. 5](#). We cannot think a good thought. Without Christ we can do nothing, [John xv. 5](#). This, to a carnal heart, looks like making of brick without straw. “A hard saying it is, who can bear it?” May not men sit down and say, “Why doth he yet complain? Is he not austere, reaping where he hath not sown? Are his ways equal?” Yea, most equal, righteous, and gracious; for this is the design of his thus dealing with us, that upon our addressing ourselves to any duty, we should look to him from whom are all our supplies, and thereby receive strength for what we have to do. How unable was Peter to walk upon the water! Yet, when Christ bids him come, he ventures in the midst of the sea; and with the command hath strength communicated to support him. God may call us to do or suffer what he pleases, so that his call have an efficacy with it to communicate strength for the performance of what he calls us to, [Phil. i. 29](#).

This, I say, are we to humble ourselves unto, — not only in the general to reckon that the duties that are required of us are not proportioned to the strength residing in us, but to the supply laid up for us in Christ; but also to lie under such an actual conclusion in every particular duty that we address ourselves to. This, in civil and natural things, were the greatest madness in the world; nor is it needful that you should add any farther discouragement to a man from attempting any thing, than to convince him that he hath no strength or ability

to perform or go through with it. Once persuade him of that, and there is an end of all endeavours; for who will wear out himself about that which it is impossible he should attain? It is otherwise in spirituals: God may require any thing of us that there is strength laid up in Christ for, enough to enable us to perform it; and we may by faith attempt any duty, though never so great, if there be grace to be obtained for it from Christ. Hence is that enumeration of the great things done by believers through faith, — utterly beyond their own strength and power, [Heb. xi. 33, 34](#), “Out of weakness were made strong.” When they entered upon the duty, they were weakness itself; but in the performance of it grew strong, by the supply that was administered. So we are said to come to Christ to “find grace to help in time of need,” [Heb. iv. 16](#), — when we need it, as going about that which we have no might nor power for.

This is the way to walk with God, — to be ready and willing to undergo any duty, though never so much above or beyond our strength, so we can see that in Christ there is a supply. The truth is, he that shall consider what God requires of believers, would think them to have a stock of spiritual strength like that of Samson’s, since they are to fight with principalities and powers, contend against the world, and self, and what not; and he that shall look upon them will quickly see their weakness and inability. Here lies the mystery of it, — the duties required of them are proportioned to the grace laid up for them in Christ, — not to what they are at any time themselves intrusted withal.

[6.] This, also, is another thing we are to humble ourselves unto, — to be contented to have the sharpest afflictions accompanying and attending the strictest obedience. Men walking closely with God, may perhaps have some secret reserves for freedom from trouble in this life: hence they are apt to think strange of a fiery trial, [1 Pet. iv. 12](#); and therefore, when it comes upon them, they are troubled, perplexed, and know not what it means; especially if they see others prospering, and at rest in the land, who know not God. Their estates are ruined, names blasted, bodies afflicted with violent diseases, children taken away, or turning profligate and rebellious, life in danger every hour, — perhaps killed all the day long: hereupon they are ready to cry, with Hezekiah, [Isa. xxxviii. 3](#), “Lord, remember;” or to contend about the business, as Job did, being troubled that he was disappointed in his expectation, of dying in his nest. But this frame is utterly contrary to the law of the grace of God; which is, that the children that he receives are to be chastised, [Heb. xii. 6](#); that they are to undergo whatever chastening he will call them to: for, having made the Captain of their salvation perfect through all manner of sufferings, he will make his conformable to him. This, I say, is part of the law of the grace of God, that in the choicest obedience we willingly undergo the greatest afflictions. The management of this principle between God and Job were worth while to consider; for although he disputed long, yet God left him not until he brought him to own it, and to submit unto it with all his heart. This will farther appear in our second head, about submitting to the law of the providence of God. The truth is, to help



our poor weak hearts in this business, to prevent all sinful repinings, disputes, and the like, he hath laid in such provision of principles as may render the receiving of it sweet and easy to us; as, —

1st. That he doth not correct us for his pleasure, but that he may make us partakers of his holiness: so that we are not in heaviness unless it be needful for us; which we may rest upon, when we neither see the cause nor the particular of our visitation; — then, on this account we may rest on his sovereign will and wisdom.

2dly. That he will make all things work together for our good. This takes the poison out of every cup we are to drink, yea, all the bitterness of it. We have concernments that lie above all that here we can undergo or suffer; and if all work for our advantage and improvement, why should they not be welcome to us?

3dly. That conformity and likeness to Jesus Christ is hereby to be attained; and sundry other principles there are given out, to prevail with our hearts to submit and humble our souls to this part of the law of God's grace: which is a thing that the devil never thought Job would have done, and was therefore restless until it was put to the trial; but he was disappointed and conquered, and his condemnation aggravated.

And this is the first thing required of us, — namely, that we humble ourselves to the law of the grace of God.

Use 1. Let us now take some brief account of ourselves, whether we do so or no. We perform duties, and so seem to walk with God; but, —

(1.) Is the bottom of our obedience a deep apprehension and a full conviction of our own vileness and nothingness, — of our being the chief of sinners, lost and undone; so that we always lie at the foot of sovereign grace and mercy? Is it so? Then, when, how, by what means, was this apprehension brought upon us? I intend not a general notion that we are sinners; but a particular apprehension of our lost, undone condition, with suitable affections thereunto. Do we cry to the Lord out of the depths? or is the end of our obedience to keep ourselves out of such a condition? I am afraid many amongst us, could we, or themselves, by any means dive into the depths of their hearts, would be found to yield their obedience unto God merely on the account of keeping them out of the condition which they must be brought unto before they can yield any acceptable obedience to him. If we think at all to walk with God, let us be clear in this, that such a sense and apprehension of ourselves lies at the bottom of it, — “Of sinners I am chief.”

(2.) Doth this always abide in our thoughts, and upon our spirits, — that, by all we have done, do, or can do, we cannot obtain righteousness to stand in the presence of God; so that in the secret reserves of our hearts we place none of our righteousness on that account? Can we be content to suffer loss in all our obedience, as to an end of righteousness? and do we appear before God simply on another head, as if there were no such thing as our own obedience in the world? Herein, indeed, lies the great mystery of gospel obedience, — that

we pursue it with all our strength and might, with all the vigour of our souls, and labour to abound in it, like the angels in theirs, — perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord; and yet, in point of the acceptation of our persons, to have no more regard unto it than if we had yielded no more obedience than the thief on the cross.

(3.) Do we, then, humble ourselves to accept of the righteousness that God in Christ hath provided for us? It is a common working of the heart of them whom God is drawing to himself; — they dare not close with the promise, they dare not accept of Christ and his righteousness, — it would be presumption in them. And the answer is common, — that indeed this is not fear and humility, but pride. Men know not how to humble themselves to a righteousness purely without them, on the testimony of God: the heart is not willing to it; we would willingly establish our own righteousness, and not submit to the righteousness of God. But how is it with our souls? Are we clear in this great point, or no? If we are not, we are at best shuffling with God; — we walk not with him. He admits none into his company, but expressly on the terms of taking this righteousness that he hath provided; and his soul loathes them that would tender him any thing in the room thereof, as men engaged to set up their wisdom and righteousness against his. But I must conclude.

*Use 2.* If all these things are required to our walking with God, where shall they appear, what shall be their lot and portion, who take no thought about these things? Some we see visibly to walk contrary to him, having no regard to him at all, nor considering their latter end. Others have some checks of conscience, — that think to cure these distempers and eruptions of sin with a loose cry of “God be merciful to them.” Some go a little farther, — to take care of the performance of duties; but they seek not God in a due manner, and he will make a breach upon them. The Lord awaken them all before it be too late!



## Sermon VIII.

What it is to humble ourselves to the law of God's grace, you have heard.

(2.) I come now to show what it is to humble ourselves to the law of his providence.

By the law of providence, I intend, God's sovereign disposal of all the concernments of men in this world, in the variety, order, and manner which he pleaseth, according to the rule and infinite reason of his own goodness, wisdom, righteousness, and truth.

[1.] To evince what it is to humble ourselves to this law, some general observations must be given. And, —

1st. There is, and ever was, somewhat, very much, in God's providential administration of the things of this world, and the concernments of the sons of men therein, which the most improved reason of men cannot reach unto, and which is contrary to all that is in us, as merely men; — of judgment, affections, or what else soever we are acted by.

"Thy judgments," saith David unto God, "are far above out of his sight," [Ps. x. 5](#); that is, of the man he is speaking of: he is not able to see the ground and reason, the order and beauty of them. And [Ps. xxxvi. 6](#), "Thy righteousness is like a great mountain, and thy judgments are a great deep;" that is, as the sea, which none can look into the bottom of, nor know what is done in the caverns thereof. So that there is a height in the judgments of God not to be measured, and a depth not to be fathomed. Men cannot look into his ways. So also [Ps. lxxvii. 19](#), "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." Men must be content to stand at the shore, and admire at the works of God; but as to the beauty and excellency of them, they cannot search them out. To this purpose discourseth Zophar, in [Job xi. 7–12](#). It is of the excellency and perfection of God in his works of providence that he is speaking; in the consideration of whose unsearchableness, he closes with that of [verse 12](#), "Vain man would know the secrets of the counsels of God, the reason of his ways; but, in his attempts after it, he is as an ass, as a wild ass, as the colt of a wild ass;" — than which nothing could be spoken with more contempt, to abase the pride of a poor creature.

The ways of God are, we know, all perfect. He is our rock; and his work is perfect: nothing can be added to them, nor taken from them; yea, they are all comely and beautiful in their season. There is not any thing comes out from him, but it is from wonderful counsel; and all his ways will at length be found to praise him. But, as Job speaks, [chap. ix. 11](#), we perceive it not, — we take no notice of it; for who hath known his mind, or been his counsellor? [Rom. xi. 33, 34](#).

Hence, not only the heathen were entangled in the consideration of the works of providence, — some, upon it, turning Atheists; most, ascribing all things to blind, uncertain *chance* and *contingency*; and others (very few) labouring to set a lustre upon what they could not understand, — but we have the people of God themselves disputing with him about the

equality of his ways; bringing arguments against it, and contending against his wisdom in them: “Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal,” [Ezek. xviii. 25](#). And again are they at it, [chap. xxxiii. 20](#), “Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal.” Yea, not only the common people, but the choicest of God’s servants, under the Old Testament, were exceedingly exercised with this, that they could not oftentimes see the beauty and excellency, nor understand the reason or order, of God’s dispensations; which I might prove at large, in the instances of Job, David, Heman, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others. Yea, there was nothing that God was more put to, in dealing with his people of old, than to justify the righteousness and perfections of his providential dispensations against their unjust, unbelieving complaints and manners.

This, then, being the condition of God’s providential dispensations in general, — that there is much in them, not only above us, and unsearchable to us, as to the reason and beauty of his ways, but also contrary to all that is in us of reason, judgment, or affections; there is surely need of humbling our souls to the law of this providence, if we intend to walk with him. Neither is there any other way to come to an agreement with him, or to quiet our hearts from repining.

*2dly.* There are four things in God’s providential disposing of the things and concerns of men in the world that require this humbling of ourselves to him, as being no way able to grapple with him:— (*1st.*) Visible confusion; (*2dly.*) Unspeakable variety; (*3dly.*) Sudden alterations; (*4thly.*) Deep distresses.

(*1st.*) Visible confusion, — like that mentioned, [Isa. viii. 22](#). He that takes a view of the general state of things in the world, will see nothing but trouble, darkness, and anguish; “yea, darkness cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” The oppression of tyrants, wasting of nations, destruction of men and beasts, fury and desolations, make up the things of the past and present ages; — the greatest and choicest parts of the earth, in the meantime, inhabited by them that know not God, — that hate him, that fill and replenish the world with habitations of cruelty, sporting themselves in mischief, like the leviathan in the sea. In respect hereof, God is said to make “darkness his secret place” and his pavilion, [Ps. xviii. 11](#); and to “dwell in the thick darkness,” [2 Chron. vi. 1](#); — and to wait for the issue of this dispensation, to humble themselves to the law of it, is the patience and wisdom of the saints. See [Hab. ii. 1](#).

(*2dly.*) Unspeakable variety. Not to insist on particulars, the case of the saints throughout the world is the only instance I shall mention, and that on a twofold account:—

[*1st.*] Compared among themselves, in what unspeakable variety are they dealt with! some under persecution always, — some always at peace; some in dungeons and prisons, — some at liberty in their own houses; the saints of one nation under great oppression for many ages, — of another, in quietness; in the same places some poor, in great distress, put hard to it for daily bread all their lives, — others abounding in all things; some full of various

afflictions, going softly and mourning all their days, — others spared, and scarce touched with the rod at all; — and yet, commonly, the advantage of holiness and close walking with God lying on the distressed side. How doth God deal, also, with families in respect of grace, while he takes one whole family into covenant, and leaves out another whole family, whose heads and springs are no less holy? He comes into a house, and takes one, and leaves another; — takes a despoiled outcast, and leaves a darling. Of them, also, some are wise, endowed with great gifts and abilities; — others weak to contempt and reproach. Who can, now, with an eye of reason, look upon them, and say they are all the children of one Father, and that he loves them all alike? Should you come into a great house, and see some children in scarlet, having all things needful, others hewing wood and drawing water, — you would conclude that they are not all children, but some children, some slaves: but when it shall be told you that they are all one man's children; and that the hewers of wood, that live on the bread and water of affliction, and go in tattered rags, are as dear to him as the other; and that he intends to leave them as good an inheritance as any of the rest; — if you intend not to question the wisdom and goodness of the father of the family, you must resolve to submit to his authority with a quiet subjection of mind. So is it in the great family of God; nothing will quiet our souls, but humbling ourselves to the law of his providence.

[2dly.] Comparing them with others was the hard case of old; the pleading whereof by Job, David, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, is so known, that I shall not need farther to insist upon it.

I shall not farther manifest this from the variety which is in the dispensations of God towards the men of the world, which the wisest of men can reduce to no rule of righteousness, as things pass among us. Solomon acquaints us with it, [Eccles. ix. 11](#). Things are disposed of according to no rule that we may fix our expectations on; which ruined the reason of that mirror of mankind, in a natural condition, Marcus Brutus, and made him cry out, Ὁ τλήμων ἀρετή.

(3dly.) Sudden alterations. As in the case of Job, God takes a man whom he hath blessed with choice of blessings, in the midst of a course of obedience and close walking with himself, when he expected to die in his nest, and to see good all his days; — ruins him in a moment; blasts his name, that he who was esteemed a choice saint, shall not be able to deliver himself from the common esteem of a hypocrite; slays his children; takes away his rest, health, and every thing that is desirable to him. This amazes the soul; it knows not what God is doing, nor why he pleads with it in so much bitterness. A man that either is, or may fall into such a condition, will find that he will never be able to walk with God in it, without humbling himself to the law of his providence.

(4thly.) Great, deep, and abiding distresses have the same effects with sudden alterations; — of which more afterwards.



And these are, in general, some of the things in God's providential disposal of the things of men in this world, that are too hard and wonderful for flesh and blood; wherein his paths are in the deep; which are contrary to all rules of procedure that he hath given us to judge by, who are to judge of things but once, he being to call all things to a second account.

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[2.] Having given these two observations, I return to what I first proposed, — namely, the duty of humbling ourselves to the law of the providence of God, so far as it concerns us in particular.

I do not intend merely that men, in general, should be content with the dealings of God in the world; but that we should humble our hearts to him in what falls to be our share therein, though it come under any one or more of the heads of difficulty before mentioned. Our lots are various in this world: how they may be farther different before we go out of it we know not. Some are in one condition, — some in another. That we envy not one another, nor any in the world; that we repine not at God, nor charge him foolishly, — is that I aim at; — a thing sufficiently necessary in these days, wherein good men are too little able to bear their own condition, if in any thing it differs from [that of] others.

The next thing, then, is, to consider how and wherein we are to humble ourselves to the law of the providence of God. There are things on this account which our souls are to be humbled unto:—

First. His sovereignty. May he not do what he will with his own? This is so argued out in Job that I shall need to go no farther for the confirmation of it. See [chap. xxxiii. 8–13](#). The words are the sum of what was, or was apprehended to be, the complaint of Job, — that in the midst of his innocency and course of obedience, God dealt hardly with him, and brought him into great distresses. What is the reply hereunto? [Verse 12](#), “Behold, in this thou art not just.” It is a most unequal thing for any man to make any such complaints. Whether Job did so or not, may be disputed; but for any one to do so, is certainly most unjust. But on what ground is that asserted? See the words following: “ ‘God is greater than man; why strivest thou with him?’ It is to no purpose to contend with him that is mightier than thou. And it is likewise unjust to do it with him, who is infinitely and incomparably so, upon the account of his absolute dominion and sovereignty. ‘For,’ saith he, ‘He giveth no account of his matters.’ He disposeth of all things as he will, and as he pleaseth.” This is pursued to the utmost, [chap. xxxiv. 18, 19](#). Men will not be forward openly to revile or repine against their governors; and what shall be said of God, who is infinitely exalted above them? Hence you have the conclusion of the whole matter, [verses 31–33](#).

This, I say, is the first thing that we are to humble ourselves unto. Let us lay our mouths in the dust, and ourselves on the ground, and say, “It is the Lord; I will be silent, because he hath done it. He is of one mind, and who can turn him? He doth whatever he pleaseth. Am not I in his hand as clay in the hand of the potter? May he not make what kind of vessel he pleases? When I was not, he brought me out of nothing by his word. What I am, or have, is

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merely of his pleasure. Oh, let my heart and thoughts be full of deep subjection to his supreme dominion and uncontrollable sovereignty over me!" This quieted Aaron in his great distress; and David in his, [2 Sam. xv. 25, 26](#); and Job in his. It is pleaded by the Lord, [Jer. x.](#), [Rom. ix. 11](#), and innumerable other places. If we intend to walk with God, we must humble ourselves to this, and therein we shall find rest.

Second. His wisdom. He is wise also, as he speaks in derision of men's pretending to be so; indeed, God is only wise. Now, he hath undertaken to make "all things work together for good to them that love him," [Rom. viii. 28](#); — that we shall not be in heaviness unless it be needful, [1 Pet. i. 6](#). In many dispensations of his providence we are at a loss, — we cannot measure them by that rule. We see not how this state or condition can be good for the church in general, or us in particular. We suppose it would be more for his glory, and our advantage, if things were otherwise disposed. Innumerable are the reasonings of the hearts of the sons of men on this account; we know not the thoughts of our own souls herein, how vile they are. God will have us humble ourselves to his wisdom in all his dispensations, and to captivate our understandings thereunto. So [Isa. xl. 27, 28](#). This is that which our hearts are to rest in, when ready to repine, — there is no end of his understanding; he sees all things, in all their causes, effects, circumstances, — in their utmost reach, tendency, and correspondency. We walk in a shade, and know nothing of what is before us. The day will come when we shall see one thing set against another, and infinite wisdom shining out in them all; that all things were done in number, weight, and measure; that nothing could have been otherwise than it is disposed of, without the abridgment of the glory of God and the good of his church. Yea, I dare say, that there is no saint of God, that is distressed by any dispensation of providence, but that, if he will seriously and impartially consider his own state and condition, the frame of his heart, his temptations, and ways, with so much of the aims and ends of the Lord as will assuredly be discovered to faith and prayer, but he will have some rays and beams of infinite wisdom shining in it, tempered with love, goodness, and faithfulness. But whether for the present we have this light or not, or are left unto darkness, this is the haven and rest of our tossed souls, the ark and bosom of our peace, — to humble our souls to the infinite wisdom of God in all his procedure; and on that account quietly to commit all things to his management.

Third. His righteousness. Though God will have us acquiesce in his sovereignty, when we can see nothing else, yet he will have us know that all his ways are equal and righteous. The holy God will do no iniquity. That he is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works, is pleaded as much as any thing that he hath discovered of himself: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Is God unjust who inflicteth vengeance? God forbid. The righteousness of God — all which springeth from, and is reduced to, the universal rectitude of his nature, in respect of the works that he doth — is manifold. It is that which is called "Justitia regiminis," — his righteousness in rule or government, in the dispensation of rewards



and punishments, — that I am speaking of. Now, because we are not able to discern it in many particulars of his proceeding, to help us in humbling our souls unto it, take these considerations:—

*First.* That God judgeth not as man judgeth. Man judgeth according to the seeing of the eye, and the hearing of the ear; but God searcheth the heart. Little do we know what is in the heart of men; — what transactions there are or have been between God and them, which, if they were drawn forth, as they shall be one day, the righteousness of God in his procedure would shine as the sun. Rest on this, — we know much less of the matter on the account whereof God judgeth, than we do of the rule whereby he judges. Most things are to him otherwise than to us.

*Secondly.* God is the great Judge of all the world, — not of this or that particular place; and so disposeth of all as may tend to the good of the whole, and his glory in the universality, of things. Our thoughts are bounded — much more our observation and knowledge — within a very narrow compass. That may seem deformed unto us which, when it lies under an eye that at once hath a prospect of the whole, is full of beauty and order. He that was able to see at once but some one small part of a goodly statue, might think it a deformed piece; when he that sees it altogether is assured of its due proportion and comeliness. All things in all places, of the ages past and to come, lie at once naked before God; and he disposes of them so as that, in their contexture and answer one to another, they shall be full of order; — which is properly righteousness.

*Thirdly.* God judges here, not by any final, determinate sentence, but in a way of preparation to a judgment to come. This unties all knots, and solves all difficulties whatever. This makes righteous and beautiful the deepest distresses of the godly, and the highest advancements of wicked men. And there let our souls rest themselves in quietness, [Acts xvii](#).

*Fourthly.* His goodness, kindness, love, tenderness. Our souls must submit themselves to believe all these to be in all God's dispensations. I shall but name that one place wherein the apostle disputes for it, [Heb. xii. 1–6](#); and add that wherewith Hosea closes his declaration of God's various dispensations and dealings with his people, [Hos. xiv. 9](#).

This, now, it is to humble our souls to the law of God's providence in all his dispensations, — to fall down before his sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, love, and mercy. And without this frame of heart, there is no walking with God; unless we intend to come into his presence to quarrel with him, — which will not be for our advantage.

This was Paul's frame, [Phil. iv. 11](#), "I have *learned* it," saith he; "it is not in me by nature, but I have now learned it by faith, I have humbled my soul to it," (ἐν οἷς εἶμι) — "in the things, state, condition, good or bad, high or low, at liberty or in prison, respected or despised, in health or sickness, living or dying," (ἐν οἷς εἶμι,) "therein to bow myself to the law of the good providence of God; which is contentment." So was it also with David. [Ps. cxxxi. 1](#): He did not exercise himself, or trouble himself, about the ways and works of God that were too



high and too hard for him. How, then, did he behave himself? [Verse 2](#): Something in his heart would have been inquiring after those things; but he quieted himself, and humbled his soul to the law of the providence of God, which hath that comfortable issue mentioned, [verse 3](#), — an exhortation not to dispute the ways of God, but to hope and trust in him, on the account mentioned before. This is also the advice that James gives to believers of all sorts, [James i. 9, 10](#). Let every one rejoice in the dispensations of God, willingly bowing their hearts to it.

This is a popular argument, of daily use. Should I insist on the reasons of it, — its consequence, effects, and advantage; its necessity, if we desire that God should have any glory, or our own souls any peace; the perfect conquest that will be obtained by it over the evil of every condition; and stretch it in application to the saddest particular cases imaginable (for all which the Scripture abounds in directions), — I should go too far out of my way.

This, then, I say, is the second thing we are to humble ourselves unto.

2. My other inquiry remains, — namely, how or by what means we are thus to humble ourselves to the law of grace and providence?

I shall but name one or two of the principal graces, in the exercise whereof this may be performed:—

(1.) Let faith have its work. There are, among others, two things that faith will do, and is suited to do, that lie in a tendency hereunto:—

[1.] It empties the soul of self. This is the proper work of faith, — to discover the utter emptiness, insufficiency, nothingness that is in man unto any spiritual end or purpose whatever. So [Eph. ii. 8, 9](#). Faith itself is of God, not of ourselves; and it teaches us to be all by grace, and not by any work of ours. If we will be any thing in ourselves, faith tells us then it is nothing to us; for it only fills them that are empty, and makes them all by grace who are nothing by self. While faith is at work, it will fill the soul with such thoughts as these: “I am nothing; a poor worm at God’s disposal; lost, if not found by Christ; — have done, can do, nothing on the account whereof I should be accepted with God: surely God is to be, in all things, submitted to; and the way of his mere grace accepted.” So [Rom. iii. 27](#). This is the proper work of faith, — to exclude and shut out boasting in ourselves; that is, to render us to ourselves such as have nothing at all to glory or rejoice in ourselves, that God may be all in all. Now, this working of faith will keep the heart in a readiness to subject itself unto God in all things, both in the law of his grace and providence.

[2.] Faith will actually bring the soul to the foot of God, and give it up universally to his disposal. What did the faith of Abraham do when it obeyed the call of God? [Isa. xli. 2](#). It brought him to the foot of God. God called him, to be at his disposal universally, by faith to come to it, following him, he knew not for what, nor whither. “Leave thy father’s house and kindred;” — he disputes it not. “Cast out Ishmael, whom thou lovest;” — he is gone. “Sacrifice thine only Isaac;” — he goes about it. He was brought by faith to the foot of God,

and stood at his disposal for all things. This is the proper nature of faith, — to bring a man to that condition. So was it with David, [2 Sam. xv. 26](#). This faith will do. Will God have me to suffer in my name, estate, family? “It is the Lord,” saith faith. Will he have me to be poor, despised in the world, — of little or no use at all to him or his people? “Who,” saith faith, “shall say to him, What doest thou?” In any state and condition, faith will find out arguments to keep the soul always at God’s disposal.

(2.) Constant, abiding reverence of God will help the soul in this universal resignation, and humbling of itself. Now, this reverence of God is an awful spiritual regard of the majesty of God, as he is pleased to concern himself in us, and in our walking before him, on the account of his holiness, greatness, omniscience, omnipresence, and the like. So [Heb. xii. 28, 29](#); [Ps. lxxxix. 7, viii. 9](#).

Now, this reverence of God ariseth from three things, as is evident from the description of it:—

[1.] The infinite excellency and majesty of God and his great name. This is the apostle’s motive, [Heb. xii. 29, iv. 13](#). So [Deut. xxviii. 58](#). The excellency of God in itself, is not only such as makes wicked men and hypocrites to tremble, whenever the thoughts of it seize on them, [Isa. xxxiii. 14](#), but also it hath filled the saints themselves with dread and terror, [Hab. iii. 16](#). Nor is there any bearing the rays of his excellency, but as they are shadowed in Christ, by whom we have boldness to approach unto him.

[2.] The infinite, inconceivable distance wherein we stand from him. Thence is that direction of the wise man to a due regard of God at all times, [Eccles. v. 2](#): He is in heaven, whence he manifests his glorious excellency in a poor worm creeping on the mire and clay of the earth. So did Abraham, [Gen. xviii. 27](#). What an inconceivable distance is there between the glorious majesty of God, and a little dust which the wind blows away and it is gone!

[3.] That this inconceivably glorious God is pleased, of his own grace, to condescend to concern himself in us poor worms, and our services, which he stands in no need of, [Isa. lvii. 15](#). His eye is upon us, — his heart is towards us. This makes David break into that admiration, [1 Chron. xvii. 16](#); and should do so to us.

Now, what are the advantages of keeping alive a reverence of God in our hearts; how many ways it effectually conduces to enable us to humble our souls to the law of his grace and providence; what an issue it will put to all the reasonings of our hearts to the contrary, — I cannot stay to declare. And the improvement of these two graces, faith and reverence, is all that I shall at present recommend unto you for the end and purpose under consideration.

But I come, in the next place, to that part of this whole discourse which was at first principally intended.



## Sermon IX.

We have at large considered the nature of this duty.

III. Let us now proceed to prove the proposition at first laid down, and shut up the whole; viz., —

Humble walking with God is the great duty and most valuable concernment of believers.

“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?” This is sufficiently asserted in the words of the text itself, which being so emphatically proposed, stand not in need of any farther confirmation by testimony; but because this is a business the Scripture doth much abound in, I shall subjoin a single proof upon each part of the proposition, — that it is both our great duty and most valuable concernment.

For the former, take that parallel place of [Deut. x. 12, 13](#). That which is summarily expressed in my text by walking humbly with God, is here more at large described, with the same preface, “What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?” It gives us both the root and fruit; the root, in fear and love; the fruit, in walking in God’s ways and keeping his commandments. The perfection of both is, to fear and love the Lord with all the heart and all the soul, and to walk in all his ways. This is the great thing that God requires of professors.

A place of the same importance, as to the excellency of this concernment of believers, which is the second consideration of it, you have in the answer of the scribe, commended by our Saviour, [Mark xii. 33](#); as if he should say, in these days, “This is better than all your preaching, all your hearing, all your private meetings, all your conferences, all your fastings.” Whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices were then the instituted worship of God, appointed by him, and acceptable to him, as are the things which I now repeated. But all these outward things may be counterfeited, — hypocrites may perform the outward work of them, as they then offered sacrifice; but walking humbly with God cannot: nor are they, in the best of men, of any value, but as they are parts and fruits of humble walking. If in and under the performance of them there be, as there may be, a proud, unmortified heart, — not subdued to the law of the Spirit of life, — not humbled in all things to walk with God; both they and their performance are abhorred of God. So that, though these things ought to be done, yet our great concernment lies, as to the main, in humble walking: “Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel.”

This is the import of the expression at [the beginning of the verse](#), — “What doth the Lord thy God require of thee?” Thou mayest cast about in thy thoughts to other things, wherein either thyself may be more delighted, or, as thou supposest, may be more acceptable to God. Be not mistaken; this is the great thing that he requires of thee, — to walk humbly with him.

The grounds of it are:—

1. Every man is most concerned in that which is his great end; the bringing about of that is of most importance to him; the great exercise of his thoughts is, whether he shall succeed as to this or not. The chief end of believers is, the glory of God. This, I say, is so, or ought to be so. For this purpose they were made, redeemed to this purpose, and purchased to be a peculiar people. Now, the Scripture everywhere teaches, that the great means of our glorifying God, is by our humble walking with him, according as it was before described. [John xv. 8](#), “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.” You may have many thoughts that God is glorified by works of miracles, and the like, amazing and dazzling the eyes of the world. Be it so; but in the most eminent manner, it is by your bearing fruit. You know the general rule that our Saviour gives his followers, [Matt. v. 16](#). It is from our good works that men give glory to God. Which advice is again renewed by the Holy Ghost, [1 Pet. ii. 12](#).

Now, there are sundry ways whereby glory redounds to God by believers’ humble walking with him:— (1.) It gives him the glory of the doctrine of grace. (2.) It gives him the glory of the power of his grace. (3.) It gives him the glory of the law of his grace, — that he is a king obeyed. (4.) It gives him the glory of his justice. (5.) It gives him the glory of his kingdom; — first, in its order and beauty; secondly, in multiplying his subjects:—

(1.) It gives God the glory of the doctrine of grace, or of the doctrine of the gospel; which is therefore called “The glorious gospel of God,” because it so brings glory to him. Walking according to this rule, we adorn the doctrine of the gospel in all things. So the apostle tells us, [Tit. ii. 11, 12](#): “This is that which this grace teacheth us; the substance is, to walk humbly with God.” And when men professing it walk answerable to it, it is rendered glorious. When the world shall see that these are the fruits which that doctrine produceth, they must needs magnify it. The pride, folly, and wickedness of professors, hath been the greatest obstacle that ever the gospel received in this world. Nor will it, by any endeavours whatever, be advanced, until there be more conformity unto it in them who make the greatest profession of it. Then is the word glorified, when it hath a free course and progress, [2 Thess. iii. 1](#); which it will not have without the humble walking of professors. What eminent gifts are poured out in the days wherein we live! what light is bestowed! what pains in preaching! how is the dispensation of the word multiplied! — yet how little ground is got by it! how few converted! The word hath a free course in preaching, but is not glorified in acceptable obedience. Is it not high time for professors and preachers to look at home, whether the obstacle lie not in ourselves? Do we not fortify the world against the doctrine we profess, by the fruits of it they see in ourselves, and our own ways? Do they not say of us, “These are our new lights and professors; proud, selfish, worldly, unrighteous; negligent of the ordinances themselves profess to magnify; useless in their places and generations; — falling into the very same path which they condemn in others”? Perhaps they may deal falsely and maliciously in these things; but is it not high time for us to examine ourselves, lest, abounding in preaching and

talking, we have forgot to walk humbly with God; — and so, not glorifying the gospel, have hindered the free course of its work and efficacy?

(2.) Humble walking with God gives him the glory of the power of his grace, — his converting, sanctifying grace. When the world shall see a poor, proud, selfish, rebellious, forward, perhaps dissolute and debauched creature, made gentle, meek, humble, self-denying, sober, useful, — they cannot but inquire after the secret and hidden virtue and power which principled such a change. This is given as the glory of the grace that was to be administered under the gospel, — that it should change the nature of the vilest men; — that it should take away cruelty from the wolf, and violence from the leopard, rage from the lion, and poison from the asp, — making them gentle and useful as the kid and the calf, the cow and the ox, [Isa. xi. 6–9](#). It is not in our nature to humble ourselves to walk with God; we have an opposition to it and all parts of it: no angels or men can persuade us to it. Our carnal mind is enmity to him, not subject to his law, — nor can be. To have our souls humbled, brought to the foot of God, made always ready, willing, obedient, turned in their whole course, changed in all their ways and principles; — this glorifies the grace of God which is dispensed in Christ; by which alone it is that the work is wrought. When men make profession to have received converting and renewing grace from God, and so separate themselves from the men of the world on that account, yet live as they do, or worse, so that their ways and walking are contemptible to all; — it is the greatest reproach imaginable to that work of grace which they make profession of.

(3.) This gives God the glory of his law, whereby he requires this obedience at our hands. The obedience of them that are subject to it, sets forth the glory of the wisdom, goodness, and power of the lawgiver in that law. But this may be referred to the first head.

(4.) It gives him the glory of his justice, even in this world. There are two sorts of people in the world; the children of God, and others. Temptations lie on both, in reference to each other. The children of God are often disturbed by the outward prosperity of the wicked: the men of the world, at the public claim which they [the children of God] make in the privilege of God's love and protection: "Why they rather than others, — than we?" For the first, we know upon what principle they are to satisfy themselves. For the latter, this gives God the glory of his justice, when those whom he owns in this world, who expect a crown of reward from him, do walk humbly with him. So the apostle, [2 Thess. i. 4, 5](#), "Your patience and faith in tribulation," saith he to the saints, "is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of his kingdom." Their patient and humble walking will be an evidence to convince even the world of the righteous justice of God, in rewarding of them and rejecting of itself. Though eternal life be the gift of God, and chiefly respects the praise of his glorious grace in Jesus Christ, yet God intending to bestow it on us in a way of reward, he will therein visibly glorify his justice also. Now, this gives a foretaste of it unto men, when they shall see those whom he will reward to walk humbly with him; wherein it



may appear that his ways are equal, and his judgment righteous; or, as the apostle speaks, “according to truth.”

(5.) It gives him the glory of his kingdom, in being an effectual means for the increase of the number of his subjects, and so the propagation of it in the world.

Now, if on all these, and on sundry other considerations, God be glorified in a humble walking with him, beyond any thing else in this world; this humble walking must certainly be the great and incomparable concernment of all them whose chief end is the advancement of the glory of God.

2. It is our great concernment, because God is greatly delighted in it; it is well-pleasing to him. The humble walking of professors is the great delight of the soul of God, — all that he hath in this world to delight in. If this be our aim, if this be our great interest, — that we may please God, that he may delight in us, and rejoice over us; this is the way whereby it is to be done, [Isa. lviii. 15](#), “As I dwell,” saith God, “in the high and holy place, — delight to abide in the heavens, where I manifest my glory; so I dwell with the humble and contrite spirit with delight and joy.” Men in an opposition to this frame, be they what they will else in outward profession, are proud men. Nothing takes away pride in the sight of God but this humble walking with him. Now, “the proud he knoweth afar off,” [Ps. cxxxviii. 6](#); he takes notice of them with scorn and indignation; they are to him an abominable thing. It is three times solemnly asserted in the Scriptures, that God resisteth the proud, or scorneth the scorner, and giveth grace to the humble and lowly, [Prov. iii. 34](#); [James iv. 6](#); [1 Pet. v. 5](#). God scorns, abominates, resists, and sets himself against such men; but he gives grace or favour to the lowly, to the humble. This is admirably set out, [Isa. lxvi. 1–3](#). He deals there with a professing people, — men that in all they did, said, “Let the Lord be glorified,” [verse 5](#). These men, aiming at acceptance with him, and to have him delight in them, pretended principally two things:—

(1.) The glory of the temple, — that high and holy house that was built to his own name. Says God, as to this, “Do you think that I have any need of it, or any delight in it, as it is such a goodly and glorious fabric in your eyes? The heaven is my throne,” saith he, “and the earth my footstool; my hands have made all these things, — what need have I of the house you have built, or what delight in it?”

(2.) They pleaded his worship and service; the duties they performed therein, their sacrifices and oblations, — praying, hearing. “Alas!” saith God, “all these things I abhor.” And so he compares them to the things which his soul did most hate, and which he has most severely forbid, [verse 3](#). But if God will take delight in none of these things, — if neither temple nor ordinances, worship nor duty of religion, will prevail, — what is it that he delights in? Saith the Lord, “To this man will I look; I will rejoice over him, and rest in my love.” Let now the proud Pharisee come and boast his righteousness, his duties, his worship, and performances; — the eye of God is on the poor creature behind the door, that is crying,

“God be merciful to me, a sinner;” that is, giving himself up to sovereign mercy, and following after him upon that account. We have got a holiness that puffeth up, that in some hath little other fruit but “Stand from me; I am holier than thou.” God delights not in it. It is a hard thing to excel in humble walking; it [*i. e.*, to excel, distinction] is easier obtained by other ways; but God delights not in them.

3. It is our great concernment, because this makes us alone eminently conformable to Jesus Christ. When the church is raised up to an expectation of his coming, she is bid to look for him as one “meek and lowly,” [Zech. ix. 9](#). And when he calls men to a conformity to his example, this he proposes to them. “Learn of me,” saith he, [Matt. xi. 29](#). What shall we learn of him? what doth he propose to our imitation? — that we should work miracles? walk on the sea? open blind eyes? raise the dead? speak as never man spake? “No,” saith he; “this is not your concernment; but ‘learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.’” “Let this mind be in you,” saith the apostle, “that was in Jesus Christ,” [Phil. ii. 5](#). What mind was this? He describes it in [the next verse](#), — in his humbling, emptying himself, making himself poor, nothing, that he might do the will of God; coming to his foot, waiting for his command, doing his will cheerfully and readily. “Let,” saith he, “this mind be in you, to be like Christ in this.” I might go over all the contents of humble walking with God, and show the excellency of Jesus Christ in them, and how our conformity to Christ doth principally consist therein; but I must hasten.

4. I might farther evince it, by an induction of the promises that are made unto humble walking with God. But this would be a long work, to insist on the most considerable particulars; so that I shall wholly omit it.

5. It will appear so by comparing it with any thing else wherein men may suppose their interest and concernment to lie:—

(1.) Some men (I speak of professors) live as though their great concernments were in heaping up to themselves the things of this world. Their hearts are devoured with cares about them, and their thoughts taken up with them. This I shall not so much as compare with humble walking with God; nor make it my business — from the vanity, uncertainty, uselessness as to any eternal end, unsatisfactoriness, attendings of fear, care, and love — to manifest their great incompetency once to come into consideration in this inquiry, as to what is the great concernment of a professor.

(2.) There are others whose designs lie after greatness, high places, esteem in the world, — to be somebody in their days; outrunning the providence and call of God to that end; and who make this their business and interest, without farther consideration. But we may say the same of these as of the former, — their way is folly, though they that follow them should praise their sayings.

(3.) There are those whose aim is to be learned indeed, and so accounted. This they make their work; on this they set up their rest; this takes up their time and strength. If this

succeed, all is well; — they have their hearts' desire. The beauty of this also is fully sullied, and the vanity of it hath been discovered by many, and the shame of its nakedness made to appear. Is this thy great concernment? Dost thou waste thy time and spirit about it? Is this the bosom of thy rest? Hast thou here laid up thy glory? and dost thou aim at this as thy end? Poor creature! thou snuffest up the empty wind. All this while God may abhor thee; and thy learning will never swell to such a greatness as that the door of hell will not be wide enough to receive thee. The vanity, vexation, dreadfulness, emptiness, of this concernment may be easily discovered.

Nay, put all these together; suppose thou hadst high places, learning, and an answerable repute and credit to them all, — that thou hadst on these heads all that thy heart can desire, and more than ever man had before thee, — would it all give rest to thy soul? Canst thou not look through it all? Why, then, dost thou spend thy strength for a thing of nought? Why is the flower of thy spirit laid out about these things, that indeed are not, or are as a thing of nought? But, —

(4.) Some men's great concernment seems to lie in a profession of religion. So they may attain to that, and therewithal a name to live, it doth suffice. Whether this humble walking with God, in any of the causes or effects of it, be found on them, they are not solicitous. That men may not rest here, give me leave to offer two or three considerations:—

[1.] All that they do may be counterfeited; and so, wherein is its excellency? It may be done by him who hath not the least of God or Christ in him. Hypocrites may hear much, pray often, speak of God and the things of God, perform all duties of religion, excel in gifts and parts, be forward in profession to a great repute, — and yet be hypocrites still.

[2.] All this hath been done by them who have perished. Many who are now in hell have done all these things, and went down to the pit with the burden of their profession and duties at their back. I could reckon up instances. And let me but try this foundation, which safely I may, — namely, that whatever excellencies have been found in hypocrites and perishing souls, may all meet in one, and yet he be an hypocrite still, — and I shall merit easily the best [repute] of mere profession. Take the zeal of Jehu, the hearing of Herod, the praying of the Pharisee, the fasting of the Jews, [Isa. lviii.](#), the joy of the stony ground, and you may dress up a perishing soul to a proportion of profession beyond what the most of us attain unto.

[3.] It is useless in the world. I shall freely say, Take away this humble walking, and all profession is a thing of nought; it doth no good at all in the world. Is it for the advantage of mankind, that a man should have credit and repute in religion, and cannot give an instance scarce that any man, high or low, rich or poor, hath been the better for him in the world? that they who should do good to all, do good to none at all? Is this being fruitful in the gospel? is this studying the good works that are profitable to all? — is this doing good to mankind in the places wherein we are?



[4.] This is the readiest way for a man to deceive himself to eternity. He that would go down to the pit in peace, let him keep up duties in his family and closet; let him hear as often as he can have an opportunity; let him speak often of good things; let him leave the company of profane and ignorant men, until he have obtained a great repute for religion; let him preach and labour to make others better than he is himself; and, in the meantime, neglect to humble his heart to walk with God in a manifest holiness and usefulness, and he will not fail of his end.

Let me not be mistaken. God forbid I should countenance profane men in their contempt of the ways of God, and the reproaches of hypocrisy that they are ready to cast upon the best of the saints of God; I say, God forbid. Nor let me be interpreted in the least to plead for men who satisfy themselves in a righteousness without these things, — whom I look upon as men ignorant wholly of the mystery of God and the Father, and of Christ, and evidently uninterested in the covenant of grace. No; this is all I aim at, — I would not have professors flatter themselves in a vain, empty profession, when the fruits they bear of envy, hatred, pride, folly, proclaim that their hearts are not humbled to walk with God. Will, then, these, or any of these things, stand in competition with that which we propose for the great concernment of souls? Doubtless, in comparison of it, they are all a thing of nought.

*Use 1.* Is humble walking with God our great concernment? Let us make it our business and our work to bring our hearts unto it all our days. What do we, running out of the way all the day long, spending our strength for that which is not bread? My business is not, — whether I be rich or poor, wise or unwise, learned or ignorant; whether I shall live or die; whether there shall be peace or war with the nations; whether my house shall flourish or wither; whether my gifts be many or few, great or small, whether I have good repute or bad repute in the world; — but only, whether I walk humbly with God or not. As it is with me in this respect, so is my present condition, — so will be my future acceptance. I have tired myself about many things; — this one is necessary. What doth the Lord my God require of me, but this? What doth Christ call for, but this? What doth the whole sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost tend to, but that I may walk humbly with God?

Give me leave to name a motive or two unto it:—

(1.) In humble walking with God we shall find peace in every condition. “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” “Let war come on the nation, — I shall have peace. Let a consumption come on my estate, — I shall have peace. Let nearest relations be taken away, — I shall have peace.” The soul that sets up its rest, and makes it its great concernment to walk humbly with God, is brought to his foot, bent to his will, is ready for his disposal; and whatever God does in the world with himself, his, or others, he hath peace and quietness in it. His own will is gone, the will of God is his choice; his great concernment lies not in any thing that can perish, that can be lost.

(2.) We shall also find comfort. Mephibosheth cried, "Let all go, seeing the king is come in peace; which was all that I desired." When a man shall see, in the worst state and condition, that his great concernment is safe; that though all is lost, God, who is all, is not lost; that this can never be taken from him; — it fills his heart with delight. Is he in prosperity? he fears not the loss of that which he most values. Is he in adversity? yet he can walk with God still; which is his all. He can therefore glory in tribulations, rejoice in afflictions; — his treasure, his concernment is secure.

(3.) This alone will make us useful in our generation, and fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. On this depends all the glory we bring to God, and all the good we do to men.

Let us, then, make this our business, — aim at it; and, in the strength of Christ, we shall have peace in it.

*Use 2.* To humble us all, that we have spent so much of our time and days in and about things wherein we are indeed so little concerned, let us a little bring our ways and affairs to the balance of the sanctuary. One hath risen early, gone to bed late, and worn out himself to increase knowledge and learning. What is it, when we have done? — an engine in the hand of Satan to puff us up with pride and folly; a diversion from the knowledge of Christ, full of vexation of spirit. How many other things have entangled us! What weight have we laid upon them! How have we put a value upon that profession, which hath been a shame rather than an honour to the gospel! The Lord forgive us our folly, in spending ourselves in and about things wherein we are so little concerned; and help us, that our mistake be not at last found out to be fatal! Could we seriously take a view of our ways and time, and see how much of it we have spent in and about things that indeed will, in the issue, do us no good; it would certainly fill our souls with a great deal of shame and confusion.

*Use 3.* As to them who seem not at all to be concerned in this business, who never made it their design in their lives to walk with God in the way that hath been spoken to; let me tell such, —

(1.) It is more than probable that they may be apt to take advantage at what hath been spoken against empty professors and profession; to triumph in their thoughts against them all, and say, "Such, indeed, they are, and no better." If so, it is possible that this discourse, through the just judgment of God, may tend to their farther hardening in their sin, — pride and folly. What is the Lord's intendment towards you, I know not. It is my duty to warn you of it. Some that are professors may fail of the mark of our high calling; but you that are none, can never attain it: but take heed that this be not the issue of this dispensation of the word towards you. I had rather never speak more in this place, than speak any one word with an intention to give you an advantage against professors. If you take it, it will be your ruin.

(2.) Consider this, — if the righteous be scarcely saved, where will you, and such as you, bitter scoffers, neglecters of ordinances, haters of the power of godliness and the purity of religion, appear? You whose pride and folly, or whose formality, lukewarmness, and superstition, whose company and society, whose ways and daily walking, proclaim you to be wholly strangers to this concernment of believers, — I say, what will be your lot and portion?

(3.) Consider how useless you are in this world. You bring no glory to God, but dishonour; and whereas by any outward acts you may suppose you do good sometimes to men, know that you do more hurt every day than you do good all your lives. How many are by you ensnared into hell! how many hardened! how many destroyed, by living in formality or profaneness!

## **Sermon X. Providential changes, an argument for universal holiness.**

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” — [2 Pet. iii. 11](#).

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That this second epistle was written unto the same persons to whom the former was directed, the apostle himself informs us, [2 Pet. iii. 1](#). Who they were to whom the first was directed, he declares fully, [1 Epist. i. 1, 2](#), “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,” etc.

“Strangers” are taken two ways: First, In a large, general, and spiritual sense. So all believers are said to be strangers and pilgrims in this world, because they are not of the world, but they look for another country, another city, another house, whose framer and builder is God. Secondly, In a proper, natural sense, for those who abide or dwell in a land that is not their own, wherein they have not right of inheritance with the natives and citizens of it. In this sense the patriarchs were strangers in the land of Canaan before it came to be the possession of their posterity; and the children of Israel were strangers four hundred years in the land of Egypt.

Now, though the persons to whom the apostle wrote were strangers in the first sense, — pilgrims, whose conversation and country was in heaven, — yet they were no more so than all other believers in the world; so that there was no just cause of saluting them peculiarly under that style and title, were there not some other special reason of that appellation. They were, therefore, also strangers in the latter sense; — persons who had no inheritance in the place of their abode, that were not the free and privileged natives of the country where they dwelt and inhabited; that is, they were Jews scattered abroad in those parts of the world.

The people of Israel in those days were under various distributions and appellations. First, They were the natives of Jerusalem, and the parts adjacent; and these were in the gospel peculiarly called Jews. You have it often mentioned, that in our Saviour’s discourse with them, the Jews answered so and so; that is, the natives of Jerusalem, and places adjoining. Secondly, Those who inhabited the sea-coasts of the country, whom the others much despised, and called them, from the place of their habitation, as if they had been men of another nation, “Galileans.” Thirdly, Those who lived in several dispersions, up and down the world, among other nations. Of these there were two chief sorts:— 1. Those who lived in some parts of Europe, in Asia the less, also at Alexandria, and other Greek colonies. These are in the Scripture sometimes called Greeks, [Acts xvii.](#); and elsewhere commonly termed Hellenists; because they used the Greek language, and the Greek Bible then in use. 2. Those who lived in the greater Asia, in and about Babylon; as also in the countries here enumerated by the apostle:— the Jews converted to the faith, that lived scatteredly up and down in those parts of Asia.

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Peter being in a special manner designed by the Holy Ghost the apostle of the Circumcision, and being now at Babylon in the discharge of his apostolical office and duty, [1 Epist. v. 13](#); and being now nigh unto death, which he also knew, [2 Epist. i. 14](#); and not perhaps having time to pass through and personally visit these scattered believers, — he wrote unto them these two epistles, partly about the main and important truths of the gospel, and partly about their own particular and immediate concernment as to the temptations and afflictions wherewith they were exercised.

It is evident, front sundry places in the New Testament, what extreme oppositions the believing Jews met withal, all the world over, from their own countrymen, with and among whom they lived. They in the meantime, no doubt, warned them of the wrath of Christ against them for their cursed unbelief and persecutions; particularly letting them know, that Christ would come in vengeance ere long, according as he had threatened, to the ruin of his enemies. And because the persecuting Jews, all the world over, upbraided the believers with the temple and the holy city, Jerusalem, their worship and service instituted of God, which they had defiled; they were given to know that even all these things also should be destroyed, for their rejection of the Son of God. After some continuance of time, the threatening denounced being not yet accomplished, — as is the manner of profane persons and hardened sinners, [Eccles. viii. 11](#), — they began to mock and scoff, as if they were all but the vain pretences, or loose, causeless fears of the Christians. That this was the state with them, or shortly would be, the apostle declares in this chapter, [verses 3, 4](#). Because things continued in the old state, without alteration, and judgment was not speedily executed, they scoffed at all the threats about the coming of the Lord that had been denounced against them.

Hereupon the apostle undertakes these three things:—

First. He convinces the scoffers of folly by an instance of the like presumption in persons not unlike them, and the dealings of God in a case of the same nature.

Secondly. He instructs believers in the truth of what they had before been told concerning the coming of Christ, and the destruction of ungodly men.

Thirdly. He informs them in the due use and improvement that ought practically to be made of the certainty of this threatening of the coming' of Christ.

For the first, he minds them, as I said, of the old world, [verses 5, 6](#). Before the destruction of that world, God sent “Noah, a preacher of righteousness,” who, both in word and deed, effectually admonished men of the judgment of God that was ready to come upon them; but they scoffed at his preaching and practice, in building the ark, and persisted in their security. “Now,” saith he, “this they willingly are ignorant of;” — it is through the obstinacy and stubbornness of their will, they do not consider it; for otherwise they had the Scripture, and knew the story. There is no ignorance like that where men's obstinacy and hardness in sin keeps them from a due improvement of what they ought to have improved to its proper



purpose. They are to this day willingly ignorant of the flood, who live securely in sin under the denunciation of the judgments of God against sin.

I shall only observe, by the way, not to look into the difficulties of these verses, that I be not too long detained from my principal intendment, — that the apostle makes a distribution of the world into heaven and earth, and saith, they “were destroyed with water, and perished.” We know that neither the fabric or substance of the one or other was destroyed, but only men that lived on the earth; and the apostle tells us, [verse 5](#), of *the heavens and earth that were then*, and were destroyed by water, distinct from *the heavens and the earth that were now*, and were to be consumed by fire: and yet, as to the visible fabric of heaven and earth, they were the same both before the flood and in the apostle’s time, and continue so to this day; when yet it is certain that the heavens and earth, whereof he speaks were to be destroyed and consumed by fire in that generation. We must, then, for the clearing our foundation, a little consider what the apostle intends by “the heavens and the earth” in these two places:—

1. It is certain, that what the apostle intends by the “world,” with its heavens and earth, [verses 5, 6](#), which was destroyed by water; the same, or somewhat of that kind, he intends by “the heavens and the earth” that were to be consumed and destroyed by fire, [verse 7](#). Otherwise there would be no coherence in the apostle’s discourse, nor any kind of argument, but a mere fallacy of words.

2. It is certain, that by the flood, the world, or the fabric of heaven and earth, was not destroyed, but only the inhabitants of the world; and therefore the destruction intimated to succeed by fire, is not of the substance of the heavens and the earth, which shall not be consumed until the last day, but of persons or men living in the world.

3. Then we must consider in what sense men living in the world are said to be the “world,” and the “heavens and earth” of it. I shall only insist on one instance to this purpose, among many that may be produced, [Isa. li. 15, 16](#). The time when the work here mentioned, of planting the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth, was performed by God, was when he “divided the sea,” [verse 15](#), and gave the law, [verse 16](#), and said to Zion, “Thou art my people;” — that is, when he took the children of Israel out of Egypt, and formed them in the wilderness into a church and state. Then he planted the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth, — made the new world; that is, brought forth order, and government, and beauty, from the confusion wherein before they were. This is the planting of the heavens, and laying the foundation of the earth in the world. And hence it is, that when mention is made of the destruction of a state and government, it is in that language that seems to set forth the end of the world. So [Isa. xxxiv. 4](#); which is yet but the destruction of the state of Edom. The like also is affirmed of the Roman empire, [Rev. vi. 14](#); which the Jews constantly affirm to be intended by Edom in the prophets. And in our Saviour Christ’s prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, [Matt. xxiv.](#), he sets it out by expressions of the same importance. It is evident, then, that, in the prophetic idiom and manner of speech, by “heavens” and

“earth,” the civil and religious state and combination of men in the world, and the men of them, are often understood. So were the heavens and earth that world which then was destroyed by the flood.

4. On this foundation I affirm, that the heavens and earth here intended in this prophecy of Peter, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men, mentioned in the destruction of that heaven and earth, do all of them relate, not to the last and final judgment of the world, but to that utter desolation and destruction that was to be made of the Judaical church and state; for which I shall offer these two reasons, of many that might be insisted on from the text:—

(1.) Because whatever is here mentioned was to have its peculiar influence on the men of that generation. He speaks of that wherein both the profane scoffers and those scoffed at were concerned, and that as Jews; — some of them believing, others opposing the faith. Now, there was no particular concernment of that generation in that sin, nor in that scoffing, as to the day of judgment in general; but there was a peculiar relief for the one and a peculiar dread for the other at hand, in the destruction of the Jewish nation; and, besides, an ample testimony, both to the one and the other, of the power and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ; — which was the thing in question between them.

(2.) Peter tells them, that, after the destruction and judgment that he speaks of, [verse 13](#), “We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth,” etc. They had this expectation. But what is that promise? where may we find it? Why, we have it in the very words and letter, [Isa. lxv. 17](#). Now, when shall this be that God will create these “new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness?” Saith Peter, “It shall be after the coming of the Lord, after that judgment and destruction of ungodly men, who obey not the gospel, that I foretell.” But now it is evident, from this place of Isaiah, with [chap. lxvi. 21, 22](#), that this is a prophecy of gospel times only; and that the planting of these new heavens is nothing but the creation of gospel ordinances, to endure for ever. The same thing is so expressed, [Heb. xii. 26–28](#).

This being, then, the design of the place, I shall not insist longer on the context, but briefly open the words proposed, and fix upon the truth contained in them:—

First, There is the foundation of the apostle’s inference and exhortation, *Τούτων οὗν πάντων λυομένων*. — “Seeing that I have evinced that all these things, however precious they seem, or what value soever any put upon them, shall be dissolved, — that is, destroyed; and that in that dreadful and fearful manner before mentioned, — in a way of judgment, wrath, and vengeance, by fire and sword; — let others mock at the threats of Christ’s coming, — he will come, he will not tarry; and then the heavens and earth that God himself planted, the sun, moon, and stars of the Judaical polity and church, — the whole old world of worship and worshippers, that stand out in their obstinacy against the Lord Christ, — shall be sensibly dissolved and destroyed. This, we know, shall be the end of these things, and that shortly.”



There is no outward constitution nor frame of things, in governments or nations, but it is subject to a dissolution, and may receive it, and that in a way of judgment. If any might plead exemption, *that*, on many accounts, of which the apostle was discoursing in prophetic terms (for it was not yet time to speak it openly to all) might interpose for its share. But that also, though of God's creation, yet standing in the way of, and in opposition to, the interest of Christ, — that also shall be dissolved. And certainly there is no greater folly in the world, than for a mere human creation, a mere product of the sayings and the wisdom of men, to pretend for eternity, or any duration beyond the coincidence of its usefulness to the great ends that Christ hath to accomplish in the world. But this is not my business.

Secondly, There is the apostle's inference from, or exhortation on this supposition, expressed emphatically by way of interrogation: "What manner?" Now, herein two things are included:—

1. The evidence of the inference. It follows necessarily, unavoidably; every one must needs make this conclusion, — so that he leaves it to themselves to determine whose concernment it is. So the apostle Paul, in another case, [Heb. x. 29](#), leaves it to themselves to determine, as a case clear, plain, unquestionable. So here: and this is a most effectual way of insinuating an inference and conclusion, when the parties themselves who are pressed with it are made judges of its necessary consequence. "Judge ye whether holiness becomes not all them who are like to be concerned in such providential alterations."

2. The extent and perfection of the duty, in its universality and compass, is, in this manner of expression, strongly insinuated: "What manner of persons?" — that is, "Such as, indeed, it is not easy to express what attainments in this kind we ought, on this account, to press after." This apostle useth the same kind of expression to set forth the greatness and height of what he would deliver to the thoughts of men, [1 Pet. iv. 17, 18](#). There is in this kind of expression somewhat more insinuated to the mind than we know how to clothe with any words whatever.

Two things seem principally to be intended:—

(1.) That even the saints themselves, in such cases, ought to be other manner of men than usually they are, under ordinary dispensations of providence. Mistake not: our old measures will not serve; another manner of progress than as yet we have made is expected from us; it is not ordinary holiness and godliness that is expected from us under extraordinary calls from God and Christ.

(2.) That our endeavours to be godly and holy ought to be boundless and endless. No less is included in this apostrophe, "What manner of persons ought we to be!" — not resting in what we have attained, nor what may seem sufficient to keep our heads above water, — but an endless and boundless pressing on. Alas! it will hardly enter into our hearts to think what manner of men we ought to be.



Thirdly. For the matter of this exhortation and inference from the former principle, couched in this interrogation, — it is, “All holy conversation and godliness.” The word “all” is not in the original; but both the other words are in the plural number, — “In holy conversations and godlinesses.” Now, these expressions being not proper in our language, the translators have supplied the emphasis and force of them by the addition of the word “all.” And there is no just cause of quarrel with them for so doing; — only, in the original the words are more weighty and emphatical than that supply doth readily reach unto. That which is principally intended is, that all the concernments whatever of holiness and godliness are couched in the words. So that two things are in them:—

1. The two general parts of that universal duty that we owe to God; and they are these:— (1.) Holiness of conversation; which is comprehensive of all holiness and righteousness, both in principle and practice; for no conversation is holy but what comes from a holy heart, and is carried on to that great and holy end, — the glory of God. (2.) Godliness, or the worship of God according to the appointment and institution of Christ. This is the proper importance<sup>366</sup> of εὐσέβεια as distinct from holiness of conversation, — a due adherence to, and observance of, the instituted worship of God.

2. The extent and compass of them both, and their degrees. It is not in this or that part of conversation, — to be holy in one thing and loose in another, — to be holy in one capacity, and vain in another, — to be godly as a private person, and ungodly or selfish as a magistrate; nor is it to observe one part of worship, and despise another: but in all concernments of conversation, in all parts of worship, doth this duty lie, — “In all holy conversation and godliness.”

Fourthly. There is the relation that we ought to bear to the universality of holiness and godliness. We ought to be “in” them; — δεῖ ὑπάρχειν ὑμᾶς, — “You ought to be, to exist, in them.” In these things is your life. They are not to be followed now and then, as your leisure will serve; but in all that you do you ought to be still in these, as in the clothes that you wear, — the garment that is on you. Be what you will, or where you will, or employed as you are called, yet still you ought to be in holiness and godliness. And what persons you ought to be in them, or how, hath been declared.

*Observation. Great providential alterations or destructions made upon the account of Christ and his church, call for eminency of universal holiness and godliness in all believers.*

I esteem it my duty to speak somewhat to this proposition, as containing the direction of our great duty in this day. That we have had many providential alterations amongst us, is known to all. What light I have about their relation to Christ and his church, I shall make bold to communicate when I come to the application of the truth in hand, and thereby make way for the pressing of the duty of the text on ourselves in particular. For the present, I

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confess I am ashamed and astonished at the deportment of many who are professors in these days. They see and talk of the alterations and dissolutions that God is pleased to make; — but what is the improvement that is made hereof? Many take advantage to vent their lusts and passions, — some one way, some another: one rejoicing at the ruin of another, as if that were his duty; others repining at the exaltation of another, as if that were their duty; some contriving one form of outward constitutions, others for another. (I speak of private persons.) But who almost looks to that which is the special call of God under such dispensations? Let us, then, I pray you, take a little view of our duty, and the grounds of it; and who knows but that the Lord may by it enlarge and fix our hearts to the love and prosecution of it?

The two great providential alterations and dissolutions that have been and shall be made on the account of Christ and his church, to which all lesser are either consequent or do lie in a tendency, are that, first, of the *Judaical* church and state, whereof I have spoken; and, secondly, that of the Antichristian state and worship, whereunto all the shakings of these nations seem to tend, in the wisdom of God, although we are not able to discern their influence thereunto:—

1. Now, for the first of these, we may consider it in its coming as foretold, and as accomplished:—

(1.) As it was foretold and threatened by Christ. How were believers cautioned to be ready for it with eminent holiness and watchfulness therein! So [Luke xxi. 34, 36](#), “Take heed to yourselves; watch, therefore.” Why so? “Christ is coming,” [verse 27](#). When? “Why, in this generation,” [verse 32](#). What to do? “Why, to dissolve heaven and earth,” [verse 25](#); to “dissolve the Jewish church and state. Watch, therefore; give all diligence.” So also [Matt. xxiv. 42](#). “Watch, therefore.” Oh! on this account what manner of persons ought we to be!

(2.) As accomplished. See what use the apostle upon it directs believers unto, [Heb. xii. 26–28](#). This is the use, this the call of Providence, in all these mighty alterations: “Let us have grace,” — strive for it. The nature of the works of God call aloud for an eminent frame of holiness, and close adherence unto God in his worship. I could show how both the duties of my text are here expressed; but I need not.

2. So is it also in reference to that other great work of God in the world relating to Christ and his church, which is the ocean of providence whereinto all the rivulets of lesser alterations do run; I mean, the destruction of Antichrist and his Babylonish kingdom.

What a frame shall be in the saints on the close of that work, the Holy Ghost declares at large, [Rev. xix.](#), — all rejoicing and spiritual communion with God! and whilst the work is on the wheel, those whom God will own in it he sets his mark on as holy, called, and chosen.

The grounds hereof are, —



1. Because in every such providential alteration or dissolution of things on the account of Christ and his church, there is a peculiar coming of Christ himself. He cometh into the world for the work he hath to do; he cometh among his own to fulfil his pleasure among them. Hence such works are called “his coming;” and “the coming of his day.” Thus James exhorts these very Jews to whom Peter here writes, with reference to the same things, [James v. 7–9](#), “Be patient unto the coming of the Lord.” But how could that generation extend their patience to the day of judgment? “Nay,” saith he, “that is not the work I design, but his coming to take vengeance on his stubborn adversaries;” which he saith, [verse 8](#), “ ‘draweth nigh,’ is even, at hand; yea, Christ, ‘the judge, standeth before the door,’ ” [verse 9](#), “ready to enter;” — which also he did within a few years. So upon or in the destruction of Jerusalem (the same work), [Luke xxi. 27](#), the Son of man is said to “come in a cloud, with power and great glory;” — and they that escape in that desolation are said to “stand before the Son of man,” [verse 36](#). So, in the ruin and destruction of the Roman empire, on the account of their persecution, it is said that “the day of the wrath of the Lamb was come,” [Rev. vi. 16, 17](#).

In all such dispensations, then, there is a peculiar coming of Christ, a peculiar drawing nigh of him, to deal with all sorts of persons in a special manner. Though he be oftentimes encompassed with many clouds, and with much darkness, yet he is present, exerting his authority, power, wisdom, righteousness, and grace in an eminent manner. It is with him as it is with God in other works, [Job ix. 11](#); though all “see him not, perceive him not,” yet “he goeth by,” and “passeth on.” The lusts, prejudices, corruptions, selfishness, injustice, oppressions of men, — the darkness, unbelief, fears, carnal wisdom, of the saints themselves, — the depth, compass, height, unsearchableness, of the path of the wisdom of Christ himself, — keep us in the dark as to his presence in this and that particular; but yet in such dispensations he is come, and passeth on towards the accomplishment of his work, though we perceive it not. Now, “what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness,” to meet this great King of saints at his coming? What preparation ought there to be! what solemnity of universal holiness for his entertainment! He is in such dispensations continually nigh us, whether we take notice of it or not.

I say, then, if there be a special coming and a special meeting of Christ in such dispensations, I suppose I may leave the inference unto all holy conversation and godliness, with the apostle, to the breasts and judgment of them that are concerned. Are we in this work to meet the Lord Jesus? What manner of persons ought we to be!

It may be observed, that Christ puts very great weight on the present frame and course which he finds men in at his coming. [Matt. xxiv. 46](#), “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” He annexes blessedness to the frame and course he finds men in at his coming; and [commends him that] waiteth for that hour, [verse 42](#). Be not asleep when the thief comes to break up the house; take heed that that day take you not



unprovided, — that you be not overtaken in the midst of the cares of this world. And he complains that when he comes he shall not “find faith on the earth,” [Luke xviii. 8](#).

But you will say, “Is this enough, then, that we look to be found in all godliness and holiness at his coming? May we indulge ourselves and our lusts at other seasons, so we be sure to be then provided? Is not the command of duty equal and universal as to all times and seasons? or is it pointed only unto such dispensations?”

*Ans. 1.* The inference for preparedness for the coming of Christ is to universal holiness, at all seasons; and that upon the account of the uncertainty of it. This our Saviour presseth again and again. “You know not at all when it will be, nor how, — no, not in the least; you believe it not when it is come: ‘I shall not find faith of it on the earth,’ ” saith Christ. “Men will not take notice of it, nor acknowledge it, nor own it, as my coming; wherefore you have no way to be prepared for it, but by universal, perpetual watchfulness.”

*Ans. 2.* The exhortation lies not unto holiness and godliness in general, but as to the degrees of it, — what manner of men we ought to be in them. It is not a godly conversation at an ordinary rate, that may find acceptance at another time, which will suffice to meet Christ at his coming; and that on sundry accounts, afterward to be mentioned. I shall at present only treat of some grounds of it from his own person who cometh, and whom we are to meet; and speak of the work he hath to do in his coming afterward:—

(1.) On the account of his personal excellencies and holiness. Consider how he is described when he comes to walk among his churches, [Rev. i. 13–17](#): He is full of beauty and glory. When Isaiah saw him, [Isa. vi.](#), he cries out, “I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips;” because of the dread and terror of his holiness. And Peter also, “Depart from me, Lord; for I am a sinful man.” They were not able to bear the thoughts of his glorious holiness so nigh to them. When the holy God of old was to come down among the people at the giving of the law, all the people were to sanctify themselves, and to wash their clothes, [Exod. xix. 10, 11](#). And order was still taken that no unclean thing might be in the camp, because of the presence of the holy God, though but in a type and resemblance. Whether we observe it or no, if there be any dissolving dispensations among us that relate to Christ or his church, there is a Holy One in the midst of us; or there will be, when any such dispensations shall pass over us. And to think to have to do in the works and ways wherein he hath to do, with hearts unlike and unsuitable unto him, to act our lusts and follies immediately under the eye of his holiness, to set our defiled hands to his pure and holy hands, — his soul will abhor it. This is a boldness which he will revenge, — that we should bring our neglect and lusts into his holy presence. Christ is in every corner, — in every turn of our affairs; and it is incumbent on us to consider how it is for us to behave ourselves in his special presence.

(2.) Upon the account of his authority. He who thus comes is the King of saints, and he comes as the King of saints, — he comes to exert his regal power and authority, to give a testimony to it in the world. So [Isa. lxiii. 1–4](#): He shows his glory, his might, his kingdom,

and authority in this work. So [Rev. xix. 12](#): When he comes to destroy his antichristian enemies, he hath many crowns on his head; he exerciseth his regal power and authority. What is the duty of saints when their King is so nigh them, when he is come into the midst of them, — whilst he puts forth the greatness of his power round about them? Will it become them to be neglective of him? to be each man in the pursuit of his own lusts, and ways, and works, in the presence of their King? Holiness and godliness hath a due regard to the authority of Christ. Wherever there is a due subjection of soul unto Christ, all holy conversation and godliness will ensue. To be neglective in or of any part of holy conversation, — to be careless of any part of worship, under the special eye of the Lord of our lives and our worship, is not to be borne with.

(3.) On the account of the present care, kindness, and love, that he is exerting in all such dispensations towards his. It is a time of care and love. The way of his working out the designs of his heart are, indeed, oftentimes dark and hid, and his own do not see so clearly how things lie in a tendency to the event and fruits of love; but so it is; — Christ comes not but with a design of love and pity towards his, — with his heart full of compassion for them. Now, what this calls for at their hands, seeing their holiness and worship is all that his soul is delighted in, is evident unto all.

Put, now, these things together:— Every such dispensation is a coming of Christ; — the coming of Christ, as it is trying in itself, so it is the coming of the holy King of saints in his love and pity towards them; yea, be the dispensation what it will, never so sharp and severe unto them, yet it is in love and compassion to their souls; — their work is to meet this their holy King in the works of his love and power: and “what manner of persons ought we to be?”

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## Sermon XI.

2. The second ground is, because every such day is a lesser day of judgment, — a fore-runner, pledge, and evidence of that great day of the Lord which is to come. God's great and signal judgments in the world are to be looked on as pledges of the final judgment at the last day. So Jude tells us that, in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, "God set forth an example of them that shall suffer the vengeance of eternal fire," [verse 7](#). And Peter calls the time of the destruction of the Judaical church and state expressly "the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men," [2 Epist. iii. 7](#). So to the full is the destruction of the Roman persecuting state expressed, [Dan. vii. 9, 10, 14](#). The solemnity of the work and whole procedure bespeaks a great day, a day of judgment; it is so, and a representation of that which is to come. And the like also is set forth, [chap. xii. 1-3](#); and the same description have we of the like day of Christ, [Mal. iv. 1](#).

Every such day, I say, then, is a lesser day of judgment, wherein much judging-work is accomplished. This Daniel tells us, [chap. xii. 10](#), — it is a trying, a purifying, a teaching, a hardening, a bleeding time. There are great works that are done upon the souls and consciences of men by Christ in such a day, as well as outwardly; and all in a way of judgment. To let pass, then, the outward, visible effects of his wrath and power, of his wisdom and righteousness, I shall consider some few of the more secret judiciary acts that the Lord Christ usually exerts in such a day:—

(1.) He pleads with all flesh that are concerned in the alterations and desolations he makes. God puts this as one act of his in judgment, that he pleads with men, [Ezek. xxxviii. 22](#). In his judgments he pleads with and against men about their sins. And in that great representation of the day of judgment, [Joel iii. 2](#), God is said to "plead with all nations." Now, I say, in general, Christ in such a day pleads with all men concerned. His providences have a voice, and that a contending, pleading voice. Unless men are utterly blinded and hardened (as, indeed, the most are), they cannot but hear him, in his great and mighty works, contending with them about their sin and unbelief, — representing to them his righteous judgment to come. Though men now cast off things, on this account and that; and, being filled with their lusts, passions, fury, revenge, or ease, sensuality and worldliness, think these things concern them not; yet the day will come wherein they shall know, that the Lord Christ in his mighty works was pleading even with them also, and that in a way of judgment about their sin and folly.

(2.) In such a day Christ judges and determines the profession of many a false hypocrite, who hath deceived the church and people of God. One great work of the last day shall be the discovery of hypocrites: it is thence principally called, "The day wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed." Many a fair pretender in the world shall be found to have been an enemy of Christ and the gospel. So is the day of Christ's coming in the flesh represented,

Mal. iii. 1, 2. All were high in their professions of desiring his coming, and of delighting in him; but when he came, what was the issue? How few endured the trial! The false, hypocritical, selfish hearts, who had treasured up the hopes of great things to themselves, being discovered by the trials and temptations wherewith his coming was attended, themselves were utterly cast off from their profession into open enmity to God and his Son. So dealeth the Lord Christ in and under the dispensations whereof we speak, to this day. What by the fury of their own lusts, what by the temptations which lie in their way, what by the advantages they meet withal for the exercise of their vile affections, their hypocrisy is discovered, and themselves cast out of their profession. Notable effects of this acting of Christ as a judge have we seen in the dispensation that is passing over us. Some he hath judged by the sentence and judgment of his churches. How many false wretches have been cast out of churches, that have withered under their judgment, and returned no more! Some who have not walked in the order of his churches by him appointed, he hath judged by the world itself; — suffered their sin and folly so to break forth, that the world itself hath cast them out from the number of professors, and owned them as its own. Some have been judged as to their profession of him by strong temptations; that is, their lusts, ambition, selfishness, which have carried them into ways and compliances wherein they have been compelled to desert, and almost renounce all their former profession. Some have been tried and judged by the errors and abominations of the times, and turned aside from the simplicity of the gospel. Now, though there have been, and are, these and many other ways and means of casting men out of and from the profession that they have made, some good, some bad, some in themselves of a mere passive nature, and indifferent; yet they all proceed from Christ in a judiciary way, — they are acts of his in his day of judgment; — and O that England might not yet be farther filled with instances and examples of this kind!

(3.) He doth exercise his judgment in blinding and hardening of wicked men; yet they shall not see nor perceive what he is doing, but shall have advantages to do wickedly, and prejudices to blind them therein. So expressly, Dan. xii. 10, “They shall do wickedly, and they shall not understand.” There are two parts of his judgment in such a day, about and against them. *First*, His giving of them up to their own lusts, to do wickedly: “They shall do wickedly.” Wicked they are, and they shall act accordingly; they shall do it in such a day to the purpose, Rev. xvi. 10, 11. Christ will providentially suffer occasions, advantages, provocations, to lie before them, so that they shall do wickedly to the purpose; they shall have daily fresh occasions to curse, repine, blaspheme, oppose Christ and his interest, or to seek themselves, and the satisfaction of their lusts, which at other times they shall not be able to do. Be they in what condition they will, high or low, exalted or depressed, in power or out of it, they shall in such a season do wickedly, according as their advantages and provocations are. And for men to be given up to their own hearts’ lusts, is the next door to the judgment of the great day, when men shall be given up to sin, self, and Satan, unto eternity. *Secondly*,

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He blinds them: “None of the wicked shall understand.” Strange! Who seems so wise and so crafty as they? Who do understand the times, and their advantages in them, more than they? Who more prudent for the management of affairs than they? But the truth is, none of them, no, not one of them, shall, or do, or can understand; that is, they understand not the work of Christ, the business and design that he hath in hand, nor what is the true and proper interest of them who are concerned in these dispensations. There are many ways whereby Christ exerts this blinding and infatuating efficacy of his providence towards wicked men in such a day of judgment, that they shall not understand or know that he is at all concerned in the works that are in the world.

Sometimes the very things that he doth are such, and so contrary to the prejudicate opinions of men, that they can never understand that they are things which he will own. How many have been kept from understanding any thing of Christ in the world, in the days wherein we live, from their inveterate prejudices on the account of old superstitions, and forms of government which have been removed! They will rather die than believe that Christ hath any hand in these things: “They shall not understand.”

Sometimes the persons by whom he doth them, keep them from understanding. “Shall these men save us?” — these whom they look upon as the offscouring of the earth. “Sure, if Christ had any work to do in the world, he would make use of other manner of instruments for the accomplishing of them.” They are no less offended with the persons that do them than the things that are done. Christ worketh all this, that they should not understand.

Sometimes the manner of doing what he hath to do [keeps them from understanding,] — the darkness wherewith it is attended, the strange process that he makes, — sometimes weak, sometimes foolish, sometimes disorderly to the reasoning of flesh and blood, though all beautiful in itself, and in relation to him.

And sometimes Christ sends a spirit of giddiness into the midst of them, that they shall err and wander in all their ways, and not see nor discern the things that are before them: “None of the wicked shall understand.”

By these, and many such ways as these, doth Christ in these days of his coming exercise judgment on ungodly men; — not to mention the outward destruction, desolation, and perdition, which usually in such seasons he brings upon them.

(4.) He exerciseth judgment at such a time even among the saints themselves. [Ps. lxxxii. 1](#): He is judging in the great congregation. So [Ps. l. 4–8](#): All this solemnity of proceeding is for the judgment of his own people; and his judging of them is in a plea about their obedience and failing therein. The sum of this his dealing with them is expressed, [Rev. iii. 9](#).

We may, then, consider, — [1.] What it is that Christ pleadeth with his own people about his coming; [2.] What are the ways and means whereby he doth so:—

[1.] There are sundry things on the account whereof Christ at his coming pleads with his saints. One or more of them:—



1st. On the account of some secret lusts that have defiled them, and which they have either indulged themselves in, or not so vigorously opposed as their loyalty unto Christ required. Times of peace and outward prosperity are usually times wherein, through manifold temptations, even the saints themselves are apt to sully their consciences, and to have breaches made upon their integrity; sometimes in things they do know, and sometimes in things they do not know, nor take notice of. Instances may be given in abundance of such things. In this condition Christ deals with them, as [Isa. iv. 4](#). There is blood and filth upon them; the spirit of judgment and burning must be set at work; which, as it principally aims at the internal efficacy of the Spirit in the cleansing of sin, so it respects a time of providential alterations and trials, wherein that work is effectually exerted. Christ in these dispensations speaks secretly to the consciences of his saints, and minds them of this and that folly and miscarriage, and deals with them about it. He asks them if things be not so and so with them? — if they have not thus and thus defiled themselves? — whether these hearts are fit to converse with him? and leaves not until their dross and tin be consumed.

2dly. On the account of some way or ways wherein they may have been unadvisedly, or through temptation, or want of seeking counsel aright from him, engaged. They may be got, in their employments, in their callings, in the work that lies before them in this world, into ways and paths wherein Christ is not pleased they should make any progress. What through leaning to their own understandings, what through an inclination of saying “A confederacy” to them to whom the people say “A confederacy,” what through the common mistakes in the days wherein they live, even the saints may be engaged in ways that are not according to the mind and will of Christ. Now, in such a day of Christ’s coming, though he spares the souls of his saints and forgives them, yet he “takes vengeance of their inventions,” [Ps. xcix. 8](#). He will cast down all their idols, and destroy and consume every false way wherein they were. One is, it may be, in a way of superstition and false worship; another in a way of pride and ambition; another in a way of giving countenance to the men of the world, and things wherein God delights not; — Christ will take vengeance of all these their inventions in the day of his coming. He acts as refiner’s fire,” and as “fullers’ soap.”

3dly. On the account of inordinate cleaving unto the shaken, passing things of the world. This is a peculiar controversy that Christ hath with his, upon the account of adherence to the passing world; and it is a thing wherein, when he comes, too many will be found faulty. I might also insist on their unbelief, and other particulars. But, —

[2.] The ways and means whereby Christ judgeth and pleadeth with his own, on these accounts, are also various:—

1st. He doth it by the afflictions, trials, and troubles, that he exerciseth them with at his coming. The use of the furnace is to take away dross; and the issue of afflictions and trials, to take away sin:— this is their fruit. So, [Dan. xii. 1](#), the time of Christ’s coming shall be a day of trouble, such as never was. And what shall be the issue? [Verse 10](#), “Many shall be

purified, and made white, and tried.” Their trials and troubles, their great tribulations, shall be purifying and cleansing. Though the design of Christ in the issue, at the appointed season, be the peace and deliverance of his saints; yet, in the carrying on of his work, great trials and tribulations may befall them all; and many may fall in the way, and perish as to the outward man. Hence, [Dan. xii. 13](#), there is an appointed time of rest, and it will be a blessed thing for them that shall be preserved unto it; but whilst those days and seasons are coming to their period, there is often “a time of great trouble,” [verse 1](#). And “the power of the holy people may be scattered,” [verse 7](#), and many afflictions and trials may befall them. Now, by these doth Christ plead with his, for the consumption of their lusts, and the destruction of their inventions, — for the purging and purifying of them. All our trials, pressures, troubles, disappointments, in such a day, are the actings of Christ to this end and purpose. The influences that affliction hath unto these ends are commonly spoken unto.

*2dly.* He doth it by pouring out of his Spirit in a singular manner, for this end and purpose, so to plead with, judge, and cleanse his saints. It is in the administration of his Spirit that at his coming “he sits as a refiner and purifier of silver,” [Mal. iii. 1–3](#); and we see what work he accomplishes thereby. The Holy Ghost, who is the great pleader for the saints, and in them, doth at such a time effectually plead with them, by convictions, persuasions, arguing, application of the word, motions, strivings, and the like. Hence those who are unrefined at such a season are said in a peculiar manner “to vex,” to grieve “the Holy Spirit” of God, [Isa. lxiii. 10](#). His design upon them is a design of love; and to be rejected, resisted, opposed, in his actings and motions, — this grieves and vexes him. Men know not what they do, in neglecting the actings of the Holy Ghost; which are peculiarly suited to providential dispensations. When God is great in the world in the works of his providence, — in alterations, dissolutions, shakings, changings, removals, — and sends his Spirit to move and work in the hearts of men, answerably to his mind and will in these dispensations, so that there is a harmony in the voice of God without and within, both speaking aloud and clearly; then to neglect the workings of the Spirit brings men into that condition complained of, [Ezek. xxiv. 13](#), “Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged any more.”

It may be observed, that at such seasons when Christ hath any great and signal work to bring forth in the world, he doth by his Spirit deal with the hearts and consciences of the most wicked and vile men; which, when the secrets of all hearts shall be discovered at the last day, will exceedingly exalt the glory of his wisdom, patience, goodness, holiness, and righteousness. So did he with them before the flood; as is evident from [Gen. vi. 3](#). When an utter destruction was to come, he saith, his Spirit shall strive with them no more; — that is, about their sin and rebellion. That this Spirit was the Spirit of Christ, and that the work of dealing with these ungodly men was the work of Christ, and that it was a fruit of longsuffering, Peter declares, [1 Pet. iii. 18–20](#). And if he deals thus with a perishing world, by a work

that perisheth also, — how much more doth he it in an effectual work upon the hearts of his own! It is the Spirit that speaks to the churches in all their trials, [Rev. ii. 3](#).

By this means, I say, then, Christ pleads with his saints; secretly and powerfully judging their lusts, corruptions, failings, — consuming and burning them up. He first, by frequent motions and instructions, gives them no rest in any unequal path; then discovers to them the beauty of holiness, the excellency of the love of Christ, the vanity and folly of every thing that hath interrupted their communion with him; and so fills them with godly sorrow, renunciation of sin, and cleaving unto God; — which is the very promise that we have, [Ezek. vi. 10](#).

3dly. As he doth it by the inward, private, effectual operation of his Spirit, so he doth it by the effusion of his light and gifts in the dispensation of the word. Christ seldom brings any great alteration upon the world, but together with it, or to prepare for it, he causeth much effectual light, to break forth in the dispensation of his word. Before the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, how he dealt with them he declares, [2 Chron. xxxvi. 15](#), “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place.” And before the final dissolution of the heavens and earth of that church and state, he preached to them himself in the flesh. A glorious light! Before the ruin of the antichristian world, he sends the angel with the everlasting gospel, and his two witnesses to hold forth the light of the gospel; and we must witness to this his way and wisdom in our generation. Now, though there are many rebels against light, and many whose lusts are enraged by the breaking forth of truth in its beauty and lustre; and many that, being dazzled with it, do run out of its paths into ways of error and folly, and none of the wicked do understand; yet, among the saints, the more light the more holiness, — for their light is transforming. This, then, is another means whereby, in such a day, Christ consumes the lusts and judges the inordinate walking of his own, — even by the light which in an eminent manner he sends forth in the dispensation of the word.

Now, if the time and season whereof we speak be such a day of judgment, wherein Christ thus pleads with all men, and with his own in an especial manner, I think the inference unto eminency in universal holiness may be left upon the thoughts and minds of all that are concerned. Especially from these considerations doth the inference lie strong unto the ensuing particulars, in the ways of holiness and godliness:— *First*, Of self-searching and self-judging in reference to our state and condition. Dreadful are the actings of Christ in such a day on the souls and consciences (ofttimes on the names and lives) of corrupt, unsound professors; — in part I declared them before. If any now should be found in such a condition, his day of judgment is come, his sealing to destruction. This the apostle calls to in such a dispensation, [1 Cor. xi. 31, 32](#). Self-judging, as to our state and condition, ways and practices, is a great principle of holy conversation and godliness. When Christ comes to judge, we

ought surely to judge ourselves; and abounding in that work is a great means of preservation from the temptations of the days whereunto we are exposed. *Secondly*, Of weanedness from the world and the things thereof. Christ's coming puts vanity on all these passing things. This is surely contained in the text, "Seeing that these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons," etc. At best they are vain and passing, uncertain things; in such a dispensation as is spoken of, they are all obnoxious to dissolution, and many of them certainly to be removed and taken away. And why should the heart of any one be set upon them? why should we not fix our souls on things more profitable, more durable? It is no small matter to meet the Lord Christ at his coming, [Mal. iii. 1-3](#). They were all full of desires of the coming of Christ; they sought after him: "The Lord whom ye seek." They delighted in the thoughts of him: "Whom ye delight in." Well, he came, according to their desires; he whom they sought was found. And what was the issue? Why, very few of them could abide the day of his coming, or stand when he appeared. He had a work to do they could not away with. They desired his coming, — they desired the day of the Lord; but, as the prophet says, [Amos v. 18](#), "Woe unto them! to what end have they desired it? — it was darkness to them, not light." That was the coming of Christ in person to his temple. It is not otherwise in any of his other comings in providential dispensations. Many men long for it, delight in it, — it is our duty so to do; but what is the issue? One is hardened in sin and lust; — another is lifted up, as though himself were something, when he is nothing; — a third stumbles at the coming itself, and falls: "Woe unto them! the day of the Lord is darkness unto them, and not light."

I proceed now to the *use*. But to make way for the due improvement of the apostle's exhortation unto us, some previous considerations must be laid down:—

First. It is known to all the world that we have had great providential alterations and dissolutions in these nations. He must be a stranger, not in England only, but in Europe, almost in the whole world, that knows it not. Our heavens and our earth, our sea and our dry land, have been not only shaken, but removed also. The heavens of ancient and glorious fabric, both civil and ecclesiastical, have been taken down by fire and sword, and the fervent heat of God's displeasure. It is needless for me to declare what destructions, what dissolutions, what unparalleled alterations we have had in these nations. Persons, things, forms of government of old established, and newly-framed constitutions, we have seen all obnoxious to change or ruin.

*Secondly*. It is no less certain that we may say, concerning all these things, "Come and see what God hath wrought." And as to these desolations of nations, ruin of families, alterations of governments, we may say of them all, as the psalmist, [Ps. xlvi. 8](#) "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations he hath made in the earth." It is his work; he hath done it himself. There is no evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it, [Amos iii. 6](#). Have there been any exaltations of men, recoveries from depression, relief of the oppressed, establishments of new frames and order of things? — it hath been all from him, [Dan. ii. 21, iv.](#)

32. Indeed, the days wherein we live are full of practical atheism. Some, out of mere stoutness of heart and innate unbelief, will take no notice of God in all these things. [Ps. x. 4](#), “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” As things have been, so they suppose they are, and will be; but as to the consideration of him who disposeth of all as seems good unto him, they are strangers unto it. Some have had their lusts enraged, and themselves so provoked and disappointed, that, flying upon the instruments which God hath used, they have been filled with prejudice, and utterly blinded as to any discovery of the ways or work of God in these revolutions. Some have been utterly cast down in their thoughts, because they have not been able to discover the righteousness, beauty, and order, of the ways of God; his footsteps having been in the deep, while his paths have not been known. And some, having found an open door for the satisfaction of their lusts, — pride, covetousness, ambition, love of the world, reputation, vain-glory, and uncleanness, — have been so greedily engaged in the pursuit of them, that they have taken little or no notice of the hand of God in these things. And others are at a stand, like the Philistine priests and diviners, [1 Sam. vi. 9](#). They know not whether all this hath been from the hand of God, or whether some chance hath befallen us. I shall not need to mention those in [Isa. xlvii. 13](#), — “astrologers, star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators,” who have endeavoured also to divert the thoughts of unbelieving, foolish men, from a due consideration of the Author of all our revolutions. To all which I shall answer in general in the words of Hannah, [1 Sam. ii. 3–9](#), “God hath done all these things.” And men that will not take notice of him and his proceedings, shall at length be forced so to do, [Isa. xxvi. 11](#).

These things being premised, one principal inquiry, which must be the bottom and foundation of the ensuing directions, is, whether it may appear that these providential alterations and dissolutions have related to Christ and his interest in the world in an especial manner?

That we may yet a little farther clear our way, you may farther observe, what I intend, by relating unto Christ and his church in an especial manner:—

1. Whereas the Lord Christ is, by the appointment of the Father, made “heir of all things,” [Heb. i. 2](#), and “hath all judgment committed unto him,” over all flesh, in all the world, — which include his right to send his gospel into what nation and place he pleaseth; — so all the alterations that are in the world, all things relate to him, and do lie in a remote tendency to the advancement of his glory. He will work out his own glorious ends from all the breakings of all the nations in the world; even where the interest of his gospel seems outwardly to be very little, or nothing at all. But it is not in this sense that we make our inquiry; for so there would be nothing peculiar in the works that have been among us.

2. Things may relate unto Christ and his church upon the account of special promise. Christ hath a special and peculiar concernment in providential dissolutions when they so relate to him; and that appears in these things:—

(1.) When the judgments that are exercised in such a dispensation flow from provocations given unto the Lord Christ, upon the account of his church. So *Isa. xxxiv. 8*. All the dissolutions mentioned of the heavens and the earth, *verse 4*, were on Zion's account, and the controversy that Christ had with Idumea about her. So, *chap. lxiii. 4*, the day of vengeance is the year of the redeemed. Whence, in such a day, the saints themselves are stirred up to take notice that the desolations wrought in the earth are on their account, *Jer. li. 35*; and so it is fully expressed in the ruin of antichristian Babylon, in the Revelation. Where, then, there is a peculiar relation of any dissolving providence unto Christ and his church, the judgments exerted in and under it regard the vengeance of the church, and proceed from the provocations of Christ on that account.

(2.) Some promises made unto Christ concerning his inheritance, — some promises of Christ unto his church, — are, in such a day, brought forth unto accomplishment. The promises of Christ to the church are of two sorts:— First, General, essential to the new covenant; and these belong equally to all saints, of all ages, in all places, — not to one more than another. Every saint hath an equal right and interest in the essential promises of the covenant with any other saint whatever; there is no difference, but one God, Lord, and Father of all, is good unto them all alike. And, secondly, There are promises which are peculiarly suited to the several states and conditions into which the visible kingdom of Christ is, in his wisdom, to be brought in several ages. Such are the promises of the calling of the Jews, — of the destruction of Antichrist, — of the increase of light in the latter days, — of the peace, rest, and prosperity of the church in some times or ages, after trials and tribulation. Now, they are the promises of this latter sort that relate unto providential dispensations.

Having premised these things, I shall now briefly offer some grounds of hope, that such have been the alterations and dissolutions wherein we have been exercised in this generation:—

First. Because very many of the saints of God have obtained real, evident, soul-refreshing communion with Christ in and about these things, on this foundation, that the things on the wheel amongst us have had a peculiar relation unto him. There is nothing of more certainty to the souls of any, than what they have real, spiritual experience of. When the things about which they are conversant lie only in notion, and are rationally discoursed or debated, much deceit may lie under all; but when things between God and the soul come to be realized by practical experience, they give a never-failing certainty of themselves. Now, by holding communion about these things with Christ, I understand the exercise of faith, love, hope, expectation, delight, on and in Christ, on the one hand; and the receiving relief, supportment, consolation, joy, patience, perseverance, on the other; from both which, holiness, faithfulness, and thankfulness have proceeded and been increased. Now, this communion with Christ, in and about the works of his providence amongst us, very many of the saints have obtained; and, which is the height and complement of it, died in the clear visions of Christ in such

communion. Now there are two things that offer sufficient security against any deceit or mistake in this thing:—

1. The goodness, care, and faithfulness of God towards his own; which will not suffer us to fear that he would lead all his people into such a temptation wherein, in their chiefest communion (as they apprehended) with himself, they should feed on the wind and delusion. If the foundation of all this intercourse with God was false, and not according to his mind, then so was the whole superstructure. Now, that God for many years should lead his people into a way of prayer, faith, hope, thankfulness, and yet all false and an abominable thing, because all leaning on a false ground and supposition; none that consider his goodness and tender pity towards his own, with the delight of his soul in their worship and ways, can once imagine. It is true, men may be zealously engaged in ways and acts of worship, and that all their lives, wherein they think they do God good service; and yet both they and their service be abominated by him for ever. But men cannot do so in faith, love, obedience, thankfulness; which alone we speak of. At least, he will not suffer his saints to do so; of whom alone we speak. We have, then, the tender mercies and faithfulness of God to assure us in this case.

2. The self-evidencing efficacy of faith in spiritual experiences strengthens their persuasion. Many, doubtless, may persuade themselves that they have communion with God, and yet feed upon ashes, and a deceived heart turns them aside. The principle of such a delusion I shall not now lay open. But when it is indeed obtained by faith, it is always accompanied with a soul-quieting, refreshing evidence; for faith in its operation will evince itself to the soul where it is. I do not say it always doth so. It may be so clouded with darkness of mind, so overpowered by temptations, that in its most spiritual and genuine acting, it may be hid from the soul wherein it is, — which we find to be the condition of many a gracious soul; but in itself it clears up its own actings. Things that have a self-evidencing power, may be hindered from exerting it; but when they do exert it, it is evident. Put a candle under a bushel, it cannot be seen; but take away the hinderance, and it manifests itself. It is so in faith, and its actings. They may be so clouded to the soul itself in which they act, that it may not be able to attain any comforting evidence of it. But take away the bushel, — fear, prejudices, temptations, corrupt reasonings, — and it will assure the soul of itself and its working. Neither is its working more evident than its fruit, or the product of its operations in the soul; it brings forth love, rest, peace, all with a spiritual sense upon the heart and spirit. Now, these have been in this thing so evident in the souls of the saints, that they have bespoken that faith which cannot deceive nor be deceived.

The bottom, then, of the communion which the saints had with Christ in this work, and have, must either be faith or fancy. If faith, then the communion was and is real, and the work true that it is built upon. That it was not, that it is not, the fancy or imagination of a deluded heart, may appear from these considerations:—

(1.) From its extent. We know it possessed the minds of the universality of believers in this nation, who were not, nor are at this day, combined in our political interest, but are woefully divided among themselves; yet have all had, more or less, this persuasion of the work relating unto Christ. Now, that this should, be any corrupt imagination, seems to me impossible. I speak not of outward actions and proceedings; for so, I know, whole nations may politically combine in evil, — though I will not believe that ever the generality of the saints of Christ shall do so. But I speak of the frame of their hearts and spirits as to communion with Christ in faith and love; whereunto no outward reasonings or interests could influence them in the least: “*Digitus Dei est hoc.*”

(2.) It appears from the permanency and flourishing of this principle in straits and difficulties. A corrupt imagination, be it never so strong and vigorous in its season, and whilst its food is administered to it, in the temptation it lives upon, yet, in trials great and pressing, it sinks and withers; or, if the difficulty continue, for the most part — unless where it falls on some natures of an unconquerable pertinacy — utterly vanisheth. But now, this principle of the saints’ communion with Christ about the work of our generation was never more active, vigorous, and flourishing, did never more evidence itself to be of a divine extract, than in the greatest straits and difficulties, — in the mouth and entrance of the greatest deaths. Then did it commonly rise up to its greatest heights and assurance. Our temptations, whether Christ be in this work or no, have, for the most part, befallen us since we had deliverance from pressing, bloody troubles. And I think I may say, that there are very many saints in these nations who can truly say, that the best and the most comfortable days that ever they saw in their lives, were those wherein they were exercised with the greatest fears, dangers, and troubles; and that upon the account of the strengthening of this principle of communion with Christ. And in very many hath it been tried out to the death, when corrupt fancies were of little worth.

(3.) It appears from the fruits of this persuasion. Every corrupt imagination and fancy is of the flesh; and the works of the flesh are manifest. Whatever it may do in conjunction with convictions, and for a season, yet in itself, and in a course, it will bring forth no fruit but what tends to the satisfaction of the flesh. But now, the principle under consideration did bring forth fruits unto God, in godliness and righteousness.

But you will say, “Do we not see what fruit it hath brought forth? Is not the land full of the steam of the lusts of men engaged in the work of this age? Can hell itself afford a worse savour than is sent forth by many of them?”

*Answer 1.* Very many who have been engaged never pretended to ought of this principle, but followed professedly on carnal (at best, rational and human) accounts solely. Now, these being men of the world, and being fallen into days of notable temptations, no wonder if their lusts work and tumultuate, and that to purpose. The principle is not to suffer for their miscarriages who renounce it.



*Ans. 2.* There was a mixed multitude which in this business went up with the people of God, who pretended to this principle indeed, and talked and spake of the interest of Christ; but, knowing nothing of the power of it, when these men were brought into the wilderness, and there met with provocations on the one hand and temptations on the other, they fell a lusting: and, indeed, they have pursued and acted their lusts to purpose also; which have been, indeed, the more abominable, in that some of them have still the impudence to pretend this principle of faith as to the interest of Christ, which teacheth no such things, nor produceth any such fruits as they abound withal.

*Ans. 3.* Many who have really the power of this principle in them, have yet been overpowered by temptations, and have brought forth fruits directly opposite unto that obedience, and holiness, and self-denial, which the principle spoken of tends unto. This, for the most part, hath fallen out since deliverance came in; and so the vigour of faith, raised by daily exercise, was much decayed. None, therefore, of these things can be charged on the principle itself, whose natural, genuine effects we have experienced to be such as no corrupt fancy or imagination could produce.

Many other reasons of this nature might be insisted on; but this is my first ground.

Secondly. Because in this much work hath been really done for Christ. Whatever have been the designs of any or all of the sons of men, Christ hath done so much for himself, as I can from thence with confidence conclude that the whole hath related unto him. Indeed, in the work he doth, his interest oftentimes lies very much in the dark, yea, is utterly hid from the instruments he employs. Little did the Medes and Persians think, in the destruction of Babylon, that they were executing the vengeance of Zion, and [avenging] the blood of Jerusalem, a poor city ruined sixty or seventy years before. And when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, little did they think whose work they had in hand. And whatever instruments thought or intended, Christ hath done notable work for himself. The destruction of false worship as established by a law, the casting down of combinations for persecution, are no small works. I say, much work hath been done for Christ. There was a generation of men that were risen to a strange height in the contempt of the Spirit and ways of Christ, — combined in a resolution to oppose and persecute all the appearance of him, either by light or holiness, in his saints; setting up an outside, formal worship, in opposition unto the spiritual worship of the gospel. And upon the account of the light and truth which he began to command forth in those days, an unspeakable aggravation attended their guilt; — in the pursuit of whose design some were imprisoned, some banished into the ends of the earth, some beggared, many ruined and given up to death itself. Now, what work hath Christ made in these days on the men of that, generation? what vengeance hath he taken on them? This is certain, not to insist on particulars, that whatever new sort or combination of men may rise up in their spirit and design, and whatever success they may obtain, yet the generality of the men of that provocation, at least the heads and rulers of it, are already sealed up under

the indignation of the Lord Jesus, and the vengeance he takes for Zion. I shall not insist on more particulars. The wasting and destruction of the most eminent persecutors of the saints; the ruin and destruction of civil and ecclesiastical fabrics and combinations of men designing the opposing and persecuting of the Spirit of Christ; the removal of all that false worship under the pretence whereof they persecuted all the spiritual appearances of Christ, — hath been all work done for him.

Thirdly. The breaking forth of much glorious gospel light under this dispensation evinces its relation unto Christ. Look upon the like outward work at any other time in the world. What is the issue of war, blood, confusion? Is it not darkness, ignorance, blindness, barrenness? Hath it not been so in other places of the world? But now, in the coming forth of Christ, though he hath a sword in one hand, yet he hath the sun in the other; though he cause darkness in the destruction and desolation that attend his vengeance, yet he gives light and faith to his saints, [Mal. iv. 1, 2](#). Christ never comes for vengeance only; his chief design is love. Love brings forth light, and that which reveals him more to his saints, and which endears his saints more to him. But I have manifested before that he brings light with him; and he hath done so in this dispensation. Light as to the mysteries of the gospel, — light as to the riches of his grace, — light as to the way of his worship, of his ordinances and institutions, hath broken out amongst us; — as [Dan. xii. 4](#). It is such a day he speaks of.

I know how obnoxious this observation is to a sad objection:— “Call you these days of light and knowledge? Say you that truth hath shined forth or been diffused? Is it increased or more scattered abroad? Is not the contrary true?”

*Ans.* It cannot be denied but that many grievous and enormous abominations have been broached in these times, under the name and pretence of light and truth. But is that singular to these days? hath it not been so upon every appearance of Christ? As the light hath been, so hath been the pretence of it in error and darkness. No sooner was Christ come in the flesh, but instantly there were many false Christs: “Lo, here is Christ,” and, “There is Christ,” was common language in those days; as, “This is the only way,” and “That is the only way,” is now; — and yet the true Christ was in the world. And whatever light at any time comes forth, some mock; — false light about the same thing immediately breaks forth. So was it in the first spreading of the gospel, so in the late Reformation, and so in our days; and this is no evidence against the coming of Christ, but rather for it. For, —

1. Satan pours out this flood of abominations on purpose to bring an ill report upon the truth and light that is sent out by Christ. The great prejudice against truth in the world is, that it is new. “He seems to be a setter forth of strange” (or new) “gods,” say they of Paul, because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. To increase this prejudice, the devil, with it or after it, sends forth his darkness; which, first, enables the world to load the truth itself with reproaches, whilst it comes accompanied with such follies as though it also were of the number; secondly, it disables weak friends to find out and close with the truth amidst so



many false pretenders. Where much false money is abroad in the world, every man cannot discern and receive only that which is good. Much less will men always keep safe when they are so unstable and uncertain, as they are for the most part, about choosing of truth.

2. God permits it so to be, —

(1.) For the trial of careless professors. There must be heresies, that the approved may be tried. Most men are apt to content themselves with a lazy profession. They will hold to the truth whilst nothing appears but truth. Let error come with the same pretences and advantage, — they are for that also. Now, God delights to judge such persons even in this world, to manifest that they are not of the truth, — that they never received it in the love thereof. And he sifts and tries the elect by it; and that for many advantages not now to be insisted on. As, first, That they may experiment the efficacy of truth; secondly, His power in their preservation; thirdly, That they may hold truth upon firm and abiding grounds.

(2.) God permits it, to set a greater lustre and esteem upon truth. Truth, when it is sought after, when it is contended for, when it is experimented in its power and efficacy, is rendered glorious and beautiful; and all these, with innumerable other advantages, it hath by the competition that is set up against it by error. When men keep to the truth, by the power of God and the sense of its sweetness and usefulness to their own souls, and shall see some by their errors turned aside to one abomination, some to another, — some made to wither by them and under them, — they discern the excellency of the truth they embrace. So that, notwithstanding this exception, the observation stands good.

Fourthly. It appears from the general nature of the dispensation itself, which clearly answers the predictions that are of the great works to be accomplished in the latter days, upon the account of Christ and his church. This is a general head, whose particulars I shall not enter into. They cannot be managed without a consideration of all at least of the most principal prophecies of the last times, and of the kingdom of Christ, as to its enlargement, beauty, and glory in them; — too large a task for me to enter upon at present.

And these are some of the grounds on which I am persuaded that the alterations and providential dissolutions of these days have related unto and do lie in a subserviency to the interest of Christ and his church, whatever be the issue of the individual persons who have been engaged therein.

Come we now to the uses.

## Sermon XII.

*Use 1. Of trial or examination.*

Hath Christ for many years now been in an especial manner come amongst us? Do these alterations relate to him and his interest, and so require universal holiness and godliness? Let us, then, in the first place, see whether, in their several stations, the men of this generation have walked answerable to such a dispensation. Christ, indeed, hath done his work; but have we done ours? He hath destroyed many of his enemies, judged false professors, hardened and blinded the wicked world, sent out his Spirit to plead with his people, and taken vengeance on their inventions; he hath given out plentiful measures of truth and light: but now the whole inquiry is, Whether all or any of us have answered the mind of Christ in these dispensations, and prepared ourselves to meet him as becometh his greatness and holiness?

For the generality of the people of the nation, Christ hath been pleading with them about their unbelief, worldliness, atheism, and contempt of the gospel. And what hath been the issue? Alas! he that was filthy is filthy still; he that was profane is so still; swearers, drunkards, and other vicious persons, are so still. Where is that man in a thousand in the nation that takes notice of any peculiar plea of Christ with him about his sin in any of these dispensations? One cries out of one party of men, another curses another party, — a third is angry with God himself; but as to the call of Christ in his mighty appearances, who almost takes any notice of it? The abominable pride, folly, vanity, luxury, that are found in this city, testify to their faces that the voice of Wisdom is not heard in the cry of fools. And whereas Christ's peculiar controversy with this nation hath been about the contempt of the gospel, is there any ground got upon the generality of men? is any reformation wrought on this account among them? nay, may we not say freely, that there is a greater spirit of hatred, enmity, and opposition to Christ and the gospel, risen up in the nation than ever before? Light hath provoked and enraged them, so that they hate the gospel more than ever. How mad are the generality of the people on and after their idols, — their old superstitious ways of worship, which Christ hath witnessed against! What an enmity against the very doctrine of the gospel! what a combination in all places is there against the reforming dispensation of it! And is this any good omen of a comfortable issue of this dispensation? Is not Christ ready to say of such a people, "Why should you be smitten any more? you will revolt more and more?" and to swear in his wrath that they shall not enter into his rest? Nay, may he not justly take his gospel from us, and give it to a people that will bring forth fruit? O England! that in this thy day thou hadst known the things of thy peace! I fear they will be hidden from thee. The temptations of the day, the divisions of thy teachers, with other their miscarriages, and thine own lusts, have deceived thee, — and, without mercy, insuperable mercy, will

ruin thee. Shall this shame be thy glory, — that Christ hath not conquered thee, — that thou hast hardened thyself against him?

But passing them, let us inquire, whether the mind of Christ hath, in these dispensations, been answered in a due manner by the saints themselves? — have they made it their business to meet him “in all holy conversation and godliness?” Indeed, to me the contrary appears, upon these considerations:— (1.) Their great differences among themselves about lesser things; (2.) Their little difference from the world in great things; (3.) The general miscarriage of them all in things prejudicial to the progress of the gospel; (4.) The particular deviation of some into ways of scandal and offence; (5.) The backsliding of most if not of all of them.

(1.) Consider their great differences among themselves about lesser things. I cannot insist on the weight that is laid by our Saviour on the union of his disciples, with the condescension and love which he requires of them to that purpose, — the motives and exhortations given by the Holy Ghost unto them on that account, — the provision of principles and means made in the gospel for it, — the necessity of it to the promotion of the interest of Christ in the world, — the benefit and advantage of it to the saints themselves, — the testimony given by it to the power of Christ and truth of his word, — the blasphemies and woeful, soul-ruining offences that ensue on the contrary frame, — the weakening of faith, hinderance of prayer, quenching of zeal, strengthening of the men of the world, that attend the neglect of it; — I must not, I say, insist on these things; but see [John xvii. 21–23](#), and [Phil. ii. 1–3](#), of a hundred places that might be mentioned. How little the mind of Christ, and his expectation at his coming, hath been answered by his saints in this particular, is evident unto all.

[1.] Who is there, almost, who, having got any private opinion, true or false, wherein he differs from all or any of his brethren, who is not ready to proclaim it, without due regard to scandal and division, and even to quarrel with and divide from all that will not think as he thinks, and speak as he speaks? Now, the pride, self-fulness, vanity of mind, unlikeness to Christ, folly, want of faith and love, that is in such a frame, can never be expressed, nor sufficiently lamented. Christ abhors such a frame of spirit as he doth the pollution of the world.

[2.] Neither is this all; but men will lay more weight on their mint and cummin, on the lesser things wherein they differ from their brethren, — spend more time about them, write more books of them, labour more in their prosecution, — than they will do in and about the weighty things of law and gospel; — all which will appear at length to have been but the laying of hay and stubble on the foundation that must be consumed.

[3.] And farther; — men fall to judging and censuring each other as to their interest in Christ, or their eternal condition. By what rule? — the everlasting gospel? — the covenant of grace? No; but of the disciples: “Master, they follow not with us.” They that believe not our opinion, we are apt to think believe not in Jesus Christ; and because we delight not in

them, that Christ does not delight in them. This digs up the roots of love, weakens prayer, increases evil surmises (which are of the works of the flesh), genders strife and contempt; — things that the soul of Christ abhors.

[4.] The abomination of this wickedness ends not here; persecution, banishment, the blood of one another, hath on this account lain in the hearts and minds of some of the saints themselves. Not only have expressions to that purpose broken out from particular men, but it is to be feared that designs for it have been managed by parties and combinations. And are they not ready to dress up one another with such names and titles as may fit them for ruin? Sectaries, heretics, schismatics, on the one side; — priests, antichristian dogs, on the other: and all this while Christ is in the midst of us! And doth this answer the expectation of Christ? is this a preparation to meet him “in all holy conversation and godliness?” Can we render ourselves more unlike him, more unmeet for communion with him? Are not saints ready to join with the world against saints? — to take the vilest men into their bosom that will close with them in defaming, deriding, or, it may be, destroying their brethren? Doth Christ look for this usage in the house of his friends?

(2.) Consider their little difference from the world in great things. The great separation that Christ requires and commands of his saints is, from the world. He died to redeem them from it and out of it, — to deliver them from the present evil world, — the ways, works, fellowship, and ends of it; so providing that, in all holy conversation, his people should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.

Now, there are five things wherein Christ calls for his own to be differenced from the world and the men thereof:— [1.] In spirit; [2.] In principle; [3.] In conversation; [4.] In ends; [5.] In worship.

[1.] In spirit. He tells us everywhere, that it is one Spirit that is in his, — another that is in the world. [1 John iv. 4](#), “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” “There is a ‘he’ in you, and a ‘he’ in the world; and they are different and opposite. There is dwelling in you the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, nor doth it know him,” [John xiv. 17](#). And when his disciples began to act in the power of a carnal spirit, he tells them they knew not what spirit they were of.

[2.] In principle. The principle that Christ requires in his saints is faith, working by love, and guided by that wisdom which is from above. [1 Tim. i. 5](#): Here are the saints’ principles (I mean, should be so) of all their operations. A pure heart, and love, which is the end of all faith, is their great principle. This cleanses the conscience, and so sets them on work; — by this they take in strength for operation from Christ, without whom they can do nothing, [John xv. 5](#). By this they receive light and guidance from Christ, and that wisdom which is from above, enabling them to order their affairs with discretion, [James iii. 17, 18](#). Now, the principle that is in the world is self, — self acted and guided by carnal wisdom; which is

sensual and devilish; on the account whereof they despise the principle and actings of the saints, [Ps. xiv. 6](#).

[3.] In conversation. He hath redeemed us from a vain conversation, [1 Pet. i. 18](#). There is a peculiar emphasis put upon a conversation that becomes the gospel. There is a twofold conversation; — one that becometh the world and the men of the world; another that becometh the gospel and the profession thereof. That these be kept unmixed is the great exhortation of the apostle, [Rom. xii. 2](#). And if you would know wherein a worldly conversation consists, the apostle telleth us, [1 John ii. 16](#). A conversation wherein any of these things bear sway, is a conversation of this world. That all holiness, all manner of holiness, universal holiness and godliness, is in the gospel conversation, to which the saints are called, shall be afterward spoken unto.

[4.] In ends. There is a double end of men's working and acting in this world:— *1st*. General, which regulates the course of their lives and conversations; *2dly*. Particular, which regulates their particular actings and works: and in both these are the saints and the world differenced:—

*1st*. The general end of the saints is the glory of God. This lies in their eye, in their design, — how God may be glorified by them, his name exalted, his interest promoted; this way the bent of their minds and spirits tends. The general end of the men of the world is self; all is resolved into self. Whatever they do or act in public or private, whatever their pretence be, yet self is their end; — self-admiration, self-ostentation, self-satisfaction, — all centres in self. Sometimes, indeed, they may perform things that seem to be of a public tendency, — for the good of mankind, the good of nations, yea, it may be, the good of the church; so that it is hard for themselves to discover, or for others to charge them, it may be, that they act for self: but there are these two things that will evince men to make self their general end and aim, even then when they act for public ends:—

(*1st.*) This is a rule that will not fail men:— whatever in public actings is not done with a single eye for the glory of God, is done for self. These two divide all the general ends of men; and where one is not enthroned, the other is. Now, though some men may so far proceed in public actings, that it may not be evident wherein their self-interest lies, — though that also be but seldom, — yet, if they do not eye the glory of God with a single eye in these their actings, it is all for self; — and so it will be found at the last day. Now, how few will be left not turning into self on this rule, now [that] pretences run so high of public aims, might be easily evinced. It were no hard matter to discover how, in things of a public tendency, men make some fleshly imagination or other the god they worship; — so *that* be enthroned, they are little solicitous about the glory of God himself.

(*2dly.*) The difference of these ends even in public actings may be seen from the ways, means, and frame of spirit in which they are carried on. Let men pretend what they will to public ends, yet if they press after them with a proud, carnal, wrathful, envious spirit, by the

ways, wisdom, and in the spirit of the world, without faith and submission to God, it is self and not God that is their aim. And this also might be improved to strip men of glorying in their public designs, were that my present business. Jehu's spirit spoiled his work.

*2dly.* There is a particular end that regulates the public actings of men. This in the saints is their doing the work of their generation; that, as Noah, they may walk with God in their generation. This is their integrity as to the special course of their lives, and their particular employment, — how they may fulfil the work of their generation. The special end of the men of the world is the satisfaction of one particular lust or other. “Will this increase my wealth, my power, my carnal interest in this world, my reputation for wisdom and ability, or give me advantage to grow in this or that corrupt end in particular?” This is the secret inquiry of their deceived hearts; this influences and regulates all their particular actings.

[5.] As to their separation in worship, I shall only point to that one place, and leave it, [2 Cor. vi. 14–18](#), and [chap. vii. 1](#), which belongs to that discourse.

Now, I wish I had a more difficult task in hand, — I wish it were harder for me to manage any principle of conviction that we have not been prepared to meet Christ in his coming, from this consideration of our little difference from the world in these great things of principle, spirit, walking, ends, and worship. For, —

What a fleshly, wrathful, carnal, worldly spirit hath discovered itself in many professors; nay, in the most! — how little of the humble, lowly, meek, loving spirit of Christ! Many think it their glory to be unlike Christ in the spirit of their minds, — high, heady, self-full, proud, revengeful. What little difference between them and the men of the world! How like to one another! What oneness is found in them! Is this to learn Christ? to put on Christ? Is this the image of Christ that manifests itself in most professors? Nor, —

Are they at a distance from the world as to the principle of their walking and working. Do they walk by faith, and work by faith? are they guided by the wisdom that is from above? make they God their refuge? or are any men more dipped into a principle of carnal wisdom than most professors are? To seek counsel of God, to take the law of their proceedings at his mouth, to look up to him for guidance and direction, to derive strength from the Lord Christ by believing for the work of their employments, — in how few are these things found! Their own wisdom, their own counsel, their own contrivance, their own abilities, shall do their work. Carnal policy and fleshly wisdom are their net and drag.

Moreover, what is our conversation? How like the world in our persons, in our families, in our spirits, callings, — in whatever the world may properly call its own! Professors have jostled the men of the world, out of the possession of the ways of the world. How few are found walking in a world-condemning conversation! a gospel-glorifying conversation! a fruitful, holy conversation! We are known from the world by word more than by deed; which is not the way that James directs us unto.



I might go through with the rest of the considerations mentioned, and manifest that there is another evil found amongst us; for as we have great differences among ourselves about little things, so we have little difference from the world in those which are great and weighty.

(3.) Consider the general miscarriage almost of all professors in things prejudicial to the advancement of the gospel. The pretence whereof we have served ourselves all along, hath been, of the furtherance, propagation, and advancement of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath sent out light, and given opportunities suitable unto such a design; — never greater advantages nor greater opportunities from the foundation of the world. If ever they be required at the hands of this generation, they will be found to have been so. Whence, then, hath it been that the work hath not gone on and prospered? why doth it yet stick? Hath it not been from the woeful miscarriage of those who were looked on as the means and instruments of carrying it on? Have there been a few saints in a place? It is odds [but] that they have been at variance among themselves, and made sport for the vain multitude by their divisions; or they have walked forwardly, provokingly, uselessly, worldly, [so] that their pretence for the gospel hath been despised because of their persons. Have they, as men concerned in the honour of Christ and the gospel, as men enjoying the blessed principle of his Spirit, laboured to be useful, fruitful, — to do good to all, to be meek, lowly, self-denying, charitable, abounding in good works, patient towards opposers, not reviling again, not returning evil for evil, bearing, suffering, committing all to Christ? Alas! how few are there who have so walked! Could some see believers making it their business to be like Christ in the world, — to deny themselves as he did, — to do good to all as he did, — to be patient under persecution and reproaches as he was, — to be tender, pitiful, merciful, like him, — to abide in faith and prayer as he did; what might we not expect, as to the advancement of the gospel amongst us? We complain of cold preaching among ministers, of dead and dull attendance in hearers, of contempt of the word in the most, whereby the power of the gospel is kept within narrow bounds. But the truth is, the prejudices that have been raised by the miscarriages of professors have had a greater influence unto that evil event than any of the rest. And hath this been to meet Christ in his coming?

(4.) Of the like nature are the scandalous offences of many. I shall not insist on the scandalous apostasies of many professors, who, some by one great sin, some by another, are fallen off from the profession of the gospel. I wish that too many other instances might not be found among them that remain. Are there not some proud unto scandal, or sensual unto scandal, or covetous unto scandal, or negligent of their families and relations unto scandal, or conformable to the ways, customs, and fashions of the world unto scandal? I wish no such things might be found among us.

(5.) Add hereunto the general backsliding, or going back from God, that is amongst professors. We scarce seem to be the same generation of men that we were fifteen or sixteen

years ago:— some have utterly lost their principle. Zeal for God, reformation, purity of ordinances, interest of Christ in his saints, are things to be despised, things that have no concernment in our condition and affairs; as though we had no more need of Christ or his interest amongst us: and in the best, is not a fresh spirit of our present engagement almost lost?

But why should I insist farther on these things? Are not the things that have been spoken sufficient for a rebuke, or a conviction at least, that the professing people of Christ have not walked as though they had a just respect to his coming, or his peculiar presence amongst them? May we not justly fear, that our multiplied provocations may at length prevail with him to withdraw, to put a stop to his work that is upon the wheel; not only to leave us to manifold entanglements in the carrying of it on, but also utterly to forsake it, — to cast down the tower, and pluck up the hedge that he hath made about his vineyard, and leave it to be laid waste? He must have a heart like the flint in the rock of stone, that doth not tremble at it. But complaints will not be our relief. That which is incumbent on us, if yet there may be hope, is our answering the exhortation in my text. If, then, any sense do fall upon our spirits that Christ is come amongst us in a peculiar manner, in the providential alterations and dissolutions that have been among us; and that we have not hitherto demeaned ourselves as becometh them who are called to meet him, and to walk with him in such ways and paths as his amongst us have been; — then, I say, let us apply ourselves in our next use to the exhortation that lies before us, — to all manner of “holy conversation.”

*Use 2.* Of exhortation. That, I say, then, which we are now to attend unto, is the exhortation that is included in this expression, “What manner of persons ought we to be?” To further the efficacy of this exhortation, give me leave to premise some few things:—

First. There are general reasons of holiness and godliness, and there are special motives unto them. I am not now dealing upon the general reasons of holiness on the account of the covenant of grace; and so shall not press it on those considerations upon believers as such. But I speak of it in reference unto the peculiar motive mentioned in the text, — namely, the providential dissolution of temporal concernments; and so speak to believers as men interested therein, — as persons whom Christ hath a special regard unto in these his dispensations. It is one thing to say, “What manner of persons ought ye to be, whom God hath loved with an everlasting love, whom Christ hath washed in his own blood, — who have received the Spirit of Christ?” and another to say, “Ye that are loved with an everlasting love, are washed in the blood of Christ, and made partakers of the Holy Ghost, seeing that Christ is come amongst us to the dissolution of the great things of the nations, what manner of persons ought ye to be?” That is it in a peculiar pressing unto holiness on the account of the motive that is intended.

Secondly. There is a holiness and godliness that is required universally, at all times, in all places and seasons, and in all persons whatever, by the gospel; and there is a peculiar



improvement of that holiness and godliness at some seasons, and in some persons, that is not required at other times, and of other persons. Christ hath work for all the grace of his people in this world; and, according as opportunities for that work are presented unto them, they ought to stir up their grace for it. In the times of Christ's coming, he hath great work to do for and by the holiness and godliness of his people. A great testimony is to be given to himself thereby; his work is much to be promoted by it; the world to be convinced, condemned; his judgments against them justified in the sight of all; — and much more hath Christ to do with the holiness of his people at such a season. Now, it is this peculiar improvement of covenant, gospel holiness that is required; not only that holiness that is indispensably incumbent on us by the virtue of the covenant, but that heightening and improvement of it which the season wherein we live, and the work that Christ hath to do, do require of us.

These things being premised, let us now proceed to the management of our exhortation; and observe, —

(1.) That the apostle calls us to a consideration how this work may be effected: "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" Consider with yourselves the equity of the matter, the greatness of the motive, and the ways whereby it may be answered. The business is not now to be left at an ordinary rate, nor unto private meditations; it is to be made a matter of solemn consideration and design; it is to be managed with advice and counsel: consider, I say, "what manner of persons." It is not about holiness in general that I speak; but about that holiness which becomes us in such a season. This, then, is the first part of this exhortation, — that as to the improvement of holiness answerable to the season of this coming of Christ, we would carry it on by design, by counsel, by deliberate consideration; not only labouring to be holy ourselves, but to promote the work of holiness, the eminency, the activity, the usefulness of it, in one another, — in all believers, — so far as our prayers, exhortations, and examples, can reach. This the apostle pleads for on the same account, [Heb. iii. 13](#); and [chap. x. 23, 24](#), to the same purpose. And we have the practice of it, [Mal. iii. 16](#). It was such a time and season as that we treat of, Christ was coming to his temple, [verses 1–3](#). The earth was full of wickedness and contempt of him. What do the saints do? Do they content themselves with their ordinary measures? Do they keep all close to themselves? No; they confer, advise, consult, and that frequently, how, wherein, whereby, the expectation of their coming Lord may be answered. The reasons, arguments, way of carrying on such a counsel and design, the apostle declares, [Rom. xiii. 11–14](#), "The time requires it, the duty is urgent, temptations are many, failings have been great, — the Lord is nigh at hand." Let, then, believers enter together into this plot, this design; draw as many as they can into it; promote it by all ways and means possible. Let them get together; make this their aim, their design, — engage in it as the duty of their day, of their time and season. This would be a plot that the men of the world would have more just cause to fear than ever they had of any, and yet dare not question, disturb, or interrupt; — a design that would blow up their contrivance, disappoint their



counsel, ruin their interest, — shake heaven and earth. Let every one contribute the best of his counsel, the best of his grace, the best of his interest in heaven, the utmost of his self-denial, to the carrying of it on. Methinks we have dwelt long enough upon others' failings, — fruitless, selfish designs; the world is full of the noise, the steam, the filth of them. Oh, that the stream of our endeavours might now be another way! Oh, that God would stir up some that might stand up and cry, "Who is for God? who is on our side for holiness now?" If ministers at their meetings, if Christians at theirs, would make this their business; if all would agree to sacrifice their lusts, their self-love, their by-opinions to this work, — what glory would redound to Christ! what salvation would be wrought in the earth! Why do any of us lie complaining? Let us up and be doing; there is no doubt, no question to be made. This is that which Christ lengthens his controversy with us about, that he will bring us to, or ruin us and destroy us as to this world. Ministers meet. What do they? Pray a while, and spend their time in and about differences, controversies, — how they may do this or that, which I shall not name. Christians meet, and pray, and go away as they came. Lusts are not sacrificed; faults are not confessed to one another; exhortations mutual are not used; — no ground is got for holiness or godliness, but things remain as they did, or rather grow worse and worse every day: at best, profession rises, and the power of religion falls and decreases.

I heartily wish professors would be persuaded to come together to advise, to consult for God, — for the glory of Christ and the gospel, and for their own interest in this thing; — to consider what are the pressing temptations of the days wherein we live; what are the corruptions and lusts that are apt to be provoked and excited by these temptations, or by the state of things amongst us; what duties seem to be neglected; and what are the common, visible failings and scandal of professors, wherein themselves, through party, or neglect, or selfishness, have been wanting: and to advise and pray for the remedying of all these evils. I wish they would seriously stir up and exhort one another to contend mightily for the crucifying of all their secret lusts and bosom sins, — for heart-purity and likeness to Christ in all things; that they would incite others, and draw all they can into their society and combination in all parts of the nation. In particular, let not us of this place stand still, expecting when others will begin the work. The meaner, poorer, worse we are, the more incumbent is it on us to rise and be doing. The water is moved, teaching [healing?] is in it, and we strive not who shall enter first, but rather stand striving, contesting with others, to put them before us!

This is the first direction:— Let us make the matter of holiness and godliness suited to the coming of Christ a business of design, counsel, and common engagement; whereunto every one may contribute of the store which from God he hath received. Blessed will be those servants whom their Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing!

## Sermon XIII.

I shall now add some cautions as to the pursuit of the first direction:—

[1.] Take heed of a degeneration into self-righteousness. Intendments of holiness have more than once been ruined by Satan through this deceit; they have set out upon conviction, and ended in Pharisaism. Now, this hath been done many ways:—

*1st.* Some, really convinced of the vanity of an empty profession, and of boasting of saintship upon the account of faith and light without holiness and godliness, — which was the way of many when James and John wrote their epistles, — fall to dispute and contend (as well they may) for the absolute necessity of holiness and strict obedience, of fruitfulness and good works. But Satan here gets advantage upon men's natural spirits, their heats, and contentions, and insinuates an inherent righteousness, upon the account whereof we should, under one pretence or other, expect acceptance with God as to the justification of our persons. So he prevailed upon the Galatians. The way is narrow and strait that lies between the indispensable necessity of holiness, and its influence into our righteousness. Because no faith will justify us before God, but that also which will justify itself by fruitfulness before men, a great mistake arises, as though what it doth for its own justification were to be reckoned unto ours. Many in our days have gone off from the mystery of the gospel on this account.

*2dly.* It prevails from a secret self-pleasing, that is apt to grow on the minds of men from a singularity in the performance of duties. This is that which the Heart-searcher aims to prevent in his command, that “when we have done all, we should say we are unprofitable servants;” that is, in the secrets of our hearts to sit down in a sense of our own worthlessness. And here lies another great practical difficulty, — namely, to have the rejoicing of a good conscience in our integrity and constancy in duties, without a reflection upon something of self, that the soul may please itself and rest in. Nehemiah fixes on the medium, [Neh. xiii. 22](#). He had in the sight of God the testimony of his conscience concerning the service he had done for the house of God; but as to the rest, he winds up all in mercy, pardon, and grace. “God, I thank thee I am not as other men,” is apt to creep into the heart in a strict course of duties. And this self-pleasing is the very root of self-righteousness; which, as it may defile the saints themselves, so it will destroy those who only in the strength of their convictions go forth after a holiness and righteousness: for it quickly produceth the deadly, poisonous effect of spiritual pride; which is the greatest assimilation to the nature of the devil that the nature of man is capable of.

*3dly.* Our own holiness hath an advantage upon spiritual sense against the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ is utterly a strange thing to the best of unbelievers; and this puts them by all means upon the setting up of their own, [Rom. x. 3](#). And believers themselves know it only by faith, [Rom. i. 17](#); which is “of things not seen.” But what we are



ourselves, what we do, what we aim at, and in what manner, this we have a near sense of. And holiness is apt to insinuate itself into the conscience with a beauty that is none of its own, — to proffer itself to the soul's embraces instead of Jesus Christ. Its native beauty consists in its answering the will of God, conforming the soul to the likeness of Christ, and being useful in the world, in a covenant of mere mercy. From its presence, and the sense we have of it, the heart is apt to put a varnish and false beauty upon it, as to the relief of conscience upon the account of justification. As it was of old with the children of Israel, when Moses was in the mount, and not seen, nor had they any visible pledge of the presence of God, instantly they turned their gold into a calf that would be always present with them; — being in the dark as to the righteousness of Christ, which is, as it were, absent from them, men set up their own holiness in the stead of it; which, though of itself it be of God, yet turned into self-righteousness is but a calf, — an idol, that cannot save them.

This is my first caution. But that we may make the better improvement of it, as unto present practice, I shall add some evidences of the prevalency, or at least contending, of self-righteousness for an interest in the soul, under a pretence of duty and holiness; as, —

(1st.) When, under a design of holiness, there is an increase of a bondage-frame of spirit; — when the mind begins to be enslaved to the duties which it doth itself perform; — when that amplitude, freedom, and largeness of mind which is in a gracious frame of heart decays, and a servile bondage-frame grows in the room of it, so that the soul doth what it doth under this notion, that it dare not do otherwise. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” [2 Cor. iii. 17](#). Those that come to Christ, he makes free, [John viii. 36](#); — there is freedom and spiritual largeness of heart unto obedience and duty. A will unto duty, enlarged, dilated, and sweetened by love, delight, joy, complacency in the matter of obedience, is the freedom we speak of. This frame, I confess, is not always alike prevalent in gracious souls. They may have things ready to die; sin within, temptations without, desertion from God, — all of them together, each of them, may disturb this harmony, and bring them for a time, it may be a long time, under an indisposition unto such a frame; — but this is for the most part predominant. When such a frame decays, or is not, all endeavours, pains, attempts, severities in duties, do all relate to the law, — to bondage; and consequently lead to self-righteousness, fear, subjection of conscience to duties, — not [to] God in Christ in the duty; fluctuating of peace according to performances. The soul, in its strictest course, had need fear a snare.

(2dly.) Increasing in form, and withering in power. Forms are of three sorts:— [1st.] Those of institution; [2dly.] Moral; [3dly.] Arbitrary, in conversation.

[1st.] There are forms and ways of worship, whereof some are, and all pretend to be, of Christ's institution. Let us at present take it for granted that they are all what they are apprehended to be, — namely, from Christ. For a man to grow high, earnest, zealous, in and about them, — to be strict and severe in contending for them, and yet find no spiritual refreshment

in them, or communion with God, nor to grow in faith and love by them, is to dwell on the confines of self-righteousness, if not hypocrisy. This was the very sin of the Jews about their institutions, so much condemned in the Scripture. None use instituted ways or forms of worship profitably, but such as find communion with God in them, or are seriously humbled because they do not.

[2dly.] The outward form of moral duties, that depend not merely on institution, is the same. Such are praying, preaching, hearing. Abounding in them, without a suitable increase in grace, power, liberty, love, meekness, lowliness of mind, argues, though under the highest light to the contrary, a real mixture of self.

[3dly.] There are also outward forms in conversation that are used to the same purpose. We have had some who have changed their outward form in a few years as often as Laban changed Jacob's wages. What shape they will next turn themselves into, I know not. This is not going from strength to strength, and increasing in life and power, but from one shape to another. And as their word and prophecy is directly proportioned and answerable, in its outward appearance, to the administration of the Old Testament, and not at all to the spiritual dispensation of the New; so it may be feared that, in the principle of their obedience, they lie under a legal bondage and self-righteousness, which hath utterly spoiled that which, perhaps, in its first design, set out for mortification and holiness.

(3dly.) Where self-righteousness is getting ground, these two, bondage and form, at length bring forth burdensomeness and wearisomeness. This God charges on such justiciaries, [Isa. xliii. 22](#), "Thou hast been weary of me." The ways and worship of God grow very grievous and burdensome to such a soul. He is a stranger to that of the apostle, "His commandments are not grievous;" and that of our Saviour himself, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The easiness of the yoke of Christ ariseth from the assistance that is given to him that bears it by the Holy Ghost, as also the connaturalness that is wrought in the heart to all the duties of it. Both these accompany a gospel frame. But when a soul is deserted of these, the yoke grows heavy, and galleth him; but yet he must go on. This is from self-righteousness. Let this, then, be our first caution.

[2.] Take heed of monastic uselessness. I am persuaded monkery came into the world not only with a glorious pretence, but also with a sincere intention. Men weary of the ways, weary of the lusts and sin of the world, designing personal holiness, left their stations, and withdrew themselves into retirement. David was almost gone with this design, [Ps. lv. 6](#), "O that I had wings!" and Jeremiah, [Jer. ix. 2](#), "O that I had a lodging in the wilderness!" Whose heart hath not been exercised with reasonings of this kind, "Oh, that we could be freed from the encumbrances and provocations of this world; what manner of persons might we be in all holy conversation and godliness?" But consider, —

1st. What success this design prosecuted hath had in others. How quickly did it degenerate into wretched superstition, and was thereon blasted and rejected of God!

2dly. God can suffer temptation to pursue us into a wilderness, that shall more obstruct us in the progress of holiness than all the difficulties we meet withal in this world. It is not of what kind our temptations are, but what assistance we are to expect under them, that we are to look after.

3dly. Not our communion [our intercourse with men], but God's work, is to be considered. God hath work to do in this world; and to desert it because of its difficulties and entanglements, is to cast off his authority. Universal holiness is required of us, that we may do the will of God in our generation, [Gen. vi. 9](#). It is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; but we must also serve our generation, as David did before he fell asleep. God hath a work to do; and not to help him, is to oppose him.

[3.] Take heed of laying a design for holiness in a subserviency unto any carnal interest, — of crying, with Jehu, "Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts," — thereby to do our own work and compass our own ends. The great scandal that hath befallen the days wherein we live, and which hath hardened the spirits of many against all the ways of God, is, that religion, godliness, zeal, holiness, have been made a cloak for carnal and secular ends. What of this hath been really given, and what hath been taken on false imaginations, the last day will discover. In the meantime this is certain, that there is a corruption in the heart of man, rising up to such a visible prostitution of the whole profession of religion, — which of all things must be carefully avoided.

And this is the grand exhortation that I shall insist on: Let it be our design to promote generation-holiness in ourselves and others, with the cautions insisted on.

(2.) That which in the next place is considerable, is the proposing of the ingredients that lie in the motive to holiness, here expressed by the apostle, "Seeing that these things shall be dissolved." As, —

[1.] It will be a furtherance of holiness, to take off our hearts from an esteem and valuation of all things that are so obnoxious to dissolution. An estimation or valuation of earthly things is on all accounts the greatest hinderance to the promotion of holiness. Earthly-mindedness, pride of spirit, elation above our brethren, self-estimation, carnal confidence, contempt of the wisdom and grace of others, aptness to wrath and anger, — some or all of these always accompany such a frame.

The apostle also makes this an effectual means of the improvement of holiness, — that the mind be taken off from the delightful contemplation of visible things, [2 Cor. iv. 18](#). Things will work towards "a weight of glory," (in which words the apostle alludes to the Hebrew word **כְּבוֹד**, "glory," which comes from a root signifying to "weigh," or "to be heavy;" that being the only weighty thing, and all others light and of no moment;) — this way, I say, things will work, whilst our minds are taken off from things that are seen. The mind's valuation of them is as great an obstruction to the growth of holiness as any thing whatever that can beset us in our pilgrimage. [Now, what can give a greater allay to the



warmth of our thoughts and minds, than their continual obnoxiousness to dissolution and change? This the apostle makes his argument everywhere. “They are temporal things,” saith he, “things that abide not, things obnoxious to change and ruin. The world passeth away, and the figure of it. Wilt thou set thine heart upon that which is not?” And there lies the force of the inference under consideration: “Seeing that these things shall be dissolved,” — and it may be in a way of judgment, in a dreadful, fearful manner, — how is it incumbent on us to fix our hearts on more durable things, to choose the better part, the better portion! What advantage can it be to enlarge our hearts to the love of the things that are upon the wing? — to cleave to parting things with our affections? — to grow in our desires after that which withdraws itself from us continually? Let us, then, consider how many duties have been omitted, — how many temptations have been offered and objected to us, — how many spiritual frames of heart prevented or expelled, — how much looseness and vanity of mind introduced, — how much self-confidence promoted, — by an overvaluation of these things; and we shall then see what influence a watching against it may have to the furtherance of a design of holiness.

[2.] It will be so, to take off our care about them. This also is a worm that lies at the root of obedience, and is of itself able to wither it, if not removed. Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving us instruction how we should be prepared for the coming of such a day as that whereof we are speaking, charges us, among other things, to take heed that we “be not overcharged with the cares of this life,” [Luke xxi. 34](#). Indeed, there is nothing so opposite to that peculiar holiness and godliness that is required of us, in and under great providential dissolutions, as this of care about perishing things. The special holiness that we press after is a due mixture of faith, love, self-denial, fruitfulness, — all working in a peculiar and eminent manner. Now, to every one of these is this care a canker and a gangrene, fitted to eat out and devour the life and spirit of them. The very nature of faith consists in a universal casting of our care on God, [1 Pet. v. 7](#), “Cast all your care on him.” All our care about temporal, spiritual, eternal things, let us cast all this on God, — our whole burden. This is believing, this is faith: and what is more opposite unto it than this care and solicitousness of the soul about the obtaining or retaining of these things? Resignation, acquiescency, rest, — all which are acts or effects of faith, — are devoured by it. Trust in God, affiance, delight in his will, — [it] ruins them all. How can a soul glorify God in believing in a difficult season, that is overlaid with this distemper. Nothing is more diametrically opposite thereunto.

Love enlarges the heart to Christ, and every thing of Christ: valuation, delight, satisfaction, accompany it. It makes the heart free, noble, ready for service, compassionate, — zealous. Nothing is more called for in such a day: and the decay of faith, in the trials and temptations of such a season, is called the “waxing cold of love;” as the fruit decays when the root is consumed. To think of glorifying God in the days wherein we live, without hearts warmed, enlarged, made tender, compassionate, by gospel love, is to think to fly without



wings, or to walk without feet. What day, almost, what business, wherein our love is not put to the trial, in all the properties of it! Whether it can bear and forbear; whether it can pity and relieve; whether it can hope all things, and believe all things; whether it can exercise itself towards friends and towards enemies; whether it can give allowance for men's weakness and temptations; whether it can value Christ above all, and rejoice in him in the loss of all, and many the like things, is it continually tried withal. Now, nothing so contracts and withers the heart, as to all these things, as the cares of this world do. Whatever is selfish, fearful, unbelieving, is inwrapped in them. They sometimes pine, wither, and render useless, the whole man; — always drink up the spirit, and deprive it of any communion with God in any thing it hath to do.

The same may be said concerning self-denial and fruitfulness; which in an eminent manner Christ now calls upon us for. Love, care, and fear, about the things that shall be dissolved, unframes the soul for them.

On these considerations, and the like which might be added, may this direction be improved, and no small obstacle unto a course of universal holiness and godliness be taken away. Is the power, are the riches, the pleasures of the world valuable? — Alas! they are all passing away; it is but yet a little while, and their place shall know them no more. Yet, could we take off our hearts from an undue valuation of these things, and care about them, half our work were done.

(3.) That which remains, for the closing of our discourse on this subject, is to give some few motives unto the duty proposed; and I shall only mention three generals:— [1.] Relating unto ourselves; [2.] Unto others; [3.] Unto Christ himself.

[1.] As to ourselves; — this alone will maintain peace and quiet in our souls, in and under those dissolutions of things that we are to be exercised with. We know what desolations, what ruin of families, what destruction of all outward enjoyments in many, they have already in these nations been attended with; and we know not how soon, nor by what ways or means, the bitterest part of the cup, as to outward pressures and calamities, may become our portion. We have seen somewhat of the beginning of the work of Christ; — where he will cease, what he hath yet farther to do, we know not. Our concernment, then, certainly was never greater than it is at this day, to keep up peace and rest within. If there should be a confederacy of outward and inward trouble, who can stand before it? A wounded body, a wounded (it may be ruined) estate, and a wounded spirit all together, who can bear? This is that alone which the world cannot take from us; which is not obnoxious to sword, fire, plots, conspiracies, — nothing without us, — even the peace that is left us, left to our own keeping, through the Holy Ghost, by Jesus Christ. It is not committed to parliaments, to armies, to rulers, to keep for us: it is committed to our own souls to keep, through the Holy Ghost; and no man can take it from us. Again: as it is valuable on this account, that it cannot be taken from us; so on this also, that it will countervail and support us under the loss of all



that can. Peace in God, rest in sole retirement, quietness, and security of mind on spiritual, gospel accounts, sense of God's love in Christ, will support and keep life and vigour in the soul in the loss of outward peace, with whatever is desirable and valuable unto us on any account that relates to this world.

Now, there is no maintaining of this peace and rest in such a season, without the performance of this duty. So dealt Habakkuk, [chap. iii. 16](#), "I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble." That which God required of him in that season, *that* he brought up his soul unto, [in order] that he might have rest; and his endeavour had the glorious issue mentioned, [verses 17, 18](#). Though spiritual peace may radically and virtually live under many sins and provocations, yet it will not flourish under them, or bring forth any refreshing fruit. To have the fruit and effect of peace under a continuance in any known sin, is impossible. Now, the omission of any known duty is a known sin; and that a peculiar pressing after eminency in universal holiness and godliness in such a season is a known duty, I have before evinced; — no maintaining of inward peace, rest in God, without it: and we shall be sure to be tried, whether it be in us of a truth or not. I discourse not what the carnal security of seared, blinded, hardened sinners will do; but I am sure the weak, tottering, uncertain peace of many believers, will not support them in such trials as it is not only possible that we may, but probable that we shall, meet withal. Would you now desire that your Master should find you unprepared, — that he should make his entrance whilst all things were in disorder? If the heavens should thunder over you, and the earth tremble under you, and the sword stand ready to devour; — oh! what sad thoughts must you have, if at the same time you should be forced to say, "O my soul! is not God mine enemy also? May not wrath, and hell, and judgment be at the end of this dispensation?" What is the reason that a very rumour, a noise oftentimes, is ready to fill many of our souls with such disturbances? Is it not because this peace doth not flourish in the inward man? And what shall we do in the day of trial itself? Let us, then, endeavour, as Peter exhorts, [2 Epist. iii. 14](#), to "be found of Christ in peace." And what may we do that we may be found of him in peace? "Why," saith he, "be 'without spot, and blameless.'" Let him come when he will, in what way he pleases, we shall be found in a way of peace, if we be found spotless and blameless, in a way of holiness. "And blessed is that servant whom his Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing." This will give light in a dungeon, as it did to Paul and Silas; — ease in the fire, in the furnace, as to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; — contentment in the loss of all, as it did to Job; — satisfaction on the foresight of future trouble, as it did to David: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant." Whatever sword be in the hand of Christ, whatever fire or tempest be before him and round about him, what vengeance soever he is to take on any or all of the sons of men, — this peace, kept up by the holiness



he requires in such a season, will make a way to his bosom-love, and there repose the soul in rest and quietness.

[2.] As to others, what Paul saith to Timothy in another case, about preaching of the gospel, may in some sense be spoken in this. "Take heed," saith he, "to the doctrine; for thereby thou shalt save thyself, and them that hear thee." Who knows but that hereby we may save ourselves, and the nation wherein we live! The Lord Christ hath certainly a controversy with these nations; he hath begun to deal with them in his indignation; and we know that there are provocations enough amongst us to stir him up unto our ruin. Who knows, I say, but that by meeting him in a way of generation-holiness, we may divert deserved ruin; at least hinder, that it be not brought upon us for the provocations of his sons and daughters?

Now, there are several ways whereby this may have an influence into the safety and deliverance of the nations themselves:—

1st. By setting all things right between Christ and the saints, that he may have no need farther to shake the earth and dissolve the heavens of the nations, to awaken his own from their security, to loosen them from perishing things, or to accomplish any other glorious end towards them. Christ sometimes sifts nations, that his wheat may be separated from the chaff: he sets nations on fire, that they may be a furnace for the trial of his own; and when their dross is cleansed he will quench his fire. When there was but one saint in a ship, yet it was for his sake that a storm came on all the rest. It is not always for the sins of the wicked, that they may be destroyed, that he comes in a way of judgment; but for the sins of his people, that they may be cleansed. So "judgment," as Peter speaks, "begins at the house of God." It is not unlikely that our troubles were brought on these nations for the sins of the nations, in their persecution of Christ, his truths, and saints, against great light. Nor is it less likely that troubles are continued on these nations for the sins of the saints themselves, — such as those before insisted on. Now, what is it that in such trials Christ calls for, and which he will not cease calling for until he prevails? Is it not the work which we are in the pursuit of, — weanedness from the world, self-denial, zeal for truth, humbleness, fruitfulness, faithfulness, universal holiness? If here, then, lies the root of Christ's controversy with these nations, as most probably it doth; if this be the cause of our troubles (as to me questionless it is); an engagement into the pursuit of this work is the only remedy and cure of the evils that we either feel or fear in these nations. Other remedies have been tried, and all in vain. O that we had hearts, through the Holy Ghost, to make trial of this, which the great physician, Jesus Christ, hath prescribed unto us! Heaven and earth call for it at our hands; the nations groan under our sin; — if we regard not ourselves, yet let us make it our business to deliver England out of the hand of the Lord, [Josh. xxii. 31](#).

2dly. In that it may be an effectual means for the reformation of the nation. Reformation is the great thing that we have been talking of many years; and this hath been our condition



in our attempts after it, — the more that light for it hath broken forth amongst us, the more unreformed hath the body of the people been; yea, the more opposite, for the most part, unto reformation. And may not this, among other things, be one occasion, yea, the principal cause of it, — the light of truth hath been accompanied with so many scandals in some, with so little power and evidence in the most, that prejudices have been strengthened in the minds of men against all that hath been pretended or professed? I am persuaded that a design for generation-holiness, carried on according to the light that we have received, would have a greater influence on the minds of the men of the world to look after reformation, than any of our entreaties or exhortations have yet obtained. We are contemptible to the nation, in our pressing after reformation whilst we are divided amongst ourselves; conformable to the world, whilst we proclaim our unmortified lusts, pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge, self-seeking. Would all the people of God stir up themselves to show forth the power of that faith and life they have received, and so take away advantage from obdurate opposers of the gospel, and give an eminent example to others, who now abhor them on the account of many prejudices that they have taken, the nations would be more awakened unto their duty than now they are. Were we agreed and united on this principle, that we would jointly and severally make this our design, — what work might be wrought in families, councils, counties, cities! Now, reformation is acknowledged to be the means, the only means, of the preservation of a nation; — and this the only means of that.

*3dly.* This is the most effectual way of standing in the gap, to turn away the indignation of the Lord against the nation. Whatever is required thereunto is contained in this design of holiness: there is reformation, there is wrestling by prayer, sundry promises improving our interest in Christ, — all included in this duty. Now, this is the most common way of saving nations, — when wrath is ready to break forth, some Moses or Samuel stands up and pleads for a deliverance, and prevails. Says God, “Destroy not the cluster; there is a blessing in it.” When the greatest and most dreadful judgment that God ever executed on sinners in this world was coming forth, had there been ten persons following after holiness, its accomplishment had been prevented. Here, then, we have a project to save three nations by; and without this, in vain shall they use any other remedies, — they shall not be healed.

[3.] Consider this thing, how it relates unto Christ and his glory. All the revenue of glory or honour that we bring unto Christ in this world, is by our obedience or holiness. He did not die for us that we might be great, or wise, or learned, or powerful in the world; but that he might purify us to be a peculiar people unto himself, zealous of good works. This was his design and aim, — that he might have a holy people, a faithful people in the world. He tells us that herein his Father is glorified, that we bear much fruit; — not that we be successful, that we rule and prevail, that we are in credit and reputation; but that we bring forth much fruit: and in the glory of the Father is the Son glorified also. It is this alone that adorns the

doctrine of his gospel, and lifts up his name in the world; but especially is Christ glorified by the holiness of his saints in such a season; because, —

*1st.* Thereby we bear witness to the world that indeed we believe him to be come forth amongst us, and that the works that are on the wheel relate to his kingdom and interest. Let us talk of it whilst we please, unless we live and walk as those who have communion with Christ in the works he doth, the world will yet think that, whatever we profess, yet indeed we believe, as they do, that it is a common thing that hath befallen us. But when indeed they shall see that there is a real reverence of his person upon our spirits, and that we bestir ourselves in his ways, like servants in the presence of their master, — this carries a conviction along with it. To hear men talk of the coming of Christ, and the day of Christ, and the great and terrible things that Christ hath done in these days, and yet in the meantime to walk as the men of the world, — in a spirit of pride, selfishness, and wrath, in sensuality or pleasure, in neglect of prayer and humiliation, yea, of all gospel duties, — swearers and drunkards do not so dishonour Christ as such men do. But let men but see professors making it their business to be holy, humble, self-denying, useful in the world, condescending in love, resigning all to God, — they cannot but say, “Well, this is a great day to the saints; they verily believe that Christ is among them.” This is a professing that brings conviction; words are but as speaking with tongues, that work not out the glory of Christ.

*2dly.* Thereby we bear witness unto what sort of kingdom it is that Christ hath in the world, and what a kind of king he is. I cannot but fear that our talking of the kingdom of Christ, and managing our notions of it (at least in the world’s apprehensions) to carnal advantages, hath been a notable hinderance of the coming of it forth in beauty and glory amongst us. Every party talks of the kingdom of Christ, some more, some less, — all pretend unto it; but it is evident that many would set him on his throne with the petition of Zebedee’s children in their mouths, — that they may sit on his right hand and his left. Hence the world doth really persuade itself, and is hardened every day in that persuasion, that, whatever is pretended of Christ, it is self-interest that carries all before it; and that men do entertain that notion for the promotion of self-ends. But now this design of abounding in real holiness sets up the pure, unmixed interest of Christ, and casts a conviction upon the world to that purpose. When the world may read in our lives that the kingdom we look for, though it be in this world, yet it is not indeed of this world, but is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, — this bring that honour to Christ wherein he is delighted, and the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence.

*3dly.* This brings honour unto Christ, and glorifies him in all the vengeance that he executes on his enemies, and all the care that he takes of his own. The world itself is hereby made to see that there is a real difference, indeed, in them between whom Christ puts a difference, and is convinced of the righteousness of his judgments. Every one may answer

them when they inquire the reason of the dispensations amongst us, yea, they may answer themselves, "The Lord hath done great things for these, even these that serve him."

## Sermon XIV. The sin and judgment of spiritual barrenness.

“But the miry places thereof, and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.” — [Ezek. xlvii. 11.](#)

This prophecy contains a vision of the glorious, holy, gospel state of the church, under the representation of a most glorious temple, incomparably excelling that built of old by Solomon; an exposition whereof we have, [2 Cor. iii. 6–8](#), etc.

The beginning of this chapter sets out the way and means of the calling and gathering of gospel churches, whose worship is to be so glorious; and this is under a vision of “waters issuing out of the sanctuary,” to heal and quicken all places to which they come.

By the waters here mentioned is the preaching of the gospel intended. And we may observe of them, first, Their rise, which was from the *sanctuary*; secondly, Their progress, — they increased until they became a *river* that none could pass over; thirdly, Their effects or efficacy, — they healed all waters where they came, and quickened, or caused to live, the *fishes* that were in them.

I must not long insist on these particulars.

First. The house, or temple, from whence these waters issue, may be taken two ways:—

1. Mystically, to denote only the presence of God. God dwelt in his temple; thence come these waters — from his presence. He sends out the word of the gospel for the conversion and healing of the nations, [Ps. cx. 2](#). Or, —

2. Figuratively; and that either for the place where the temple of old stood (that is, Jerusalem), as the preaching of the gospel was to go forth from Jerusalem, and the sound of it from thence to proceed unto all the world, as [Isa. xli. 27](#), [lii. 7](#); [Acts i. 4, 8](#); or for the church of Christ and his apostles, the first glorious, spiritual temple unto God, whence these waters issued.

Secondly. Their progress; which is described by degrees, it being at first small, — few men preaching it, and to a few, — but afterward increasing until it filled the whole earth.

Thirdly. The effects mentioned or ascribed unto these waters are two, — quickening and healing; which I shall not in general speak farther unto, because I shall do it in the opening of my text.

In the words of the text you have the state and condition of those places whither the waters of the sanctuary do come, and the effects before ascribed unto them are not produced; for so the words are to be read, — they “shall not be healed.”

We have here a description of some lands or places whereunto the holy waters do come. First, They are “miry and marshy places;” secondly, The event of the waters coming to them, — they are “not healed;” thirdly, The consequent of that event, — they are “given unto salt.”

I shall in a few words lay open the allegory, or parable, unto you.





First. By the waters of the sanctuary, I told you, is meant the preaching of the gospel, — that quickening and healing word which the Lord sends out to gather his church unto himself all the world over, to call his saints to that glorious, gospel, spiritual worship, which is here described in this vision of a temple.

Secondly. The “miry and marshy places” where these waters come, are such where persons cleave inseparably and incurably to their lusts and sins, so that they are not healed by the word. The healing word of the gospel comes, but they receive it not; the water flows over them, they drink it not in, — are not quickened nor healed by it.

Thirdly. To be “given unto salt,” is to be left unto barrenness, [Deut. xxix. 23](#); [Judges ix. 45](#); [Jer. xvii. 6](#).

The figurative sense of the passage thus explained will afford us the following observations:—

*Observation* I. God is pleased oftentimes to send the waters of the sanctuary to “miry and marshy places,” that “shall never be healed” by them, nor made fruitful; — or, God, in his infinite wisdom, is pleased to send the preaching of the word unto some places wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue upon the souls of them that hear it.

II. All places in the world are barren, unsound, and unhealthy, before the coming of the waters of the sanctuary upon them; — or, the souls of all men are spiritually dead and full of woeful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel. The word must come and heal them.

III. The waters of the sanctuary are healing waters; — or, the word of the gospel is in its own nature a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word, to them who receive it.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord to salt or barrenness for ever; — or, where the word of the gospel is, by the infinitely wise disposal of God, preached unto a place or persons, and they receive it not so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are usually, after a season, given up, by the righteous judgment of God, unto barrenness and everlasting ruin.

It is this last proposition, as that which is the direct design and scope of the place, that I intend to insist principally upon. But yet I shall speak somewhat to the former.

I. God is pleased oftentimes, in his infinite wisdom, to send the preaching of the word unto some places wherein it shall not put forth its quickening and sanctifying power and virtue upon the souls of them that hear it.

The whole Scripture, and whole story of the providence of God in sending the gospel abroad in the world, bears witness to this truth. It was his way from the foundation of the world, and continueth to this very day. Hence was that complaint of the prophet, [Isa. liii. 1](#), “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Loud revealed?” — the gospel is preached to them that believe not the report thereof; — and [chap. xlix. 4](#), “Then I

said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought.” But we need no greater instance nor any other than that of our Saviour, who spent the greatest part of his ministry in preaching to them who were never healed, — never converted nor sanctified by his word. That account he gives of his work, [Matt. xi. 21–24](#), “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!” etc.

Now, though there be no searching into the depths of the counsels of God, yet there appear many reasons wherein his wisdom in this dispensation doth shine forth; as, —

1. He doth it principally because, in those places where the word is rejected by the generality of the people, yet there may be some secret, poor souls belonging to the election of grace, whom God will have gathered and called home to himself. So for their sakes, though in the world they are taken no notice of, the word shall be preached unto multitudes. [Amos ix. 9](#), “I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.” The grains of Israel must be preserved through all the nations of the earth, that not one grain may be lost. Thus Paul preaches the gospel at Philippi, [Acts xvi. 12, 13](#). And what entertainment meets it withal? He and his companion are taken and beaten, and cast into prison sore hurt and wounded; [verses 22, 23](#). Why, then, was it that the gospel must be preached there? Why, there was a stranger come to that town, a poor woman, one Lydia, that dwelt at Thyatira, and she was to be converted, and brought home to God, [verse 14](#). So at Athens, [chap. xvii. 34](#). And the apostle affirms that he “endured all things for the elect’s sakes,” [2 Tim. ii. 10](#). Here and there a poor despised person is designed to be called.

2. God doth it for a testimony against them that receive it not, and to leave them inexcusable at the last day. [Mark vi. 11](#), “Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.” The word is to be preached, and witness, as it were, is to be taken upon it that it was preached, that men may be left without excuse at the last day. As our Saviour pleads concerning his own preaching to the Pharisees, [John xv. 22](#), “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin.” God will cause men to be without excuse, by that tender of mercy which is made unto them in the gospel. It shall be for a testimony against them at the last day.

*Use.* Let not men boast themselves in the outward enjoyment of the word, nor rest themselves in it. It were well, indeed, if all were believers to whom the word is preached, — if all lands were healed where the waters of the sanctuary come; but the Holy Ghost tells us they are not so, [Heb. iv. 2](#), “The word preached did not profit them.” Capernaum was “exalted unto heaven,” in the use of means; but “brought down to hell” for the neglect of them. Let men look to themselves; God hath various ends in sending the gospel. The Lord knows what will be the end of England’s enjoying the gospel so long as it hath done. Sad symptoms appear of a tremendous issue. But I shall speak of this afterward.

II. The souls of all men are spiritually dead, and full of woeful distempers, until they are quickened and healed by the dispensation of the gospel.

The waters of the sanctuary must come, to quicken them and heal them. They are distempered, therefore, and woefully disordered, before the coming of these waters. So the apostle informs us, [Tit. iii. 5](#), “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Before the gospel grace comes to heal and cleanse them, this is the state and condition of men; as it is more largely described by the apostle, [Rom. i. 18](#) to the end.

I shall not stay to mention all the particular distempers that rage in some, and that rule and reign in all before the coming of the gospel; as darkness, blindness, ignorance, worldly-mindedness, sensuality, hatred of God, envy, and malice, which are fixed in the souls of men by presumption and self-righteousness. There is nothing in them of spiritual life or holiness, of purity or zeal, — nothing that is acceptable or pleasing unto God. But to set forth this to the utmost, were to describe the whole natural condition of men, — which is not my present work; and therefore I shall not farther insist on it.

III. The word of the gospel is in its own nature a quickening, healing, sanctifying, saving word, to them who receive it.

They [the waters of the sanctuary] bring Christ along with them, the great physician of souls, who alone is able to cure a sin-sick soul. They bring mercy with them to pardon sinners, that “the inhabitants of the land may no more say they are sick, having their sins forgiven them,” [Isa. xxxiii. 24](#). They bring grace with them to cure all the distempers of lusts, [Isa. xi. 5–7](#); [Tit. ii. 11, 12](#).

These things I have only touched upon, and proceed now to the fourth observation, on which I chiefly proposed to insist.

IV. Where the waters of the sanctuary come, and the land is not healed, that land is given up of the Lord to salt and barrenness for ever; — or, where the word of the gospel is preached unto a place, or persons, and they receive it not so as to have their sinful distempers healed by it, they are given up by the righteous judgment of God unto barrenness and everlasting ruin.

To clear this proposition I shall show, — 1. What I mean by the coming of the waters of the sanctuary, or the preaching of the gospel, to a place or persons; 2. What by healing their sinful distempers; 3. What by being given up to barrenness and ruin.

1. By the coming of the healing waters of the sanctuary, I intend not the occasional preaching of a sermon, although this be sufficient to justify God in the rejection of any

person or people. In the first preaching of the gospel, the refusal of one sermon lost many their souls unto all eternity. When the Lord Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the tidings of everlasting peace, he commanded them to pass through the towns, cities, and villages, and to offer them peace and mercy in the word of truth; which if they received not, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against them, [Matt. x. 12–15](#); [Luke x. 8–12](#). But O the unspeakable patience of Christ to many in the world, where the word is continued oftentimes for a very long season, and the salvation tendered therein despised! But this is that which I intend as the rule of the dispensation mentioned, — namely, when God by his providence doth cause the word to be preached for some continuance, and to the revelation of his whole counsel; as Paul affirmed himself to have done at Ephesus, [Acts xx. 27](#), where he had abode above a year.

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Nor do I mean any waters, but the waters of the sanctuary; not any preaching, but the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ: which Paul affirms to be his work, [Eph. iii. 8](#). All waters are not the waters of the sanctuary; all preaching is not the preaching of the sanctuary. There is preaching in the world wherein God and the souls of men are no more concerned than in an oration of an ancient heathen. Many undertake to be preachers who never “stood in the counsel of God,” as he complains, [Jer. xxxiii. 22](#), who never received of the Spirit of Christ, nor knew his mind, — blind leaders of the blind. The children of Zion are promised, under the gospel, that “they shall be all taught of God.” And we have men undertaking to be teachers of them, who never learned any thing of Christ; — a wicked generation of soul-murderers, for which cursed work they every day invent new engines, — whom the Lord’s soul abhors. See their condition and portion, [Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4](#), etc. I mean, therefore, a dispensation of the word according to the mind of Christ, — the due unfolding of the mystery of the gospel. This is the coming I intend.

2. What is meant by their sinful distempers not being healed? Look what the waters of the sanctuary come to do: if that be not effected, they are not healed.

Now, there are two effects here ascribed unto the waters of the sanctuary:— (1.) They quicken and give new life, [verse 9](#). A natural life they had before, but these give them another life. (2.) Healing, as the waters of Jericho by Elisha, [2 Kings ii. 21](#). Where these effects are not produced, that is the condition described, that is the state of these” miry and marshy places,” — they are not healed:—

(1.) Men are not quickened; they receive not a new spiritual life; they are not so brought to the knowledge of God. It is not enough that men have their affections wrought upon, or their lives in some measure reformed; — unless they are quickened, unless they receive a new spiritual life by the word, they are as the unhealed places, over which the curse here mentioned hangs.

(2.) The healing of these quickened souls (consists in the curing and mortifying of their sinful distempers. This follows the other. Where there is life, there will be healing. Let not

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men pretend that they live spiritually, if their lusts be not healed. If men are proud, worldly, sensual, they are dead also; there is no effect of the waters of the sanctuary upon them. If men are not made holy, humble, believing, zealous, if they receive not the spirit of prayer and faith, they are not healed.

This is the condition of the “miry and marshy places” here mentioned:— God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, causeth the gospel to be dispensed among a people, to be preached, where they do, or may, and ought to attend unto it; but they are not converted by the word, not sanctified by it, but continue in their old state and condition. He that was filthy is filthy still; he that was unrighteous is so still; — he that was in the mire of the world and sin is so still.

3. What is the lot and portion of such persons? Why, “they shall be given to salt;” that is, as I have showed, to barrenness, fruitlessness, unprofitableness, and eternal ruin.

This is the meaning of the proposition; and it is a dreadful word, which yet is true, and will prove so at the last day. Woe to the “miry and marshy places” of the world! woe to the persons and places to whom [and to which] the waters of the sanctuary have come and they are not healed! I shall not need to insist much on the proof of the proposition, the Scripture so abounds with testimonies of it. But I shall do these three things:— 1. Name some places that plainly speak the same truth; 2. Show the degrees in which God proceeds usually in this great work, in giving up unprofitable hearers to ruin; and, 3. Give the grounds of it:—

1. For other Scriptures which assert the same truth, take [Prov. i. 25–31](#), “But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices;” — [Prov. xxix. 1](#), “He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy;” — [Luke xiii. 6](#), “He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none,” etc. So [Heb. x. 28–30](#); [2 Cor. ii. 15, 16](#).

2. For the degrees of rejection, see [Ezek. x. 18, xi. 23](#); [Heb. vi. 8](#), “But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” They are first rejected, then cursed, and lastly burned. But, —

3. That which I shall principally insist upon, is to show the ways whereby God doth usually proceed in giving up such persons to barrenness, and so to everlasting ruin:—

(1.) He casts them out of his care; — he will be at no more charge nor cost with them, nor about them. So, [Heb. vi. 8](#), the land is ἀδόκιμος, — “rejected;” the owner will take no more care or pains about such an unprofitable piece of land; he will till it no more, dress it

no more, but leave it to its own barrenness. God is the great husbandman, [John xv. 1](#). When a miry place is not healed, he will cast it out of his husbandry. So [Ezek. xxiv. 13](#), They have had their time and season, and “are not purged;” therefore “they shall be purged no more.” [Jer. vi. 29, 30](#), “The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.” This the Lord Christ declares to be his way of proceeding with them, [Zech. xi. 8, 9](#), “My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.” A sad parting, the Lord knows! They give up Christ, — he gives up them; and their meeting will be infinitely more sad to them. Now, this the Lord doth several ways:—

[1.] He will sometimes utterly remove the gospel from them; — turn the stream of the waters of the sanctuary, that they shall come to them no more. So he threatened the church at Ephesus of old, [Rev. ii. 5](#), “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen,” etc., “or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.” They shall have the light of the word no more; it shall be removed and taken from them. Ah! how ninny places lie under this woeful judgment of God at this day, — this sentence of being given up to salt for ever! Places there are in the world that have enjoyed the word at God’s appointed season, or, at least, the tender of it, and opportunity to enjoy it; but continuing unprofitable under it, what is now their state, and condition? God hath left them to that sore judgment, that they themselves should be made instrumental to cast out the word from amongst them; like the foolish woman, pulling down the house with their own hands: and so [they] have got darkness for a vision, and they that would not rejoice in the truth, and in the light, do now, through the tremendous judgment of God, triumph in darkness, and in a thing of nought.

It is true, the gospel may be sometimes taken for a season from a people for their trial and exercise, and not penalty; — it may be driven from them, and not absolutely sinned away. Now, as the Lord hath many glorious ends in such a dispensation, so it may easily be known whether people have lost the gospel only for a season, in a way of trial; or penalty, as a beginning of their being given up to salt and barrenness. As, —

1st. They that are deprived for a season of gospel enjoyments for their trial and exercise, are sensible of the displeasure of God in that dispensation, and greatly humble themselves under his hand on that account. They say, as the church in [Mic. vii. 9](#), “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me.” They look on this as the greatest calamity and trial that can befall them; whereas they that lose it penalty, are either very little concerned about it, or do greatly rejoice at it. The word tormented them, and they are glad they are freed from it. [Rev. xi. 10](#), “And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts

one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” Some never rejoice more than when they are got quit of the gospel; and others are like Gallio. Now, when such as these have the word taken from them, and are no way sensible of the displeasure of the Lord in it, nor do humble themselves before him on that account, it is a certain evidence that God is giving them up unto a state of salt; that is, barrenness and eternal ruin.

*2dly.* They that are deprived of it for a season in a way of trial have no rest, but are earnest with the Lord for the return of it. [1 Sam. vii. 2](#), The ark was gone; and though they had peace and plenty, and all things else in abundance, yet all will not satisfy them; the ark is absent, that pledge of God’s presence, and they lamented after him. So is it with these; — let them have peace, or liberty, or prosperity, all is one; if they have not the ark, — if they have not the gospel and ordinances of God, — they can take no rest, but are still lamenting after the Lord, still longing after the enjoyment of his word. David doth excellently express this frame of heart, [Ps. lxiii. 1, 2](#), “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.” He was driven from the ordinances of God; the waters of the sanctuary came not to him. But now they from whom the word is taken penally are no way troubled about it, nor do long after it; they rejoice in what they have in the room of it, — are exceedingly well pleased without it. Let them have an increase of corn, and wine, and oil, — let them have their lusts and their sports, their formalities and follies, — they care not whether ever they hear of the word of the gospel any more. Such men are certainly entering into a condition of salt, of barrenness and ruin.

*3dly.* They who are deprived of the word for a season for their trial, have a high estimation and value of their mercy and privilege who enjoy it. They do not think the proud happy, nor envy at prosperous wickedness, nor bow in their hearts before the Hamans of the earth. But those they think blessed who enjoy the word, and the presence of God therein. This our Saviour teaches them to esteem, [Luke xi. 28](#), “But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” David doth excellently set out this frame of heart, [Ps. lxxxiv. 4](#), “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee. Selah.” “I am,” saith he, “a poor outcast, deprived of thy word and ordinances. O the blessed condition of those who enjoy them! Let them be what they will as to their outward state, they are in a blessed condition if they may dwell in thy house, — enjoy the privileges of the spiritual house of God and his worship, in the gospel.” This is the frame of such persons, — those only they esteem blessed who are refreshed with the waters of the sanctuary; but none are more despised by those from whom the gospel is judicially removed. It is the great, the mighty, the rich, the sensual, that they esteem blessed; for those others they esteem as the dirt or the mire.



Now, hence it is that God may at the same time remove his gospel from a place, judicially from some, and by a way of trial from others, whereby these contrary effects are produced:— Some are humbled under the hand of the Lord, mourn after his presence, and account them blessed who enjoy his ordinances; — others triumph and rejoice in their condition, look upon it as good and blessed; at least, are little concerned in the dispensation that God is dealing with them in. And as the Lord doth good to the former by this exercise, preparing them also for farther mercies, in a greater estimation of his word, and profiting under it when enjoyed; so to the other, this is the entrance of their ruin; — they are cast out of the care of God, and you never see such a people afterward obtain mercy.

[2.] God doth this sometimes though he causeth the word to be continued unto them, — by restraining the efficacy of it, that it shall not profit them. Men may have lived out their season that God hath given them to be healed in, and yet God have work to do in that place where they live; so that the word must be preached. Some poor souls amongst them are to be quickened or healed, called or edified; so that he will not turn away the course of these holy waters, but continue the dispensation of the gospel. But as for those who have withstood their season of healing, and are cast out of the care of God, God will so order things that the word shall have no power upon them. Now, though the righteous judgment of God have a hand in this matter, yet, by his permission, their own lusts are the immediate cause of it; as,

1st. They shall have some prejudices against them by whom the gospel is dispensed in the power and purity of it, which shall keep them from attending unto or profiting by their message. So in the days of Ahab there were four hundred preachers that he had a mind to hear; but they were all false prophets, teachers of lies, idolatrous, and superstitious: only, there were two prophets of the Lord, Elijah the Tishbite, and Micaiah the son of Imlah; and both these he looked upon as his enemies, as persons not well affected unto him; so that he would believe nothing of what they preached. So of Elijah, [1 Kings xxi. 20](#); and of Micaiah, [chap. xxii. 8](#). So shall it befall many whom God will leave to salt, because the season of their healing hath been withstood; — though the word be preached, they shall have prejudices against the dispensers of it, so that they shall not profit by them. And little do they think that these prejudices and hard thoughts are chains and fetters to keep them in unto the judgment of the great day. And of this nature also are other prejudices that men have.

2dly. He will suffer them to be unconquerably hardened in the love of some sin or lust, which shall keep off the power of the word from their hearts. So the ground here that is not healed is said to be “miry and marshy;” — such as hath a mixture of filth incorporated with it sufficient to repel all the virtue of the healing waters of the sanctuary. Thus we see men every day so furiously set upon their lusts, sports, and sensuality, that they hate, and are filled with madness and rage against, all that would persuade them to sobriety: much more



doth the word of the gospel torment them, so that they rise with fury against it; and this keeps them from profiting by it. "They are given to salt."

*3dly.* God withdraws the efficacy of his Spirit in the dispensation of the word, that it shall not have that strength and power on them as upon others. God sends his word towards his own in a way of covenant; and then it is always accompanied with his Spirit, [Isa. lix. 21.](#) And where God dealeth with men in covenant mercy, these go together. But now when he casts men out of his care, though the word may be preached to their ear, because of some others whom he yet cares for, yet he hath said concerning them, that his Spirit shall strive with them no more. And thence it is that the word makes no impression on them, — its healing virtue is as to, them withheld.

And this is the first thing the Lord doth to such poor creatures as he leaves to salt, to barrenness, and ruin, for despising the season and means of their healing, — he casts them out of his care, as to the dispensation of the word.



## Sermon XV.

We shall now proceed to the *uses*.

*Use 1.* Wonder not if you see a diversity of success in preaching of the word. Some receive it with joy; the most despise it as a thing of nought. Whence is this difference? Multitudes are rejected of God, — cast out of his care, — barren land; he will till them no more. A cursed state! Marvel not that many refuse to hear the word, that they love lies; they are given up of God to their hearts' lusts. Marvel not that the word which they hear affects them no more; — the power of the Spirit is withheld from them. Multitudes are thus cast out of the care of God, and tokens of the plague are upon them. They like their condition, rejoice and triumph in it, think none so happy as themselves, and despise them that love the waters of the sanctuary: all which are tokens of this sore plague. Can they expel the gospel from any place? can they quench the light that is in it? can they triumph over the ways of God? — they suppose they have gotten a great victory. This is not an ordinary judgment: they are poor creatures, assuredly cast out of the care of God; "they are given to salt," and it is a miracle of mercy if ever any of them be healed.

Oh! it is a woeful thing to look on a place or persons that give evidences of their withstanding the season of their healing, as so many in this nation do! How was our Saviour affected with it in reference to Jerusalem, [Luke xix. 41, 42](#), "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Oh! if we had but any measure of that pity and compassion which dwelt in his holy soul, how could we pass through towns and cities, and see and hear, and not mourn!

*Use 2.* Take that advice of the prophet, [Jer. xiii. 16](#), "Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

(2.) The second thing that God doth, in giving up an unhealed land unto barrenness, is his judicial hardening of them, or leaving them to hardness and impenitency, that so they may fill up the measure of their sins. [Heb. vi. 8](#), "That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing." When the care of God is once taken from them, they are nigh unto cursing. The next thing that God will do to them, is to curse them, as our Saviour did the barren fig-tree.

This woeful judgment is at large set forth, [Isa. vi. 9, 10](#), "And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Isaiah was a gospel preacher; "Yet this," saith God, "shall be the effect of thy preaching towards them that have withstood their season, and have not been healed by the

word.” And John tells us that this very thing was accomplished when the gospel was preached by our Saviour himself, [John xii. 40, 41](#). And surely their condition is most woeful whom the preaching of the gospel hardeneth, — whom the only remedy destroys.

Now, there are four things in this spiritual judgment that God sends upon unhealed souls, that have outlived their season of healing, more or less:—

[1.] Blindness of mind and understanding. Their natural blindness and ignorance shall be increased and confirmed; and that by two ways:—

1st. God will send them a “spirit of slumber,” [Rom. xi. 8](#); that is, a great inadvertency and negligence as to the things of the gospel that are spoken of or preached unto them. As men that slumber take little notice of what is spoken to them or about them; they hear a noise, and sometimes discern a little what is spoken, but not to any use or purpose: so is it with these persons on whom God doth judicially send this spirit of slumber; they hear the sound of the word, and sometimes, it may be, take notice of some one thing or other that is spoken; but to receive and understand the design of it, to ponder it and improve it, that they cannot do; — they are under a spiritual slumber. We may see multitudes in this condition every day. The word hath no life nor vigour towards them; they perceive not the mind of God in it; they understand it not. God hath given them a “spirit of slumber,” and they die under it.

2dly. God sends them a spirit of giddiness, causing them to err in their ways, [Isa. xix. 14](#). We have a notable instance of this judgment of God, [2 Thess. ii. 10–12](#). The waters of the sanctuary came unto them, and they were not healed; the gospel was preached unto them, but they withstood their season. They received not the love of the truth; they did not believe and obey, that they might be saved; — because they had pleasure in unrighteousness. How, then, doth God deal with them? [Verse 11](#), He will send them a spirit of giddiness or delusion, that “they shall believe a lie,” — false doctrine, false worship, superstition, and idolatry. This they shall believe, and have pleasure in; which will have the fearful end mentioned, [verse 12](#). And this judgment, as it is already come upon many, so it lies at the door, I fear, of the most. We see men every day that have for some years, it may be, enjoyed the preaching of the gospel; but not being healed, quickened, and sanctified by it, are now, with all greediness, given up to follow after fables on the one hand, or superstition on the other; — there is a spirit of giddiness from the Lord upon them. And by these means is the darkness of the minds of men increased when God is giving of them up to barrenness.

[2.] Obstinacy in the will, or hardness of heart properly so called, is in this judgment of God also. God will give up unhealed persons to hardness of heart. So is it in that place of Isaiah, [Isa. vi. 10](#): and it is the same with that which the apostle calls “a reprobate mind,” [Rom. i. 28](#); that is, a mind and heart that is good for nothing with regard to spiritual things, — profligate, and altogether insensible of them. And when this befalls any, they will openly despise the word, and cast it off, using one foolish pretence or other for their so doing; as



[Jer. xlv. 16](#), with [xliii. 2](#). Such persons, whenever the word is preached unto them, and it lies cross to their carnal imaginations or sensual affections, lusts, or sports, rise up in their hearts with contempt, and rage against it. Sometimes they will colour their wickedness in their hearts by some pretence or other: “This is the way, the humour, the singularity, of the preacher.” Or sometimes their rage will carry them directly out against the word, without any colour or pretence, but because it displeaseth them. Or if they fall not thus into pride and rage (which usually is occasioned by their temptations), they grow utterly senseless, and stupid, and unconcerned in the things of God. Let the word thunder from heaven against their sins, they regard it not; let the still small voice of the gospel persuade them unto reconciliation, they attend not unto it; let the judgments of God be abroad in the world, if they escape themselves they are not concerned about them. Do they reach their own persons, they have wrath, and anger, and vexation; but they cannot repent or turn to the Lord. This is, apparently, the condition of most in the world.

[3.] Sensuality of affections is in this judgment also, [Rom. i. 26](#), “He gave them up to vile affections;” that is, to place their affections on vile, sensual things. Unhealed persons shall do so. Our streets, ale-houses, and many other places, are full of such whose affections are fixed with madness on vile things; and they please themselves in them, little thinking that this is part of the judgment whereunto they are given up of God for their unprofitableness under the word, — for their not being healed by the waters of the sanctuary.

[4.] Searedness of conscience. [1 Tim. iv. 2](#), “Having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” [Eph. iv. 19](#), “Being past feeling.” Whatever sin they commit, or condition they fall into, conscience shall no more discharge its duty in them and towards them.

And this is the second thing that God will do towards such unhealed persons.

(3.) The third thing considerable is the event of this dealing of God with them, or what is meant by this land’s becoming salt.

Two things, as I have showed before, are hereby intended:— [1.] Barrenness in this world; [2.] Eternal ruin in the world to come:—

[1.] Barrenness. They shall never bear any fruit to God. This was the curse that our Saviour gave to the fig-tree, “Never fruit grow on thee.” Man was made to bear fruit unto God; — this is all he came into the world for. Now, when God shall say to any, “Go your ways; you shall never do any thing more for me whilst you live in this world; you shall never bear any fruit to me;” — what sorer judgment can any man possibly fall under? I might show you the misery of this condition in many particulars. “Israel is an empty vine,” [Hos. x. 1](#).

[2.] Eternal ruin, and that irreparable. [Prov. xxix. 1](#), “He that, being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” [John xv. 6](#), “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” [2 Thess. ii. 12](#), “That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” [Heb. vi. 8](#), “But



that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” This is the certain event of that land that is left unto salt, because not healed; and of those persons who, having passed over their season of quickening and sanctifying by the word, are given up to barrenness and ruin. It will do neither me nor you good to flatter you, and to put you into any better hope than your condition will admit of. See [Ezek. xxxiii. 8](#), “When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.” This will be the end of the one and the other, when that course is taken. Did I not see the tokens of this judgment of God abroad in the world, I would not thus insist upon it as I do.

*Use 1.* Of exhortation. Make use of your season, that you fall not under this sore and inexpressible judgment. God gives men a season, a space to repent in, [Rev. ii. 21](#). This space and season, as I have showed you before, is not oftentimes all the while that the gospel is preached unto you. The word may be preached, and yet its efficacy wholly restrained from you, and that because your time and season is gone. And so it comes to pass daily; and you know not how soon it may be your lot and portion, and you perceive it not. Therefore is the apostle so earnest in exhorting men to make use of their day, before their season be gone, [Heb. iii. 12, 13](#), “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” As if he should say, “Take heed to yourselves; stir up yourselves: for if your day be once passed over, you are then gone for ever; it will then be too late for you to look out after mercy.” And so again, [2 Cor. vi. 2](#), “Now is the day, now is the time.” If you stand in need of any commodity that can be had but at one fair, — that day, that season you will not neglect. You stand in need, I am sure, of grace, mercy, pardon, Christ, life, — salvation; there is only this day, this season, for you to obtain it in. O that you would be persuaded to look out after it before it be hidden from you! See [Heb. x. 31](#), “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” So the same apostle again, [Heb. xii. 15](#), “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.” Use all diligence in this matter.

To excite you a little to this, consider, —

(1.) That if you are not healed during your season, you can never be healed. If the gospel cure you not, you must die in your sins. Men are greatly mistaken, when they flatter themselves that it can never be too late for them in this world, — there is time enough whilst they are alive. Alas! you have but your season; and that may be over with you many days before you leave the world, yea, many years. We have everywhere ground evidently “left to salt,” though yet not burned up. Use your day.

(2.) You know not how your day is going away, nor when it will be over. The traveller on the road, that hath a journey to go, knows how to order his affairs. “It is,” saith he, “so



many hours to night, and I have time enough before me;" — so doth the labouring man also: but, alas! it is not so with you; you know not how soon your day may be over. I speak not of your lives, which, the Lord knows, are uncertain; but the day of the gospel may be over whilst the day of your lives continue. Nor can you be certain of the day of the preaching of the word; but your day, and your season in it, may come to an end this day, or this night, for aught that you or I know: so that your concernment is unspeakably great in the proposal that is made unto you. Remember the virgins that were shut out, and their cry at midnight!

You will say, then, "What shall we do to know when it is our season, that we may apply our hearts unto this exhortation?"

I answer, The Lord alone, who is the searcher of all hearts, knows how it is with you, and whether you have not any of you in particular outstod your opportunity. I can only tell you what is a gospel season; which you are to take care that you may have a share and interest in:—

[1.] It is required that the gospel be preached in the power and purity of it. This in general makes "the acceptable day, the time of salvation." And if there be nothing else concurring, this is enough to let a people or person know that the day of the Lord is come upon them, — that the waters of the sanctuary are come unto them. Now, consider with yourselves, whether the gospel be preached unto you or not, or whether you may not or might not have it so preached unto you, or enjoy the dispensation of it, did you but discharge your duty. If it be so, this is one evidence that it is yet your day.

[2.] It is a special season when providential calls do join in with and further gospel calls; — when God causes the gospel to be dispensed unto a people, and at the same time puts forth some acts of his providence, that are suited to awaken men to the consideration of their state and condition, then is the season of that people. I shall not go over the several providential calls that have been upon us to inquire after the ways of God. Are all the alterations that have been amongst us, discovering the great uncertainty of all things that are here below, no call? Was there no call in the great unseasonableness of the year? — no call in the danger of the loss of the gospel, which seems to stand ready for its flight from you? — the great uncertainty how long you may enjoy these waters of the sanctuary? It is certain, that if you have not neglected already your season, your day of grace, you are now under the time that you are to be tried in.

[3.] Then is the season, when God moves, [as he does] at some seasons, more effectually upon your hearts and spirits in the dispensation of the word than at other times. This you alone can give an account of; — you only know how it is with you. You can tell whether you have not been moved by the word more than formerly, or convinced by it; whether you have not had purposes of amendment and reformation wrought in you by it; whether you have not been caused to love it more than you have done formerly; whether it hath not begotten at times resolutions in you to try for life and immortality. If it have not, it is much



to be feared lest the Lord is leaving of you to salt, — to an estate of perishing and everlasting ruin. But if you have had such effects wrought in you, know of a certain that the kingdom of God hath come unto you; and if you withstand your opportunity, you are gone and undone for ever, unless you make thorough work before this dispensation be overpast.

[4.] When you see others about you earnest after the word, this is God's call and ordinance unto you to look to your own condition.

If now, by any of these means, you come to know that the day of the Lord and the season of your healing is upon you, oh, that you would be prevailed with to be wise for your own souls, and to close with the word of the gospel before the things of your peace be hidden from your eyes!

I thought, in the next place, to have given you the signs of a departing gospel-day, and evidences of men's having outlived their season, and being given up to salt and barrenness; but for some reasons forbear.

*Use 2.* To discover the miserable condition of poor creatures that, having not in their season been healed by the waters of the sanctuary, are given up of the Lord to salt and barrenness. No heart can conceive, nor tongue, express, the misery of such poor creatures. Let me only mention some particulars:—

(1.) They know not that they are so miserable. They perceive not, they understand not, the sore judgment that they are under. Do but their heads ache, or are they sick of an ague, they feel it presently, and seek out for remedies; but in this case the curse of God is upon them, and they do not at all perceive it, and so seek not out for relief. [Hos. vii. 9](#), “Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.” They are nigh to ruin, to destruction, and perceive it not: they take no notice of the misery that is at hand ready to devour them; or if at any time they begin so to do, they shift off the thought of it, which is a great part of their misery.

(2.) They are pleased with the condition in which they are; “they cry, Peace and safety, when sudden destruction is at hand,” [1 Thess. v. 3](#). They please themselves in their condition, when the vengeance of the Lord is ready to seize upon them. Is the gospel removed from them, and the streams of the sanctuary turned away? — They are so far from being troubled at it, that they rejoice in it, as hath been declared; they think they may now follow their lusts freely, and do whatever seems good unto themselves; they despise others and bless themselves, as if all were well with them. Or is the word yet continued, but they left to senselessness and salt under it? — They are pleased with their estate, wonder at those who are troubled under the word, and exceedingly despise them. All is well with themselves; and some of them are ready to deride all others that are under the work of the Lord. On this account it is that they do not, will not, look out for relief or healing.

(3.) No man can help or relieve them. Men may pity them, but they cannot help them. All the world cannot pull a poor creature out from under the curse of the great God.

- (4.) Their eternal ruin is certain, as before proved.
- (5.) This ruin is very sore on gospel despisers.



**Sermon XVI. Human power defeated.**<sup>367</sup>

“The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands. — [Ps. lxxvi. 5.](#)



The common circumstances of this psalm, concerning the penman, title, and the like, I shall not at all inquire after. The time of its being given to the church is alone to us considerable; and yet all the knowledge thereof, also, is but conjectural. What particular time it was wherein it was given we know not; but that it was given for the use of all times, that we know. Probable it is, from [verse 3](#), that it was established as a monument of praise in the days of Hezekiah, when, by the immediate hand of God, Jerusalem was delivered from the army of Sennacherib. For a return of which mercy though good Hezekiah came short of the obligation laid on him, rendering not again according to the benefit done unto him, yet the Lord himself takes care for his own glory, setting forth this psalm as a monument of the praise due to his name unto all generations.



The deliverance of Jerusalem, then, from so great ruin as that impending over it from the threatening army of Sennacherib under their walls, being the occasion of penning this psalm, it cannot but yield us a meet foundation of making mention of the name of the Lord in a suitable work this day.

In general the whole is eucharistical, and hath two parts:— first, Narratory, concerning the work of God for his people; secondly, Laudatory, or the praise of his people for those works.

The first part hath three particulars:— 1. An exordium, by way of exultation and rejoicing, [verses 1, 2](#). 2. A special narration of the work of God, for which the praise of the whole is intended, [verses 3, 5, 6](#). 3. An apostrophe to the Lord concerning the one and the other, [verse 4](#).

The latter containeth, — 1. A doctrinal observation for the use of the church, from the whole, [verse 7](#). 2. The reasons and confirmation of the doctrine so laid down, taken from the power and righteousness of God in the actions recounted, [verses 8, 9](#). 3. A threefold use of the doctrine so confirmed:— of instruction, [verse 10](#); of exhortation, [verse 11](#); of establishment and consolation, [verse 12](#).



The particulars, preceding my text I shall a little touch upon, that the mind of the Holy Ghost therein may be the more clear unto you, and the doctrine from thence appear with the greater evidence:—

1. In the exordium, [verses 1, 2](#), you have two things:— (1.) The names of the place wherein the work mentioned was wrought and the praise returned held forth; — and these are, Judah, Israel, Salem, Zion. (2.) The relation of God unto this place, which lies at the bottom of the work he did for them and the praise they returned unto him. He was known, his name was great amongst them; there was his tabernacle and his dwelling-place: which may be referred to two heads. — the knowledge of his will, [verse 1](#); and the establishment of his worship, [verse 2](#).

(1.) For the description of the place, by its several names titles, I shall not insist upon it; they are all but various expressions of the same thing. It is the church of God that is ad-

orned with all these titles and names of singular endearment:— Judah, that single tribe of which the Messiah was to come; Israel, a prevailing people, the posterity of him that prevailed with God; Salem, the place he chose above all the places of the earth to settle his name therein; and Zion, the choice ornament of that Salem, — a model wherein the beauty and excellency of all the other are contracted, whose gates were then so dear unto the Lord. Or perhaps you have the distribution of the whole into its several parts; — Judah, the governing tribe; Israel, the body of the people; Salem, the chief place of their residence and glory; and Zion, the presence of God in his worship amongst them all. Now, the mention of these titles of the church, so dear to the Lord, doth front the following narration, to afford us this observation:—

*Observation.* The care of Salem, of Zion, lies at the bottom of all God's powerful actings and workings among the sons of men. Every mighty work of God throughout the world may be prefaced with [these two verses](#). The whole course of affairs in the world is steered by Providence in reference to the good of Salem. Zion hath been the rise and downfall of all the powers of the world; it is her deliverance or trial that is intended in their raising, and her recompense and vengeance in their ruin. God works not among the nations for their own sakes. When they are sifted with a sieve, they are but the chaff; Israel is the corn for whose sake it is done: whereof not the least grain shall fall to the ground, [Amos ix. 9](#). She is precious in God's sight and honourable; he loves her: therefore he giveth men for her, and people for her life, [Isa. xliii. 4](#). The men of the world are very apt to pride themselves in their thoughts, as though great were their share and interest in the glorious things that God is accomplishing; like a fly that sat on the chariot wheel, and cried, "What a dust have I raised round about!" The truth is, their names are written in the dust, and they are of no account in the eyes of the Lord in all he is accomplishing, but only to exalt his name in their miscarriage and destruction. Was it not in the thoughts of some lately amongst us, that their right hand had accomplished the work of the Lord, and that the end of it must be the satisfaction of their lusts? And hath not the Lord declared that they have neither part nor lot in this matter? It was Salem, not self, — Zion, not Babylon or confusion, that lay at the bottom of the whole.

(2.) There is a relation of God unto this place. His will was known there, [verse 1](#); and his worship was established, [verse 2](#). And these also have their particular mention.

*Observation.* In the deliverance of his people, God hath a special regard to the honour of his ordinances. Why so great things for Salem? Why, there his word is preached, whereby his will is known and his name made great; — there his tabernacle is fixed, and his dwelling-place established; — there he gives his presence in his worship and ordinances, wherein he is delighted. "Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee," [Ps. lxviii. 29](#). Here is the temple, Christ, and then, the worship of Christ: for their sake it shall be done. When vengeance is recompensed upon an opposing people, it is the vengeance of

the temple, [Jer. l. 28](#). And it is a voice from thence that rendereth recompense to his enemies, [Isa. lxvi. 6](#). The great work which the Lord at this day is accomplishing in the world looks fully on this one thing. Wherefore is it that God shaketh the powers of this world, and causeth the towers to totter which they uphold? Is it not that the way of his worship may be vindicated from all their abominations, and vengeance taken upon them for their opposition thereunto? And there is no greater sign of God's care for a people, than when he shows a regard to his ordinances among that people. The defence he gives is of the glory of the assemblies of mount Zion, [Isa. iv. 5](#). When the ark departs, you may call the children, "Ichabod." The taking away of his candlestick, the removal of his glory from the temple, is an assured prologue to the utter ruin of a people.

And hath not the Lord had a special eye this way in the late deliverance? It is his promise, that he will purge the rebels from amongst his people. And he hath done it. Were there not children of Edom amongst them, who cried, "Down with them, down with them even to the ground"? Hath not God magnified his despised word above all his name? Was it not as an offscouring to many particular persons among them in the late murmuring for pre-eminence against those whom the Lord hath chosen? — who, I suppose, have no other joy in their employment than Moses had in his, who once desired the Lord to slay him, that he might be freed from his burden. Only the will of the Lord and the good of a poor thankless people swayed their hearts unto it. And were there here any more discriminating rods cast in before the Lord, to have that bud and spring which he owned (as [Num. xvii.](#)) than this one: Scripture, or no Scripture? solemn worship, or none at all? I speak only as to some particulars, and that I can upon my own experience. The Lord give their hearts a free discovery of his thoughts in this business! Doubtless he hath had respect to his tabernacle and dwelling-place. For my part, they are to me as the Theban shield; and, notwithstanding all my pressures, I would labour to say, as Mephibosheth, "Let all go, since I see the king in peace."

I might farther observe, from both these things together, that among the people of God alone is the residence of his glorious presence. This song is held out from Zion. "In his temple doth every one speak of his glory," [Ps. xxix. 9](#). "Bless ye God in the congregations, the Lord, from the fountain of Israel," [Ps. lxxviii. 26](#). "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion," [Ps. lxxv. 1](#). As a lame leg, and as a thorn in the hand, ungraceful, painful, "so is a parable in the mouth of fools," [Prov. xxvi. 7, 9](#). It is the saints who are bid to be joyful in the Lord; and the high praises of God must be in their mouths, [Ps. cxlix. 5, 6](#). They are high things that beseeem only those whom God doth magnify. If the Lord give us matter of praise, pray know from whom it will be acceptable, — whose praises they are he delighteth to inhabit. If you have some defiling lust, the sunshine of mercies will exhale nothing but the offensive steam of carnal affections. The sacrifices of wicked hearts are an abomination to the Lord. If your fleshly affections work this day, without the beatings of a pure heart, and the language of a

pure lip, the Lord will reject your oblations. Would you have your praise as sweet to the Lord as a mercy is to you? — be assured that in Christ you are the Israel of God, and your prayers shall prevail, your praise shall be accepted.

2. The second particular, as I observed, is a special *narration* of the works of God, for which the whole is intended, [verses 3, 5, 6](#). And therein you have these two things:— (1.) The place where these acts were wrought and are remembered, “There,” [verse 3](#); (2.) The acts themselves related; which refer, — [1.] To God the worker, [verse 3](#), “He brake;” [2.] To the persons on whom they were wrought, [verses 5, 6](#).

(1.) The place where these things were acted and the monuments of them erected, — that is, “There;” there, in Salem and Zion, Judah and Israel; there, not so much in those places, as with reference unto them.

*Observation.* All the mighty actings of God regard his church; and there are the monuments and trophies of his victories against his enemies erected. To the first part of this I spake before. A word for the latter:— God decketh and maketh Zion glorious with the spoils of his adversaries. There the glory of Pharaoh and all his host, drowned in the Red sea, is dedicated, [Exod. xv.](#); there are the shields of all the mighty men in the host of Sennacherib, slain by an angel, hung up, [Isa. xxxvii. 35, 36](#); there is the honour, the robes, the crown, and the reason of Nebuchadnezzar laid up, for the glory of Zion, [Dan. iv. 33, 34](#), himself being changed into a beast; there is all the pomp and glory of Herod deposited, [Acts xii. 23](#), when, as a reward of his pride and persecution, he was devoured of worms; there is the glory of all persecutors, with the blood of Julian in a special manner, who threw it into the air, and cried, “Vicisti Galilæe;” there Haman is visibly exalted upon the gallows by himself erected for the ruin of a prince of the people, [Esth. vii. 10](#); there the peace and the joy of the church, their choice frame under the bloody massacres of the inhabitants of Zion, is set to show, for the glory of it; there all the rochets of popish prelates, the crowns, and glory, and thrones of the kings of the earth, — all set apart as monuments and trophies of God’s victories in Zion; there is a place reserved for the man of sin, and all the kings of the earth who have committed fornication with the mother of harlots, whose destruction sleepeth not. God will at length certainly glorify Salem with the arrow of the bow, the shield, the sword, and all spoils of its oppressors.

(2.) There is what he did describe, both immediately in the actions themselves, [verse 3](#), and with reference to the persons towards whom he so acted, [verse 5](#). Now, because the former is fully contained in the latter, I shall not handle it apart, but descend immediately to the consideration of the words of my text, being a declaration of what the Lord hath done for his people in the day of their distress, with particular reference to the cause of that distress.

And here we shall look a little, — 1. To the reading of the words; and, 2. To their explication:—

1. To the reading: The “stout-hearted;” or, the “strong in heart,” the “mighty in heart,” (so in the original;) — men of stout, stubborn, unpersuadable hearts and courage, whose epithet is, that they are “far from righteousness,” [Isa. xlvi. 12](#). The Septuagint have rendered it, ἀσύνητοι τῆ καρδίᾳ,<sup>368</sup> — “the, foolish in heart.” Stubborn-hearted men are foolish-hearted men: not to yield unto, is worse than not to understand, what is good. They “are spoiled, — אֲשַׁתְּזוּ לָלוּ, have yielded themselves to the spoil.” So properly, and so rendered by most interpreters;<sup>369</sup> which sense I shall follow. “They have slept their sleep,” — אֲנָמוּ, “dormitârunt,” “They have slumbered their sleep.” What it is “to slumber a sleep” we shall see afterward. The residue of the words are literally rendered, save only in the placing of the negation; for whereas we set it on the persons, “none of the men,” in the original it is upon the act, “have not found;” affirming concerning the persons, “all the men of might have not,” — that is, “none of the men of might have:” a very frequent Hebraism, imitated by [John 1 Epist. iii. 15](#), Πᾶς ἀνθρωποκτόνος οὐκ ἔχει ζωὴν, — “Every man-slayer hath not life, — that is, “none hath.” And so you have the words, “The stout of heart have yielded themselves to the spoil, they have slumbered their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands.”

2. The words thus read contain three general heads:—

(1.) A twofold description of the enemies of Salem:—

[1.] In respect of their internal affections: they were “stout of heart,” men of high spirit and haughty courage, “cedere nescientes,” not knowing how to yield to any thing but the dictates of their own proud spirits.

[2.] In respect of their power for outward acting: “Men of might;” strong of hand, as well as stout of heart. Courage without strength will but betray its possessor; and strength without courage is but “inutile pondus,” — a burdensome nothing: but when both meet, — a stout heart and strong hands, — who shall stand before them? Thus you have the enemies set out like Goliath, with his spear and helmet, defying the host of the living God.

368 So in the text (the Hebrew being אֲבִירֵי לֵב); as if the LXX. had read it, by mistake, אֲבִירֵי לֵב, “who have lost their heart.” In the parallel from Isaiah, they render it ἀπολωλεκότες τὴν καρδίαν. It is much better rendered by Symmachus, in the first instance, ὑπερήφανοι τὴν καρδίαν, — in the second, σκληροκάριοι.

אֲבִיר sometimes signifies a *bull* ([Ps. xxii. 13](#)), — the symbol, when untamed, of stubbornness, [Jer. xxxi. 18](#). It is an ingenious suggestion of Vitranga, adopted also by Parkhurst, that the original words correspond strikingly with the “*esprits forts*” of the French. — Ed.

369 See [Isa. lix. 15](#), where the same woeful occurs again in the Hithpael form; and, as in the Targum and by Jerome, is rendered, “maketh himself a prey.” — Ed.

(2.) You have a twofold issue of God's providence in dealing with them, suitably to this their double qualification:—

[1.] He opposeth himself to the stoutness of their hearts, and they “yield themselves to the spoil.” Where observe, first, The act itself: they “yield themselves.” Nothing in the world so contrary to a stout heart as to yield itself. To yield, is a thing of the greatest distance and contrariety to the principle of a stout heart in the world: it is far more reconcilable to death than yielding. But this God will effect. Secondly, The extent of this yielding: it was “to the spoil.” This exceedingly heightens the mighty working of the Lord against them. Should they be brought to yield to reason, persuasion, and union, it were well; but that they should be so prevailed on as to yield to the spoil, — that is, to the mercy of those against whom they rose and opposed themselves, — this is “*digitus Dei*.”

[2.] He opposeth himself to their actual might: they “found not their hands.” Hands are the instruments of acting the heart's resolution. The strength and power of a man is in his hands; if they be gone, all his hope is gone. If a man's sword be taken from him, he will do what he can with his hands; but if his hands be gone, he may go to sleep, for any disturbance he will work. For men not to find their hands, is not to have that power for the execution of their designs which formerly they had. In former days they had hands, — power for doing great things; but now, when they would use them against Salem, they could not find them. And why so? — God had taken them away; God took away their power, — their strength departed from them. Samson found not his strength when his locks were cut; though he thought to do as at other times, yet he was deceived, and taken. When God takes away men's power, they go forth, and think to do as in former days; but when they come to exercise it, all is gone: their hands are laid out of the way, — in allusion to one that seeketh.

(3.) There is the total issue of this whole dispensation, placed in the midst of both, as arising from both: “They have slumbered their sleep.” When their hearts yielded, and their hands were lost, courage and power both taken away, what else should they do? Some take this for an expression of death, as it is sometimes used, [Ps. xiii. 3](#), “Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” I rather conceive it to hold out that condition which God threateneth to bring upon the enemies of his people, when he sends them a “spirit of slumber,” [Rom. xi. 8](#). Now, in such a condition two things are eminent:—

[1.] Its weakness. A condition of slumber and sleep is a weak condition. A sleeping man is able to do nothing. Jael can destroy a drowsy Sisera.

[2.] Its vanity. Men in their sleep are apt to have foolish, vain fancies. This, then, is that which the Lord holds out concerning the enemies of his church, his people, his ways, when their hearts are gone and their hands gone:— they shall be brought to a condition of weakness in respect of others; they shall not be able to beat them: and of vanity in themselves; they shall feed themselves with vain thoughts, like the dream of a hungry man, [Isa. xxix. 8](#), “He dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; he waketh, and, behold, he is empty.” They please them-



selves for a little season with strong apprehensions of the accomplishment of their hearts' lusts and cobweb fancies; but the issue is shame and disappointment.

The words, being opened, will yield us these three observations:— I. Men of stout hearts and strong hands, of courage and power, are often engaged against the Lord. II. God suits the workings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications and actings of his opposers; their stout hearts shall yield, their strong hands be lost. III. Though men have courage, might, and success, yet when they engage themselves against the Lord, weakness and vanity shall be the issue thereof. In the brief handling whereof I hope you shall find the word of God and the works of God exceedingly suited.

I. Men of courage, power, and success, of eminent qualifications, are oftentimes engaged against the Lord, and the ways of the Lord.

I shall multiply neither testimonies nor instances of this truth; for that were but to set up a candle in the sun; — the experience of all ages has made it good. One or two places may suffice:— [Ps. lxviii. 30](#), “Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the people.” There are not only “calves of the people,” easily deluded, sottish men; but also multitudes of “bulls,” heady, high-minded, bearing down all before them, throwing up all bounds and fences, laying all common to their lusts, not easily to be resisted; — these also are amongst the adversaries of the ways of the Lord. The first open opposers of the ways of God were “giants,” “mighty men,” and “men of renown,” [Gen. vi. 4](#). At once “two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, and men of renown,” joined themselves in rebellion against the Lord, [Num. xvi. 2](#); and that, —

1. Because these very qualifications, of a stout heart, strong hands, and former success, are apt of themselves, if destitute of directing light and humbling grace, to puff up the spirits of men, and to engage them in ways of their own, contrary to the mind of the Lord. When men take advice of their stout hearts, strong hands, and former success, they are very evil counsellors. When Jeremiah advised the Jews from the Lord for their good, the proud men answered, they would not obey, [Jer. xliii. 2](#). When Pharaoh is made stout for his ruin, he cries, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” [Exod. v. 2](#). And for success, God makes the Assyrian the rod of his anger, sends him against the people of his wrath, with charge “to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets,” [Isa. x. 6](#). He goeth, accordingly, and prospereth. But when he hath so done, see what a conclusion he makes! He goes against Jerusalem, and cries, “Let not your God deceive you. Have the gods of the nations delivered them? and do you think so to be? [Isa. xxxvii. 10, 12](#). From the success he had from God, he concluded the success he should have against him; — like those of late amongst ourselves, who having been partners with others in former successes, whilst they went upon the command of God, doubtless received in their stout hearts establishment and strengthening to other undertakings; as if the God of the Parliament

could not help. Amaziah, king of Judah, wages war with Edom, and they are destroyed before him, [2 Kings xiv. 7](#). The war was of the Lord. Upon this he is lifted up, and causelessly provoketh Jehoash, king of Israel, [verse 8](#), against the mind and will of God. Jehoash sends him word, that if the thistle pride itself against the cedar, the wild beast will tread it down, [verse 9](#). But he had former success, and on he will go to his ruin. The stout-hearted men (for a delivery from whose fury and folly we desire this day to lift up the name of the Lord) having received help and assistance against Edom, will needs lift up the thistle against the cedar, — act out of their own sphere, turn subjection into dominion, to their shame and sorrow. But it were better their hearts should be filled with sorrow, than the nation, and especially the people of God in the nation, with blood and confusion, ending in bondage and tyranny. And this is the first account of it, why men of such qualifications are engaged against the Lord. The qualifications themselves do set up for it, if destitute of divine light and humbling grace. Such men will run upon God, and the thick bosses of his buckler.

2. God will have it so, that the greater may be his glory in the powerful protection and defence of his own, with the destruction, disappointment, and ruin of their enemies. If his enemies were all sottish, weak, foolish, childish, until he makes them so, where would be the praise of his great name? when would there be “*Nodus Deo vindice dignus*,” — work worthy of the appearance of the Most High? But when there is a great mountain before Zerubbabel ([Zech. iv. 7](#)), — a high, haughty, oppressing empire, — to level that to a plain is glorious. When God will get himself a name, he raises up, not a poor, effeminate Sardanapalus, — a poor, sensual, hypocritical wretch, as some have been; the Lord will not make an open contest by such a one, such as some of our sore oppressors have been: but he will raise up a Pharaoh, a crooked leviathan, a stout-hearted, cunning-headed, strong-handed oppressor; and he tells him (such a one as he), “For this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth,” [Exod. ix. 16](#). “Thou art a fit subject,” saith he, “for me to exalt my glory in thy ruin.” The beast is to make war with the Lamb; and he shall not do it alone: God will give him in assistance. And who shall these be? — women, and children, and weak ones? No; he will put it into the heart of the kings of the earth “to give their power and strength to the beast,” [Rev. xvii. 17](#), to break them in pieces. This will be glory indeed. All the opposers which formerly have risen, or at least most of them, have had the power to that height, as they have been exceedingly above all outwardly appearing means of being resisted. The breaking of the old monarchies and of papal power is a work meet for the Lord. And in this shall mainly consist the promised glory of the Church of Christ in after days; whose morning star, I doubt not, is now upon us:— the Lord will more immediately and visibly break the high, stout, haughty ones of the earth, for the sake of his people, than in former times. Look upon all the glorious things that are spoken concerning Zion in the latter days, and you shall find them all interwoven with this still, — the shaking of heaven, the casting down of thrones, and dominions, and mighty

ones. I mention this, because indeed I look upon this late mercy as the after-drops of a former refreshing shower, — as an appendix of good-will, for the confirming the former work which God had wrought. “Though,” saith he, “ ‘ye have lien among the pots,’ — have been in a poor, defiled condition, a condition of bondage, — ‘yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold,’ — ye shall be made exceeding glorious.” But how or when shall this be? Why, when the Almighty scattereth kings for her sake, then shall she be as white as snow in Salmon, [Ps. lxxviii. 13, 14](#). When God by his almighty power takes away so great opposers, then glory and beauty shall arise upon you. And this, in some degree, lies also at the bottom of the late dispensation of Providence, — men’s hearts were full of fear of a storm; yea, a storm was necessary, that some evidence might be given of the Lord’s continuing his presence amongst you, that if hereafter we be forsaken, it may appear that it was for our own unbelief, unthankfulness, and folly, and not for doing the work of the Lord. Now, how was this expected? “Why, this poor people, or that, unacquainted with the things of their peace, will rise and make opposition.” “No,” saith the Lord, “you shall not have so easy a trial; you shall have men of stout hearts and strong hands, with many former successes on their shoulders; that, when deliverance is given in, my name may be glorious indeed.”

*Use 1.* Be not moved at the most formidable enemies that may arise against you in the ways of God. “It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind,” [Isa. vii. 2](#). When strong combinations arise, how apt are we to shake and tremble before them, especially when they have some strangeness as well as strength! That Syria should come against Judah, is no wonder; but what, I pray, makes Ephraim too, their brother, and fellow in former afflictions? Besides, Syria and Ephraim were always at a mortal difference among themselves. But they who agree in nothing else usually consent in opposition to the ways of God. Then you shall have Edom, Ammon, Amalek, and Ashur altogether of one mind, [Ps. lxxxviii. 6–8](#). And the kings of the west, that perpetually devour one another, yet have one mind in exalting the beast and opposing the Lamb, [Rev. xvii. 14](#); — as, in our late troubles, there was a concurrence not only in the main of Syria and Ephraim, the two grand extremes, but also of innumerable particular fancies and designs; so that if a man should have met them, (like him in the fable, the lion, the ass, and the fox), he could not but wonder “*Quo iter unâ facerent*,” — whither they were travelling together. But, I say, when such combinations are made, how apt are we to shake and tremble! “They are stout men, valiant men; and perhaps Ahithophel is with them!” Why, if they were not such, I pray how should the Lord have any praise in the close of the dispensation? We would be delivered, but we care not that God should be glorified. If God’s glory were dear to us, we should not care how high opposition did arise. Precious faith, where art thou fled? Had we but some few grains of it, we might see the rising of the greatest mountains to be but a means to make

the name of God glorious, by removing them into the midst of the sea. Hath it not been thus in the days of old? The Lord humble us for our unbelief!

*Use 2.* Let men to whom the Lord hath given stout hearts, strong hands, and great success, watch carefully over their own spirits, lest they be led aside into any way against the mind of God. Great endowments are oftentimes great temptations. “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?” [Obad. 3](#). Was it not the ruin of Amaziah, of whom notwithstanding it was said, “he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord?” [2 Chron. xxv. 2](#). He who is heightened against the king of terrors, if he hath not humility (one of the chief of graces), will quickly choose himself paths of his own. Alas, poor creatures! if hearts and hands be, and God be not, what will it avail? But of this afterward. I now proceed to the second observation.

II. God suits the workings and actings of providence for deliverance to the qualifications of the opposers.

Are they stout hearts? — they shall be made to yield themselves. Are they men of might? they shall lose their power, — they shall not find their hands. To this I shall speak very little. This is the cutting off of Adonibezek’s toes and thumbs. God countermines them in their actings, and blows them up in their own mine. “In the thing wherein they deal proudly, he is above them,” [Exod. xviii. 11](#). They shall not soar so high on the wings of their pride, but that still they shall find God uppermost. When they take counsel, and think to carry it by their advices, God saith, “I am wise also, and will bring evil,” [Isa. xxxi. 2](#). When they think to carry it by a high hand, his strength shall appear against them. When Herod owns the blasphemy of being called a god, he shall rot and be eaten of worms, [Acts xii. 23](#). Pharaoh cries, “Come on, let us deal wisely against Israel,” [Exod. i. 10](#). He of all men shall play the fool, for his own ruin and the ruin of his people, [Exod. xiv. 27, 28](#). If Sennacherib boasts of his mighty host, be sure he shall not find his hands. How evidently hath the Lord thus carried on his providence in the late dispensation! Were not many of the headless, heady undertakers, “robusti animo,” — mighty of heart? and were they not forced to yield themselves, yea, to “yield themselves to the spoil?” Were they not deep in their plotting? Doubtless they or their seducers had digged deep to lay their design; though of the generality of them it cannot be said, as was of Cæsar and his companions, “Accessere sobrii ad perdendum rempublicam.” They were brought to act things in very folly and confusion. They were great men of might: whence is it they made no more opposition? The Lord laid their hands out of the way. Many reasons might be given of this; but I must pass to the last point.

III. Though men have courage, might, and former successes to accompany them, yet when they engage themselves against the Lord, or any way of his, vanity, weakness, and disappointment will be the issue thereof.

“Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you?” saith the Lord, [Ezek. xxii. 14.](#) “Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth; woe unto him that contendeth with his Maker!” [Isa. xlv. 9.](#) “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?” [Job ix. 4.](#) “The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought; but the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever. He maketh the devices of the people of none effect,” [Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11.](#) Whoever riseth up without him, or against him, shall fall and come to nothing. This is a plain point, that we suppose ourselves exceedingly well versed in. But He who searcheth our spirits, and is acquainted with our inward parts, knows how great is our unbelief in this very thing; and therefore, in tender condescension, he hath carefully provided for our support herein. A man would think one word, once spoken, were enough to convince and persuade the whole world of this truth; but, the Lord knows, there must be line upon line, here a little, and there a little, to give his own people any establishment herein. And therefore it is that in so many places in his word he hath asserted and affirmed this one thing, — namely, let men be never so strong, powerful, and successful, if once they engage against him, they are utterly destroyed, unless he pluck them out of the snare. “Associate yourselves,” etc., [Isa. viii. 9.](#)

But you will say, “Engage against the Lord! That is true; whoever engageth against him shall surely fall. But who is so mad as to do so? Very Rabshakeh himself affirms that he came not up to Jerusalem without the Lord, but that the Lord sent him to go up against the land to destroy it,” [Isa. xxxvi. 10.](#) It is true he said so; and by this observation you have an answer to the Scripture. For though he said so, he lied before the Lord, and belied the Lord; his undertaking was against the Lord, and against his mind, as the sequel fully manifested. Many suppose they engage for God, when they engage against him. To engage against the Lord, is to engage against his mind and will. To undertake without the will of God, is enough to be the ruin of the best and stoutest; as we see in the case of Josiah; but to engage against him! — who can do it, and stand when he is provoked? This, then, is that which neither stout hearts nor strong hands shall ever be able to go through withal. For instance, to engage against that authority which God will own and defend, is successlessly to engage against the Lord. Now, because these are the days wherein the Lord will shake heaven and earth, beat the nations with a rod of iron, breaking much of the power of the world, it may be asked by some, how it shall be known that any authority is such as the Lord will not destroy and overturn, but own it as a way of his own? I answer, To omit the rule of reason, law, and common established principles amongst men, all which give a great light unto the rule of walking in this case, I shall give you six scriptural significations, “a posteriori,” of such an authority as the Lord will make as a brasen wall, or a rock in the sea, against which the waves dash with noise and fury, but are themselves broken to pieces:—

1. If it be such as the Lord hath honoured with success and protection in great, hazardous, and difficult undertakings for himself. Thus was it with Moses. Never had a leader of a

people more murmurings, revilings, and rebellions against him. The story is obvious unto all. He was envied, hated, reproached of all sorts, from the princes of the congregation to the mixed multitude. But Moses had travelled through the sea and the desert with the Lord, and was encompassed with success and protection; and therefore all attempts against him shall be birthless and fruitless. This is one; but it will never do alone, unless conjoined with those that follow.

2. If the persons enjoying that authority abide to act for God, and not for themselves, after such success and protection. Saul began to act for God, and he vexed all his enemies, which way soever he turned himself; but afterward, turning to himself, God left him to himself. Cyrus, how honoured, how anointed was he for his great undertaking against Babylon! but afterward, pursuing his own ambition, he was requited with blood for the blood he sought. The Lord is with them that are with him, and whilst they are so. The establishment of the house of Saul is far from the Lord: for “those that honour him, he will honour; and they that despise him shall be lightly esteemed,” [1 Sam. ii. 30](#). There is no more certain sign in the world of persons devoted to ruin, or at least of their being divested of their authority, than that having followed God for a season in their enjoyment of success and protection, they turn aside to pursue their own ends, like Jehu. I could give you an example of this, as yet not much above half a year old. But when men undertake with the Lord, and for him, and having known his assistance therein, shall continue to lay out themselves in his ways; the Lord will then build them a house like David, which shall not be prevailed against.

Here I must give one caution by the way; — that I am very far from countenancing any to move against just and righteous authority, who discern not these things: the Lord forbid. Let men look to the rule of their obedience, which I have nothing to do withal at this time. I only describe such as unto whom, if any dare to make opposition, in an ordinary dispensation of providence, it will prove fruitless and vain.

3. The third thing is, that they subject their power to the power of the Lord Christ, who is Lord of lords, and King of kings. The psalmist tells the rulers of the earth, that the reason of their spoiling is, that they do not “kiss the Son,” [Ps. ii. 12](#), or yield unfeigned obedience to the mighty King whom God hath set on his holy hill. God hath promised that he will give in the service of kings and nations to Christ in his kingdom; and therein shall be their security. When God puts it into the heart of rulers to rule according to the interest of Christ and his gospel, and to seek the advancement of his sceptre, they shall surely be as a fenced wall. I cannot stay to show what this interest of Christ is. In a word, it is the ordering, framing, carrying on of affairs as is most conducive to the unravelling and destruction of the mystery of iniquity.

4. If they are supported by the prayer of a chosen people, who seek their welfare, not for their own interest and advantage, but for the advantage of the gospel and the ways of Christ, by them asserted. If God’s own people pray for them in authority, that under them

they may enjoy some share of their own, and obtain some ends suited to any carnal interest of theirs, God will reject those prayers. But when they seek their welfare, because it is discovered to them that in their peace the gospel shall have peace and prosperity; surely the Lord will not cast out their prayers, nor shame the face of his poor supplicants.

5. If in sincerity, and with courage and zeal, they fulfil the work of their magistracy, in the administration of righteous judgment; especially in those great and unusual acts of justice, in breaking the jaws of the wicked and terrible, and delivering the spoil out of the teeth of the mighty, [Job xxix. 17](#). Innumerable are the demonstrations of God's owning such persons.

6. If they have not the qualifications of that power which in these latter days God hath promised to destroy. Now these are two; I will but name them unto you. First, Drinking the cup of fornication that is in the hand of the harlot; that is, practising any false worship and forms invented besides the word. Secondly, Giving their power to the beast, or engaging in any ways of persecution against any of the ways of God, or his saints in those ways. That the Lord is about to shake, break, and destroy all such powers as these, I did not long since, by his assistance, here demonstrate.

And so have I completed my instances that they who engage against such an authority as is attended with these qualifications, engage against the Lord. I could also give other instances, in other ways and institutions of God; but I chose these as most accommodated to the season. If now I should tell you, that, notwithstanding all clamours to the contrary, these things, for the main, are found in your assemblies, thousands in the world would (yet I hope your own consciences would not) return the lie for so saying. But yet, though the Lord seems to bear witness to some integrity in his late dispensations, I shall only pray that what is wanting may be supplied; — that you may never want the like protection in the like distress.

Come we now briefly to the reasons why those who oppose such authority shall not succeed. And it were an easy labour to multiply reasons hereof. The sovereignty, the power, all the attributes of God would furnish us with arguments. I shall omit them all; [and] only touch upon two that are couched in the text.

They shall have no better issue, because, — (1.) The Lord will take away their stout hearts, whereby they are supported; (2.) He will take away their strong hands, whereby they are confirmed: and when hearts and hands are gone, they also are gone.

(1.) He will take away their stout hearts, that they shall no more be able to carry them out to any success in their great undertakings. He will break that wheel at the very fountain, that it shall no more be the spring of their proceedings.

Now, this the Lord usually doth one or more of these four ways:— [1.] He fills them with fury and madness; so taking away their order. [2.] He fills them with folly and giddiness; so taking away their counsel. [3.] He fills them with terror and amazement; so depriving them of their courage. Or, [4.] with contrition and humility; so changing their spirits:—

[1.] He fills them with fury and madness, taking away their order, which is the tie and cement of all societies, in all undertakings. “ ‘Though all the people of the earth,’ saith the Lord, ‘be gathered together against Jerusalem,’ they shall not prosper.” And why so? “I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness,” [Zech. xii. 4](#). Madmen have often great strength, and with it great fury; but know not how to use it, except to their own ruin: when they think to do the greatest mischief, they cut and gash themselves. Thus the Lord threateneth those who in outward profession are his own people, when they walk contrary to him: “The Lord shall smite thee with madness of heart, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways,” [Deut. xxviii. 28, 29](#). Because smitten with madness, therefore they shall not prosper. This is that untameable fury whereby men are carried out to sinful, destructive enterprises, as the horse rushes into the battle; — a judgment which some men vocally, as well as actually, at this day proclaim to be upon their spirits. They cry their blood boils, and their hearts rage for revenge; reviling those in authority, whereby to foment, [Acts xix](#). Hence they stir up men for the engaging in such designs as, if accomplished, in the judgment of all men not mad like themselves, would certainly prove ruinous to themselves and others. And in this frame they delight, of it they boast; not once considering that it is a badge and character of men whom God will disappoint and destroy in their proceedings; it being nothing but the working of that evil spirit which came upon Saul, stirring him up to rage and fury, when once the meek, calming Spirit of the Lord departed from him.

[2.] He will fill them with folly and giddiness; so taking away their counsel. Foolish and giddy undertakers do but conceive chaff, and bring forth stubble. “The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit.” [Isa. xix. 13, 14](#). This he calls taking away the spirit of Egypt, and destroying the counsel thereof, [verse 3](#). There is no means of ruin, destruction, and disappointment, that God doth more frequently threaten than this, — he will take wisdom from the wise, and then pour contempt upon the spirit of princes. When to their madness he adds blindness; to their fury, folly; to their rage, giddiness; what can be the issue but such as is expressed: “They shall stagger like a drunken man in his vomit”? Stand before him, and he’ll pour his filth upon you; let him alone, and he and it will quickly tumble to the ground. What, I pray, can be expected from mad, blind, furious, foolish, raging, giddy men? Should a man use these expressions of any, it would be said he railed; yet God hath spoken it, that all undertakers against him shall be so, and no otherwise. Now, hence ariseth upon the spirits of such men a twofold effect; — first, they shall not be able to advise rationally against others; nor, secondly, shall they be able to receive suitable advice from others. They shall be able neither to make out counsel to support them in the way wherein they are, nor to take in counsel for their reducing to better paths. If this were



not evident in the late dispensation of the Lord towards poor creatures setting up themselves against the Lord, then never did any providence speak plain in any latter age.

[3.] He will fill them with fear and amazement; so taking away their courage. This God caused to fall upon a whole host at one time; [so] that, without seeing an enemy, they ran and fled, and lost all they had, and the spoil, [2 Kings vii. 6, 7](#). And he threatens that in such a condition he will make men like women, — they shall be afraid and fear, [Isa. xix. 16](#). Yea, this is the way of God's usual dealing; first, he overcomes the spirit of his enemies, and then their armies or force: and the Lord is magnified therein; as is fully set out, [Exod. xv. 14–16](#). The hearts and spirits of men are all in the hand of God; he can pluck them in, or let them out, as seems good unto him; make him that was mighty one day, the next day to be of no power: what is left of fury, folly shall devour; and what is left of folly, fear shall consume; and the purpose of the Lord shall be established.

[4.] If he have any favour for them, and so will not proceed in these ways of revenge against them, which would end in their speedy ruin; he will give them contrition and humility, so changing them. What a clear testimony of this did he give in the business of Jacob and Esau! Esau resolves and threatens his death upon the first opportunity, [Gen. xxvii. 41](#); an opportunity is put into his hands by Jacob's return into Canaan, [chap. xxxii.](#); means of revenge he is ready furnished withal, and comes out, accordingly, with a band of cut-throats for the purpose, in the same chapter. What should any man now rationally expect, but that poor Jacob must certainly be ruined, and the mother slain with the children? In an instant the Lord toucheth the heart of Esau, and all his menaces of revenge issue in tears and expressions of love and joy! [chap. xxxiii. 4](#). It is to be rejoiced in, that the stout hearts of some men are changed upon their disappointment: and the issue of the mercy is no loss to you, to the nation, and themselves therein; though truly to them it had been an argument of greater love, had the Lord graciously bent their spirits unto it before. But by his infinite wisdom he hath accomplished his holy will.

Now, in one, more, or all of these ways, will the Lord proceed with the mighty of heart, that set up themselves against him, until he take away their hearts, and make them useless; that, either willingly or unwillingly, “they shall yield themselves” even “to the spoil.”

(2.) He will not only take away their hearts, but also their hands; he will not only dispirit them, but he will also disarm them; he will take not only wisdom from their hearts, but the wheels from their chariots. He is the God of the power of men, as well as of the spirits of men. Will he continue power and strength unto men, to use it against him that gives it?

*Use 1.* To discover the ground of God's late dispensation, in taking away the hearts from the stout and hands from the mighty, — bringing them into a condition of weakness and vanity. Their undertakings were against the Lord, and their hearts could not endure, neither could their hands be strong.

I shall give some instances in their undertaking against the Lord:—

(1.) In their declared enmity to the ministry of the gospel; — not to the persons of ministers, because engaged in some faction in the state, wherein, perhaps, many may be opposed, and that from the Lord; — nor yet because of their persuasion for the administration of ordinances after this or that form; which often ariseth to very great animosities, — the Lord pardon them unto his people: but because in general they do administer ordinances. Now, certainly there is so much of God in that administration, that if they be opposed, not for other causes, or upon other pretences, but “eo nomine,” as administrators of ordinances, that opposition is made to God himself. It was part of the end of Christ’s ascension, that he might bestow those gifts upon them which they do enjoy, [Eph. iv. 8](#). And shall the fury of men make the work of God, the purchase of Christ, of none effect? Doubtless in this respect God will make as many as are sincere “a fenced brasen wall,” [Jer. xv. 20](#). Men may batter their hands, and beat out their brains against them; but they shall not prevail. It is true, as many of them are pleased in these days to engage themselves in several parties; so, if they do close and act with them that are pernicious to the commonwealth, all inconvenience that lighteth upon them is from themselves, — their profession gives them no sanctuary from opposition: but when they are envied, “eo nomine,” as administrators of ordinances, not in such or such a way, but as ordinances, — shall not the Lord plead for this thing? Now, that this was aimed at by some, I suppose none can doubt. The Lord open the eyes of them who in this deliverance have received deliverance, but will not see it! I fear some men had almost rather perish, than be delivered not in their own way. Envy in some men will outbalance safety. Alas! we are proud beggars, when we will refuse the mercy of God if we may not appoint the hand whereby it shall be bestowed.

(2.) Against the spiritual ordinances of God themselves. These are the carved work which they aimed to break down with their axes and hammers. Christ hath said, “I will build my church.” Their voice was, “Down with it! down with it even to the ground!” Poor creatures! they dashed themselves against the rock. Is this a time, think you, to engage against all ordinances, when the Lord Jesus is joining battle with all the world for their abuse of them; and is vindicating them in order to more purity, beauty, lustre, power, efficacy, and peace, than ever yet he adorned them withal? You were not wise, poor souls, to discern the seasons. What! no time to pluck down, but when Christ himself is building! Ah! turn your weapons against Babylon; it will prove far the more thriving warfare. Let Zion alone, if but for your own sakes. Jerusalem will prove a burdensome stone to all that take her up. You have received more loss in a week of days from Christ in this nation, than you would have done in a week of years from Antichrist in another. God will make them that shall go for Ireland sensible of this truth. See [Ps. xlvi. 12–14](#).

(3.) Principally and immediately against magistracy; if not in the abstract, yet openly as established in the hands of those whom the Lord hath owned in the darkest day that ever this nation saw. It is the hope of my soul, that the Lord hath borne witness that they have

the sixfold qualification before mentioned. And why would they have at once destroyed the Parliament and their own commander? Look upon the end of their common workmen: was it not that every one might have enjoyed their lust for a season? Of the more crafty: was it not to get themselves power to attempt their folly, and execute their fury? Look upon the end of the work: was it not to have wrapped us in confusion for a few months, and then to have given us up to the revengeful will of enraged enemies? So that, truly, there is but one thing wonderful to me in all this business, that God should take away the hearts and hands of these men in this enterprise; and that is, that he should do it in mercy for such an unthankful, unworthy, unbelieving people as we are. In this is he for ever to be admired and blessed. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horses have failed.

*Use 2.* If this be the cause why “they have slumbered their sleep,” be instructed, ye that are rulers of this nation, in the ways of peace, protection, and safety; — be in the ways of God, and do the things of God, and no weapon that is formed against you shall ever prosper. Many protections and deliverances you have had in your actings for him. Hath he not deserved at your hands to be trusted and feared all your days, with all your power? As my heart hath always been towards the governors in Israel, who willingly offered themselves among the people; so truly my heart never more trembled over them than now. Oh! where shall we find hearts fit to receive so many mercies as have been given into our bosoms? Oh! where shall we have hearts large enough to receive all these mercies? The oil ceased when the vessel would hold no more. All my hope and confidence is, that God will work for his name’s sake. I could exhort you to sundry particulars, and lay down several paths of God, walking wherein you shall be sure to find peace and safety; as especially, that you would regard that which God hath honoured, whereunto the opposition which he had resolved to make void was made.

*Use 3.* You that are men of courage, and might, and success, stout of heart and strong of hand, be watchful over yourselves, lest you should in any thing be engaged against the Lord. The ways of the Lord are your locks; — step but out of them, they will be cut, and you will become like other men, and be made a prey and a mocking to the uncircumcised that are round about. These eminencies you have from God are eminent temptations to undertakings against God, if not seasoned with grace and watchfulness. Ah! how many baits have Satan and the world suited to these qualifications! Samson shook himself, and went out, saying, “I will do as at other times;” but he knew not that the Lord was departed from him. You may think, when you are walking in paths of your own, that you will do as at other times; but if your strength be departed away, what will be the end?

*Use 4.* Our last use should be of instruction in respect of God; that you may see both what he can do and trust him, and consider what he hath done and bless him. For the first; — weapons of all sorts, men of all sorts, judgments of all sorts, are at his command and disposal: see it in this psalm. And for what he hath done; — if there be any virtue in the

presence of Christ in his ordinances, — if any worth in the gospel, — if any sweetness in carrying on the work of Christ's revenge against Babylon, — if any happiness in the establishment of the peace and liberty of a poor nation, purchased with so much blood and so long a contest, — if any content in the disappointment of the predictions and threats of God's enemies and his people's, — if any refreshment to our bowels that our necks are yet kept from the yoke of lawless lust, fury, and tyranny, — if any sweetness in a hope that a poor, distressed handful in Ireland may yet be relieved, — if any joy that God hath given yet another testimony of his presence amongst us, — if it be any way valuable that the instruments of our deliverance be not made the scorned object of men's revengeful violence, — if any happiness that the authority under which we enjoy all these mercies is not swallowed up, — is it not all in the womb of this deliverance? And who is he that hath given it into our bosom?

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## **Sermon XVII. The divine power of the gospel.**<sup>370</sup>

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” — [Rom. i. 16.](#)

The preceding verses of this chapter contain a declaration of the person who wrote this epistle, the apostolical authority wherewith it was wrote, and a gracious salutation of them to whom it was wrote. This verse makes an entrance upon the main subject-matter designed to be treated on in the whole epistle; so that it is the centre of this glorious part of the Scripture, wherein the first general part of it doth issue, and whereon the remaining part depends.

The church at Rome was planted some while before; but it is altogether uncertain by whom. The wisdom of God foreseeing what abuses would be made of the foundation of that church, hath hid it quite from us. There is nothing in Scripture, nothing in antiquity to intimate by whom the faith was there first preached. Probably it was by some believers of the Circumcision; whence those disputes arose and contentions about the observation of Judaical ceremonies, which the apostle handles and determines, [chap. xiv., xv. of this epistle.](#) Hearing of their faith, our apostle — upon whom, as he saith, “was the care of all the churches,” and to whom “the ministry of the Uncircumcision was in an especial manner committed,” [Gal. ii. 7, 8](#) — writes this epistle to them, to instruct them in the mystery of the gospel, and confirm them in the faith thereof, and in the worship of God required therein.

To give weight to what he wrote, and commend it to their consideration, he acquaints them with that love and care he had for them, answerable to his duty, from whence it did proceed; telling them, [verses 14, 15](#), that “he was debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So that as much as in him was, he was ready to preach the gospel to them that were at Rome also.” And hereby he prevented a prejudice and jealousy that might possess their minds, and answers an objection they might make to him about his writing. For they might say in themselves, “What makes him, a stranger, at so great a distance, interpose in our concerns? Doth he not ‘stretch himself beyond his measure,’ or ‘boast himself in another man’s line?’ ” — which he affirms in another place he did not; for he was charged with such things. His zeal carrying him out to act for the gospel in a peculiar manner, he was charged to “exceed his measure,” and “boast in another man’s line.” To obviate this, he tells them, “No; I do nothing but what becomes an honest man, discharging a debt the Lord Jesus Christ hath laid upon me by virtue of my call to my office, and my susception of it. ‘I am debtor to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; to the wise, and to the unwise.’ I am called,” saith he, “to preach the gospel to all sorts of people under

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370 This sermon was preached May 19, 1670.

heaven; my commission is to 'go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,' ” [Mark xvi. 15](#), — that is, as expounded, [Matt. xxviii. 19](#), “to all nations,” persons of all nations, — “as I have opportunity.” Our Lord Jesus Christ, out of his love and care unto them whom he had redeemed with his blood, that they might be saved, had given the apostles to be theirs, — “All things are yours; Paul is yours, Apollos is yours,” — and charged them to preach the gospel to them; so that, [Acts xx. 26, 27](#), he saith, “Now I am free from the blood of all men.” How doth he prove it? “I have not shunned to declare to them the whole counsel of God.” He frees himself from any surmise that they might have that he had a design of his own, and sought some advantage to himself in thus interposing in the concerns of the gospel, by telling them he doth but discharge a debt. “I am a debtor,” saith he. And it is truly and really the wisdom of those who, in their several spheres, have the dispensation of the gospel committed unto them, to let the people know that they need not absolutely, whatsoever they do consequentially, count themselves beholden to them for preaching the word; but that, indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ hath engaged us in a debt: which if in his name we pay and discharge, we are sure of a reward; if not, he will require it at our hands. We owe the preaching of the gospel to them that are willing to hear it; and if, upon any account, we withhold it from them, we do defraud them. “I am debtor,” saith the apostle. And every one that receiveth the gift and call from Christ is a debtor, and so should esteem himself. “I have done nothing,” saith he, “but engaged in the discharge of the debt which I owe to the souls of men.”

But there might likewise arise another objection, “If he be so concerned in the publication of the gospel that he writes an epistle to Rome, the greatest theatre then upon the earth, the head of the empire, and most eminent place in the world, why did he not come himself and preach it?” He returns an answer thereunto, [verse 15](#). “That,” saith he, “is not at present in my power. I am not my own; I am disposed of by a call of Christ, and guidance of his Spirit. But ‘I am ready to come to Rome;’ I have a readiness to preach the gospel wheresoever God calls me.”

Now, that he might not seem to have outbid himself, in speaking of going thither to preach the gospel, without considering what it might cost him, he gives them the reason and ground upon which he had so engaged himself to be ready to come to Rome, in the words of the text, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

In the words there are, —

First. A general assertion, laid down as the ground of what he had before affirmed; and that is in these words, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.”

Secondly. He gives a reason of that assertion, what made him say so, “I am not ashamed, because the gospel is the power of God.” To which reason he gives a threefold limitation:— First, As to the especial end of it, “The power of God.” Whereunto? — for this or that end in the world? No; “It is the power of God for salvation.” Secondly, He limits it in respect of the object, “The power of God unto salvation.” To all? No; but “to every one that believeth,” — to all believers, consider them either antecedently to their being made believers, or consequentially, having received the word. To others it is “foolishness;” but to us that believe, it is “the power and the wisdom of God.” Thirdly, It hath limits as to the manner of administration, “To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” The word “first” there, respects the order of dispensation, and not a priority of efficacy or excellency. The word was first to be preached to the Jews, as you know, in many places, and that for many ends not now to be insisted on. This is the design of the words.



I shall, for the opening of them, inquire into two things:— 1. What is intended by the “gospel”? 2. What is it to be “ashamed of the gospel”? After which the great reason will ensue of the apostle’s assertion, “Because it is the power of God unto salvation.”

1. What is intended by the “gospel”? The gospel is taken two ways:— (1.) Absolutely, as it is in itself; (2.) Relatively, with reference unto our practice and observance of it:—

(1.) Absolutely, and in itself; and so also it is taken two ways:—

[1.] Strictly, according to the signification of the word “good tidings,” for the good tidings of the accomplishment of the promise by the sending of Jesus Christ. The name is taken from [Isa. lii. 7](#), “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that publisheth the good tidings of the gospel.” And in this sense the apostle gives us a description of the gospel, [Acts xiii. 32, 33](#), “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again;” — sent Christ according to the promise; the tidings of which is strictly the gospel.

[2.] The gospel is taken more largely for all things that were annexed to the accomplishment of the promise, the revelation of truths made there, with all the institutions and ordinances of worship that accompanied it, — the whole doctrine and worship of the gospel. The first is what God doth for us in giving Christ; the second is what God requireth of us, in faith and obedience, and in the whole worship of the gospel. And this is the common sense wherein this word “gospel” is taken.

(2.) The gospel may be considered relatively, with reference unto believers; and then it intends our profession of the gospel: which profession consists in the performance of all gospel duties, when and as they are to be performed by virtue of the command of Christ; — which I would desire you to consider and remember; for I can assure you all your concerns in the gospel will be found to depend upon it.



It is in reference unto the gospel in both these senses that the apostle here speaks; — as it contains the promise of Christ, the doctrine of the gospel, the worship of God, the institutions therein, and every man's performance of his own duty, according to the rules and commands of Christ in the gospel. This is that which the apostle says he was “not ashamed” of.

2. What is it to be “ashamed of the gospel”? Shame in general is a grief, perturbation, and trouble of mind upon the account of things vile, foolish, or evil, rendering a man (as he thinks) liable to reproach and contempt, working a resolution in him to have no more to do with such things, if once delivered from them. As the prophet Jeremiah, [chap. ii. 26](#), “A thief is ashamed when he is taken.” Two things befall such a person:— fear, which respects his punishment; and shame, which respects the vileness and reproach of the thing that he is taken in. And shame doth particularly respect honour, esteem, and repute. Hence, if you can by any means take off the disrepute of a thing in men's judgment, they are no more ashamed of it. The world hath prevailed to take off among themselves, and within their own compass, the disrepute of as odious sins as can be committed in the world; and men cease thereupon to be ashamed of them. We meet with men that will not at all be ashamed of swearing, cursing, blaspheming, nay, of drunkenness, — scarce of uncleanness; the wickedness of the world hath taken off the disrepute of them within their own compass: yet take the same men in lying or theft, and it will fill them with shame; not but that the guilt and evil of other sins is as great, it may be greater than these, but these are under a disrepute, and therefore they are thus ashamed.

Now this shame may be considered two ways:—

(1.) Objectively, as to the things that in themselves are shameful, though men may be relieved against them, so as not to have any inward shame in their minds. So the apostle tells us, [1 Thess. ii. 2](#), that he was “shamefully entreated at Philippi;” he had all manner of shameful things done unto him. And, [Acts v. 41](#), all the apostles together “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame.” “They suffered shame, but they were not ashamed,” [Heb. vi. 6](#). It is said those apostate backsliders “put the Son of God to open shame.” They did those things unto him which in their own nature cast shame upon him; they deserted his worship and ways, as if he was not worthy to be followed. Now, our apostle was very far from thinking that nothing of this shame would befall him at Rome, that no shameful thing would befall him. He was led thither bound with a chain, and cast into prison. This is not the shame intended.

(2.) There is shame in the person. And this also may be considered two ways:—

[1.] As it merely respects the affections of the mind, before mentioned; — when persons have a trouble and confusion of mind upon them for any thing wherein they are concerned, as that which is dishonourable, base, vile, or foolish.





[2.] When there are the effects of shame; — when men act as though they were ashamed, and will have no more to do with those things wherein they have been engaged, but leave them as if ashamed. It is said of David's soldiers, who had done no shameful thing, but courageously acquitted themselves in the battle against Absalom, but because of David's carriage upon that business, "They went every one away as men ashamed, that fly in battle." It may be there is that light and conviction upon most concerning the gospel, that it is impossible for them to be brought into perfect trouble and confusion of mind about it, as though it were a shameful thing; but yet perhaps they will do like men that fly in battle and are ashamed. And in this sense the word is principally used; for saith Christ, [Mark viii. 38](#), "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of him." How is that? What will the Lord do? He will not own him; which is called being ashamed of him.

Now this is that which the apostle intends. "For the doctrine," saith he, "and worship of the gospel, and for my work in preaching and dispensing it, I have neither trouble of mind, nor will I desert it; 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.'"

But you will say, "What great matter is this? I am persuaded there is not one present but will be ready to think that they would be as forward as the apostle in this matter. Ashamed of the gospel of Christ! God forbid. What is there in it, that the apostle thus signally expresses it, that he would not be ashamed?" I answer, Pray consider these three things:—

1st. The apostle here expresses it with especial reference to his preaching and professing the gospel at Rome. "I will come to Rome also," saith he; "for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Now, there was at that time at Rome a collection of all the great, wise, and inquiring men of the world. And how did they look upon the gospel, and the profession of it? Our apostle tells you, [1 Cor. i. 23](#); — as a foolish, weak, contemptible thing. How did they look upon them that professed it? — as the filth and offscouring of all things, [1 Cor. iv. 13](#). Here is a collection of the rulers of the greatest empire of the world, — of all the wise and learned men and great philosophers, princes of the world, — all looking upon this gospel, obedience to it, and the worship of God in it, to be as foolish a thing as ever men engaged in, — fit for none but contemptible persons. But saith the apostle, notwithstanding this, "I am not ashamed of it."

And we may observe here, that there was not yet at Rome any actual persecution of the gospel, farther than shame and reproach. And the apostle declares by this word, that it is the duty of all men to gather up their spirits to confront present difficulties, whatsoever they be. It is loaded now with shame: "I am not ashamed." It will come to blood: "I will not fear my blood." He expresseth the whole in this which was his present duty. And for a person of those parts and that learning which he had, to come among all the wise men in the world, to be laughed at as a babbler, as one that came with a foolish thing in his mouth, and to say, "I am not ashamed;" — it was the presence of God with him, as well as a sense of duty, that enabled him hereunto.



2dly. To an ingenuous, gracious soul, in all sufferings nothing is more grievous than shame. Hence it is reckoned as a great part of the humiliation of Christ, that “he made himself of no reputation,” [Phil. ii. 7, 8](#). He forewent all the esteem he might have in the world as the Son of God. And [Isa. l. 6](#), “He hid not himself from shame.” So [Heb. xii. 2](#), “He despised the shame.” To be dealt withal as a vile person, as the offscouring of all things, as the “filth and dung of the city” (as the word signifies), to be carried before the face of scorners, makes a deeper impression upon gracious and ingenuous spirits than any thing else which can well be thought of. Therefore it is a great thing that the apostle saith, — “I am not ashamed of the gospel.”

3dly. There is also a figure in the word, called Litotes, — wherein, by a negation of one, the contrary is affirmed, and that emphatically, — “I am not ashamed;” that is, “I am confident; it is a thing I glory in, that I make my boast of. I am ready to do and suffer any thing, according to the mind of God, for the gospel; willing to undergo whatsoever God calls me to, or to perform any thing he hath appointed, for the gospel.”

The opening of these two things will give us ground for our observation from the words; which is this:—

*Observation.* Not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but to own it, avow it, and profess it, as a thing holy and honourable, in all the duties it requires, against all reproaches and persecutions that are in the world, is the indispensable duty of every one who desires to be saved by the gospel.

I shall not produce many testimonies of Scripture to confirm this. But let us all be advised, in such a day as this, not to make darkness our refuge, and an unacquaintedness with our duty our relief; but let us search and see what Christ hath spoken concerning such a day where there is the profession of the gospel.

I will give you one place, to which you may reduce all the rest: [Luke ix. 26](#), “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.” The whole sum of the gospel is comprised in this, — the person of Christ and the words of Christ. The person of Christ takes up the whole work of the promise; and the words take up all the commands and institutions of Christ. We have heard before what it is to be ashamed of them. And what shall be the end of such? The Son of man shall be ashamed of them, when he shall come in his own glory, and his Father’s glory. There can be no greater weight put upon words, to strike awe and dread into the minds of men. The Son of man, who loved us, redeemed us, gave his life for us, shall come again, though now he be absent, and we think things are put off for a season; and then he will inquire into our deportment about the gospel: at which time he will appear in all his own glory, the glory given him upon the account of his doing his Father’s will, and the glory of his Father and the holy angels. Certainly we should be extremely troubled then to hear Christ say, “I am ashamed of you.” You have the



same repeated, [Mark viii. 38](#). Our apostle gives the same great rule, [Rom. x. 10](#), “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” “There is righteousness; let us rest there, — what need we do more?” Ay, but “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation;” — which confession comprises all the duties the gospel requires; and salvation as indispensably depends upon that as justification doth upon faith. We cannot be justified without faith, nor can we be saved without confession.

You will say, “How can this be?” To clear it to you, I shall do three things:— I. I shall show you what there is in the gospel that we are in danger to be ashamed of, if we look not well to it. II. How we may be ashamed of it. III. I shall give you the reasons why we ought not to be ashamed of it.

I. What is there in the gospel that we ought in an especial manner not to be ashamed of?

We ought not to be ashamed of whatever is in an especial manner exposed in the world to shame and contempt. The truth is, we do or have lived in days wherein it hath been so far from being a shame to be counted a Christian, that it hath been a shame for a man to be counted no Christian. It hath not been the especial duty of believers to profess the gospel in general, but the common custom of all. The profession of the gospel which many trust to in this world, is nothing but that conformity to the world which Christ curses. In this sense no man is ashamed of the gospel.

But there are some things that accompany the gospel which are exposed at all times to contempt and reproach, even where Christ and the gospel are publicly professed; and these we are to take heed not to be ashamed of. I will give you four instances:—

1. The special truths of the gospel; 2. The special worship of the gospel; 3. The professors of the gospel; 4. The profession of the gospel according to godliness. These are things men are very apt to be ashamed of, as being all exposed to shame and contempt:— 1. There are some especial truths of the gospel that in all seasons are exposed to especial contempt and reproach. Peter ([2 Pet. i. 12](#)) calls it “The present truth;” which in the primitive times was twofold. The apostle had to do with Jews and Gentiles; and there were two especial truths exposed to contempt and reproach that he principally insisted upon, and would never forego. With the Gentiles, this was exposed to contempt, reproach, and persecution, — that there should be salvation by the cross, [1 Cor. i. 23](#). “It is foolishness to all the Gentiles,” saith he, “that there should be salvation by the cross.” What doth the apostle do? — let go this doctrine, and preach some other? No; he tells you, [chap. ii. 2](#), “he determined to know nothing among them, but Christ, and him crucified.” But when he had to do with Jews, where lay the difference? In addition of Judaical ceremonies unto the worship of God, and some place in justification. Thus, [Gal. v. 11](#), “If I preach circumcision,” says he, “why am I persecuted?” — that is, “If I preach circumcision as they do, they would persecute me no

more.” Will he do it, then? No; *Gal. vi. 12*: He will not give place; he will preach the cross of Christ, and nothing else; and preach against them, and encourage all to do so.

“How shall we know, then, what are the present truths of the gospel, that we may take care not to be ashamed of them?”

I answer, In two things:—

(1.) The first is, that we must shut our eyes very hard, or all the world will not suffer us to be unacquainted with them. A man must very much hide himself if he will not know what the truths of the gospel are that meet with contempt and reproach in the world; for he may hear of them everywhere.

(2.) For a general rule, take this: Consider the ways and methods God hath proceeded in for the manifestation and declaration of himself, and we shall find whereabouts, in the general, the truths lie that we are not to be ashamed of, if we will continue our testimony to God:—

[1.] God made a revelation of himself principally in and as the person of the Father, the unity of the divine essence acting in the authority and power of the Father in the creation of the world, in the giving of the law, and the promise of sending Christ. What was the opposition the world made unto that declaration of God? — for the world doth never make conjunct opposition to the being of God, but unto the declaration that God makes of himself. While God made that declaration under the Old Testament, what was the opposition that the world made? It was plainly in idolatry and polytheism. They would have many gods, or make gods, till he was grown among them an unknown God. The testimony, then, which the people of God were to bear, and not be ashamed to give, was the unity of the divine essence.

[2.] In the fulness of time God sent his Son; and he was immediately declared and manifested in the love and work of the Son, — the second person. Where lay the opposition of the world? It lay directly and immediately against the person of Christ, and against his cross; it would not believe that he was the Messiah, but called him “a glutton, a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” Wherein, then, consisted the testimony that believers were to give? Why, it was to the person of the Messiah, the Son of God incarnate, and to the work he had to do. God so revealing and glorifying himself in the incarnation and mediation of the Son, — the truths which concerned his person were those which men ought peculiarly not to be ashamed of, and which the world peculiarly opposed.

[3.] Where the gospel is preached, the whole work of glorifying God is committed to the Holy Ghost. Christ promised to send him to glorify him, to do the work of God in the world, and carry on all the concerns of the covenant. The Father laid the foundation of his own glory: the Son comes, and professes he came not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him; and promises to send the Holy Ghost to do his will, — to accomplish all the concerns of the covenant of grace. Wherein, then, lay the opposition of the world to God?



It lay in opposition unto the person, doctrine, graces, gifts, and office of the Holy Ghost, as he supplies the room of Christ, to carry on his kingdom in the world. The great opposition that is made in the world against God at this day is immediately against the work of the Holy Ghost, as carrying on the kingdom of Christ in the world. These are the objects of reproach and contempt.

By the way observe, that the opposition which was made by the heathens in their idolatry against the Deity, against God, and that made by the Jews against the person of Christ, and that which is now made against the work of the Holy Ghost, is all the same; the nature of the opposition is not changed, but only the object. The opposition that was in Cain, and the profession in Abel, is the same still: the one embraces the revelation of God, the other opposes it; and that principle that acts against the Holy Ghost would act against God, and set up idolatry in the world.

And hence we may see, that whereas God has, in the days wherein we live, given a great and illustrious testimony unto the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost — it may be as great as in any age since the time he gave extraordinary gifts to the apostles, — and Satan had lost the advantage of managing an opposition by open blasphemies and reproaches of the Spirit, and being somewhat impatient till it returned into his hands again, he raises up another spirit, that should stand in competition with it, and do the same thing; a spirit which, like the unclean spirit that cast him into the fire and into the water in whom he was, threw those possessed by it into all difficulties, to manifest itself. But whatsoever glory it might have put upon it in some men, by enabling them to suffer and bear the rage of the world that was cast upon them, there are three things that will discover that it is not a spirit from God:—

1st. The place from whence it comes. It comes not from above, — it is not looked for, prayed for, to be the Spirit of Christ from heaven, which he hath promised; but is a mushroom that grows up in a night, — the gourd of a night, that springs up within themselves, and is called the light within them all. Now, the Spirit that doth the work of God is promised from above, is given by Christ, and is expected and received from thence.

2dly. It is known also by its company. The Spirit which beareth witness with Christ is always accompanied with the word. *Isa. lix. 21*, “This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth,” etc. Now, the work of this spirit is to cast the word of God out of the church, — to render it useless.

3dly. It is known by its work. The work of the Spirit of God is to glorify Christ; the work of this spirit is to glorify itself, — to resolve all into itself, for measure, rule, principle, and all abilities.

I could not but mention this by the way, because I put the great opposition that is made in the world in these days against the Spirit of God, his graces and gifts, and the worship



which believers are enabled to perform by the Spirit, in this thing. And, therefore, let us try the spirits, and not believe every spirit that is gone forth.

This is the first thing we are not to be ashamed of, — namely, the truths of God that are reproached in the world, especially those concerning the Spirit, his graces and gifts, and the revelation of the mystery of the gospel, while a heathenish morality is advanced in their place. God forbid we should be ashamed of the gospel in this respect, — that every one of us should not bear his testimony, as God is pleased to call us!

2. There is the worship of the gospel, which is always exposed to reproach and contempt in the world in the due performance of it. I pray God to keep this always in our minds, that we have no other way to be ashamed of the gospel but by being ashamed of these things; and we have no other way to be ashamed of them than by neglecting the due performance of them, as the gospel commands. Men are ashamed of the worship of the gospel, — (1.) Upon the account of the worshippers; and, (2.) Upon the account of the worship itself:—

(1.) Upon the account of the worshippers, who are for the most part poor and contemptible in the world; for “not many great, not many noble, not many wise and learned are called.” Whatsoever work God hath to do by his, they are looked upon as the offscouring of all things, — such a company as those who are of gallant minds and spirits do despise. I wonder what thoughts they would have had of Christ himself, when followed by a company of fishermen, women, and children, crying “Hosanna;” and others, who said, “This people who knoweth not the law are cursed,” [John vii. 49](#). Now, is not a man apt to be ashamed of such objects as follow Christ? Shall a man leave the society of great, and wise, and learned men, to join with them? Let those think of it who are upon any account lifted up in the world above their brethren. Do not be ashamed of them; they are such as you must accompany, if ever you intend to come to glory. We must keep company with them here, if we intend it hereafter. And, therefore, be not ashamed of the worship of Christ because of the worshippers, though they can do nothing but love Christ and worship him; notwithstanding the suffrage that lies against them by great and learned men, such as were at Rome when Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

(2.) Upon the account of the worship itself. The world is, and ever was, in love with a gaudy worship, which some of them have called, being well painted, “The beauty of holiness.” The Jews and Samaritans, take them in all, — the one was for the temple, the other for the mountain. The gospel comes and calls them from them both, to worship God in spirit and in truth; — to a worship that hath no beauty but what is given by the Spirit of Christ; nor order, but what is given by the word. This is greatly despised in the world; and not only despised, but persecuted; — I mean, sometimes it was so, I am sure, formerly. Therefore the apostle gives that caution, [Heb. x. 25](#), “If you would not be ashamed, ‘forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.’ ” There is a synecdoche in the word “assembling,” and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was per-

formed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ: as some of them did when exposed to danger; and it is the manner of some still to do so. When a fair day comes, then they will go to the assemblies; but in a storm they will absent themselves, as did the Samaritans. But what should move them to forsake their assembling? He tells you, [verses 33, 34](#), “Ye were made a gazing-stock, by reproaches and afflictions, and the spoiling of your goods. But ye know in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” This made some weary of assembling; but be not you ashamed of assembling, or of the worship of God. This is the second thing that is exposed to shame and reproach in the world; and which, in particular, we are bound by our profession not to be ashamed of.

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### **Sermon XVIII.**<sup>371</sup>

3. We are not to be ashamed of the professors of the gospel. Our Lord Christ hath laid it down as an everlasting rule, that in them he is honoured or dishonoured in the world. And it is the great rule whereby false professors will be tried at the last day, — men who pretend a profession of the name of Christ; as you may see, [Matt. xxv. 40, 45](#), “What you have done unto them, you have done unto me,” saith he; “and what you have omitted that ought to have been done to them, you have omitted the doing of it unto me.” It is those alone in whom Christ may be honoured or despised in this world; for he is in himself, in his own person, in that condition that our goodness, our honour, extends not immediately unto him: and for the contempt and despising of men, he is not concerned in it. Hence this is reckoned as the great commendation of the faith of Moses, [Heb. xi. 23–26](#), that he refused all the honours of the world, and all the reputation he might have had, to own and esteem the poor, reproached, despised, persecuted interest of Christ in the world; as he there calls it. He joined himself unto the professors of the faith, in opposition to all the world, and the greatness of it; which was his greatest commendation. And see the pathetic prayer of the apostle Paul for Onesiphorus upon the discharge of this duty, [2 Tim. i. 16–18](#), “The Lord,” saith he, “give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.” Onesiphorus was a man of some credit and repute in the world; poor Paul was a prisoner bound with a chain, that he might have been ashamed to own him: but, instead of that, he sought him out; he was not ashamed of his chain. To be ashamed of the poor professors of the gospel, — so in themselves, or made so by the power of oppressors, — is to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, his truths, his worship, and his people.

4. There is a special kind of profession, that, in its own nature, is exposed to reproach in the world. The apostle Paul tells us, [2 Tim. iii. 12](#), “They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” There is ([John xv. 4, 5](#)) a being in Christ by profession, and not living godly: for there are branches in the vine by profession, that bring forth no fruit; — men that have a profession wherewith they do not trouble the world, and for which the world will not trouble them; — that can go to that length in compliance with the world, and the ways of it, as that they shall not have one drop of the spirit of the witnesses of Christ, who torment the men of the earth. But “they that will live godly,” — that is, engage in a profession that shall, upon all occasions, and in all instances, manifest the power of it, — they “shall suffer persecution.” We see many every day keep up a profession, but such a profession as will not provoke the world. Now, this is to be ashamed of the gospel, — to be



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371 This sermon was preached May 26, 1670.



ashamed of the power and glory of it, — to be ashamed of the Author of it. No man can put Jesus Christ to greater shame, than by professing the gospel without showing the power of it.

III.<sup>372</sup> I shall now give the reasons why we ought not in any thing to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I speak unto persons that are under a conviction that such and such things belong unto the gospel. If we are not, what makes us here this day? I do not go to persuade any that this or that worship, or this or that way, is according to the gospel; but I suppose a conviction thereof to be upon us: upon a supposition of which conviction and persuasion I shall offer these reasons why we ought not to be ashamed of the gospel. And, —

1. The first is this:— Because Christ, the captain of our salvation, and the great example of our obedience, was not ashamed of all that he had to undergo for us.

There are two things that greatly aggravate things shameful, and press, if possible, shame upon a person:—

(1.) The dignity of the person that is exposed to things shameful. It is more for a person honourable, noble, and in repute for wisdom in the world, to be exposed to indignities, reproaches, and things shameful, as the apostle speaks, than for beggars, — poor vile persons of no repute. Now, consider the person of Christ, who he was, and what he was. He was the eternal Son of God, the “first-born of the whole creation:” and as, in his divine nature, he was “the express” (the essential) “image of the Father;” so in his whole person, as incarnate, he was the glory of all the works of God. And the apostle, when he would set out the great condescension of Christ in submitting unto things shameful, doth at the same time describe the greatness and glory of his person, [Phil. ii. 6–8](#), “He made himself,” says he, “of no reputation; he took upon him the form of a servant, and he was obedient unto the death of the cross;” which three things, as could show you, are comprehensive of all that was shameful to Christ. But at the same time that he tells us what he did, how doth he describe him? When he did so, he was “in the form of God, and accounted it no robbery to be equal with God.” He was the great God in his own person, and equal with the Father; yet then this honourable one condescended to all things shameful and reproachful in the world.

(2.) Shame is aggravated from the causes and matter of it. There are various things that cause shame. Some are put to shame by reproaches, scandals, lies; some, by poverty; some, by imprisonment; and some, by death, made shameful by the ways, means, and preparations for it. By which of these was Christ now made an object of shame? By all of them, and inconceivably more than any heart is able to apprehend, or tongue to express. He was reproached as wine-bibber and a glutton; as a seditious person and mover of sedition; as a fanatic, and

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372 This sermon, according to the method announced, p. 224, is given under a threefold division. The second branch of the subject has either been omitted, or, what is more probable, to judge from the strain of the author’s remarks, the illustration of the second is merged and contained in the first branch. — Ed.

one beside himself. He was in that state of poverty, that, during the whole course of his ministry, he had not where to lay his head, nor any thing to live upon, but what good people administered unto him of their substance. In the midst of this course he was taken praying; when, he told them, they might have taken him at any time. "I was," says he, "in the temple openly; I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me." He was taken by soldiers with swords and staves, as a thief and malefactor; apprehended, carried away, and hanged upon a tree (the shamefulest death then in the world), in the midst of Jews and Gentiles; — with both which sorts of men that kind of death was the most shameful. The Romans put none to that sort of death but slaves, thieves and robbers, — the worst malefactors: and among the Jews it was the only kind of death that was accursed, [Deut. xxi. 23](#), "He that is hanged on the tree is accursed of God;" — which words our apostle repeats, and applies them to Christ, [Gal. iii. 13](#). How did Christ behave himself now, as to all these shameful things that came upon him? Hear the prophet expressing of it in his name, [Isa. l. 6, 7](#), "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair" (the usual way of dealing with persons in such cases); "I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: I know that I shall not be ashamed." Did he recoil, or go back from his work did he repent of it? No; "Thy law is written in my heart; I am content 'to do thy will, O God.'" And in the issue of the whole, [Heb. xii. 2](#), "He despised the shame, and endured the cross;" which made way for his glory.

Now, here lies the foundation of our reason:— If the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, — being engaged purely out of his own love in a work for us poor, vile, sinful worms of the earth, whom he might have left justly to perish under the wrath of God, which we had deserved, — underwent all these shameful things, and never had a recoiling thought to draw back and leave us to ourselves; have we not an obligation of love, gratitude, and obedience, not to be ashamed of those few drops of this great storm that may possibly fall upon us in this world for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we be disciples of Christ, and yet think in this matter to be above our Master? Can we be his servants, and think to be above our Lord? We are delicate and tender, and would fain have all men speak well of us; but we must come to another frame, if we intend to be the disciples of Christ. What would be the issue of our account at the last day, if he should inquire of us what we have done in reference to the profession of the gospel? whether we have observed all those duties that we have had a conviction upon our spirits and consciences we ought to observe and perform, in the assembling of ourselves, in the dispensation of the word, in the celebration of ordinances, in prayer, fasting, hearing the word, and all those things which the gospel requires of us? Should we make that answer, "Truly, Lord, we thought all very good; but were afraid, if we engaged in them, we should have been exposed to all the reproach, contempt, and trouble in the world: it would have brought trouble upon our persons, and the spoiling of our goods; it would have brought us into great distress." What would then be the reply, according to the

rule of the gospel, but, “Stand upon your own bottom. That was my day, these were things I required of you: you were ashamed of me; I am now ashamed of you”? Certainly this would be a woeful issue of it. But, —

2. The second reason is this:— That whatsoever state or condition we may be brought into, upon the account of the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ will not be ashamed of us in that state and condition. I told you before, in the opening of the words, that shame principally respects dishonour and disreputation; that the things we are engaged in are vile, contemptible, exposed to reproach. Now if a man, in any thing he is called in question about, have those who are great and honourable to abide by him, and own the cause wherein he is engaged, whatever other affections he may have, it will take off his shame. Now, this great and honourable person will not be ashamed of us in any condition, [Heb. ii. 11](#), “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” “But suppose they are poor, and have nothing left them in this world?” It is all one. “Suppose they are in prison?” Christ will stand by them, and say, “These are my brethren.” The word ἐπαισχύνεται, “ashamed,” is there used peculiarly in respect to those shameful things that may befall us in this world. Notwithstanding all these sufferings, yet “he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” “Doth he go no farther?” Yes: [Heb. xi. 16](#), “Wherefore” (speaking directly to this cause in hand) “God is not ashamed to be called their God.” What is the reason it is so expressed? The words are emphatical. Look upon the two parties that are in the world; — the one great, wise, glorious, powerful, and at liberty; the other poor, despised, contemned all the world over. God comes into the world and sees these two parties. Which, now, do you think he owns? Is it not a shame for the great and glorious God to own poor, despised, contemned, reproached, persecuted ones? No: God “is not ashamed to be called their God;” their God in particular, their God in covenant, one that owns them in opposition to all the world, — with whom they have to conflict. Oh, that we would persuade our hearts in every duty that this is our state, — that Jesus Christ stands by, and saith, “I am not ashamed of you!” God stands by, and saith, “I am not ashamed to be owned to be your God!” Is not this great encouragement?

3. The third reason is, — Because in the profession of the gospel we are called to nothing at all that is shameful in the judgment of any sober, wise, rational, judicious man. If the profession of the gospel called us unto any thing that is vile, dishonourable, unholy, of ill report among men, certainly we had reason to be extremely cautious of our practising of it. But is it any shame to own God to be our God, to own Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Master, — to profess we must yield obedience unto the commands of Christ? Is there any shame in praying, in hearing of the word of God, in preaching of it according to his mind and will? Is there any shame in fasting, in godly conference? Let all the world be judge whether there be any thing shameful in these things, which are good, useful, honourable to all mankind. The gospel calls to nothing that is shameful. Therefore the old heathens were so wise that they would not, against the light of nature, oppress the assemblies of Christians,

where there was nothing shameful; and therefore they charged all shameful things upon them. The whole vogue of the world was, that they met together to further promiscuous lusts and seditions. They made that their pretence; they durst not disturb them merely upon the account of their profession. And it is so still. Men little know that we will not, dare not, cannot, take the name of our God, in vain, and prostitute any ordinance of God, to give the least semblance to any seditious practice. Whatsoever violence may come upon the disciples of Christ, they had rather die than prostitute an ordinance of Christ, to give the least countenance or semblance to any such thing. The gospel calls us to nothing that hath any reproach in it. If men will esteem the strict profession of the gospel — praying, hearing the word, abstinence from sin — to be shameful things; if they will count it strange that we run not out into the same excess of riot with themselves; shall we stand to the judgment of such sensualists, that live in a perpetual contradiction to themselves, — who profess that they honour Christ, and at the same time reproach every thing of Christ in the world? We have no reason, then, to be ashamed of the gospel, which requires no shameful thing at our hands, — nothing that is evil and hurtful to mankind; nothing but what is good, holy, beautiful, commendable, and useful unto all societies of mankind. And we dare not prostitute the least part of an ordinance to the encouraging any disorder in this world, and therein take the name of our God in vain.

4. The fourth reason is that which the apostle gives us, [Heb. xii. 1](#), “We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,” to this very end and purpose. In [the preceding chapter](#) he had given a catalogue of many under the Old Testament, patriarchs and prophets (time would have failed him to reckon up all), who signally manifested they were not ashamed of the gospel, and the promises of it, whatever difficulties did befall them. “And now,” saith the apostle, “you have ‘a cloud of witnesses,’ — the great examples of those holy souls that are now at rest with God, enjoying the triumphs of Christ over all his adversaries. They were, as you are, conflicting in this world with reproaches, adversaries, persecution; and they had this issue by faith, — they made conquest over all.” And James says, “You have, my brethren, the prophets and apostles for your examples.” The Lord help us, to take the example they have set us, [Acts v. 41](#), when they went away triumphing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for the name of Christ! The Lord help us, that we dishonour not the gospel by giving the world reason to say, that there is a race of professors risen up now who have no manner of conformity to them who went before them in the profession of the gospel!

5. The next reason I shall insist upon is taken out of the text, the particular reason the apostle here gives why he was not ashamed of it. “I am not ashamed,” saith he, “of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to all that believe.” We talk of profession of the gospel. “What is it,” say some, “but canting among yourselves, — speaking things unintelligible?” Such kind of expressions are cast upon it in the world. But, saith the apostle,

“This gospel we profess is quite another thing than you dream or think of; and we profess it no other, nor ever will engage one day in the profession of the gospel any farther, than as it comes under this account, that ‘it is the power of God unto salvation.’” Manifest to me that any way or parcel of the gospel which we do profess, or practice, hath not the power of God in it and upon it, towards the furtherance of salvation, and I will throw off that profession.

But you will ask, perhaps, “In what sense is the gospel the power of God?” I answer, In a threefold sense:—

(1.) Negatively: there is not any other power in it. The world saw that there was a great efficacy in the gospel, and they knew not whence it was; but they charged it upon two things:— First, Upon the matter of it, that it was a cunningly-devised fable. So the apostle Peter tells us, [2 Pet. i. 16](#), “We have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known unto you the power of Christ.” The world charged it so, and thought that gave it its efficacy. Secondly, There was another thing to which they thought its efficacy was owing, and that was the eloquence and power of its preachers. “The preachers of it were surely eloquent, excellent men, that they could so prevail upon the people, and win them over to the gospel.” No; saith the apostle, [2 Cor. ii. 4, 5](#), “My speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” But let not men mistake; the efficacy of the gospel is owing to neither of these causes, but to the divine power that accompanies it.

(2.) It was the power of God declaratively; it made known the power of God. So our apostle declares in the very next words to the text. “For therein,” saith he, “is the righteousness of God revealed.” It hath made a revelation of the way whereby God will save men. It makes a revelation of that power which God puts forth for the salvation of men.

(3.) It is the power of God instrumentally. It is the instrument God puts forth to effect his great and mighty works in the world. Preaching is looked upon as a very foolish thing in the world. “We preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks foolishness,” [1 Cor. i. 23](#). But God hath chosen this foolish thing to confound the wise. And though the preachers of it are very weak men, mere earthen vessels, God hath chosen this weak thing to bring to nought things that are strong and mighty, — the things of this world. Therefore ([Acts xx. 32](#)) it is called “The word of God’s grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” The plain preaching of it hath this power upon the souls of men, — to convince them, convert them, draw them home to God; to expose them to all troubles in this world; to make them let go their reputation and livelihood, and expose themselves even to death itself. It is the power of God to these ends and purposes; God hath

made it his instrument for that end. If it were the power of God to give peace and prosperity unto a nation, or to heal the sick, there is no man need or ought to be ashamed of it; but to be the power of God for so excellent an end as the eternal salvation of the souls of men, makes it much more glorious. The gospel we profess, — all the parts of it, every thing wherein it is engaged, — is that whereby God puts forth his power to save our poor souls, and the souls of them who believe; and the Lord God never lay it to the charge of any who would hinder the dispensation of the gospel unto this end and purpose! It were sad for men to keep corn from the poor, physic from the sick, that lie a-dying; but to keep the word of God from the souls of men, that they might be saved, Lord, lay it not to the charge of any!

The Author of the gospel was not ashamed of his work he engaged in on our behalf; is not ashamed of us in any of our sufferings, in any of the shameful things we may undergo. The gospel requires no shameful thing at our hands, — puts us upon no duty that can justly expose us to shame; the things are good, useful, honourable to men. We have a cloud of witnesses about us; and if any man require of us what this gospel is which we profess, and an account whereupon we profess it, we can make this answer, “ ‘It is the power of God unto salvation;’ and for that end alone do we profess it.”

I might speak to some farther reasons, to show why this duty is indispensably necessary; for, as I said, it is not only that we ought not to be ashamed, but the duty is indispensable. And I thought to have spoken to those two heads, which alone make a duty indispensable, that we may not upon any account be against it; — because it is necessary, as we say, “*necessitate præcepti*,” and likewise “*necessitate medii*,” that is, both *upon the command of Christ*, and *upon the account of the order of the things themselves*.

It is necessary upon the command of Christ, because he hath required it at our hands; and under that condition, that if ever we intend to be owned by him at the last day, we should own his gospel in the profession of it. All the world, and all our own things, and all the injunctions of the sons of men, cannot give a dispensation to our souls to exempt them from under the authority of the commands of Christ. Let us look unto ourselves; we are under the commands of Christ, and there is no one particular duty to be avoided but what must be accommodated to this rule. And not only so, —

But it is necessary also from the order of things: Christ hath appointed it as a means for that great end of bringing our souls to salvation. As well may a man arrive to a city, and never come into the way that leads unto it, as we go to rest with Christ, and never come to the profession of the gospel, nor abide by it: this is the way that leads unto it.

I have done with what I thought to deliver upon this doctrine; and among many uses that might be made, I shall only commend one unto you; without which it will be utterly impossible that any of us shall be able, at the long-run, to keep up to the profession of the gospel, or any duty of it. And that is this:—

*Use.* Get an experience of the power of the gospel, and all the ordinances of it, in and upon your own hearts, or all your profession is an expiring thing; — unless, I say, you find the power of God upon your own hearts in every ordinance, expect not any continuance in your profession. If the preaching of the word be not effectual unto the renewing of your souls, the illuminating of your minds, the endearing of your hearts to God, — if you do not find power in it, you will quickly reason with yourselves upon what account should you adventure trouble and reproach for it.

If you have an experience of this power upon your hearts, it will recover all your recoiling, wandering thoughts, when you find you cannot live without it. It is so as to every ordinance whatever; unless we can have some experience of the benefit of it, and of the power and efficacy of the grace of God in it, we can never expect to abide in our profession of it. What will you bear witness unto? an empty, bare profession, that neither honoureth God nor doth good to your own souls?

If you would, then, be established in this truth, of not being ashamed of the gospel, recall to your minds what benefit you have received by it. Have you received any advantage by hearing the word? hath it at any time restored your souls when you have been wandering? hath it comforted you when you have been cast down? hath it engaged your hearts unto God? Recall to mind what benefit and advantage you have had by it; and then ask what it hath done, that now you should forsake it. And in every ordinance that you are made partakers of, inquire diligently what power of God upon your own hearts goes forth in the dispensation of that ordinance. This will confirm and strengthen you; and without this all your profession is vain, and will signify nothing.

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## Sermon XIX. God the saints' rock.<sup>373</sup>

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” — [Ps. lxi. 2.](#)

There are two things in the words:— First, The state wherein the psalmist was. Secondly, The course that he steered in that state.

His estate is doubly expressed:— 1. From the place where he was, — “From the end of the earth;” and, 2. From the condition he was in, — “His heart was overwhelmed.”

And in the course he steered there are two things also:— 1. The manner of it, — “He cried unto the Lord.” 2. The matter of that cry, — “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

First. There is the state wherein he was. And, —

1. The first description of it (for both parts are metaphorical) is from the place where he was, — “The end of the earth.” Now, this may be taken two ways:— either naturally, and then it is an allusion to men that are far distant and remote from help, relief, and comfort; or, as I may say, ecclesiastically, with reference to the temple of God, which was “*in medio terræ*,” — “in the midst and heart of the land,” where God manifested and gave tokens of his gracious presence and favour: as if he had said, “I am at the end of the earth; far from any tokens, pledges, or manifestations of the love and favour of God, as well as from outward help and assistance.”

2. The second description of his state is, that “his heart was overwhelmed.” Wherein we have two things:—

(1.) A confluence of calamities and distresses. (2.) The effect they had upon him; — his heart was overwhelmed, and fainted under them. As long as the heart will hold up, they may be borne, — “The spirit of a man will bear his infirmity;” but when “the spirit is wounded,” and the heart faints, a confluence of calamities greatly oppresses.

What is meant by “overwhelmed,” himself declares in another place, [Ps. cii.](#) The title of the psalm is, “A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed.” And he describes that condition in the psalm itself, [verses 3, 4](#), etc., “My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top. Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.” To be overwhelmed, is to be under a confluence of all manner of distressing

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373 This sermon was preached November 11, 1670.



calamities. [Ps. cxlii. 3, 4](#), he describes again what it is to be overwhelmed: "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." So that to have a confluence of manifold distresses, with an eye to the indignation of God as the spring of those distresses, until the spirit sink and faint under it, is to have the heart overwhelmed. This is his state and condition.

Secondly. The course he takes in this state, as we have already observed, is also doubly expressed:—

1. In the manner of it. "I cried," saith he, "unto thee." The word is frequently used in this case in Scripture; and it is naturally expressive of the principal actings of faith in a distressed condition.

There are four things that faith will do in a condition of distress in believers; and they are all of them comprised in this expression, "I cried:" —

(1.) It will make the heart sensible of the affliction. God abhors the proud and the stubborn, that think by their own spirits to bear up under their pressures. [Isa. xlvi. 12](#), "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness." Persons that think to bear themselves up, when God dealeth with them, by their stout heart, are such whom, of all others, God most despises and abhors: they are "far from righteousness." Now, crying doth include a sense of evils and pressures the soul is exercised withal, and that we do not despise God when we are chastened, as well as that we do not utterly faint, but cry unto the Lord.

(2.) The next act of faith is a holy complaint unto God in such a state and condition. So the psalmist tells us, [Ps. cii.](#), "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord." He often mentions "his complaint, coming with his complaint unto the Lord." And God takes nothing more kindly than when we come to him with our complaints; not repining at them, but spreading them before the Lord, as from whom alone we expect relief: for it declares we believe God concerns himself in our state and condition. There is no man so foolish, whatsoever he suffers, as to go unto them with his complaints whom he supposes are not concerned in him, nor have any compassion for him. It is a professing unto God that we believe he is concerned in our condition, when we cry unto him, and pour out before him our complaints.

(3.) There is in it an endeavour to approach unto God; as you do when you cry after one whom you see at a distance, and are afraid he will go farther from you. It is the great work of faith to cry out after God at a distance, when you are afraid lest at the next turn he should be quite out of sight. Crying to the Lord, supposes him to be withdrawing or departing.

(4.) There is earnestness in it. It is expressive of the greatest earnestness of spirit we can use, when we cry out in any case.

Thus he behaves himself during the condition described:— He had a sense of his distress; he makes his complaint unto the Lord; he cries out after him, for fear he should withdraw himself, and that with earnestness, that God might come in to his help.

2. The matter of it is, — that God would “lead him to the rock;” that is, that God would give him an access unto himself by Jesus Christ, in whom God is our rock and our refuge in all our distresses; that he would but open a way through all his dark and overwhelming entanglements, that he might come unto himself, there to issue the troubles and perplexities that he was exercised withal.

That which I would speak to you, from the words thus opened, is this:—

*Observation.* In the most overwhelming, calamitous distresses that may befall a believing soul, faith still eyes a reserve in God, and delights to break through all to come unto him; though, at the same time, it looks upon God as the author of those calamities.

I have told you before, in the opening of the words, what I intend by these overwhelming distresses. They are of two sorts; inward and outward:—

First. Inward, in perplexities upon the soul and conscience about sin; when the soul is in darkness, and hath no apprehension of any ground upon which it may have acceptance with God; when it is pressed with the guilt of sin, and abides in darkness upon that account, and hath no light.

Secondly. Outward; and these are of two sorts:—

1. Private; in afflictions, losses, sickness, pains, poverty, either as to ourselves or those who are near unto us, and wherein we are concerned. These may sometimes have such an edge put upon them as to prove overwhelming.

2. Public, in reference unto the church of God; when that is in great distress, when there is no prospect of relief, no beam of light; when the summer is past, and the harvest ended, — expectations come to an issue, and no relief ensues. This is an overwhelming distress to them whose hearts are in the ways of God, and have a concern in his glory, — when Zion is in the dust, and the bones of the children of Zion lie scattered like wood upon the face of the earth.

These are the heads of overwhelming distresses. And I say, faith looks upon them as proceeding from God. Is the soul in distress upon the account of sin? They are God's rebukes, God's arrows; — it is God that hath caused this darkness. Is it troubled or pressed upon the account of afflictions or dangers? “Affliction,” saith faith, “doth not spring out of the earth, or troubles from the ground; — these things are from God.” Is it with respect unto the church of God? “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?” Is it not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? It is, therefore, his wrath and indignation in all these things. Yet, notwithstanding this, faith will look through all, and make a reserve in God himself.

I shall, — I. Give some instances of this. II. Show the grounds of it. III. Come to that which I chiefly intend; namely, to discover what it is in God that in such an overwhelming condition faith can see and fix upon to give it support and relief. IV. Show how this differs from that general reserve which the nature of man is apt to take in his thoughts of God in distress.

I. I am to give some instances. And we have a very remarkable instance of this in Jonah, who tells us, [chap. ii. 2](#), that he was in “the belly of hell.” Hell in Scripture, when it is applied to the things of this world, doth intend the depth of temporal evils; as in [Ps. xviii. 4](#), “The sorrows of hell compassed me,” saith David, speaking of the time of his affliction and persecution under Saul. And “the belly of hell” must needs be the darkness and confusion of all those calamitous distresses. Where did Jonah (viewing himself in this condition) look for the cause from whence it did proceed? He tells us, [verse 3](#), “For thou hast cast me into the deep.” He knew the occasion of it was his own sinful forwardness; the instrumental cause, — the mariners, upon his own persuasion; but he refers it all to the principal cause, God himself: “Thou hast cast me into the deep.” And how did this affect him? [Verse 7](#), “My soul fainted within me.” What relief then had he? [Verses 5, 6](#), “The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever.” No manner of relief, support, or succour to be expected! What did he do in this case? He tells presently. “My prayer came in unto thee,” saith he, looking upon God as him who had cast him into this condition; his eye was to him. David gives us several instances of it in himself. Once, I acknowledge, he was mistaken in his course. He tells us so. [Ps. lv. 3–5](#), he had described the overwhelming condition wherein he was. And what course doth he take? [Verse 6](#), “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest; I would wander far off, and be in the wilderness” “O that I was gone from the midst of all these perplexities, — that I was rid of those that are ready to overwhelm me!” But this was not a right course. I might give innumerable instances of the contrary. [Ps. xxxi. 9, 10](#), etc., is a description of as sad a condition as any man can fall into, and which is accompanied with a great sense of God’s displeasure, and of his own sin. [Verse 10](#), “My strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.” What course doth he then take? [Verse 14](#), “But I trusted in thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my God.” “When my strength failed because of mine iniquities, and my bones were consumed; when there was nothing but distress round about me, and that from God, yet then ‘I trusted in thee, and said, Thou art my God.’” And this is what God himself invites us unto. [Isa. xl. 27](#), there is a complaint made by Jacob, “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.” We have but two things wherein we are concerned in this world, as we are professors of the gospel; and they are, — our way, and our judgment. Our “way;” that is, the course of obedience and profession which, according to the truth, we are engaged in; as believing in Christ is called a “way.”

“My way of faith, my way of worship, my way of obedience, is hid from the Lord; God takes no notice of it;” which is as much as to say, “My all in the things of God is at a loss: God takes no notice of my way.” Should that be our condition, really we should be of all men most miserable. But there is also our “judgment;” that is, the judgment that is to be passed upon our cause and way, which David doth so often pray about when he begs that God would “judge him in his righteousness.” Now saith the church here, “God takes no notice of it, but hath put off the cause to the world. My judgment is passed over, determined for me no more; but he lets me suffer under the judgment of the world.” And truly, when our way and judgment is passed over, — profession and obedience as it were hid from God, — God takes no notice of them. And when he puts off the judgment and determination of our cause, what have we more in the world? What doth God now propose to them for their relief? what promises, what encouragements, will he remind them of? Nothing but himself. [Verse 28](#), “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” God calls them to consider him in his own nature and being, with those glorious acts suited thereunto. He calls our faith to look for rest in himself alone. It is impossible thy way and thy judgment should thus pass over from him, because he is “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator.”

II. I come now to the grounds of it, — whence it is that faith doth this. And that is upon a twofold account:— 1. Because it knows how to distinguish between the nature of the covenant and the external administration of it. 2. Because it is natural to faith so to do; and that upon a double account, as we shall see presently:—

1. Faith doth this, because it is able to distinguish between the covenant itself, which is firm, stable, invariable; and the administration of the covenant, which is various and changeable, — I mean the outward administration of it. And this God teaches us, [Ps. lxxxix. 30–34](#), “If his children” the children of Jesus Christ — “forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.” The covenant of God shall stand firm and unalterable, then, when the rod and the stripes of men are upon our backs. In the midst of all God’s visiting for iniquity, whether by internal rebukes or outward chastisements, yet faith sees the covenant stable; and so makes unto God upon that account. David, when he comes to die, gives it as the sum of all his observation, that the covenant was immutable, but the outward administration various, [2 Sam. xxiii. 5](#), “Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” “However God doth deal with my house, whatever misery is brought upon us, yet the covenant itself is everlasting; ‘ordered in all things, and sure.’ ” Whatever misery and distress

may fall upon a believing soul (and I pray God help me to believe it, as well as to say it), — whatever darkness or temptation he may be exercised withal upon the account of sin — whatever pressure, in afflictions, persecutions, dangers, may befall him — they all belong unto God's covenant dispensation in dealing with him. For God being his God in covenant, he acts according to the covenant in all things. Hence saith Hezekiah, [Isa. xxxviii. 16](#), "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." What are these things? Why, saith he, "I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones; from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it; I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." One would think the next words would be, "By these things men die." No; but, "By these things believers live, and in all these things is the life of my soul" because they are all administered from the invariable covenant for the good of the souls of them who are exercised with them. Now, as God is pleased to declare himself, so is the soul to think of God in these dispensations of the covenant. Doth God hide his face, and leave the soul to darkness? — in darkness it must be. [Job xxxiv. 29](#), "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?" Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only, — be it against one person, or the whole church of God, — if he hides his face, and causeth darkness, none can behold him. When God chastens us, we cannot but look upon him as angry; when he gives us up into the hands of men, hard masters, we cannot but look upon it as a token of his displeasure. When God doth thus in his outward dispensation of the covenant, so that all things are dark, and show nothing but displeasure; and we are to look upon him as a God that hideth himself, and is displeased with us, and exercising anger towards us; — in such a day what shall the soul then do? Why, under all these outward tokens of God's displeasure, faith will, though but weak and faint, work through unto God himself, as invariable in his covenant; and there have a reserve in him beyond them all. [Ps. xcvi. 2](#), "Clouds and darkness are round about him; but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." "I confess I have clouds and darkness round about me; but if I could but break through these clouds and darkness, that are the consequents of God's hiding his face, and come to his throne, there is righteousness and judgment, — that righteousness and judgment wherein he hath betrothed me unto himself in covenant," [Hos. ii. 19](#). "Could I get through this darkness of mind, this pressure upon my spirit, this sense of guilt, and come unto his throne; there I should find him faithful and stable in his promises, and unalterable in his love." Now, suppose a person to have all these things upon him at once, — that God hath left him to a great sense of sin (for our troubles about sin are not according to the greatness of our sin, but to the sense God will let in upon us; and they are not to be reckoned the greatest sinners who are most troubled for their sin), and his troubles are very great; and at the same time the Lord, in his providential dispensation, is pleased to exercise him in sharp afflictions; and if at the same time his interest and concern-

ment in the people of God is likewise in darkness and distress, that there is no relief in that neither, — to such a one there are clouds and darkness round about God. What then will faith do, in such a case? Why, true faith will secretly work through all to the throne of God, where there is righteousness, and judgment, and acceptance with him. So it is said, [Isa. viii. 17](#), “I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.” The face of God is his love in Christ, and the shining of his countenance in the promises of the covenant; for the way whereby God communicates his love unto our hearts, is by his promises. Now, when the soul is sensible of no communication of love, nor promise of it, then God is said to hide his face. What will faith do in such a case? — betake itself unto any thing else for relief? No; saith he, “I will wait upon God, that hideth his face.” As a traveller, when the sky is filled with clouds and darkness, tempests and storms, that are ready to break upon him everywhere, yet remembers that these are but interpositions, and the sun is where it was; and if he can but shelter himself till the storm be over, the sun will shine out again, and its beams refresh him: so is it with the soul in this case; it remembers God is still where he was. “Though there are clouds within, and distresses without, — sorrow, and anguish, and fears round about us, and the enemy enters into the very soul; yet the sun is where it was still, — God will hide us where we may abide till this indignation be overpast, and the light of his countenance will yet shine upon me again.” Faith considers God in the midst of all his various administrations; and so finds a way for relief.

2. Faith will naturally thus act, as it is the principle of the new nature in us, that came from God, and will tend unto him, whatever difficulties lie in the way.

Evangelical faith will have a secret double tendency to God:—

(1.) Upon that necessary respect which it indispensably and uncontrollably hath to Jesus Christ; for it being the purchase of Christ, and wrought in us by his Spirit, and being the product and travail of the soul of Christ, it hath a natural tendency unto him, [1 Pet. i. 21](#), “Who by him do believe in God,” — by Christ as mediator, as our surety, undertaking for us; — so that let what will overwhelm the soul, where there is but the least faith, it will have relief in this, that Christ was substituted in its room against all real indignation and wrath from God. The father of the faithful was once reduced to great distress, — when he had lifted up his knife to the throat of his only son: but when destruction lies so near at the door, a voice called to him from heaven, and stopped him; and he looked behind him, and saw a ram caught for a sacrifice to God. When many a poor soul hath the knife at the throat of all his consolations, ready to die away, he hears a voice behind him, that makes him look and see Christ provided for him, as a substituted sacrifice in his room.

(2.) The new creature is the child of God, whereof faith is the principle. It is begotten of God, of his own will; and so, against all interpositions and difficulties whatsoever, is tending to him.



III. I now proceed to show what it is that, in such an overwhelming condition as I have described, faith regards in God to give it a support and relief, that it be not utterly swallowed up and overwhelmed. And, —

1. The first thing faith considers, in such a condition, is, the nature of God himself and his excellencies. This is that which God, in the first place, proposes for our relief, [Hos. xi. 9](#), “I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim.” What reason doth he give to assure us that he will not? “For,” saith he, “I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee.” He proposes his own nature to our faith, to confirm us that, whatever our expectations be, he will not execute the fierceness of his wrath; and he reproaches them who put their trust in any thing that is not God by nature. So [Deut. xxxii. 21](#), “They have provoked me with that which is not God.” And he curseth him “that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,” [Jer. xvii. 5](#). But he proposes himself for our trust, — one of infinite goodness, grace, bounty, and patience.

Now, there are two ways whereby God proposes his nature, and the consideration of it, for the relief of faith in overwhelming distresses:—

(1.) By his name. The name of God is God himself, [Ps. ix. 10](#), “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee;” that is, “They that know thee.” Whatsoever the word itself signifies, yet it is the nature of God that is declared by his name. And you know how he doth invite and encourage us to trust in the name of God: “The name of God is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe,” [Prov. xviii. 10](#). [Isa. l. 10](#), “Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” The name of the Lord, is what he declares himself to be, “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,” [Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7](#). Here he reveals and declares his name. God proposes his name, and the declaration of it, against the working of unbelief; which apprehends that he is severe, wrathful, — that he watcheth for our halting, treasures up every failing and sin to be avenged of it, and that he will do it in fury. No: saith God, “Fury is not in me,” [Isa. xxvii. 4](#). The Lord is good and gracious, as appears by his name, especially as revealed in Christ; so that faith will find secret encouragement in it in all distresses.

By the way, hence you may observe, that God in former days, whilst revelation was under a progress, and he revealed himself by little and little, did still give out his name according as the state and condition of his church and people required; because he called them to trust in his name. How did he reveal himself unto Abraham? He tells you, [Exod. vi. 3](#), “I revealed myself unto Abraham by the name of God Almighty.” So, [Gen. xvii. 1](#), he says to him, “I am the Almighty God.” And he gives an explication of that name, [chap. xv. 1](#), “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Abraham was in a state and condition wherein he wanted protection in the world; for he was a stranger, and wandered up and down among strange nations, that were stronger than he, and such as he might fear destruction from



every day. "Fear not," saith God, "for I am God Almighty; I am thy shield." And in the faith of this did Abraham travel among the nations. And at that time he had no child. What end, then, should he have of all his labour and travel? Why, saith God, "I am thy reward." And [Gen. xiv.](#), where there is a discourse about the nations of the world, who began to fall into idolatry, Melchizedek is called "The priest of the most high God." God revealed himself to be a "high God," to cast contempt upon their dunghill gods. And when Abraham came to speak with the king of Sodom, he says, "I have sworn by the most high God." So when God came to bring the people out of the land of Egypt, he revealed himself unto them by his name Jehovah. "I did not reveal myself so before," saith God; "but now I reveal myself so, because I am come to give subsistence unto my promise." Thus God dealt with them, when he came to maintain his church, by gradual revelations. But now God reveals himself by his whole name; and we may take what suits our distress, especially that which is comprehensive of all the rest, — "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

(2.) God doth this by comparing himself to such creatures as act out of natural kindness: "Can a woman forget her sucking child? Yet will I not forget."

Now, there are three reasons why it is necessary that faith, in an overwhelming condition, should have regard to the nature of God, and the essential properties of his nature, for its relief:— [1.] Because of the circumstances of our distresses; [2.] Because of the nature of them; and, [3.] Because of the nature of faith:—

[1.] Because of the circumstances of our distress. There are three or four circumstances that may befall us in our distress, that faith itself can get no relief against them, but from the essential properties of the nature of God:—

1st. The first is, place. Believers may be brought into distress in all places of the world; — in a lions' den, with Daniel, — in a dungeon with Jeremiah; they may be banished to the ends of the earth, as John to Patmos; or they may be driven into the wilderness, as the woman by the fury of the dragon. The whole church may be cast into places where no eye can see them, no hand relieve them, — where none knows whether they are among the living or the dead. Now, what can give relief against this circumstance of distress which may befall the people of God? Nothing but what Jeremiah tells us, [Jer. xxiii. 23](#), "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off, to the ends of the earth?" [Ps. cxxxix. 7](#), "Whither shall I flee from thy presence? to the utmost ends of the earth?" It is all in vain: the essential omnipresence of God can alone relieve the souls of believers against this great circumstance of various places, whither they may be driven to suffer distresses and be overwhelmed with them. If the world could cast us out where God is not, and hath nothing to do, how would it triumph! It was a part of their bondage and great difficulty of old, that the solemn worship of God was confined to one certain country and place; so that when the enemies of the church could cast them out from thence, they did, as it were, say unto them, "Go, serve other gods." God hath taken off that bondage; all the world cannot throw us out of a place where we cannot



worship God. Wherever there is a holy people, there is a holy land, and we can be driven to no place but God is there; and if we should be compelled to leave our land, we have no ground to fear we shall leave our God behind us. God's essential omnipresence is a great relief against this circumstance of distress, especially to souls that are cast out where no eye can pity them. Should they be cast into dungeons, as Jeremiah was, yet they can say, "God is here."

*2dly.* It is so likewise with respect to time. The sufferings of the Church of God are not tied up to one age or generation. "We can see some little comfort and relief that may befall us in our own days; but what shall become of our posterity of future ages?" Why, God's immutability is the same throughout all generations; his "loving-kindness fails not," as the psalmist saith, — which is the only relief against this distress. Alas! if a man should take a prospect of the interest of Christ at this day in the world, and consider the coming on of wickedness like a flood in all parts of the earth, he would be ready to think, "What will God do for his great name? what will become of the gospel of Christ in another age?" But God is the same through all times and ages.

*3dly.* There is relief to be found in God, and only in himself, in the loss of all, — when nothing remains. Should a man lose his lands, if his house remains he hath something to relieve him; he knows where to repose his head under his cares. But when all is gone, what can relieve him? Nothing but God and his all-sufficiency. This was Habakkuk's comfort if all should fail him. "Yet," saith he, "I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

*4thly.* The last circumstance of distress is death. The way and manner whereby it may approach us, and how soon this will be, we know not. When all this state and frame of things shall vanish, and we prove to have an utter unconcernment in things below; when the curtain shall be turned aside, and we shall look into another world; the soul's relief lies in God's immutability, — that we shall find him the same to us in death as he was in life, and much more.

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**Sermon XX.**<sup>374</sup>

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” — [Ps. lxi. 2.](#)

In my former discourse upon this text, I told you that there were three reasons why faith betakes itself to the nature of God for relief in overwhelming distresses. The first was taken from the circumstances of those distresses; the second from the nature of them; and the third from the nature of faith itself. I mentioned four circumstances in such distresses, that nothing can relieve the souls of men against, but the consideration of God's essential, properties; which I shall not here repeat, but proceed to the second reason:—

[2.] There are some distresses that, in their own nature, refuse all relief that you can tender them, but only what is derived from the fountain itself, — the nature of God. Zion's distress did so, [Isa. xlix. 14](#), “Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me.” And [chap. xl. 27](#), “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.” She was in that distress, that nothing but the nature of God could give her relief. God therefore proposeth that unto her, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not?” [verse 28](#). A man would think, sometimes, it was no difficult thing to answer those objections which believing souls charge against themselves, even such as we are well and comfortably persuaded are believers. But it frequently falls out quite otherwise; and nothing will bring them to an issue, but the consideration of the infinite grace and goodness that is in God.

Nay, there may be temporal distresses that, in their own nature, will admit of no other relief; — as when the whole church of God is in extreme calamity in the world, which nothing can remove but infinite power, goodness, and wisdom. You know how Moses was put to it when God told him he would deliver Israel out of Egypt. He looked upon it as impossible, and raised objections till it came to that, [Exod. iii. 13](#), — “If it must be so, tell me *thy name*.” And God revealed his name: “I am that I am.” Till God confirmed him with his name, — that is, with his nature, — Moses could see no way possible how the church should be delivered. And so it falls out with us as with Moses. When God did not appear, Moses thought he could have delivered them himself, and goes and kills the Egyptian; but when God appeared, he could not believe that God himself could do it, till he gave him his name.

But some may object, “When faith comes to approach unto God to find relief, as God proposes himself in his name, it will find other things in God besides his goodness, grace, and mercy. There is severity, justice, righteousness in God; which will give as much discouragement on the one hand as the other properties will give encouragement on the other. To

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374 This sermon was preached November 25, 1670.

come to God, and see him glorious in holiness, and infinite in severity and righteousness, — here will be discouragement.”

I shall answer this briefly, and so pass on:—

1st. It is most true that God is so. He is no less infinitely holy than infinitely patient and condescending; no less infinitely righteous than infinitely merciful and gracious: but these properties of God's nature shall not be immediately glorified upon their persons who go unto him and make their addresses in faith; though he will be so to others. There is nothing but faith can take a proper view of God. Wicked men's thoughts of God are referred unto these two heads:—*First*, They think, wickedly, “that God is altogether such an one as themselves,” [Ps. l. 21](#). While under the power of their corruptions and temptations, while in pursuit of their lusts, they have no thoughts of God, but such as these. The meaning of which is, — that he is not much displeased with them in what they do; but hath the same care of them in the way of their sins, as of the holiest in the world. *Secondly*, Their other thoughts are (commonly when it is too late, and God lets his terrors into their souls) what the prophet saith in Isaiah, “Who of us shall dwell with eternal fire?”

2dly. God hath given believers assurance that he will not deal with them according to the strictness of his holiness and severity of his justice. So speaks Job, [chap. xxiii. 3, 4](#), “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.” But doth he know of whom he speaks? and what this great and holy One will speak when he appears? Yes; [verse 6](#), “Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he will put strength in me.” “God will not plead with me by his dread, and terror, and great severity; but he will put strength in me.” Therefore, [Isa. xxvii. 5](#), he bids them “lay hold on his arm.” Who dare lay hold on God's arm? “Let them lay hold upon my arm, that they may have peace; and they shall have peace.” Poor creatures are afraid to go to God, because of his power; but “Fury is not in me,” saith God.

3dly. It is impossible for faith ever to consider the nature of God, but it hath a secret respect unto Jesus Christ, as the days-man or umpire between God and the soul, and as him by whom — as to all that concerns these properties of his nature — his severity and justice are already manifested and glorified.

[3.] There is one reason more why the soul will thus, in overwhelming distresses, betake itself unto the nature of God, as manifested by his name; and that is taken from the nature of faith itself. The formal reason of faith is the veracity of God's word. What we believe with divine faith, we believe upon this account, — that God hath revealed and spoken it. And the ultimate object of faith is God's all-sufficiency. And whatsoever you act faith immediately upon, it will not rest and be satisfied till it comes, as it were, to be immersed in the all-sufficiency of God; like the stream of a river that runs with great swiftness, and presses on till it comes to the ocean, where it is swallowed up. It is said, [1 Pet. i. 21](#), that “through Christ we



believe in God." Christ is the immediate object of faith; but God in his all-sufficiency is the ultimate object of faith.

Again: faith acts thus, because it is the great principle of that divine nature which God hath inlaid in our souls, created in us, and whereof he is the Father; for "of his own will he hath begotten us, by the word of truth." Faith, therefore, as it is the child of God, — the new nature that God hath ingrafted in us, — has a natural tendency towards God; so that it is working in and through all to God himself, who is its Father. This is the first thing that the soul considers in God, that faith makes its application unto for relief.

2. In an overwhelming condition, faith finds relief in sovereign grace; that is, grace as it is absolutely free. What I mean by it, is that which is mentioned, [Exod. xxxiii. 19](#), "I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy upon whom I will show mercy." The things we stand in need of are grace and mercy; the principle from whence they flow, and are bestowed, is the sovereign will and pleasure of God. God refers the dispensation of all grace and mercy merely unto his own sovereign will and pleasure. Now, when the soul can find nothing in the promise, nothing in any evidence of the love of God, or in the experience that it hath formerly had, it betakes itself unto the sovereignty of grace. And in sovereign grace there are two things:—

(1.) That God is able to give relief in the state and condition wherein we are; whatever we stand in need of, — mercy, life, salvation, — God is able to give it: whatsoever he will do, he can do. And this in the Scripture is made a great encouragement of rest upon God. Thus, [Dan. iii. 17](#), when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in that great and overwhelming distress, what did they relieve themselves withal? "If it be so," say they, "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." "If God will not:" it is not, "If God cannot;" for he can do what he will. If he had not been able, they would not have worshipped him. There is nothing for these sixteen hundred years that hath seemed harder to be effected, than the call of the Jews; but the apostle gives us this ground yet to fix our hopes upon, in the expectation of it:— "They may be grafted in; 'for God is able to graft them in again,'" [Rom. xi. 23](#). The very power of God — that he is able to do whatever he pleases — is a foundation for faith to act upon, and relieve itself by. And therefore God pleads it emphatically, [Isa. l. 2, 3](#), where he tells them that his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, but he is still able to do it. "Is my hand shortened at all," saith he, "that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea: I make the rivers a wilderness: I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."

Now, there are four things that are included in this very apprehension of faith that God is able to do this, whatever our condition be:—



[1.] There is nothing contrary to his own nature in it. There are things that are contrary to the nature of God, and these things God cannot do. "God cannot lie," [Tit. i. 2](#); [Heb. vi. 18](#). It is one part of God's infinite perfection, that he can do nothing contrary unto his own nature. So that whatever I believe is of God's sovereign grace, which he is able to do, I believe there is nothing in it contrary unto the nature of God. Whatever apprehensions we have of pardon of sin, it includes an atonement; for without an atonement God is not able to pardon our sins: God cannot do it without satisfaction unto his justice. So that every soul that hath an apprehension that there is sovereign grace in God, whereby he is able to relieve and help him, he includes in that apprehension the belief of an atonement; without which God cannot do it. "He cannot deny himself." It is the judgment of God, that "they that commit sin are worthy of death."

[2.] If God be able, there is nothing in it contrary to any decree of God. There are many things that may be contrary to God's decree, that in themselves were not contrary unto his nature; for the decree of God is a free act of his will, which might have been, or not have been. But when the decree of God is engaged, if any thing be contrary unto it, God cannot do it; for he is not changeable.

Now, the decree of God may be taken two ways:—

*1st.* For his eternal purpose concerning this or that person or thing. But this I intend not.

*2dly.* The decree of God signifies "sententia lata," "a determinate sentence," that God hath pronounced against any person or thing; contrary to which God will not proceed. So, [Zeph. ii. 2](#), we are invited to "seek the Lord, before the decree bring forth;" that is, before God hath passed an absolute and determinate sentence in that matter and case. When Daniel would assure Nebuchadnezzar of his doom, he tells him it was "the decree of the Most High," [chap. iv. 24](#). So in the case of Saul. "The Lord hath rejected thee," saith Samuel, [1 Sam. xv. 26](#). But will he not call it back? No; "The Strength of Israel will not lie," [verse 29](#). The sentence is gone forth, and it shall stand. God rejected the house of Eli from the priesthood, [1 Sam. ii](#). But will he not return again? No; "The iniquity of the house of Eli shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever," [chap. iii. 14](#). So it was with them of whom God "swore in his wrath they should never enter into his rest." Now, while there is faith in God's sovereignty, if there be no decree in the case, there is hope. But if God had decreed, and put forth his oath, he would not have raised my faith to look after sovereign grace; — which declares an ability in God, that he can do it.

[3.] It includes this, That there is nothing in it contrary unto the glory of God; for this is the measure of all that God doth in all his dealings with us, — he aims in all things at the manifestation of his glory. And we are not to desire any thing that is contrary to the glory of God. We are not to desire that God would not be holy and righteous because of us, — that we might be saved in our sins, and while we are obstinate in them. This is to desire that

God would not be God, that we might live. But now, to save an humble, broken, contrite sinner, — a poor guilty creature, that lies at his feet for mercy — to deliver poor distressed believers from ruin and oppression, — is not inconsistent with the glory of God. God can do this for the advancement of his glory. I have known it go well with some poor souls when they could come to believe this, that to save and pardon them was not contrary to God's nature, decree, and glory.

[4.] There is this in it also, That if there be need of power, God can put it forth, that power which carried Abraham through all difficulties. [Gen. xviii. 14](#), "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" What is your difficulty? it may be an overwhelming guilt of sin? "Is any thing too hard for God?" What is your distress? a wicked, prevailing corruption? "Is any thing too hard for God?" In outward distresses that lie upon the church of God, there is this relief in sovereign grace: "Is any thing too hard for God?" Every thing is too hard for us; but nothing is too hard for God. This is the first thing in sovereign grace, — that God is able.

(2.) If it be so, then all that we have to do is resolved into the will of God; so that all I have to do in this world is but to go to God, as the leper did unto Christ: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." If God will, he can pardon, sanctify, save me. And if God will, he can deliver his church and people. Here lies the whole question, — it is all resolved into his will.

Now, two things ensue after once a poor soul hath resolved all his concerns into the will of God:—

[1.] There will be an end put unto all other entangling disputes and dark thoughts, which overwhelm the mind: "For now," saith the soul, "it is come to this, that my whole condition depends upon God's sovereign pleasure." David somewhere makes his complaint, that he was in the mire. A poor creature is bemired; and the more he plungeth, the faster he sticks. When a soul is in this condition, saith God, "Be still, and know that I am God," [Ps. xlvi. 10](#). And now all is rolled upon the will of God.

[2.] When once we can resolve our conditions absolutely, without farther dispute, into the will of God, innumerable arguments will arise to persuade the soul that God will be willing. I will name some of them:—

1st. One is taken from that goodness and graciousness of his nature which we have been before considering and proposing unto you, and doth now properly in this place occur unto us. Suppose any of us had a business with a man whom we believe to be a good man, — a man that hath something of the image of God upon him, — and the matter is to us of great importance (it may be, as much as our lives are worth), and he can easily do it, without any prejudice or disadvantage unto himself, with one word; — can we cast a greater reflection upon this man, than to think he will not be willing to do it? — that, merely to do us a mischief and spite, he will change his own nature, and act contrary to his own principles? Shall we, then, question the good-will of God? Shall we question, when all is resolved into his will,

that he will not give us out grace and mercy in time of need? Our Saviour presses this argument, [Luke xi. 11–13](#), and in other places, where he brings the issue as near as possible; telling us, it is not to be expected that a child, who finds nothing but his father's will to hinder, will mistrust his giving him bread. "And if ye, being evil," saith he, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" And when we can bring the concerns of God's church and people merely to his will, his own nature will supply us with arguments enough to confirm our expectation that he will do it.

*2dly.* There is another great argument, when all is brought to the sovereignty of the will of God, which is mentioned, [Rom. viii. 32](#), "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up unto death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Shall I question whether God will do this thing or no, considering this great instance of his will? It was his will to send Jesus Christ to die for poor sinners. He did not send him to die in vain, and that his death should be lost. If God were not willing to give out grace and mercy to sinners, wherefore did he send Jesus Christ? why did he give his own Son out of his bosom? why did he not spare him, and cause our iniquities to meet upon ourselves? Can God give a greater sign of his readiness to spare sinners than his dealing with Jesus Christ? That is the second thing which faith considers, when it comes unto God for relief in an overwhelming condition, — sovereign grace, that God is able, all things are resolved into his will.

*3dly.* Faith in this matter takes into consideration that one particular property of the grace of God in Christ which is mentioned, [Eph. iii. 8](#), "The unsearchable riches of Christ." Saith faith, "There is more grace and more mercy too in God (for these are God's riches that are here intended) than possibly I can see and look into. Will the mercy that hath been declared unto my faith, the promises that have been discovered and revealed unto me, give me satisfaction? No, they will not. I cannot be satisfied with what I have received, with what discoveries have been made unto me of the grace of God." But, saith the soul, "There lie behind unsearchable riches of grace, which I can by no means conceive; which all the world, or all the angels in heaven cannot find out." This is a great relief in an overwhelming condition.

*4thly.* Once more: faith in such a condition learns to resolve former experiences, not into its own present condition, but into the unchangeableness of God. And this one thing being wisely managed, is enough to relieve our souls under many overwhelming distresses that do befall us. The psalmist doth so, [Ps. lxxvii](#). He had experience of God, [verse 6](#), "I call to remembrance my song in the night." Compare it with that in [Job xxxv. 10](#), "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" David intends some such intimation of the love and good-will of God as made him rejoice in the night season. But what is his state now? He tells you, [verse 2](#), that it is the "day of his trouble;" that "his sores run in the night and cease not; his soul refuses to be comforted." And, [verses 7, 8](#), etc, "Will the Lord cast

off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" In this grand and overwhelming distress where doth he find relief? He resolves his experience into the unchangeableness of God, [verse 10](#), "This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." "He that gave me that former song in the night season, though now I am nothing but darkness, and ready to fear his mercy is quite gone for ever; yet he is the same, and he will give in the like experience again: though I am changed, he is not."

3. I should go farther, to show what respect faith in such a condition hath unto the covenant of God; but I cannot now insist upon it.

IV. I thought to have shown you also, in the last place, the difference between the faith of the godly and that of unbelievers, — that which the worst of men will have in God in the time of their distresses, and that relief which true evangelical faith finds in an overwhelming condition; but I see it would take up too much time.

One word of use, and I have done.

*Use.* This is an overwhelming time, — a time wherein many are at the ends of the earth literally, and many metaphorically, — a time and season wherein most that fear the Lord are obnoxious to some overwhelming distress or other. Suppose that God hath not let forth upon many at this day an overwhelming sense of guilt, — that there are not many tempted, wounded, and troubled (though some there are, whom we meet with every day); yet I have great reason to fear that, if we were all rightly awakened, an overwhelming distress would come upon the minds of men, from the want of humility, holiness, fruitfulness, faith, and love; which ourselves have sometimes enjoyed, and are proposed unto us, and which the examples of them who are gone before us lead us to inquire after. Are none overwhelmed with the hardness of their hearts, instability of their spirits? — overgrown with careless, empty, light, worldly frames? Truly, more or less, we have all reason to be overwhelmed; and we have showed you a little where our relief lies in this state and condition.

Are we ready to be overwhelmed with the calamitous condition of the people of God all over the world, and as to ourselves, our goods, and personal concerns, — any thing that is near and dear unto us? I pray God make our hearts jealous over it, especially those that are at ease in their health and prosperity. When God throws others of his people into the furnace, such have great reason to be jealous lest he deal more severely with them than the poorest saint that wants a morsel of bread. Well, you see the way of relief in this case also. It is God alone unto whom we must make our application. He is willing to receive us, because of the goodness of his nature; and he is able to save us, because of the abundance of his grace and power.

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## Sermon XXI.<sup>375</sup> Gospel charity.

“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Col. iii. 14.

The word ἀγάπη, which we here translate “charity,” is the only word used in the [New Testament to signify “love.” And I wish we had always rendered it so, because in our common use of speech, charity is restrained to one effect of love, in relieving the poor and afflicted; which is nowhere the sense of the word in Scripture. It is love, then, that is intended. “Above all these things put on love.” There is no grace nor duty but the exercise and practice of it is commanded in the Scriptures, and most of them fall under particular commands, and are enjoined absolutely; but there is but this one, that I remember, which hath a preference given unto it in a command above other things, as here, *Ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις*, — “Above all these things put on love.” So *1 Pet. iv. 8*, *Πρὸ πάντων*, — “Before all things, have fervent



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375 Joseph Caryl, so well known from his “*Exposition of the Book of Job*,” was born in 1602. He studied at Oxford, and entered into holy orders in 1627. After preaching for some time in Oxford, he came to London, and preached with much acceptance before the Society of Lincoln’s-Inn. He was a member of the Assembly of Divines in 1643; and in 1645 he was appointed to the charge of St Magnus’, near London Bridge. Along with Dr Owen, he accompanied Cromwell to Scotland in 1650; and towards the close of 1653 he acted on the Commission of *Triers*, for removing ignorant and scandalous ministers. He attended the Conference at the Savoy in 1658, when several Independent divines endeavoured to agree on a Confession of Faith. He was again in Scotland with Major-General Whalley and Colonel Goffe, in order to confer with Monk on the state of public affairs. After the Restoration, he was ejected from St Magnus’, in 1662; but continued to preach to a congregation of his former hearers till his death, which occurred in February 1672–3. The public duties to which he was often called bespeak his ability, and the confidence reposed in him by the leading men of his day. The savour of his piety yet remains in his works; which consist chiefly of sermons, and his bulky but precious commentary on Job. He had some share in the preparation of an English-Greek Lexicon for the New Testament; and his qualifications for the task must have been considerable, when they extorted from Anthony Wood the commendation of their author as “a learned and zealous Nonconformist.” Before his death, his congregation had been for some years worshipping in Leadenhall Street. The church under the care of Owen had been in the habit of assembling for worship at no great distance from them. About four months after the death of Caryl, the two churches united. It appears that, previously to the union, Owen’s congregation consisted only of 36 members; in the Leadenhall Street congregation there were 136 communicants. In this small number, however, amounting only to 172, there were many whose names deserve to be held in remembrance for their rank in society and public services, and still more for their eminent Christian worth. — See “*Life of Owen*,” vol. 1, p. 90. On the 5th of June 1673 the two congregations met together for the first time under the ministry of Owen; and it was in these circumstances he preached this sermon, — very suitable to the occasion, and rich in suggestions for the cultivation of Christian unity and love. — Ed.

love among yourselves.” And so in that of our apostle, [1 Cor. xii. 31](#). He had given them directions about the use and improvement of spiritual gifts for the edification of the church (and it is an excellent way to have the church edified, by the due and orderly exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the elders and members); but when he hath done, he adds, “Behold, I yet show you a more excellent way;” and that is this duty of love, as he shows in [the next chapter](#). It is not only commanded, but it hath a special eminency and excellency put upon it, in reference to all other duties, for some certain end.

That which I shall at present discourse upon is this:—

*Observation. Love, and its exercise, is the principal grace and duty that is required among, and expected from, the saints of God, especially as they are engaged in church-fellowship.*

I shall not prove it in general, but speak to these three things:— I. I shall show you the nature of this love that is thus signalized in the gospel precept. II. Give you the reasons of the necessity and importance of it, by mentioning some of them the Scriptures give. III. Lay down some directions for its practice:—

I. Concerning the first we may observe, that the love here intended is the second great duty that was brought to light by the gospel. There is nothing of it in the world, neither as to the degree nor as to the knowledge of it, but what proceeds from the gospel. The world neither hath it nor knows what it is. Variance, strife, wrath, entered by sin; for when we fell off from the love of God, and from his love to us, it is no wonder if we fell into all hatred and variance among ourselves. The love of God was originally, in the state of innocency, the bond of perfection: when that was broke, all the creation fell into disorder, — all mankind, in particular, into that state described by the apostle, [Tit. iii. 3](#), “Living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” There is carnal and natural love still in the world, that follows necessarily upon natural relations; and the same is in some degree in brutes themselves. There is also a love that arises from a society in sin, in pleasure, — from a suitableness of humour in conversation, or of design as to political ends; to which heads you may reduce all the love in the world: but all these are utter strangers from this evangelical love. And therefore, when it was brought to light by the gospel, there was nothing so much amazed the heathen world as to see this new love among Christians. It was even a proverb among them: “See how they love one another!” To see persons of different sorts, different nations, tempers, degrees, high and low, rich and poor, all knit together in love, was the great thing that amazed the heathen world. And I shall show you the grounds of it afterward.

You may likewise observe, that this love is the means of communion between all the members of the mystical body of Christ, as faith is the instrument of their communion with their head, Jesus Christ. And, therefore, our apostle doth seven or eight times in his epistles join faith and love together, as the entire means of the communion and fruitfulness of the mystical body of Christ. And in one place he hath so ordered his words, to show their inviolableness and indissolubleness, that you must make a distribution of them to gather their

right sense. It is in [Philem., verse 5](#), “Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.” A man would think that both the objects relate to both the duties, — faith and love towards Christ, and towards all the saints. But though Christ be the object of our love also, the saints are not the object of our faith; so that you must make a distribution of the words: “Hearing of thy faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and of thy love towards all the saints.” But the apostle so places them to show how indissoluble these things are, that they must go together; — where the one is, there will be the other; and where the other is not, there that will not be. It is therefore the life, and soul, and quickening form<sup>376</sup> of all duties that are performed, among believers toward one another. Whatever duties you do perform, be they never so great and glorious, never so useful one to another, to any of the members of Christ; if they are not quickened and animated by this love, they are of no value to thy communion with Christ, and edification of the church. And men may perform many things that appear to be duties of love, without love. In the [two verses before the text](#), saith the apostle, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. But above all these things put on love.” So that all these things may be, yet not love. Those which seem to be the greatest and most effectual fruits of love whatever, yet they may be all without love. We may forbear without love, forgive without love, be kind to one another without love; and all this of no use, if above all these things, over and upon them, we do not superinduce love, — if we be not quickened and acted by love. The truth is, he that shall read over the New Testament, especially those things which we have most reason particularly to consider in it, — which are the special instructions and commands that Christ left unto his disciples when he was going out of this world, — would think this same love, whatever it be, is the sum and substance of all that Christ required of us; as indeed it is. And the apostle John, who lived long, and lived to see the Christian religion much propagated in the world, and very probably saw a decay of love, wrote his First Epistle almost to this very end and purpose, — to let us know, that there was neither truth of grace, nor evidence of the love of God to us, nor of our love to God, unless there was fervent and intense love towards the brethren. Whatsoever we think of our profession, if there be not an intense love unto the brethren, we have neither the truth of grace, nor evidence of God’s love to us, or of our love to God.

But you will say, then, “What is this love?”

I answer briefly, It is a fruit of the Spirit of God, an effect of faith, whereby believers, being knit together by the strongest bonds of affection, upon the account of their interest in one head, Jesus Christ, and participating of one Spirit, do delight in, value, and esteem

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each other, and are in a constant readiness for all those regular duties whereby the temporal, spiritual, and eternal good of one another may be promoted.

I will a little open the description I have given of it, and so proceed:—

1. This love, concerning which I speak, is a fruit of the Spirit, [Gal. v. 22](#), “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” There may be, and is implanted in some natures, a great deal of love, kindness, and tenderness, in comparison of others that are forward; but that is not the love here intended. That which renders it peculiarly gospel love is its being the product of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Truly, I cannot turn aside to every particular, to show how we may know whether love be a fruit of the Spirit, or arising from our own natural inclination; but you must inquire into it upon those general rules that are given to discern and distinguish such things. This only I say, it is a fruit of the Spirit, a product of the Holy Ghost in us, or it belongs not to our work.

2. It is an effect of faith. So saith the apostle, “Faith worketh by love.” How doth faith work by love? how doth faith set love on work? When it respects God’s command requiring this love, his promise accepting it, and his glory, whereunto this love is directed, — then doth faith work by love. And it is not the love we aim at, which we design and press upon you, if it proceed upon any other account but this, — because Christ commands it, and promises to accept it, and because it lies in a tendency to his glory. Self may work by love sometimes, — flesh, interest, or reputation may work by love; that is, by the fruit of it: but it is that love which faith worketh by that we alone intend.

3. It is that love which doth knit together the hearts and souls of believers with entire affection one unto another. For the apostle tells us, [Eph. iv. 16](#), speaking of that communion which the church hath by love, “The whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint and part supplieth.” Now, we can supply nothing to one another but by love; and from thence issues delight and esteem. “All my delight,” saith he, “is in the saints,” [Ps. xvi. 3](#), “and in them that excel in the earth.” And there is that valuation, that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren; that is, to be willing to expose ourselves to difficulties and dangers, our lives to hazard, yea, to lay them down, if the edification of the church so require. The martyrs of old did not lay down their lives for Christ personally only, but for Christ mystical; they not only laid them down in faith, but in love, — love to the church. The apostle saith of all his afflictions, “I fill up the measure of the afflictions of Christ, for his body, which is the church.” He bore his afflictions out of love to the church, as well as out of faith and love to Christ personally, that there might be no offence, scandal, or temptation befall the church. That their faith might be confirmed and strengthened was a great reason why the martyrs laid down their lives. And it should be so with us, if we come to be called thereunto. This is that love which the Scripture speaks of; and not that careless, negligent, carnally-influenced love which the world, I had almost said, nay, I will say it,

which too many professors abound withal, and no more. And it were a task, not for one sermon, but many discourses, to show what are the duties that his love requires of us, and will put us upon; how it will influence all our walkings, direct us in all our ways, — in our whole course and conversation, and all that we do.

It may be asked, seeing all believers are the objects of this love, “How are we to exercise it towards them, since there are few of them we know and are acquainted withal, and that we have a satisfaction in their state and condition that they are such, — few, that we know their occasions, straits, and necessities?”

I answer, —

(1.) The whole mystical body of Christ being the adequate object of gospel love, of love in and by the Holy Ghost, it is indispensably required of us that, radically and habitually, we have an equal love unto all believers, as such, — unto all the disciples of Christ throughout the world. But this is accompanied with some limitations:—

[1.] In the exercise of it, it will much answer the evidence that persons are interested in the mystical body of Christ. There are some whose vain opinions, and indeed corrupt practices, will exercise the most extensive charity to judge they belong unto the mystical body of Christ; yet according unto our evidence, so is our love to be.

[2.] There may be degrees in our love, especially as to delight and valuation, according as we see more or less of the image of Jesus Christ upon any believer; the likeness and image of Christ being the formal reason of this love.

[3.] The exercise of love must be determined by occasions and opportunities. But with these three qualifications a man may pronounce he is no believer who hath not, habitually and radically, a love to all the believers in the world, so as to be inwardly concerned in their good and evil, and to be influenced unto prayer, compassion, delight, and joy, according as their state and condition doth require.

(2.) There is required an inclination and readiness to all acts of love towards all believers, as opportunity shall be administered. If we turn away our face from our brother, and hide ourselves from him, how dwells the love of God in us? If there be a real love in any of us, of this kind, let it be but heightened and advantaged by an opportunity, it will break through difficulties, through reasonings, pleas of flesh and blood, to the exercise of itself. As they that know any thing in this world know that, as the first great opposition of hell, the world, and corrupt nature, is against faith to God by Christ; so the next great opposition made against us, is against our love. If we do not understand this, we are unwise, and have not considered the various states and conditions of things in this world; and how every moment things are presented unto us with a tendency to the weakening of love, upon one account or other. But, —

(3.) Our Lord Jesus Christ, in infinite wisdom, tenderness, and condescension, hath provided us a safe, suitable, constant, immediate object for the exercise of this love. Having

given so great a command as that of love, and laid so great weight upon it, he will not leave us at an uncertainty, how, or where, or when we shall exercise it; but hath directed us to a particular way wherein he will make a trial of our obedience unto the command in general; and this is, by his institution of particular churches. There are two great ends why Christ did institute a particular church; and they were to express the two great graces and duties that he requires of us:—

[1.] The first end why Christ did institute a particular church was, that his saints together might jointly profess their faith in him, and obedience to him. And we have no other way of doing it: he hath tied us up to this. A blessed way! “You shall this way,” saith he, “jointly profess your faith in me, and obedience to me, or no way.”

[2.] The next great end why he did institute a particular church was, that we might have a direct exercise of his other great command, and of that other great duty, of love to believers. “I will try you here,” saith Christ; “I require this of you indispensably, — to love all the saints, all believers, all my disciples. You, shall not need to say you must go far, this way or that, for objects; I appoint you to such an order as wherein you shall have continual, immediate objects of all that love which I require of you.” When God gives commands that great things turn upon, and [that] are general, he gives some particular instance wherein he will have our obedience tried to those commands. When he gave the great command at first in the state of innocency, he tried them in the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. The Lord Jesus Christ hath given us this great command of love, and hath plainly declared, that if we love not one another, we are not his disciples. “I will give you an instance whereby you may be tried,” saith he; — “cast you into such a society, by my order and appointment, as wherein you may have immediate objects for the exercise of love to the utmost of what I do require.” If we find a person that is orderly admitted into church society, he is as certain and evident an object of our love, as if we saw him lying in the arms of Christ. We walk by rule; he hath appointed us to do so. Let none, then, pretend that they love the brethren in general, and love the people of God, and love the saints, while their love is not fervently exercised towards those who are in the same church society with them. Christ hath given it you for a trial: he will try your love at the last day by your deportment in that church wherein you are. The apostle tells us, “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, will never love God whom he hath not seen.” I am sure I may say, he that exercises not love towards the brethren whom he doth see in that relation wherein Christ hath appointed him to exercise love, loves not the brethren whom he doth not see, and that he hath not that peculiar relation to and acquaintance withal. The great Lord and Guide of his church binds it upon all our spirits and consciences; it is our life, our being. I declare unto this congregation this day, I witness and testify unto you, that unless this evangelical love be found acted, not loosely and in general, but among ourselves mutually towards each other, we shall never give up our account with joy unto Jesus Christ, nor shall we ever carry on the great work of

edification among ourselves. And if God be pleased but to give this spirit among you, I have nothing to fear but the mere weakness and pravity of my own heart and spirit. This is the great way Christ hath given us to exemplify our obedience unto that great and holy command of love to his disciples; and great weight is laid upon this duty.

II. The next thing I am to speak to is, to show you the grounds why this love is so necessary: “Before all these things have love. I show you a more excellent way; and that is love.” There would be no end, if I should insist long upon the grounds and reasons of this duty. I will give you some of them that are of weight and importance unto me. Do but carry this along with you, that what I speak about love is to be exercised, first among ourselves, and then to have emanations, upon all opportunities and occasions, to the whole mystical body of Christ throughout the world:—

1. It is necessary, because it is the great way whereby we can give testimony to the power of the gospel, and our witness to the Messiah, the Christ that was sent of God. The great thing we have to do in the world is, to bear witness unto God’s sending Christ into the world for the work for which he came. How shall we do this? He himself shows us. [John xvii. 21](#), “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” And again, [verse 23](#), “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the world may know that thou hast sent me.” Jesus Christ lays the weight upon this, — that the world may be convinced that God hath sent him. How shall this be evidenced? Saith he, “If all believers are one it will be evidenced.” There is, I acknowledge, another principle of the oneness of them that believe, — by a participation of that one Spirit of the Father and the Son, whereby we come to be one in the Father and the Son. But that is not the whole oneness; nay, I do not think it is at all the oneness here intended. And my reason is this, because it is perfectly invisible, and imperceptible unto the world; and he prays for such a oneness as may convince the world, — that the world may see that they are one, and so believe that God had sent him. It is no oneness but that whereof love is the bond of perfection, the life, and soul, and spirit of it, that will give conviction unto the world that God hath sent Christ. And if this be not eminent in us, we do what lies in us to harden the world in their unbelief. Persons that profess the gospel, some way or other, have framed unity and uniformity to themselves; and neglecting this oneness of love under them hath been the greatest means of hardening the world in unbelief. “What great matter is there in this?” saith the world; “I can make such a union when I list; it is but making such and such laws about outward observations, and tie men to the observance of them.” But the union of love, no man can give but Jesus Christ. And why will this convince the world that God hath sent Christ, when the disciples do so love one another? where lies the argument? From what topic do you argue to prove God hath sent Christ, because his disciples do so love one another? It lies in this, as I told you before:— when sin entered, the bond of all union and perfection among the creatures was



quite broken, by the loss of love; the whole world was irrecoverably cast under envy, wrath, — “hateful, and hating one another.” Nothing under heaven, no means in us, could retrieve men unto love again, to pure spiritual love. God sends Christ to retrieve this loss, to bring in a new creation, to bring things into order, — to renew the world and the face of things. That glorious part of the work wrought in the heart of man is invisible; that which is visible is love. The world sees here a new union brought forth among Christ’s disciples, such as is not in the world, nor of the world, — such as the world doth not partake of. By this they know that God hath sent Christ to do this great work. The care, kindness, condescension, love, delight, and concernment we have in one another, as members of the mystical body of Christ, exemplified in our peculiar church relation, is the great testimony we give to the world that God hath sent Christ; and they will be forced to see, and say, at last, “A glorious work is done upon these persons, that ‘were foolish and disobedient, living in divers lusts and pleasures, hateful, and hating one another;’ a glorious work hath been done by the Son upon them: and we profess it is from Christ, from God’s sending him for this end and purpose.”

2. We have no evidence that we ourselves in particular are the disciples of Christ without it. [John xiii. 34, 35](#), “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” I have a little inquired why this command of love is here and in other places called a new commandment. I told you before, when sin entered into the world, envy and hatred entered with it; and it is continued upon the same account. “Whence come wars and fightings?” saith the apostle; “is it not from your lusts that war in your members?” In the first revelation God gave of himself in the law, he commanded love. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us so, — that we are commanded to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.” Whence, then, is this command so often called a new commandment? “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another,” saith he.

There are divers reasons of it:—

(1.) I judge one may be this, — That under the law God did indulge that carnal people in sundry things wherein they came short of the royal law of love, by reason of the hardness of their hearts. When Christ comes and gives this command in its full extent, it was a new command. Again, —

(2.) They were carnal, and did not see the spirituality of the command. And the truth of it is, you hear so little of it in the Old Testament, and so much of it in the New, that Christ may justly call it a new command. Besides, —

(3.) At the time when he came, there were cursed expositions of the law that went current in the whole church, which had overthrown the whole duty of love between the brethren and members of it; as you may see in our Saviour’s vindicating of it, [Matt. v](#). But Christ,





coming to take off all indulgence to carnal men, by reason of the hardness of their hearts; and to take away the darkness that was upon their minds, whereby they could not see the spirituality of the command; and to remove those false expositions that were put upon the law, corrupting the command; he calls it a new commandment.

(4.) Above all these, there is one reason more for it, which lies here in the words I before read unto you: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another.” The reason why it was a new commandment was, because there was no quickening, enlivening example of it, to express the power of love, under the Old Testament. This was reserved for Christ. He comes and gives that glorious instance of love, in his condescension in all that he did, and in all that he suffered. He shows that there was something in love that they never before had an instance of in the world. Whence the command for love lies thus: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus;” — “That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” And then it is a new commandment indeed, which it was not before. “Hereby,” saith he, men shall know that ye are my disciples:— if the great example I have set you, the great command I have given you, and the great work I came into the world about, was to renew love; by love men will know that ye are my disciples, and not else.” We have no other way to evidence ourselves to be disciples of Christ. Men’s parts, gifts, wisdom, will not do it; if there be no love, the world has no reason to conclude that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. It is that wherein the communion of saints doth principally consist. There is great talk about communion of saints; and certainly it is a great thing. We may observe it had a place in all the ancient creeds of the church: where they profess to believe in God, in Christ, and in the Holy Ghost, they profess also to believe the communion of saints; which shows it to be a thing of great importance. Wherein doth it consist? There are three things in it:— (1.) The fountain and spring of it; (2.) The profession and explanation of it; (3.) The formal reason and life of it:—

(1.) The fountain and spring of the communion of saints lies in their common participation of one Spirit from the one head, Jesus Christ. And you may as soon form a good society among dead men, as work a communion among professors, where it is not fundamentally laid in a common participation of the same Spirit with the head, Christ.

(2.) This communion is expressed principally in the participation of the same ordinances in the same church. This is the great expression of the communion of saints.

(3.) The life and formal reason of this communion, which derives strength from the fountain, and communicates it into that expression and profession, lies in love.

Truly, I have a little jealousy upon my spirit, that churches have been apt to place their communion too much, if not solely, in the participation of the same ordinances, depending upon the same pastor and teacher, — joining together in the celebration of the same sacred institutions. Friends, this is but the expression of our communion, and it may be without



any real communion. There may be a communication in the same ordinances, without any communion of saints; you know it is too much [so] in the world. If we be not acted and influenced by this love in all we do, there is no communion. So far you are faithful unto your station in the church of God, so far you discharge your duty, and act as living members of the church, as you find love acting in you towards one another, and no farther. Your utmost diligence in attending unto order, — your constant attendance at the celebration of ordinances, — your dependence on the doctrine and instructions afforded in the church, — may all be without communion of saints. When you have all this, it is love makes this communion: that is the life and formal reason of it; as you may see in the place before quoted, [Eph. iv. 15, 16](#), “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” It is the greatest and most glorious description of the communion of saints that we have in the Scripture. It begins in love, — “Speaking the truth in love;” and it ends in love, — “Edifying itself in love.” And it is also carried on by love. There is the fountain and spring of this communion, that lies in the head, — in our relation unto, and dependence upon, Christ, the head. If we hold not the head, we can have no interest in this communion. But it is not enough there be a head; there must be a “growing up into him in all things, who is the head.” We shall never carry on the work of communion unless we grow up into Christ, by express dependence on him; deriving life and strength from him, and returning all unto his praise and glory as our head: being thereby brought nearer, and made more like unto him. The exercise of faith in these things, is our growing up into Christ. Suppose, then, we go thus far in the business of communion:— we hold the head by faith; and by the exercise of faith and obedience grow up into the head; what is next? “From whom the whole body is fitly framed together.” There will be such supplies from the head, Christ, being thus held and grown up into, as will communicate such variety of gifts and graces as shall suit the body, and every member one to another. But how are believers cast into church-union and order? I will not say how they are not: I know what attempts there are in the world. I will plainly tell you how they are. It is by the various communications of Christ, the head, unto them all, fitting and suiting them to one another. What do they, then, themselves herein? They are of two sorts; either joints or other parts. May be they are joints; that is, either officers or principal members, who, by reason of their gifts, yield a supply to the communication of the effects of those gifts and graces they have received, carrying on farther this supply that is received from the head. What shall become of the other members? Not only the joints, but every part doth so, according to the measure of each. The graces and gifts of Christ cast every member into what part it bears. Let none of us choose our own part in the house of God. The graces and gifts of Christ cast us into each part, or joint, and from thence do we supply, according to the

measure of that part; and no more is required of us. But how shall we do this? Why, saith he, Ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, — “Speaking the truth in love.” The plain meaning of which is, that whatever we do, in declaring or obeying the truth, — in preaching, or in a way of duty, — we do it all in love. It is not merely speaking, or declaring; but it is a doing whatever we do in obedience to the truth. Whatever your concern is in the truths of the gospel, let love be acted in it; and that is the means whereby you convey your supplies from every joint and part unto the whole. Truth requires our pity, compassion, admonition, exhortation, forbearance, and the like. “Do it all in love,” saith he. How then? “The body will be increased, and edify itself in love.” It is all love. I have sometimes thought that ἐν ἀγάπῃ, “in love,” may be taken for διὰ ἀγάπης, “by love, — “Shall edify itself by love.” But take it as we have rendered it, — “Edify itself in love;” that is, love in the body shall be increased; and where love is increased, there the body is edified. A church full of love, is a church well built up. I had rather see a church filled with love a thousand times, than filled with the best, the highest, and most glorious gifts and parts that any men in this world may be made partakers of. Could they go beyond and exceed all we aim at or desire, — could they “speak with the tongues of men and angels,” — it is ten thousand times more for the glory of God and our own comfort, to be a company of poor saints, who are filled with love, than [to be] with those of the highest attainments without it. We neither give testimony unto the world that God sent Christ, nor evidence that we are his disciples, nor do we contribute any thing to the edification of the church, unless God give us to act this grace of love in an abundant measure. Whatever our gifts and parts are, and whatever our wisdom is, such things are apt to puff us up. If this love abound not in us, we shall be thorns in the sides of one another, and shall contribute nothing unto the real spiritual edification of the church. The apostle hath not only laid this down, but so disputed it, in [the 12th and 13th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians](#), that I shall not insist upon it. “Though I could,” says he, “speak with the tongues of men and of angels, yet if I have not love, I am but as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,” that make a little pleasant noise that comes to nothing. I would wind up all arguments with this, — If we have not love, we have no grace. He that loves Him that begets, will love them that are begotten. If we love not the brethren, the love of God doth not dwell in us. It is not our outward order and form, nor our duties, nor any thing we do or can do, will evidence that we have any thing of the grace of God in us, if we want this grace of love.

III. Having spoken thus far of the nature of evangelical love, and of the reasons of its importance, I would willingly say something to press it upon your hearts and mine own.

The whole issue of this day’s work which you have called us unto, under the care and kindness of Christ, depends wholly upon this one instance, of our discharging ourselves in this one duty of love. I know not how it comes to pass, but so it is, that professors have of late been wonderfully harassed with sharp invectives and bitter rebukes for their want of

love; and yet I cannot observe there is any fruit of it, or any advantage made by it. And the reason of it seems to be, because all those invectives have been managed upon this principle, — “If you will do so and so, — if you will come up to such and such practices in things of religion, — if you will go thus far, and thus far, — if you will leave off these and those institutions and ways wherein ye walk, — then you have love; if not, you have none at all.” And what hath been the fruit hereof? New divisions, new animosities, new rendings and tearings, without the least appearance of any improvement of love whatsoever. I should be very sorry that any man living should outgo me in desires that all that fear God throughout the world, especially in these nations, were of one way as well as of one heart. I know I desire it sincerely; but I do verily believe, that when God shall accomplish it, it will be the effect of love, and not the cause of love. It will proceed from love, before it brings forth love. There is not a greater vanity in the world, in my weak apprehensions, than to drive men into such and such a way, and then suppose that love will be the necessary consequence of that way; — to think that if, by sharp rebukes, by cutting, bitter expressions, they can but drive men into such and such practices, that then love will certainly ensue. We see the contrary all the world over, — that those who do most boast and glory in bringing all to uniformity of practice, have least love among them. You may see it in the papal church. They have obtained their end, in driving all into a uniformity in practice; and yet the members of it are fighting with and tearing one another. It is a vain supposition, to think to bring men to such a way whether they will or no, and then to love whether they will or no. I know not, truly, any way that any who fear God do walk in, — though some are nearer the truth than others, — which in itself is an obstruction of love. I profess, if I did, I would fly from that way as from a pest-house, or any thing that was mortally destructive; because I know the end of all Christ’s institutions is to increase love. Some may be nearer the truth than others; some are so; — but if any way doth really in itself obstruct love, without farther consideration, without debating whether it was right or wrong, I would leave that way; for I know it is false. But for persons to reflect upon any institutions of Christ, — such as particular churches are, and will be proved to be, — as though they were hinderances of love, argues a great unskilfulness in the ways of God, if not ill-will towards them; nay, they are appointed of Christ for this end, that we may first exercise that love which he commands, immediately towards one another, that so we may learn to exercise it towards all believers throughout the world. Pray let us not be overtaken with any such apprehension, that we cannot exercise love until we come to such and such a way of agreement, and so put off the duty till we have no opportunity or ability to exercise it; but let us address ourselves to it in our present state and condition.

I shall close all with two or three cautions against things that may be hinderances in the diligent practice of this great duty I have been speaking of unto you:—

1. Let us take heed of a morose, sour, natural disposition. If it doth not hinder many fruits of love, yet it sullies the glory of its exercise extremely. Some good persons have so

much of Nabal in them, that blasts the sweet fruit of love which comes from them; it is soured with something of an ill disposition, that hath no life or beauty in it. It is a great mistake, to believe that grace only subdues our carnal corruption, and doth not change our natural temper. I believe grace changes the natural temper, and ennobles it; it makes “the leopard to lie down with the kid,” and “the bear to eat straw with the ox,” as it is promised: it makes the froward meek; the passionate patient; and the morose benign and kind. And we are to apply grace to these ends and purposes; and not to humour and please ourselves, as though such things are our natural disposition. Grace comes to alter our natural dispositions, that are unsuited to love, and indispose us for it. We are apt to excuse ourselves and one another, and hope that Christ will do so too, because this or that is much from our natural temper. Pray let us not act thus; our natural tempers are to be cured by grace, or it hath not its perfect work upon us.

2. Take heed of such hinderances of love as may attend your peculiar state and condition. I would speak to them who have the advantage of riches, wealth, honour, reputation in the world; which encompass them with so many circumstances, that they know not how to break through them to that familiarity of love with the meanest member of the church which is required of them. Brethren, know the gospel leaves all your providential advantages entirely unto you; whatever you have by birth, education, inheritance, estate, titles, places, it leaves the entire enjoyment of them. But in things which purely concern your communion together, the gospel lays all level; —there is neither rich nor poor, free nor bond in Christ, but the new creature. Therefore we are so expressly commanded by the apostle James, [chap. ii.](#), that we should have no particular respect in the congregation to persons, upon the account of outward advantages. We all serve one common Master, the same Lord; and he is such a Lord, that when he was rich in all the glory of heaven, he became poor for our sakes. And let me beg of you that are rich to remember this common Lord and Master; and let not your outward advantages, therefore, keep you at a distance from the meanest, the poorest saint that belongs unto the congregation. If they do, your riches are your temptation, and your place a disadvantage; which you must labour to break through.

Something also might be said to the poorest and lowest sort, who have their temptations, too, to keep them off from the exercise of love. But I shall waive it.

3. Lastly, Take heed of satisfying yourselves, all of you, with the duties of love, without looking after the entire working of the grace of love. You here, that are joined with us this day, have had for a long time so great a light and instructor, that I doubt not but you are acquainted with all the duties of love that are required of you in your especial relations wherein you stand, and that you have been found in the practice of them. I only mind you to take heed that you be spirited with the grace of love, — that which proceeds from faith, and is acted in you by the Holy Ghost, — that which gives you delight in, and a dear esteem



and valuation of the saints, and creates a cheerfulness and readiness in you for the performance of all these duties.

I thought to have given you many other directions; but I must conclude. If God be pleased to imprint any thing from this word upon our hearts and spirits, we shall have cause to rejoice in it. However, remember thus much, that you were begged and entreated, — as you regard the glory of God, the honour of the gospel, and the edification of this church (which of two is now become one), concerning which you must all in your places give an account, as well as I in mine, and as you have any respect unto the ministry of him whom God hath set over you, — that all be wound up in this one duty of love; which if God please to increase, and make intense among us, I no way doubt but he will prosper this day's work of our union.

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## Sermon XXII.<sup>377</sup> Christ's pastoral care.

“Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.” — [Mic. vii. 14.](#)

It is not much I shall offer unto you from these words; yet I cannot give you a right apprehension of the mind of God in them, and what I intend from them, without a little going over the chapter from the beginning. “Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits,” etc, [verse 1.](#) When the prophet says, “Woe is me,” he speaks in the name of the earth, say some, as it was the seat of the church of God. I rather take it to be in the name of the church of God, of those who were truly so, in the midst of a profane but outwardly professing people. And this lamentation is with a prospect and view of the sin which was in the people, and of the misery which was coming upon them. They have both of them ever been matter of lamentation unto all that truly fear God. They cannot consider the sins and the miseries of an outwardly professing people, but every one of them ought to cry, “Woe is me! sorrow is to me; sadness of heart is to me.” In respect of sin, David saith, [Ps. cxix. 136,](#) “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.” And in respect of misery and judgments, Jeremiah expresses his sense thus, [Jer. ix. 1,](#) “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.” The prophet foreseeing both these, — an overflowing of sin, and an overflowing of judgment, — had reason to cry, “Woe is me!” — “It is a lamentation unto me.”

He gives an account of the state of the professing, visible church: which he looks upon to be like unto a field or a vineyard, after the harvest is past and the vintage over: “I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desireth the first ripe fruit.” His prayer was, that they might be a fruitful vineyard unto God; but saith he, “We are just as when the vintage is over; there are some grapes, some clusters left under the leaves, but the principal are taken off:” — and not only so, but when a field is reaped, or a vineyard gathered, the owner leaves it for a season, takes down the fence, and the beasts come in and prey upon it, until the time of culture and tillage is come again. God never leaves a professing church to be a wilderness, unless upon the utmost apostasy; but he many times leaves them to be as a field after harvest, or a vineyard after the vintage. God will leave Babylon to be as a wilderness, that shall never be tilled any more, — shall have no rain, no fences, no tillage; but he will not leave his church so, unless the utmost apostasy come. In like manner, when a man hath gathered in his corn out of the field, you would think he had thrown off all his care about it; the fence is broken down, and

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377 This sermon was preached October 16, 1673.

the beasts come in; it lies in common, — men ride over it, and trample upon it, and he lets it alone: but when the time of culture is come again, the man makes up his fence, drives out the cattle, tills the ground again, and sows it with good seed, that it may bring forth good fruit. So God deals frequently with his church. He dealt so with them here. He takes down the hedge, he suffers the wild beasts to come in, — lets persons spoil at their pleasure; but there will come a time of culture again, when he will have fruit brought forth unto his praise.

In [verse 2](#) the prophet refers the evil he complained of unto two heads:— first, That those who were good were very few; and, secondly, That those who were evil were very bad: “The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men; they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.” This phrase, “The good man is perished out of the earth,” is not that the good man perisheth, but that he is taken away, and the earth hath lost the benefit and advantage which it had by him. The same expression is used, [Isa. lvii. 1](#), “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to hear; and merciful men are taken away;” and [Ps. xii. 1](#), “The godly man ceaseth; the faithful fail from among the children of men.”

From hence, therefore, we may observe, that when the good are very few, and the bad are very bad, inevitable destruction lies at the door of that place or nation. If either of these be otherwise, there is yet hope, If there had been but ten good men in Sodom, it had been spared. If the sin of the Amorites had not been come to the full, they had not been ruined. If the good, therefore, are not very few, or the bad very bad, there is yet hope; but where both concur in a professing nation, as in this, which was the visible church of God, unavoidable destruction is at the door; there is neither hope nor recovery: and therefore, they that endeavour to make men good, to increase the number of the good, they do not only endeavour to save their own souls, but they endeavour to save the nation from ruin. And we will place our plea and our cause there, — wherein we are engaged in this world against the world and those that do reproach us, — that our design is to save the nation as far as we are able; for it is to increase the number of the good, to convert men unto God: the consequence of which is to preserve the nation. And it will at last be found, that they who are useful herein, do more for the preservation of the nation than armies or navies can do. But when the prophet says, “The good man perisheth, and there is none upright among men,” it is an hyperbolic expression, intimating that there are but few that are either good or upright.

From the description of the other part of men, you may observe two things:— first, The instance of their sin; secondly, The manner of the prosecution of it, The instance of their sin was *blood*; which word comprises all violence, oppression, cruelty, and persecution: and the way of prosecuting this evil is, with much diligence and great endeavours: “They lie in wait for blood; and they hunt every man his brother;” or, as it is expressed, [verse 3](#), “They





do evil with both hands earnestly." And where men do lay out all their wisdom, and all their industry and strength in the pursuit of sin, there also destruction lies at the door. When men are slothful, careless, negligent, — sensual in all other things, but industrious only in doing evil, — this is another thing the prophet lays down as a certain sign of approaching destruction.

Having spoken this of the body of the people, he divides them into two parts; the rulers, and the residue of the people: and the rulers he also distributes into three sorts; *the prince*, *the judge*, and *the great man*. Thus saith he, "The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man uttereth his mischievous desire," [verse 3](#). I shall not particularly open these words; but this is what the prophet would teach us, — That when there is, as it were, a conspiracy in all sorts of rulers to commit the same iniquity, and to *wrap up* the whole business by agreement among themselves; so that there is none to intercede, none to stand in the gap, none to do otherwise that lies in a tendency to those judgments which he will afterwards declare. And this was the state of affairs at that time: for this prophecy was given in the days of Ahaz; and there was a great agreement and conspiracy among all in power then to oppress, and to carry on their own covetous and "mischievous desires," as they could. They agreed together, and so *wrapped it up*.

In [verse 4](#) he speaks as to the residue of the people. "The best of them," saith he, "is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge." The prophet, after he had laid so great a charge upon them, seems to reflect upon some that made a great pretence of friendliness to the Church of God, pretending they would be a hedge, a fence unto it; but saith he, "They prove 'briers and a thorn-hedge.'" "This hypocritical part of the nation, who speak so fair, and make such a mighty appearance of friendship, yet, when a man presses upon them, tear and rend him, and give him nothing but trouble and vexation. Whatever pretences they make, there is nothing to be expected from them but what you would look for from briers and thorns." And I observe, that the prophet, upon this occasion of dealing, with this hypocritical part of the people, doth insert a threatening as though the judgment should fall more upon them than those whose open wickedness he had before described. "Therefore 'the day of try watchmen and thy visitation cometh;'" that is, the day which the watchmen had so often declared would come upon them, for their false and hypocritical dealing with God: "Now shall be their perplexity." When false professors make a specious pretence to relieve the church, but really neither design nor effect any thing for them but farther vexation and rending, — the day of the watchmen is then at hand.

In the [5th and 6th verses](#) he showeth that this universal corruption that was among the people had extended itself to all sorts of relations, — that there was nothing of confidence left even among relations. "Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-

in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." It is a sign of extreme confusion, when disorder breaks in among relations, and all grounds of confidence between them are taken away. But this place is applied by our Saviour particularly unto the time of persecution for the gospel, [Luke xii. 53](#); [Matt. x. 35, 36](#). There is no wickedness doth so debauch the nature of man, and break off all confidence in the nearest and strongest relations, as an enmity to godliness, and persecution thereon. "When once they are engaged in this, then," saith our Saviour, "it shall be so and so."

This being the state and condition of the people of the land, the prophet makes, in the name of the church, a threefold application of himself:— *First*, To God, [verse 7](#); *Secondly*, To her enemies, [verses 8, 10](#); and *Thirdly*, To himself, [verse 9](#).

*First*. Upon the prospect of this state and condition, he makes application to God: "Therefore I will look unto the Lord," saith he; "I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me," [verse 7](#). When all things are in confusion and at a loss, the people of God are not discouraged from looking unto God; yea, they are encouraged thereunto; and it is made necessary for them so to do. And in such a season, not to be looking peculiarly unto God, is an evidence of a heart insensible of the state and condition of the church of God.

*Secondly*. The prophet, in the name of the church, applies himself unto her enemies: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her; now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets," [verses 8, 10](#).

We may observe here, —

1. Who this enemy is: "She that is mine enemy." Some say one thing, some another. Certainly it is some false church; it may be Babylon, or Samaria, or the false professors among themselves. But as Samaria was not yet carried captive, I take it most probably to be the false worshippers of Dan and Bethel, the false church that dwelt in the same land with them. There is no enemy to the true church of God like the false church.

2. Wherein this her enemy did show her enmity. He doth not speak of those enemies that outwardly wasted and destroyed them, but of that enemy which said unto her, "Where is now the Lord thy God?" — that enemy which reproached them with their profession of faith in God, their nearness unto God, and of God's accepting of them; which is the reproach of the false church continually. Others that are open heathens, do not think so much of it; but the false church's reproach usually is, "Where is the Lord thy God?" — "Where are your prayers and waitings upon God? where is your confidence in him?"

3. She intimates that there was some countenance in her present state and condition, through the providence of God, given to the enemy thus to reproach her, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall." There is a fall that gives countenance to this enemy so to reproach her. But to all these reproaches she opposes her confidence in God: "My God will

save me." And she comforts herself that the time was coming when God would certainly destroy this enemy of his church. This enemy; that is, any church of false worshippers who reproach the church of God, under their straits and difficulties, with former trusting and confidence in God.

*Thirdly.* He applies to himself, personating the church, [verse 9](#), "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him," etc. Here is a very becoming frame under the present state of affliction, — a deep humiliation for sin, and a quiet submission to the corrections of God's hand; but, at the same time, here is expressed the firm resolution of faith to wait till God should plead her cause, and execute judgment on her enemies. There seems to be the utmost confidence in this case: "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."

The issue of the whole of this prophecy is, the deliverance of the church, and that restoration which was accomplished in part in the deliverance of this people a long while after out of captivity. "In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria," etc. All the people that have been scattered about shall be gathered to Zion, to worship God in his temple, [verses 11, 12](#). But when he had said this, he doth, as it were, correct himself. "Ay, but stay; that is not yet to come," [verse 13](#). "Notwithstanding," saith he, "the land shall be desolate, because of them which dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings." As if he had said, "Notwithstanding all this, though God hath thoughts and a purpose of mercy for his own hidden, secret people, yet there is a time when he will by no means turn away the judgments that are due unto the provocations of the generality of professors. God will indeed do all these things for his church in the appointed time; but 'notwithstanding, the land shall be desolate;' there is no avoiding that. The description of things given before is such, that there is no issuing of it but in the desolation of the land, because of the wickedness of them that dwell therein, and for the fruit of their doings."

I have made these short observations upon this part of the chapter, to give you the state of things here represented. The land was full of sin, and of horrible provocations of God amongst all sorts of people, from the highest to the lowest. The people of God secretly complain hereof, and bear it as their burden, and tremble at the thoughts of judgments approaching. God had irrevocably, irrecoverably decreed desolation upon the whole land. Things were so stated, that whatever might be the mercy and goodness of God, and his thoughts towards his people, notwithstanding, the land was to be desolate.

In this state and condition, the prophet puts up this request: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old."

The observation I shall make from the words is this:—

*Observation.* In the most calamitous season, in the greatest inundation of sin and judgment, under the unavoidableness of public judgments, there is yet ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation, safety, and deliverance of his people.

All these things are here laid down:— a calamitous season; an inundation of sin and judgment; and an irrecoverable purpose of God to destroy the land. Yet faith, I say, hath ground in this state and condition to plead with God for the preservation and protection of his own secret people. You will say, “This is no great matter. It may be we have heard arguments that God will preserve them and deliver them; and have heard the time computed when God will deliver them, and could say ‘*Amen*’ to it. But it is to no purpose to go farther in teaching than in endeavours to raise up our faith and believing.” I confess I can go no farther than this, that I have ground for duty; and to leave all the rest to God’s sovereignty. If God should inevitably decree to destroy this nation, yet we have ground for faith to plead with God for the preservation and deliverance of his own inheritance.

I shall go no farther than the text to prove it; for the opening the text and the proof of the doctrine will be one and the same.

In the words we have, — I. What is prayed for, what the prophet pleads for; and that is, “Feed thy people with thy rod.” II. There are the arguments of faith the prophet pleads in this condition, when God had inevitably decreed desolation to the whole land; and these are four:— 1. That they were God’s people: “Feed thy people.” 2. That they were the flock of his heritage: “Feed thy people, the flock of thine heritage.” 3. That they “dwelt solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel.” 4. That God had, in former days, “fed them in Bashan and Gilead.”

I shall briefly handle these things, and both show you what is prayed for, and what in these arguments faith hath to plead in such a condition. For though God may say concerning a nation, “Plead no more for it,” yet he never saith so concerning his own people.

I. We shall consider what the prophet here prays for; which is, that God would feed his people with his rod: “Feed thy people with thy rod.” God is here compared to a shepherd; and it is a relation that he doth very frequently in Scripture take to himself; and you know what a large field I have to walk in, if I would insist upon the allusion. God is a shepherd, and Christ is a shepherd; therefore he saith, “Feed thy people with thy rod.” The word *ῥαβδος*, here used, sometimes is put for a *sceptre*, wherewith kings rule; sometimes for a *staff*; and sometimes for a *rod*. It was the instrument, whatever it was, that shepherds used in those days. It is mentioned, [Ps. xxiii.](#), which is a great description of God as a shepherd, “Thy rod and thy staff;” the same word as here. God, as a shepherd, rules his people with a rod; which they used both for direction and correction. He will not strike his sheep with great and violent instruments, to break their bones, to destroy them; but he makes them know he hath a rod in his hand. But I take it, that this rod was principally for the direction of the flock; and he prays that God would “feed them with his rod.” Truly, we have reason to consider what is



in this word; because I think here is a rule of faith given us what we are to pray for the people of God in such a day as we have described. The great thing we are to pray for now is, that God would "feed them;" not that God would make them kings, and rulers, and great men, and give them the necks of their enemies to tread upon, and such kind of things. "But when things are thus," saith he, "your prayer should be, that God would 'feed them.'" There are three things in this feeding of God's people:—

1. That God would supply their spiritual and temporal wants, that they may be preserved from great distresses. This is in the word, [Rev. xii. 6](#), "The woman fled into the wilderness; and God fed her there." While the woman was in the wilderness, she was preserved with such spiritual and temporal supplies as kept her from destroying distresses. This we may pray for, this we have a rule for, when we fear inevitable desolation is approaching upon a nation. God allows us to pray, and gives us a ground of faith to pray, that for his own people he would provide spiritual and temporal supplies; so as they may be kept from great distress.

2. There is, in this feeding of them as a shepherd, that God, in that state which is coming upon them, would give them pledges, singular pledges, of his own tenderness and love. It is so said of Christ, under the like comparison, [Isa. xl. 11](#), "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." How is that? "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." We have this in the rule of faith for prayer at this day, — that God would deal with all believers, of all sorts, according to their weakness, and according to their wants; that when the day of visitation and the day of perplexity comes upon the world, Christ, in a way of feeding, would suit himself to every one's condition. Some may be more able to be driven before; others must be carried in his arms and in his bosom. We must pray, therefore, that he will deal with every one of them according to their state and condition.

3. By feeding is intended, rule, protection, deliverance; — present rule, and protection and deliverance in God's appointed time. It is not for a shepherd merely to carry his flock into good pasture; but he is to take care to preserve them from all evil, whereunto they are exposed. David, that great shepherd, who was a type of Christ, gives this account of himself: "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he rose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him," [1 Sam. xvii. 34, 35](#). This was part of David's care as a shepherd over his sheep. Feeding is ruling, in the word here used; and [chap. v. 4](#), it manifestly intends rule and protection: "He shall stand and feed," or rule, "in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide." It is such a feeding of Christ, in the majesty and in the power of God, as his people shall be preserved by. We have, therefore, in our rule, particularly this comprised, thus far we may go:— necessary supplies of spiritual and temporal, inward and outward mercies; grace and mercy towards all, according as their state and condition doth



require; to the weak, diseased, and those that are great with young, protection and powerful deliverance, in God's good time.

This is the first thing, — What it is we have a rule to pray for, even in the most calamitous season, and when inevitable destruction is decreed against a place or nation.

II. Let us now consider the arguments of faith to be pleaded in this case, which our text affords. And these, as I have said, are four.

I would only first observe of these arguments in general, that there is no one of them taken from any thing of worth, of desert, from thing of good, nay, nor of grace, that is in the people themselves; but they are all taken from God himself, and the relation which they have to God, and what God had formerly done for them. Whatever pleadings or arguings, in such a day, we may have in our own spirits with God for safety and protection, if they are secretly influenced with thoughts that we are good, and better than others, there is nothing of faith in our arguings. God knows, all the graces and fruits of all believers and professors in this nation, considered in themselves, will not make up one argument. But to proceed:—

1. The first argument the prophet here uses is, That they were the people of God: "Feed thy people." They were the people of God upon a threefold account; each of which contains an argument:—

(1.) They are the people of God upon the account of election. Christ commands the apostle to abide preaching the gospel at Corinth with this argument, "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city," [Acts xviii. 10](#). They were the people of God by election; God had eternally chosen them, and designed them to be converted by the gospel, — by the preaching of his ministry.

Will this afford any argument to plead with God? Yes: [Luke xviii. 7, 8](#), "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he tarry long? I tell you, he will avenge them speedily." The argument for vengeance is from his people's being his elect: "Shall he not avenge his elect?" There is something in God's decree of election and choosing his people that may be pleaded with him for the highest part of feeding; which is to avenge them of their enemies.

(2.) They are the people of God by purchase and acquisition. This was the great plea under the Old Testament: "The people of the Lord, whom thou hast redeemed with a high hand, and with a stretched-out arm;" — "whom thou hast taken out of the world, and planted for thyself." He made it his argument to plead with God, because they were his people by purchase and acquisition, "by a high hand, and by an out-stretched arm." And the argument is grown more strong under the gospel, because they are purchased by the blood of his Son. [Rom. viii. 32](#), "If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up to death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The people we plead for are God's elect people; and he will avenge his elect speedily: they are God's purchased people, and that purchased

with the blood of his Son. And will he not together with him give them all things, all necessary things, — all things that pertain to life and godliness? Here is ground for faith to plead with God in such a case.

(3.) They are God's people by covenant. This is that which makes up their relation, which is prepared in election, acquisition, purchase, and redemption. But the formal denomination arises from the covenant: [Jer. xxxii. 38–40](#), "I will make a covenant with them, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God." That completes the relation. Hosea, [Hos. ii. 23](#), speaks also to the same purpose.

What arguments arise from hence that they are the covenant people of God? The sum of all arguments that can be pleaded upon that head, and they are great and many, are all laid down, [Luke i. 68](#), etc., "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us," etc.; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life." Here is all we have warrant to pray for, — all that is comprised in God's feeding of us. What is the plea and argument for it? — God will "remember his holy covenant, the oath which he hath sworn," whereby it is established; and hence he will establish us, that we may "serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life." A great argument, that those we plead for are God's covenant people! " 'Lord, feed thy people,' — those that are thine by election, by acquisition and purchase; and those that are thine by covenant, — a people that have made a covenant with thee."

2. The next argument is, "Because they are 'the flock of thine heritage.'" There are two things in this argument that we may plead with God:— (1.) That they are "a flock;" (2.) That they are "the flock of God's heritage."

(1.) They are "a flock," — that is, of sheep; wherein these three things are comprised, which are pleadable with God:— [1.] That they are helpless; [2.] Harmless; [3.] Useful. A flock of sheep is so:—

[1.] They are helpless. Sheep are poor, helpless creatures; the more of them there are, the more are they exposed unto all manner of rapine and destruction. When left unto themselves, they are poor, helpless creatures. And, truly, so are the people of God, unless Christ, their shepherd, be with them. They are, and have been, a poor, helpless people throughout the whole world. I confess, when Christ, their shepherd, goes before them, they will go through great difficulties; but of themselves they are altogether helpless.

[2.] They are harmless. So are sheep; and it is required of all the saints of God that they be so likewise, [Phil. ii. 15](#), "Be harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation."

Let us do the world no harm, neither public nor private, — do them no wrong nor injury, — that we may have an argument from hence to plead with God.

[3.] Sheep are useful. And I will name three things (though I love not to pursue allegories) wherein the people of God are useful in the world:— 1st. In the secret blessing that goes along with them; 2dly. In the good example they give; 3dly. In their industry in the world:—

1st. There is a secret blessing goes along with them; as you see here, [chap v. 7 of this prophecy](#), “The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst” (or in the bowels) “of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.” This poor remnant of Jacob, that lies in the bowels of the people, communicates secret blessings to them; this remnant is as the dew that makes them spring. All they have is from this remnant of Jacob in their bowels. But who sees it? “No,” saith he, “it is not such a dew; ‘it tarrieth not for man.’” None see the secret way whereby the dew falls; nor those secret ways whereby blessings are communicated to the whole nation from this secret remnant of Jacob, that lies in the bowels of them.

2dly. They are useful, from the good example they give; walking in the world as becomes creatures made to the glory of God. [Tit. iii. 8](#), “This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.” Not only unto them who are relieved by them, but unto all mankind it is profitable. When professors are diligent and fruitful in good works, all mankind is profited by their example.

3dly. They are profitable and useful in the world, by their industry in it. [Tit. iii. 14](#), “Let ours also learn to maintain good works,” to profess honest trades, “for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful;” — useful to the world by their “industry in their honest trades;” the words may be well rendered so, and it is so in the margin of your Bibles. Many others help only to consume the fruits of the earth in luxury and wantonness; but God gives these an industry in their honest callings. Here is argument in this, that this flock is helpless, harmless, fruitful, useful. But, —

(2.) The main of this argument lies upon the adjunct. Saith he, “Feed the flock of thine heritage.” This flock is God’s *heritage*. [Deut. xxxii. 9](#), “The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.” Why “the lot of his inheritance”? When the people came to possess the land, it was divided to them all by lot. God hath his lot in the world. That which, if I may so say, is fallen to God’s share is this flock; and Christ rejoices in it, [Ps. xvi. 5, 6](#), “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” His lot was cast in Canaan, — in a good and fruitful place. Christ takes a view of his church, and is satisfied with it. “I desire no more,” saith he; “‘the lines are fallen to me in a pleasant place,’ this my lot is ‘a goodly heritage.’”

And these things may be pleaded from this, — that they are “the flock of God’s heritage:”

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[1.] It being God's heritage, if he take not care of it, nobody else will. Every man takes care of his own heritage, — that which belongs to him; and if God take not care of his, there is none else to care for them. It is frequently so expressed, that they are such as none care for. Why? It is not their heritage. It is not the heritage of princes and great men of the world, — of the Turk or the Pope. As, therefore, it is God's heritage, if he will not take care of it, it is in vain to expect it from any other.

[2.] It is the heritage of Him whom the whole world looks upon to be their greatest enemy. The whole world is at enmity against God: and you see the state of things in the world; every one's design is to destroy the heritage of his enemy. As long as the world continues in this enmity against God, its whole design is to destroy his heritage. Look upon the nations abroad in all their agitations; — their main design is to ruin this heritage, because it is God's; against whom they maintain enmity in their hearts, worship, and ways. If, therefore, God doth not take care of his own heritage, it will certainly be destroyed, because his.

[3.] This argument may also be pleaded:— If this flock be the lot of God's heritage, then take it away, and the whole world is hell. If God's lot be out, if this remnant be destroyed; let men make things as fine as they will, adorn their dungeons as much as they please, — it is all but hell.

These are the arguments that may be pleaded with God from this, "Feed thy people," and, "The flock of thy heritage:" — It is a poor, helpless, harmless flock; yet useful to the glory of God, and the good of men. It is God's heritage: if he minds it not, none will; and if it be taken out of the earth, it will presently become a hell. This is the second argument in the text for faith to plead with God.

3. The third argument is taken from their state and condition, — That they "dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel." The first argument pleads God's glory, his love, and faithfulness: "Thy people," in covenant. The second argument pleads God's interest: "The flock of thy heritage." This third argument pleads God's pity and compassion: "Which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel." Every word hath argument in it to plead with God in this case:—

(1.) They "dwell solitarily;" that is, disconsolately. It is a poor, disconsolate flock that dwells separate from relief. This takes in two things:— inward disconsolation, from themselves, and their own fears and distresses; and outward helplessness. They are where none comes at them to relieve them. It is a great plea, — the solitariness of God's flock, with the compassion and mercy of God, for their relief. It may be, through our peace and plenty, and such things as we enjoy, we are not so sensible of the efficacy of this argument; but the Lord knows, and many of his understand, how strong a plea it is with God upon that account: "We are a poor solitary people; comfortless within, and helpless without."

(2.) As they "dwell solitarily," so "in the wood;" that is, in a dark and entangled condition. They are not only solitary, disconsolate, and helpless, but they are in the dark, see not their

way, and so in danger to wander; and if they are out of the certain path, the wild beasts of the forest are ready to devour them. There is nothing harder with the people of God at this day, than that they are in the wood, where it is difficult to find their way. The Lord make them careful, and to see the steps of their Shepherd going before them, that they may not wander, and so be exposed to the wild beasts that are ready to devour them!

(3.) Another plea is from the place where this wood is; it is "in the midst of Carmel." Though there was a particular place so called, yet the word is a common name for a fruitful field for feeding. The country or nation where they lived was such. Some think this hath relation to Babylon, which was very fruitful unto the inhabitants of it; yet the poor remnant dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel. The Jews did so. Nehemiah gives us a most pathetic description of their state, [Neh. ix. 36, 37](#), "Behold, we are servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold we are servants in it: and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins: also, they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress." This people "dwelt in the wood, in the midst of Carmel," a land good and pleasant; yet they were in a distressed condition.

(4.) There is yet another plea in it for mercy: That they are not only solitary for a little season, entered into the wood, but they dwell in this solitary condition, — have been long in it, and may continue long so. It signifies an abiding or continuing in that state. This argument, as I told you, respects the pity, the bowels of God, his compassion and tenderness, when his poor people shall dwell and abide long solitary, in an entangled, perplexed condition, as in a wood, in the midst of a fruitful land that God had given their fathers. It is so at this day with many of God's people; and it is a great plea for mercy and compassion.

4. There is one argument more in the words, which I shall but name, and I have done. "Let them feed," saith he, "in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." Bashan and Gilead were places of very fruitful pasture. Whence the children of Reuben and Gad desired Moses that they might have their possession in Gilead, and in the kingdom of Bashan; "Because," say they, "it is a place for cattle, and thy servants have much cattle." It was a fruitful place, where their flocks were well fed and nourished.

Where lies the argument here? It is fetched from former experiences of what God had done, — it is from God's faithfulness, grounded upon former experience. "We have seen what God can do, how he hath brought his people out of straits, and carried them through difficulties, and delivered them out of troubles, and fed them in Bashan, and in the land of Gilead;" — which is made an argument that he would feed them so again.

I might press this argument farther, but I shall offer nothing more at present; and I think what I have said is not unseasonable. We have seen the state of things laid before us; — that we have a rule of faith what to pray for in such a day, — That God would "feed his people." We have showed you what is contained therein, and have gone over briefly those

arguments that may be pleaded with God in such a case, reserving the time and season unto his own sovereignty.

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## **Sermon XXIII.<sup>378</sup> A Christian, God's temple.**

“For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”  
— [2 Cor. vi. 16–18.](#)

There are three things in these words:—

First, The privilege of believers, especially as they are the church of God: They “are the temple of the living God, as God hath said.”

Secondly. The duty which, by virtue of that privilege, is incumbent on all believers: “Wherefore,” saith he, “come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.”

Thirdly. A promise made unto the due performance of the duty by virtue of that privilege: “And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

You may well think I shall not speak at large to these things. I intend only so far to touch upon them, as just to lead me to what I think is the present sin of this nation, and what are the causes of the judgments upon it.

In [verse 16](#), believers are said to be dedicated, consecrated, and made holy to God, as his peculiar lot and portion. And then the use of it is to show the twofold sin for which judgment cometh upon this nation. The first is, That the nation deals not with them as God's consecrated lot and portion; that is the sin of the nation. The second is, That they behave not themselves as God's consecrated lot and portion; that is the sin of the people of God.

I shall spend some time in confirming my foundation. You have it, with the ground of it, [Rev. v. 9](#), where the church speaks to Christ, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests.” Before the purchase of them by Christ, they lay in the common lot of mankind; they were in the people, and tongues, and kindreds, and nations of the earth. Christ makes a purchase of them. He did not die to redeem all, but to redeem some out of all the kindreds, and nations, and tongues under heaven. Upon Christ's making a purchase of them, they are no more their own. “Ye are bought with a price,” saith the apostle; “ye are not your own.” Whose, then, are they? They are Christ's, [Rom. xiv. 9](#), “For this cause he both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead

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378 This sermon was preached March 27, 1674.

and living;" that is, of the whole church, alive and dead, that they might be his. He took them all into his disposal. And what did he do with them? When they were absolutely his own, and in his power to dispose of them as he saw good, he dedicates them to God. "He makes us kings and priests unto God," saith he. Christ might have disposed of his purchase another way; but this course he took, — he dedicates them unto God. Kings and priests were so, as I shall show you afterward. The apostle Peter tells us the same of all believers, [1 Pet. ii. 9](#), "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar" or purchased "people." The same is expressed again, [Tit. ii. 14](#), and in sundry other places, which I shall not insist upon. But there is one expression of it which must be taken notice of; and that is, where they are called the "first-fruits unto God," [James i. 18](#), "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." And [Rev xiv.](#) the expression occurs again,<sup>379</sup> "These are they which were not defiled with women, ... being the first-fruits unto God." When God gave and sanctified all things unto his church of old, he reserved the first-fruits unto himself. These were all to be dedicated to him, every one in his way whereof he was capable; — clean beasts by sacrifice; men by redemption; corn and wine by a meat-offering: but God retained all the first-fruits to himself. He laid it upon the land as a rent-charge, that he might keep up his title to the whole. So he tells them, [Lev. xxv. 23](#), "The land is mine," saith he, "and ye are but strangers and sojourners with me." All the concernments of the Church of God are God's. He entertains us in his house, at his table, and sustains us with his ordinances. God took the first-fruits as an acknowledgment that they held all from him; and when he would take them no more, he destroyed the land.

Now God takes believers, that they may be a kind of first-fruits unto himself of the creatures. He satisfies himself with believers throughout the world, to be first-fruits of the whole creation. And if God should cease from taking these first-fruits, he would destroy the world. To what end should he maintain this fabric at such an expense of power, patience, forbearance, goodness, wisdom, if there came no revenue to him? Now, he never took any revenue but the first-fruits. And if any one (as I shall afterward show) do put forth his hands to this portion of God, he will be sure sorely to revenge it. For the most part this is the state of things among worldly men, — the more they have, the readier they are to lay their hands upon the portion of others. But I am sure the more men have throughout the world, the readier they are to lay their hands upon the portion of God. But saith he, [Jer. ii. 3](#), "Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord;" — they shall contract guilt, and they shall have

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379 In the original edition the words are, "he expresses it again." As these words are very ambiguous, and seemingly ascribe the language quoted from the Revelation of John to the apostle James, mentioned in the preceding sentence, we have ventured, in this instance, on a slight alteration of the text. — Ed.

punishment fall upon them. “All that devour them shall offend.” If that were all, they would not much care for it; — but, “Evil shall come upon them, saith the Lord.”

Let us a little inquire how believers come to be dedicated, consecrated, and made holy unto God, — to be his temple, tabernacle, first-fruits, his lot and portion, as they are called.

Why, this notion is taken from the Old Testament, and it is spoken of in allusion to what was in use then, when both persons and things were dedicated to God.

By what way, then, were things dedicated and consecrated to God, made his portion, and became holy?

There were four ways whereby this was done:— I. By special call and legal constitution. II. By unction. III. By inhabitation. And, IV. By vow, and actual separation thereupon.

There is no other way whereby any thing was ever dedicated to God under the Old Testament. And we shall find [that] all these ways believers are dedicated and consecrated unto God.

I. There was a dedication to God by special call and law constitution. So Aaron was dedicated to God to be a priest, [Exod. xxviii. 1](#), “Take to thee Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office.” What was this? “No man,” saith our apostle, “takes this honour to himself, unless called of God, as was Aaron.” Aaron was called of God to be dedicated a peculiar priest unto him. And this was confirmed by the law of the priesthood. He “was made a priest after the law of a carnal commandment,” saith he. And, [Num. i. 50](#), God took the Levites to the service of the tabernacle, whereby they became his portion; and, [chap. iii. 3, 4](#), they are separated upon God’s call.

This, then, is the first way whereby God takes any thing unto himself, and by which any one is separated and dedicated unto God; — it is by a solemn call, and legal constitution thereupon.

II. The second way whereby any thing was dedicated unto God, was by unction. So Aaron, after his call, to complete his dedication, [chap. xxix.](#), was anointed in his consecration; and so were his sons. In like manner Elisha was anointed to be a prophet in the room of Elijah; and David was anointed to be king over Israel. It was the great consummating ordinance whereby any were dedicated unto God. In [Exod. xxx. 22](#), etc., you have the institution of the making of this oil. “Ye shall not,” says God, “make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, shall be cut off from his people, or putteth any of it upon any stranger.” What is the meaning hereof? Why, this anointing oil, wherewith the priests and all the holy utensils of the altar were anointed, was a type of the graces and gifts of the Spirit of God. And where God hath given the gifts and graces of his Spirit for holy ministrations, — for praying, for preaching the word, for administering the ordinances, — for any one to make an oil like it, by liturgies, homilies, and the like, is to act contrary to this command. All that is done in the whole



liturgical, ceremonial course, is nothing but to make an oil like the oil God hath made for his sanctuary, which he doth so severely prohibit any man to put his hand unto; for this reason, because it was a type of the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost that were to be poured out upon Christ, and believers under him.

This is the second way whereby any thing was consecrated unto God.

III. The third way whereby the temple (as believers are peculiarly said to be “God’s temple,” in the text and other places) and tabernacle were consecrated, was by inhabitation. God consecrated them unto himself by a glorious inhabitation, and dwelling in them. He came and dwelt in them. Thereby they became peculiarly his own. And this God did two ways:— 1. By an extraordinary sign of taking first possession of his house, and entering into it, that all might take notice that this was his house. 2. By ordinary constant pledges of his presence:—

1. He did it by an extraordinary sign of his taking possession of his house. When the tabernacle was built, and ready to be set apart for service, the glory of the Lord filled it, [Exod. xl](#). It was a dark cloud; for then God dwelt in thick darkness. And, [1 Kings viii. 10](#), when the temple was built, God came by a glorious sign, and took possession of it. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. And this also was a cloud. God took possession of those houses — the tabernacle and the temple — by a cloud, to signify those types and veils which the people were under, so that they could not see to the end of those houses; which were to denote the coming of the Son of God to fix his tabernacle among us, by taking human nature upon him.

2. God did it by a visible pledge of his abode and *residence*. Now, this was the ark, and the mercy-seat, encompassed with the cherubims, which had the direct form of a throne. The ark being supported to such a height, the mercy-seat placed upon that, and the cherubims shading it as arms, had the direct appearance of a throne. Hence the ark is sometimes called “The glory of God.” It is called “The King of glory,” [Ps. xxiv.](#), “Lift up your heads, ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory” — that is, the glorious ark, which was the type and representation of God’s dwelling gloriously in the tabernacle and temple — “may come in.” There are these two things required to inhabitation:— a glorious entrance by an extraordinary sign; and, a constant residence by an ordinary pledge: and both these were in the dedication of the temple and tabernacle. And two things ensued thereon:—

(1.) A special manifestation of God’s glory. Where he dwells, there is a special manifestation of his glory. God is everywhere; but is not said to dwell everywhere. He fills heaven and earth by his omnipresence; but God’s “dwelling” signifies something more; — not only his being, his essential, eternal being, but the manifestation of that being also. So, heaven is said to be his dwelling-place and throne, because God doth most gloriously manifest himself

to those creatures of light, his holy saints and angels, that come to the enjoyment of him. In the tabernacle, and in the temple, there was such a manifestation of God's glorious presence continually. This made them holy. And hence it is, that if all the men in this world should agree together to build a glorious fabric for the worship of God, — suppose at Jerusalem, — and when they had done, dedicate it to God with all the power they have; they cannot make it holy, unless God come to take possession of it by a visible pledge of his presence, and appoint a token of his presence to be in the place. The very notion that some men have, though you may think there is little in it, that they can dedicate any thing to God, hath been the greatest ruin that ever befell religion in this world. It hath wholly cast out all apprehensions of God's portion from the minds of men, and erected another portion for God, which was never called, never anointed, never inhabited by God himself. And that hath occasioned men, who contract the guilt of persecuting God's only dedicated portion, to put the notion of sacrilege upon tithes and titles, and I know not what, that God never dedicated, nor put his name upon, nor ever took possession of. There is no dedication to God, but it must be by these means. And, —

(2.) The special worship of God must by God himself be confined unto it. And truly we have great reason — considering what conflicts and contests are befallen us in these latter days, which only divine wisdom could foresee — to bless our dear Lord Jesus Christ for that good word of liberty he gave us: “The day cometh that neither at Jerusalem, nor in this nor that mountain, men shall worship God; but he that worships God, let him worship him in spirit and in truth.” This sets us at liberty from all ways, places, and forms of men's finding out and dedication.

That is the third way.

IV. There is one way more; and that is, by special vow of things that are in our power, giving them up to God according to his mind. So did Jacob, [Gen. xxviii. 22](#), “Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” Men, are usually very tenacious of what they have got; they are loath to part with any portion of it, — no, not to God himself; therefore doth Jacob so well express it here, “Of all that thou shalt give me, I will give the tithe to thee.” If ever Jacob had any thing God did not give him, that was all his own: and so he knew full well; for when he comes to call over this business again, he remembers, that “with his staff he went over Jordan, but God had now made him two bands.” When men gave to God according to his mind, of things in their own power, they were, under the law, made holy unto the Lord.

Now, I say, believers are dedicated, consecrated to God, and become his portion by all these several ways:—

*First.* They are so by calling, — which was the first way; God calls them out of the world to be a peculiar portion unto himself, [Rom. i. 7](#). They are “called to be saints,” and separated unto God. So likewise, [1 Cor. i. 2](#). Now, though this calling doth also imply effectual internal



vocation, whereby the heart and nature is really sanctified; yet it also includes an external separation and dedication unto God. Christ redeems us out of the world, and he calls us out of the world. An obediential compliance with that call of God for separation from the world makes us to be God's dedicated portion. "Come out from among them, and be separate," saith God. If we live in the world after the manner of the world, — if we are like the world in our ways and walk, in our affections and conversation, — we have no reason to look upon ourselves as the dedicated portion of God. He that is so, brethren, that is thus called to be God's, he endures the world, and doth his own duty in it; and that is all his concern; — I say, he endures the world. That which is the world, and properly so, hath nothing pleasing to him; only, he doth his own duty in it. If we intend to be at all interested in this great privilege here, let us secure ourselves that we are God's portion by calling, that we have complied with his call to separate ourselves from the world. The people of God dwelt alone of old, and were not reckoned amongst the nations. Our mixtures in the world, our conformity to the world, our touching of the unclean thing, is the sin of professors at this day; whereby they are concerned in procuring all the judgments that God is pouring out upon the land.

*Secondly.* Believers are made God's peculiar portion, and are dedicated to him by unction. I will first show that they are anointed, and then how they are anointed:—

1. The apostle says, [2 Cor. i. 21](#), "He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God." And you know that place, [1 John ii. 20, 27](#), "Ye have an unction from the Holy One; and the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you." It is plain, therefore, that believers are anointed. God in his providence did suffer that name to go upon us, that we should be called Christians; which is in English, "Anointed ones." That is the name of God's people in the world. How well we answer that name, many of us may do well to consider.

2. We cannot know how we were anointed, how we became Christians, but by considering how our Head was anointed, — how Jesus became Christ. Christ was anointed, [Isa. lxi. 1](#), "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me." [Heb. i. 9](#), "God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Wherein consisted the unction of the Messiah, the anointing of the Most Holy? which was prophesied of, [Dan. ix. 24](#). How did Jesus become Christ? Truly, I have elsewhere so largely insisted upon the communication of the Spirit of God to the human nature of Christ, — how, and for what end, — that I shall not here speak to it again. In a word, it was the gift of the Spirit of God, with his gifts and graces, in an immeasurable manner, to the human nature of Christ: "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him," [John iii. 34](#). So he is, therefore, said to be "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." How to his fellows? [Eph. iv. 7](#), "To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." All believers have their measure. He had no measure. This anointing consists in the communication of the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost to all believers. This is our unction, —

thence we are called Christians. And those who despise the Spirit of God, and his graces and gifts, will find little relief in calling themselves Christians another day.

But how doth this anointing dedicate believers unto God? It doth it two ways:—

(1.) It gives a peculiar interest unto God in them, which is not in any others. Where there are the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God, there God hath something that is not in any part of the world beside. It is, indeed, the way whereby God takes possession of any soul; he comes and deposits this treasure there. “There is my treasure,” saith God: “I lay it up there; and thereby I take possession of this soul to be mine.”

(2.) Every thing dedicated to God was to be employed in the service of God. And this anointing makes us able to serve God according to his mind and will, when we can do so no otherwise. There is no serving of God without the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost. God abhors all service proceeding from any thing else.

*Thirdly.* By inhabitation. The Spirit of God dwells in believers. I must say of this also, as I did of what went before, — I have shown so at large how the Spirit of God dwells in and, inhabits in believers, and how they are his temple and tabernacle, that I shall not speak more to it now; but only apply to the case of believers what was said before, — that wherever God inhabits, he first takes possession in a cloud, and dwells in a visible pledge of his presence.

1. When God converts a soul, he comes into it with a cloud. I know nothing in this world that I would be more jealous of in my ministry, than of speaking any thing, on conversion or regeneration, that I had not experience of myself. I would not bind others by any experience of my own, unless it be confirmed by a general rule; for one man may have an experience that another hath not: and we ought to be wonderful tender in giving out any thing that should be found in persons, as to conversion and regeneration, if we have not a general rule for it as well as our own experience. But yet I think this I can say, that God generally takes possession of souls in a cloud; that is, there is some darkness upon them: they cannot tell what their state is; — sometimes they have hopes, and sometimes fears; sometimes they think things are well, and sometimes they are cast down again. This is the way whereby God generally enters into all souls. These things may be in part where God doth not come; but seldom have I heard of any that have come unto God, but that God first took possession of them in a cloud.

2. God doth it by some visible pledge of his presence, when the cloud is over; for the cloud is but for a season, though it may continue upon some longer than upon others. I have shown before, that the pledge of God's visible presence in the temple and tabernacle was the ark and the mercy-seat, formed into the fashion of a throne with cherubims; which was a type of Jesus Christ. The ark had the law, and the mercy-seat was propitiatory, covering the law from the eye of justice; and so atonement was made. And this was a type of Christ.

How, then, doth God dwell in the hearts of believers by constant residence? When Christ is enthroned in the heart: and we can have no farther pledge of it. There may be a great deal of duty, careful and wary walking, and a great deal of profession; but if Christ be not upon the throne in the heart, there is no pledge of God's dwelling there. So God dedicates his people by inhabitation.

*Fourthly.* The last way whereby any thing was dedicated unto God was, by vow and covenant. Now, we are all of us under a two-fold dedication to God, — by vow and covenant: the one in general, whereof the token is baptism; and we are likewise under a particular vow and dedication as we are a church. What, I pray, is our engagement to walk with God in professed subjection to all the ordinances of Christ, but to give up ourselves to God by vow and covenant to be his, by a dedication of ourselves according to God's appointment and mind? God help us to look unto it, every one of us in our several places and stations; — there is more in these things than we are aware of.

Now, as there was never any other way whereby any thing could be dedicated to God, and believers being all these ways dedicated unto him, they become his peculiar portion. "They shall be mine," saith God. They are God's kings, priests, tabernacle, temple, sacrifice: "Yield your bodies a living sacrifice." And they are God's first-fruits, called so expressly.

There are two uses follow necessarily from hence: —

*Use 1.* If believers, especially as they are in church relation, which adds the last hand of dedication, by particular church vow and covenant to be God's; if believers, I say, are thus God's peculiar portion, dedicated unto him, it is not in my power to give warning unto the world to take heed how they meddle with this portion of God. They do not, they will not hear me; and if I could speak unto them, it would rather provoke them than cure them. But give me leave to say this, and to give glory and honour unto God therein, that among all the sins that so reign in the nation at this day, and have done so for a long season, that which hath peculiarly stirred up the displeasure of God against the nation, — so as to threaten us with spiritual judgments (the giving us up to Popery, which men are afraid of), and with temporal judgments of all sorts whatever, — hath been the violence that hath been done to God's portion all this nation over. Other sins are great and provoking, but God hath given the earth to the children of men. "He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction." He will bear with men in all their abominations, leave them for many ages, in many places of the world, to sport themselves in the earth, like the leviathan in the waters; but when a nation comes (as it hath been the sin of this whole nation, from one end to the other) to put forth its hand against God's portion, tearing, rending, destroying, imprisoning, banishing, starving the remainder of God's heritage, — it is the cause (let it be spoke to the glory of God, and that which God will own at the last day) why wrath is gone out against us. This hath not been done in a corner, by some few, at some certain time. We have known the day when the whole nation, as one man, was on fire to consume the residue

of God's heritage; it was the sin of the nation, from one end of it unto the other. Saith God, "All that devour her shall offend; evil shall come upon them." There hath been a great devouring of God's first-fruits; and truly in such a manner, that we have no greater cause to mourn this day, than that we have not been sensible of it as we ought to be, how these first-fruits of God have been devoured. But they shall offend, and evil shall come upon them. It is the very word that God speaks to the nation this day, if I understand any thing of the will of God in these matters. He speaks so again, [Jer. xii. 14](#), "Thus saith the Lord against all mine evil neighbours, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them." What is the inheritance God hath caused us to inherit? It is his ordinances, his ways and worship; it is not the great things of this world. Let all take their portion and lot, as God in his providence directs. The inheritance which God causeth Israel to inherit, is his ways and worship, the purity of his ordinances, and their serving Christ in them. This is our inheritance. Saith God, "I will pluck up my evil neighbours, that will not leave my inheritance." — "Let them take what is their own; but they will not leave my inheritance." That generation of vipers, those evil neighbours of God's inheritance everywhere, that have been devouring it, and taking of it away, their doom is read in the prophet, and will come upon them in God's appointed time. The great sin that is upon the nation, and which we ought to bewail, and be humbled for, is the violence they have done to God's portion. It hath not been done by this and that person; — no man hath cared for Zion, none hath pitied her; there have been none to plead her cause, none to relieve her, while her friends have died in prisons, been impoverished, banished, etc.

*Use 2.* There are sins with us, even with us also, against the Lord our God. And our great sin is this, — that notwithstanding all the violence that hath been showed us, all the fears, troubles, perplexities that we have undergone, yet we have not been willing to come out from among them, and be separate, but we have cleaved greatly to the unclean thing. There may be a time, and there hath been, when God calls his people to a local separation. So he did to his people in Babylon: "Come out of her, my people." And we can remember the day when God carried many of his people out of this nation into a wilderness, and there hid them for a season. They were under the call of God to a local separation. I see no ground for that now. God binds men down by his providence to their stations; relation and duty bind them down to bear a testimony to the ways of Christ against all those wicked oppositions that are made unto them. But to separate more in the holiness of our lives and conversations, to keep more from the uncleanness and vanities of the world, all the abominations of it; — God's call is upon us all for this. These two things being thus met together, — namely, violence upon the portion of Christ, upon God's separate ones; and neglect of duty in those separate ones, to separate themselves more and more from the world — who can save? who can deliver? and what can be our expectation while this frame doth abide? I wish I had a

little more time to press this upon us, that if we intend to be made partakers of the last thing in my text, — which is the promise that God will “receive us, and be a Father to us,” and use us as his sons and daughters, if we would be made partakers of it, when an apprehension of an interest in it will be worth ten thousand times more than all this world can afford; then let us stir up ourselves to this great duty of farther and daily separation from the world in things moral and spiritual, in our minds, in our spirits, in our ways, in our whole course; that if it be the will of God, there may be some interposition for the saving of the land.

## **Sermon XXIV.<sup>380</sup> God's withdrawing his presence, the correction of his church.**

“O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.” — [Isa. lxiii. 17](#).

These are words that carry a great deal of dread in them; — tremendous words, methinks, as any in the book of God. And, according as our concernment shall be found in them, they require very sad thoughts of heart. It is come now to the last; this is the last cast; if we miss in pursuing this great inquiry, we are undone for ever: “O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways? why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?” God is in this matter, whereof we have been complaining.

It is the true church of God that speaks these, words. This is plain in the acting of faith as to the great interest and privilege of adoption, in [the verse foregoing](#), where they say, “Doubtless thou art our Father;” — “However things are with us, ‘doubtless thou art our Father.’ ” When all other evidences fail, faith will secretly maintain the soul with a persuasion of its relation unto God; as you see by the church in this place. They were “all as an unclean thing;” and their “holiness all faded away as a leaf,” [Isa. lxiv. 6](#). And yet faith maintains a sense of a relation to God; and therefore they cry, “Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: O Lord, thou art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” And I am persuaded some of you have found it so, — that faith hath maintained an interest in a relation to God, when all particular evidences have failed. So it is in our head, Jesus Christ, when he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” When all particular evidences fail, he can still say, “My God, my God.” So is it here with this miserable and distressed church and people of God; — all is lost and gone, and yet faith cries, “Doubtless thou art our Father.” And if, in the matters of this day, God would help us to maintain and not let go our interest in him as our Father, by faith, we should have a bottom and foundation to stand upon. If it be so with us as hath been confessed to God (and I fear it is worse), we shall be at a loss for our particular evidences, at one time or other; but yet it will be a great advantage, when faith can maintain its station, and we be enabled to say, “‘Though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel will not own us,’ such vile creatures; and though ‘our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,’ and our holiness

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380 This sermon was preached on a solemn day of fasting and prayer, March 21, 1675. For which occasion the Doctor had prepared another discourse; but by a special reason which then occurred, had his thoughts directed to this subject. [Such is the note appended to the sermon in the edition of 1721. It is to be regretted that it is not more full and explicit. We have not been able to discover what the circumstances were to which it makes allusion. Owen seems to have been unwell when the discourse was preached. See page 298. — Ed.]

‘fadeth away as a leaf,’ and our adversaries have trodden upon us; ‘yet doubtless thou art our Father.’” The Lord help us to say thus when we depart, and we shall yet have a foundation of hope.

I would observe here the condition of the church at that time. It was a state of affliction and *oppression*; — *of oppression* on the one hand, and of deep *conviction* of sin on the other. It is well when they go together.

*First.* It was a time of distress and *oppression*; as is declared, [verse 18](#), “Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.” The adversary had grievously oppressed them; but that which the church was most concerned in was, that they had trodden down the sanctuary, — disturbed the holy assemblies, and broken up the worship of God. And it is well, brethren, if, under all oppression and distresses that may befall us, we do really find our principal concern is for the treading down God’s sanctuary. Whatever else lay upon them, this was that they complained of: “Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary.”

*Secondly.* It was also a time of deep *conviction* of sin with them. As the prayer is continued unto the end of the next chapter, you may see what a deep conviction of sin was fallen upon them, in [verses 6, 7](#), “Behold, we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and melted us down, because of our iniquities.”

Well, then, suppose it be a state of great oppression, and a state of great conviction of sin, what is the course that we should take? We may turn ourselves this way and that way; but the church, you see, is come to this, — to issue all in an inquiry after, and a sense of, God’s displeasure, manifesting itself by spiritual judgments. And this, in truth, brethren, if I understand any thing of the state and condition of my own soul and yours, and of the generality of the churches of God in the world, is that which we are in particular called to, and where we are to issue all this business, — namely, to inquire into God’s displeasure, and the reason of it, manifesting itself in spiritual judgments. “O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways? and why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?”

It is but a little I shall speak to you at this time; God, I hope, will give us other seasons to pursue the same design: my present distemper, and other occasions, will not suffer me now to enlarge. However, I will lay a foundation, if God help me, by opening the words unto you:— I. What is it to err from the ways of God? II. What is it to have our hearts hardened from the fear of God? III. What ways are there whereby God may cause us to err from his ways, and harden our hearts from his fear? IV. What may be the reasons why the Lord should deal thus severely with a poor people, after they have walked with him, it may be, many years, — that at length they should be brought to this complaint, “Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?” And then, V. What is to be done for relief in this condition? what course is to be taken?

These are the things that should be first spoken to from the text; and then we should come to the last clause: "Return for thy servants' sake," etc. I shall proceed as far as I am able:— I. What is it to err from the ways of God?

The ways of God are either God's ways towards us, or our ways towards him, that are of his appointment. God's ways towards us, are the ways of his providence: our ways towards God, are the ways of obedience and holiness. We may err in both.

I think in that place of the Hebrews, "They have always erred in heart, and have not known my ways," God principally intends his ways towards them; they did not know the ways of his providential workings, how mightily he had wrought for them. But the ways that God hath appointed for us to walk in towards him, are those here intended. Now, we may err from thence two ways:— 1. In the inward principle. 2. In the outward order:—

1. We may err in the inward principle. When the principle of spiritual life in our hearts decays, when we "fade as a leaf," and wither, then is this our case.

2. We err as to outward order, when we fail in the performance of duty in our walking, and in the course of our obedience and holiness that God hath called us unto. These for the most part go together; but from the text, and the whole context, I judge the first here to be principally intended; — a failing in the principle, in our hearts, and in a lively power of walking in the ways of God, and of living unto him. So that to err from the ways of God is to have our hearts weakened, spiritually disabled, often turned aside from the vigorous, effectual, powerful walking with God, which we are called unto.

II. What is it to have our hearts hardened from the fear of God?

There is a twofold hardening from God's fear:— 1. There is a total hardening; and, 2. A partial hardening:—

1. There is a total hardening, like that mentioned, [Isa. vi. 10](#), "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." This was a total hardening that came upon the Jews when they rejected Christ. That is not the hardening here intended. Those that are given up to a total hardness will not thus humble themselves before God, nor plead with God. Blessed be God that he hath not given us up to a total hardening, that we should utterly and wickedly depart from his ways!

2. There is a partial hardening mentioned by the apostle, [Heb. iii. 13](#), "Take heed, 'lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;' lest there come a hardness upon you that may be to your disadvantage." And it is this partial hardening that is here intended; and wherein it consists I shall speak a little afterward. It is this partial hardening that is intended in the text: "Thou hast hardened our hearts from thy fear."

III. How is God said to cause us to err from his ways, and to harden our hearts from his fear?

God is said to do it these several ways:—





1. God is said to do that (and it is not an uncommon form of speech in Scripture) whose contrary he doth not do, when it might be expected, as it were, from him. "If there be a prophet that doth prophesy so and so, 'I the Lord have deceived that prophet,' " [Ezek. xiv. 9](#); that is, "I have not kept him from being deceived, but suffered him to follow the imaginations of his own heart, whereby he should be deceived." God may be said to cause us to err from his ways, and to harden our hearts from his fear merely negatively, — in that he hath not kept us up to his ways, nor kept our hearts humble and soft in them.

2. Again; God hardens men judicially, in a way of punishment. This is a total hardening; of which we spoke before. And there are these acts of it, which, I think, are as evident in the times wherein we live as the judgments of God have been in the plague, or burning of the city, inundations, or any thing else. Spiritual judgments of God, in hardening the hearts of men judicially and penally to their destruction, are as visible to every considering person as any of God's outward judgments whatsoever. This will appear if we consider the following things, wherein it consists:—

(1.) The first thing God doth, when he hardens men's hearts penally, is, to give them up to their own lusts. It is directly expressed, [Rom. i. 24](#), "Wherefore God gave them up to their hearts' lusts." When God leaves men, and gives them up to pursue their own lusts with delight and greediness, then he is hardening them. And this is a visible judgment of God at this day: he takes off shame, fear, all restraint and disadvantages, and gives men up to their hearts' lusts.

(2.) The second thing is, that God, in penal hardening, gives men up to Satan, to blind them, darken them, harden them; for he is "the god of this world, that blinds the eyes of men," and the great work of blinding and hardening men is committed unto him. And the principal way whereby he works at this day, is by being a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets, crying, "Peace, peace," when God hath not spoken a word of peace: as it was in the business of Ahab; when Satan went and caught at a commission to seduce Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead, he did it by being a lying spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. God is visibly at work in the world with this judgment, giving men up unto Satan, acting in the mouths of the false prophets, who cry, "Peace, peace," to all sorts of sinners, when God speaks not one word of peace.

(3.) The third way whereby God doth judicially give up men to hardness of heart is, by supplying them in his providence with opportunities to draw out their lusts. They shall have opportunity for them. It is commonly given for one of the darkest dispensations of divine providence towards men, when it orders things so that they shall have opportunities, to accomplish their lusts and go on in their ways, administered unto them.

(4.) Lastly; in pursuit of all these, God gives them over to a "reprobate mind," [Rom. i.](#); that is, a mind that can neither judge nor approve of any thing that is good. Propose to men the most convincing things wherein their own interest and concern lies; show them that



eternal ruin lies at the door; — it is all one; they having a mind that can judge of nothing that is good. And the world is full of evidences of this work of God.

3. God may be said to cause men to err from his ways, and to harden their hearts from his fear, by withholding, upon their provocation, some such supply of his Spirit and actings of his grace as they have formerly enjoyed, to keep up their hearts to the ways and in the fear of God. And that is the hardening here intended. The Lord had withheld, upon just provocations, those supplies of his grace and Spirit which formerly were enjoyed, and which had given them a vigorous spirit in the ways of God, and a tender heart in the fear of God, which now they have lost, or else they could never have been sensible of it.

From what has been said, we may make the following observations:—

*Observation 1.* Even true believers themselves may for a season so err from the ways of God as to have their hearts partially hardened from his fear; and may fall under this state and condition, to err from the ways of God, by a decay of the principle of grace: and so as to have their hearts hardened from his fear, that they know not where they are, what they are doing, how it is with them, which way to look for relief to supply themselves, or how to recover strength or heal themselves; but are forced to cry, “O Lord, why hast thou caused us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?”

*Obs. 2.* God himself hath a righteous hand in this frame of spirit that sometimes befalls believers.

*Obs. 3.* This frame is the most deplorable condition that can befall the Church of God at any time; which is manifest upon these two accounts, — that it both takes away all solid evidences of God's special love, and inevitably exposes us to outward distresses and ruin, if it be not remedied. And therefore it is a most deplorable condition, to be brought into such a state.

Let us now a little inquire, as we before proposed, what it is to have our hearts hardened thus partially from the fear of God.

The fear of God may be considered in several respects:— as it regards sin, and so is a fear of caution and humility; or as it regards judgments, and so is a fear of reverence, wisdom, and diligence to improve them; or, lastly, as it regards duty, and so becomes a fear of obedience and watchfulness. Now, the want of a due sense of sin, of judgments, or of a due attendance unto duties, is this partial hardening.

(1.) A partial hardening consists in the want of a due sense of sin. It is the fear of God alone that can give us a due sense of sin. Judgments will give dread, and convictions disquiet; but it is the fear of God alone that gives a due sense of sin. Therefore, when we want this, our hearts are in some measure hardened from the fear of God; which discovers itself in the following particulars:— [1.] A want of a due sense of secret sins; [2.] A want of a due sense of sin in an uncircumspect walking; [3.] A want of a due sense of surprisal into known sins;

[4.] A want of a due sense of the sins of others. Where these things are, there is hardening from the fear of God.

[1.] This hardening consists in a want of a due sense of secret sins. And there is much in this. I shall but just name things unto you. The psalmist lays great weight on it, [Ps. xix. 12, 13](#), "Cleanse thou me from secret faults;" also, "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins." In these two lie the life of a believer. And there is no more safety, if we are not cleansed from secret sins, than if we are not kept back from presumptuous sins. Every one will conclude, if they are not kept back from presumptuous sins, they are undone for ever; but the danger is the same if they are not cleansed and have not a due sense of secret sins.

If it be asked, "What are these secret sins?" — *1st.* They are the vain imaginations of the mind; *2dly.* The corrupt actings of the affections of the heart; and, *3dly.* A frame of soul suited unto them. These are the things I intend by secret sins:—

*1st.* The vain imaginations of the mind. The Holy Ghost tells us that by nature "all the imaginations of the heart of man are evil, and that continually." And God knows what remainders there are of this vanity of mind, and these vain imaginations, in all our hearts. I place it at the head of what I intend; whereof if we have not a due sense, we are under hardening from the fear of God. These vain imaginations of our mind are such as no eye sees, none knows, not the angels in heaven nor the devils; but are the special object of the eye, and sight, and knowledge of God.

*2dly.* The corrupt actings and desires of our affections, wherein lust conceiveth. Lust tempts and seduces in vain imaginations, but conceiveth in the corrupt desires and actings of our affections.

*3dly.* And both these, if indulged in any measure, will be continually pressing upon our nature; — both the vain imaginations of the mind, and the corrupt actings of the affections towards perishing, worldly, sensual things, — either to lawful objects in an undue manner, or to unlawful objects, — will both be pressing on the mind; and if, by solicitation, they take place upon it, then the mind is cast into a dead, lifeless, carnal, loose frame: which frame also I reckon among these secret sins.

Now, brethren, more or less these things are true in us, according to the several degrees of grace we have received, through the woeful negligence we have been betrayed into. Have we a due sense of these things? or can we walk with boldness and confidence, peace and undisturbedness in our minds day and night, though these things be upon us? If so, we are in some measure hardened from the fear of God. The fear of God hath not its proper work upon us, which would keep us deeply sensible of these things, deeply afflict us for them, keep us in an abhorrence of them, and make us watchful against them night and day; and not suffer vain thoughts to come and go without spiritual conflicts; nor inordinate affections to the world, without wounds given to it by the Spirit of God. If it is not so with us, our hearts are hardened from the fear of God.

[2.] This partial hardening also contains in it a want of a due sense of an irregular course of walking. There is a course of walking that will please the world, satisfy the church, and which professors shall greatly approve of; and yet if a man come to examine his own heart by the rule, he shall find his course of walking judged: for though the world hath nothing to object against us, and though professors do well approve of us; yet when we come to the rule, that will discover our iniquity. We are bound to walk by rule. "God will have mercy on them that walk according to this rule." We are bound to walk circumspectly in all things: "Walk circumspectly, redeeming the time; worthy of God, worthy of the Lord; " — which extends to all duties of our walk in the whole course of our lives. If we satisfy ourselves that our walk is such as answers known duties that are required of us, — that none in the world can lay blame upon us, and professors will approve of, — but do not bring it to the rule, and judge it there, we err from the ways of God: and if we bring it to the rule, and judge it there, and have not a due sense, so as to be greatly humbled for it, our hearts are so far hardened from the fear of God; for if we were in the fear of God all the day long, as we ought to be, it would be so with us. Many men's boldness and confidence in the world, and many men's peace, will be resolved at length into a neglect of this duty, — that they have not proved their walk by this rule, and that light God hath set up in their own souls. We may, I say, brethren, have something of this partial hardness upon our hearts in these instances, — want of a deep sense as to secret sins, want of self-judging as to our irregular walking, wherein it comes short of the rule, the holy rule we are to attend unto. And who can say of his walk, that it is worthy of God and the Lord? which yet we are called unto. Alas! it is not worth the owning ourselves, and the profession we make:— how much less is it worthy of God!

[3.] This hardening, likewise, carries in it a want of a due sense of sin, upon surprisal into known sins. "There is no man that liveth and sinneth not;" — but this respects known sins; I do not mean sins that are known unto others, but sins we know in particular, wherein we have offended against God. And known sins are great sins, — sins against light, and for the most part against engagements and promises of watchfulness; and there is something, if we examine thoroughly, of wilfulness in them. And great sins should have great sorrow, and great humiliation. Truly, brethren, I am afraid (and would be jealous over myself and you) that we are apt to put off even known sins upon slighter terms than the rule of the covenant doth admit of. We are apt to resolve them, in general, into the covenant of grace and mercy, or to pass them over with one or two confessions, or the like; and do not bring every known sin unto its proper issue in the blood of Christ, as we ought. If we do not do this, we are hardened thus partially from the fear of God. The true fear of God would keep us up to this, that no one known sin should ever pass us, without a particular issuing of it in the blood of Christ, and obtaining peace in it.

[4.] Want of a due sense of the sin of others is a great sign that we are partially hardened from God's fear; as it is a sign men are totally hardened, when they do not only commit sin

themselves, but have pleasure in them that do it. We have before us the sins of professors, the sins of the world, the provoking sins of the nation in the generation wherein we live, and the sins of all sorts of men; and I think there is not in any one duty more spiritual wisdom required of believers, than how to deport themselves with a suitable frame of heart, in reference to the sins of other men. Some are ready to be contented that they should sin, and sometimes ready to make sport at their sins; and for the most part it is indifferent unto us at what rate men sin in the world, so it go well with us or the Church of Christ. We understand but little of that, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law," [Ps. cxix. 136](#). I confess, I think there is little of this in the world, — that we can truly say, as he did, by the Spirit of God, that our eyes run down with water, because other men, all sorts of men, keep not God's law. There is a "sighing and mourning for all the abominations that are done among a people." What people? Truly, people that were idolaters, and false worshippers, and very wicked, as that people were at that time; yet God required there should be "sighing and mourning for all the abominations;" and took special notice of the working of grace that one way, above all other things. And the Lord help us, I am afraid we have very small concern for the sins of other men. And it is resolved into these two principles:— want of zeal for God's glory, and want of compassion to the souls of men; which would make us deeply concerned for the sins of other men. Sin in the world is grown a common thing to us; we do not rend our garments, when we hear of all the blasphemies and atheism in the world, — all the blood, uncleanness, profaneness, oaths. Every sin is grown common to us; nobody is affected. "None taketh hold upon God," saith the prophet. What will be the end of these things? Yet we speak of them as commonly as of our daily food. This is not to be under the power of the fear of the Lord. There is a partial hardness upon us from the fear of the Lord, in that general and almost universal unconcernedness that is upon us about the sins of other men.

I thought to have spoken to the remaining heads of this partial hardness of our hearts from God's fear; — the want of a due sense of God's judgments; and the want of a due attendance unto and walk with God in a way of duty: but I shall waive them, and proceed to the fourth thing proposed to be inquired into.

IV. Why doth the holy God deal thus with a professing people? What reason can we find in ourselves why it should be so, in making this complaint? that we neither charge God foolishly as the author and cause of sin, nor go about to extenuate our own sins, but aggravate and burden our consciences with a sense of them. Why doth the holy God thus deal with us?

The reasons are of two sorts:— 1. What provokes God unto it, which are the procuring reasons; 2. What God aims at in it, which are the final reasons why it is thus with us.

1. What provokes God to it? I answer, three things:—

(1.) Unthankfulness for mercy received. Thus, in the chapter wherein is my text, it is said, [verses 8–10](#), “Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old, But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” God doth in this matter turn to be our enemy; he fights against us. Why doth he so? Because he hath redeemed us in his love, — because he hath borne us in his arms all the days of our lives, — because he hath manifested that in all our afflictions he was afflicted, — because he had been a Saviour and heard us; and under all these mercies received, we have rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit, have been unthankful and ungrateful: therefore he is become our enemy, and fights against us. I beg of you, brethren, that we may call over those innumerable mercies we have received from the Lord, spiritual mercies, temporal mercies, and consider whether these evils be not befallen us, — whether our unthankfulness for mercy hath not caused God to become our enemy, and to fight against us.

(2.) A second reason is, “inordinate cleaving to the things of the world at a most undue season. It may be it would not provoke God so much thus to fight against us, and harden our hearts from his fear, if the season of it was not undue. Do not we see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, that God is unsettling all things here below, and that all these things shall be dissolved? When God gives so many intimations that “all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” Cleaving inordinately to the things of the world at such a season, is that which provoketh God to deal thus: “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.” God smote them for the iniquity of their covetousness in such a woeful, undue season. Let us, brethren, be at work. I may be under great mistakes and misapprehensions, but I must tell you what is upon my heart; — I cannot but think, that unless we are particularly at work, every one of us, we shall be overtaken with these dismal and dreadful effects, and God will appear against us, and fight against us.

(3.) The third reason is, — our unprofitableness, and unsuitableness to the means of grace we have enjoyed. O the barren land of England, upon which the rain hath often fallen, and [it] hath brought forth nothing but briars and thorns! We have had our proportion in it, brethren; you of this congregation can even make your boast of what you have enjoyed of this and that man's ministry for many years; but O the leanness and barrenness that is among us, now all is done! — our unsuitableness to the means we have enjoyed! We may repent one day that we ever had any among us who excelled others in gifts and graces, if we profit no more. We have not profited suitably to the means we have enjoyed; but every vain and foolish imagination hath turned us aside from keeping as we ought to the good and holy ways of God. We do not flourish in fruitfulness, in savouriness, and profitableness,



answerable to what the dispensations of God have been towards us; for the dew of God hath been upon us from time to time.

Now, besides these things named, which are public causes, why God hath brought us under this dispensation, let us all search our hearts, and say, "Lord, why hast thou caused me thus far to err from thy ways, and hardened my heart from thy fear? Why have I not former faith, love, affection, zeal? Why do not I mourn more? Where are my tears and humiliation? those heart-breaking sighs and groans after God which my heart was once filled withal? O Lord, 'why is my heart thus hardened from thy fear?' " Let us inquire into the particular reasons, that at last we may come to cry, "Return, O Lord, for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance."

2. What does God aim at in such a dispensation? We have mentioned the procuring reasons and causes; now, what are the final ends why God will thus deal with us?

There are two ends the holy God seems to have in these things:—

(1.) The first is, to awaken us unto the consideration of what an all-seeing God he is with whom we have to do. When we please the world and one another, and ourselves, in our walkings and conversations, God will have us know he is displeased. Though we please ourselves and cry, "Peace," and please the world and one another; yet God will so withdraw his Spirit and grace, that we shall be forced to say, "Why is God thus displeased with us?" He will have us glorify him, as one that is an all-seeing God, — as one that knows our inward frames, and tries us upon them.

(2.) God doth it to awaken us. If there be any thing of true grace in our hearts, a sense of spiritual judgment, will awaken us, when all outward judgments in the world will not do it; — no, if thunder and lightning be round about us, — if ruin and the sword be before us, and the earth underneath be ready to swallow us up, — they will not work so kindly upon a believer's heart as a sense of spiritual judgments. I hope God hath a design of love to awaken us all by this dispensation to return unto him.

But to proceed to the last inquiry:—

V. What way shall we take now for retrieving our souls out of this state and condition?

One way is prescribed here:— It is by prayer, "Return, O Lord." It is to beg of God to return.

What arguments have we to plead with God to return? This being the case, the arguments here given are peculiar to the case; and we may plead them. They are two:— 1. Sovereign mercy and compassion; and, 2. Faithfulness in covenant. They are both here pleaded:—

1. Sovereign mercy, [verse 15](#), "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me? are they restrained?" Our great plea in this case is upon sovereign mercy and compassion. Plead the pity of God; beg mercy of God; come to God as those that stand in need of mercy, and of the sounding of his bowels.

2. The second argument is, God's faithfulness in the covenant, [verse 16](#), "Doubtless thou art our Father; we are thine."

These are the two arguments. We are night and day to plead with God, for our recovery from the state and condition of erring from the ways of God, and of having our hearts hardened from his fear, sovereign mercy and covenant faithfulness. And this is all I shall speak to at this time.

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## Sermon XXV.<sup>381</sup> **The beauty and strength of Zion.**

“Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.” — [Ps. xlviii. 12–14.](#)

Many expositors think this psalm to be an ἐπινίκιον, — a triumphant song of thanksgiving after some great deliverance at Jerusalem. Some apply it to the times of Asa, when Zerah and the Ethiopians came with an army against Jerusalem of ten hundred thousand men; others apply it to the times of Jehoshaphat, when the Moabites, and Ammonites, and mount Seir (the Edomites), were gathered together against Judah; and others, again, to the days of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib and his army came against Jerusalem and were destroyed. They ground their interpretation upon [verses 4–6](#), “Lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it” (but they could come no farther), “and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail:” — which is a description of some great consternation that befell the enemies of God, and the enemies of Jerusalem, when they drew near unto it. So the Jews do interpret these verses, “Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces;” — that, notwithstanding this great and dreadful attempt, whether by the Ethiopians, or by the Moabites, or Sennacherib, there is not one tower broken down of Zion or of Jerusalem, but all things are safe and well. For my own part, I should rather judge this psalm to be composed by David, and purely mystical and prophetic. It is easy to manifest that all the foregoing psalms are so. And the close of the former psalm is the calling of the Gentiles, where he saith, “God reigneth over the heathen; God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness,” [verse 8](#). And in [verse 9](#), you read, in the margin of your Bibles, better than in the text, “The voluntary of the people are gathered unto the people of the God of Abraham.” The people were become a willing people in the day of his power. However, all conclude that these words are a graphical, description of the defence that God will at all times give his church, which the psalmist doth set before our eyes.

Look upon it, and observe what a diligent view he requires to be taken of what he here proposes. He looks upon Zion as a well-fortified garrison, not like to be carried in haste by the enemy. And he would have you well consider, too, what the fortifications are; therefore he distributes his direction into so many particulars:— “Walk about Zion;” this is the way whereby you may come to see how Zion is fortified. It may be you have gone a little way in walking, and have seen much, but do not cease, “Go round about her;” see if you can find one weak place, where she is likely to be attacked by the enemy. “Tell the towers,” — cast

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up the number of them, and see that they are not few; which is what a man of judgment and understanding would do, if he were to take a view of a fortified place, and consider whether it would hold out against a strong enemy. “Mark ye well her bulwarks;” or, “Set your heart to her bulwarks;” consider them, — do not take a general view of these fortifications of Zion, but ponder and consider whether they are likely to hold out or not, and whether you may put your trust in them. “Consider her palaces;” which were the great and eminent buildings in and about Zion, called in some place, “palaces of ivory,” with which they were greatly adorned. So that here is this direction given, to take a very strict, sedate, considerate view of the fortifications of Zion; since it would certainly be attacked by great and powerful enemies. There are two things added:— One is, the particular end wherefore they should do so: “That ye may tell it to the generation following,” since other ages of the church would have the use of it; — the other is, the ground why all this would be of benefit to them and the generations following: “For this God is our God in covenant, and that for ever and ever, and will ‘be our guide unto death.”

I shall make one observation from the words, and speak a little very briefly and plainly to it:—

*Observation. A diligent search into, and consideration of, the means and causes of the preservation and protection of the church in the greatest dangers and difficulties, is a duty incumbent on us, for our own support against sinful fears, and to enable us to that testimony which is required for future generations, to encourage them to trust in the Lord.*

Every age is to give over a good testimony of God’s dealing with Zion to the age that comes after. And a diligent search and inquiry into the causes and means of the protection and preservation of the Church of God in the midst of imminent dangers and difficulties, is a duty incumbent upon us, that we may be fortified against sinful fears in ourselves, and encourage succeeding generations to trust in the Lord. As we have received the testimony of such who have gone before us, so we are to give our testimony to those who shall come after.

All that I shall do at present is to answer these five questions:—

I. What is to be understood by the preservation and protection of the church? so as we may look neither for less nor more than what we are like to meet with.

II. What is meant by searching into, and considering of, these causes and means of the church’s preservation? “Walk about Zion, tell her towers, set your heart to her bulwarks, consider her palaces,” etc.

III. What are those causes and means of the church’s preservation, those towers and bulwarks which will not fail, whenever Zerah or Sennacherib comes, or whatever attempts are made upon Zion?

IV. What reason is there why we should thus search into and consider these causes of the church’s preservation and protection?

V. What is the testimony which we have to give concerning this matter to the ensuing generation? “That ye may declare it to the generation to come.”

I shall speak a little in answer to these five inquiries:—

I. What is that preservation and protection of Zion, the church of God, that we may expect, — whose causes and means we should inquire into?

This may be reduced unto three heads:—

1. The eternal salvation of the church of God. This is the goal and the prize that all this great running is about in the world. Satan is, in his own nature, as active and restless as he is malicious; and yet, I suppose, if this end was taken away, if this was not in his eye, — the eternal salvation of the church, of all that believe, — he would give himself much more leisure than he doth. All things here, evils, trials, persecutions, and the like, are but skirmishes; but where goes eternal bliss, there goes the victory. This, therefore, is part of that preservation and safety of Zion which we are to look after, — namely, as the apostle saith, “That all Israel shall be saved.” You have a great security, that our Lord Jesus Christ gives of it, [John x. 27](#), etc., “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. I and my Father are one.”

This is the first thing in the church’s preservation, — namely, that, let the conflict be never so great, never so severe, all true believers shall be eternally saved. And if we do not lay the principal weight in our thoughts upon this, our concern in other things will be of no moment unto us. There is one false opinion doth more mischief to the honour of God in the world in this matter than all the devils in hell are able to do; and that is, of the total and final apostasy of true believers: for if that be so, we have lost our very first principle of the preservation of Zion, — namely, that “all Israel shall be saved,” and that none shall take believers out of the hands of Christ.

2. There is this in it also, that there shall be a church, a professing church, preserved in the world throughout all generations, in despite of all the oppositions of Satan and the world; that is, there shall be a called number, yielding obedience internally unto Christ, and openly professing that obedience, always preserved unto the end of the world. It is expressly included in that promise, [Isa. ix. 7](#), “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” However it may fall out in particular places and nations, yet Zion will be preserved; God will reserve for Jesus Christ a church visibly professing and yielding obedience unto him according to the gospel.

But you will say, perhaps, “Where was there such a church in the time of the antichristian apostasy? did not the visible church wholly fail?”

I answer, — Though I acknowledge all the churches in the world have greatly apostatized and fallen away, yet, in the first place, all did not fall away in the same length or manner with those in these parts of the world that were under the antichristian apostasy. There were churches in the east which, though very corrupt formerly, and now more so, yet might justly be esteemed a visible church. Besides, the church of God was then in Babylon until the Reformation. There was in the Roman church a number of persons that sincerely feared God, and belonged unto the Zion of Christ, who were preserved. Hence is that call, [Rev. xviii. 4](#), “Come out of her, my people.” Christ’s people were in her until the time that God gave them a call to come out of her. And another part of them were in visible opposition all along to the growing apostasy of the Papacy. About four or five hundred years after Christ, the great composition was made between Christianity and Paganism, when the outward court was given to the Gentiles to be trodden down; that is, plainly, when those northern nations that divided and destroyed the Roman empire were brought in to be Christians. And, upon that composition, nations came in to a profession of Christianity with Pagan worship and manners; but yielded obedience unto Christian rulers, — bishops, priests, and the like. Now, from that very time, when all things sunk into Antichristianism, there was still a visible testimony given against it by the church of Christ; that is, by believers from one generation to another, — an eminent, blessed testimony, against all that cursed apostasy.

It is good to keep our faith and expectation within bounds, — that we do not look for more than is like to come to pass; and yet still to have our faith confirmed in those things that may be sure not to fail. “All Israel shall be saved,” and Christ will maintain his kingdom in the world against all opposition; — that is, the cause wherein we are engaged, whatsoever becomes of our persons, will be triumphant. Believers shall be saved, and a professing church shall be preserved; which is all the general cause wherein we are engaged. And God, it may be, hath placed us in this age to give over our testimony to the future generation.

3. There belongs to the preservation of the church, the protection and deliverance of the true church of God under persecution: this likewise comes within the compass of these fortifications. We are very apt to look after our own concerns, and, it may be, to imagine we are more concerned in this third head than in both the former. But those that think so make a very wrong judgment; for the measure of all our concerns in present deliverance, or in the conflicts of the church, is to be taken from these two generals, — the eternal salvation of the church at last, and the preservation of the kingdom of Christ in the world. And if once we begin to measure them by our own advantages, peace, liberty, or friends, we shall take wrong measures of God’s providence and our own expectation.

There are three seasons, or three ways, whereby churches, in particular times and places, are in danger of coming short of this protection, or seeming so to do:— (1.) When the power of Satan and the world are set upon them in a way of persecution. (2.) When the nations of the world among whom they live are so wicked that God will not forbear a general devastation

and destruction. (3.) When themselves apostatize and decay, and provoke God to remove his candlestick from among them. In such seasons it comes to a trial, whether particular churches, or a church in any particular place, shall be preserved and protected in their present trial, or not. And I confess unto you that my thoughts are, that all three are upon us at present; which makes our case the more difficult and hard to be determined. But this, I bless God, I cannot but think, that what we most fear is least to be feared. It is plain we most fear the first; and I think I am certain that the first is least to be feared. I shall speak briefly to each of them:—

(1.) As to the first, there are two rules whereby to make a judgment of the preservation of the church in time of persecution. The one is that given by the prophet Hosea, [Hos. xi. 12](#), “Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.” He prophesies the immediate destruction of Ephraim:— The Church of Israel shall wander to Assyria. But Judah shall yet abide. Why? “Judah yet ruleth with God;” that is, for God, — the ruling power of Judah is for God. I take that to be the meaning of the words; for if you will observe concerning Judah, all that ever were good among them was in the ruling power. In the very days of Josiah himself, Judah, that is, the body of the people, turned to God feignedly, and not with their whole heart, [Jer. iii. 10](#). But yet the prophet foresaw a time would come that Judah should not be so. He shall rule, therefore, while he is faithful to God. Here, then, is your rule:— While the ruling power of a church or nation is for God, is faithful to God and his interest, walking with him, they are within these bulwarks. And truly, to speak what I believe in this matter (for in all things that are future, that we may not have clear and full evidence of, there is a reserve for sovereignty), wherever there are churches walking with God, ruling for God, and faithful to him, they shall never be prevailed against by outward persecution in any place; unless it be in subserviency to the hidden design of sovereign wisdom to remove the gospel wholly from such a place. This, then, is the second rule: and we can never fathom, and so must be in the dark, whether the church in this or that particular place shall be absolutely preserved; because, if God pleases, he can make the total scattering to be a means subservient to the spreading of the gospel. But so far as they walk with God, they are within this protection.

(2.) The church’s danger lies in the destruction that may come upon places where they are, for national sins. There were in the days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, “good figs at Jerusalem, very good figs, even as the first ripe figs,” [Jer. xxiv. 2](#), — that is, there were many precious, saints of God, — and there were also “evil figs, so evil that none could eat them;” and yet God puts all these figs into a basket, good and bad, and all must go into captivity. He could no longer forbear, for the provoking sins of the nation; the whole must go into captivity together. Now, if such a season may come upon any place, as hath upon many nations deservedly because of national sins, the good may suffer with the bad, and churches may receive a scattering.



(3.) The third danger is their own apostasy. There is not any thing in the world that we ought to be more afraid of than of a church's scattering in an apostatizing condition. Then we shall bear the burden of our guilt in our scattering, and be clean taken off from all means of retrieving it. But there is an interest of all particular churches walking with God in this preservation and protection that is here promised and described to be round about Zion; and it is an act of mere sovereignty where God dealeth otherwise with them. That is the preservation and protection of the church, in answer to the first inquiry.

II. The second question is, — What is it to search after and consider the causes and means of this preservation? Where shall we look for it?

To this I answer, —

1. Be sure to take off your search and consideration from those things which are not, and will not, prove to be the bulwarks of Zion. You know how they were blamed in such a case, [Isa. xxii.](#), in a time of great distress and invasion that was coming upon them. The prophet tells you what the people did, [verse 8](#), etc., “He discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many; and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool; but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.” Looking unto carnal aids and helps in straits and difficulties hath been our folly. The first thing in this call to look to Zion, is, to “cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for whereof is he to be accounted?”

2. Where shall we look for these bulwarks? We must look for the protection of the church where we look for the destruction of its adversaries. And where shall we look for that? The prophet tells us, [Isa. xxxiv. 16](#), “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his Spirit it hath gathered them.” All the foregoing prophecy is concerning the utter destruction of Idumea in the type; but of Babylon, Rome, Antichrist, in the anti-type. And [the verses from 11 to 15](#) express the gathering of all the fowls of prey, dismal fowls, to dwell in the place. But how shall we know whether this will come to pass? Says the prophet, “Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read; no one of these shall fail:” that is, no one particular judgment that God hath threatened in his whole book against his adversaries shall ever fail; no, not in one circumstance: neither the cormorant nor the screech-owl shall want her mate. Seek it out of the book of the Lord; you will find it recorded in these prophecies: and nothing shall fail there; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the Spirit of the Lord shall accomplish it. We are to look, therefore, and search for these defences, causes, and means of the protection of Zion, in the book of the Lord. This is “the tower of David, where hang a thousand shields, all shields of mighty men,” [Cant. iv. 4](#); where is recorded all the defence

of the church and people of God. It is your duty to search in the book of God, and read, to see what are the causes and means of the protection and preservation of the church; and when you have found them out, you are then to consider them. Want of consideration weakens our faith greatly. If you can find, by reading in the book of God, that there are such and such defences and bulwarks of Zion; our duty is now to consider whether they will hold out against the greatest attacks and attempts of Satan and all our adversaries. I speak what is plain, but very fit for this day. When you have found out these defences, bring them to the shield of faith, and obedience to God, and consider whether they are like to hold out; consider each, and give judgment upon them. And if you judge they are so, then trust to them; drive all you have, all your concerns, within the compass of these fortifications, and trust to them. And this may suffice in answer to the second question, — Where are we to search for the preservation and protection of the church?

III. What are the causes and means of the preservation of Zion, and protection of the church, that we are to search out, and to consider, and trust unto?

It is but a little I can comply with the text in. I cannot go round about Zion, I cannot tell her towers; but we will consider some of her bulwarks, that will be a sure preservation against all opposition. And I will name four or five unto you:—

1. The designation and constitution of Jesus Christ to be king of the church, king of Zion, is the great bulwark of Zion. This is the fort-royal that never fails. *Ps. ii.*, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” — “Notwithstanding all this tumult, conspiracy, and rage, all these counsels and advices, yet,” saith he, “Zion must stand; for I have set my king, I have anointed Christ, my eternal Son, to be king upon my holy hill of Zion.” But though Christ be made king, it doth not follow but he may give over reigning; and so there will be no security from hence. The truth is, he will do so, he will give over reigning as to his mediatory kingdom;<sup>382</sup> but not before he hath done with all his enemies, *Ps. cx. 1*, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” And the apostle, *1 Cor. xv.*, saith, “He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” And when he shall have put down all power and authority, then he shall give up the kingdom. The great security of the church is from hence, that Christ is made king of Zion; and if he be a king he must have subjects. The word is his law; he rules

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382 On the subject of the continuance of Christ’s mediatorial office in heaven, Dr Owen gives a detailed exhibition of his views in the last chapter of his “*Treatise on the Person of Christ*,” published four years after this sermon was delivered, vol. 1 p. 271. — Ed.

by his Spirit: but rule and law together will not make a kingdom, unless there be subjects to yield obedience. If Christ be a king, if he sit upon Zion, the church must be preserved; for he must have a kingdom. There is but one way in the world that looks probable to put an end to Christ's reign; and that is, to cease being his enemies: for the express terms of his reign is, "Till all his enemies be made his footstool." How easy were it for me to dwell upon this, that this king of the church hath power to preserve it to all ends, and in all circumstances; power to preserve it to eternal salvation, in visible profession, or in particular trials! And what king is there among men that will not preserve his subjects in time of trial, when it is in his power so to do? The Lord Christ will preserve them. "I give unto them eternal life, and no man shall take them out of my hands." He is able to save them to the utmost, even all that come unto God by him; and he is given to be head over all things to the church, — to dispose of all as seems good unto him, for the end, use, and interest of the church.

This is the first bulwark and security we have for the preservation and protection of the church; and unless men can dethrone Jesus Christ, and cast him off from being king upon the holy hill of Zion, it is in vain to think of prevailing against Zion.

2. The second bulwark of Zion is the promises of God, which are innumerable. I will name but two of them. One is the foundation of the Old Testament, and the other of the New. One held it out for four thousand years, and was never impeached; and the other for these sixteen hundred years, and shall never be shaken.

The promise that was the foundation of the Old Testament, was the first promise of God, [Gen. iii. 15](#), "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." There are these four things in that promise:— (1.) That there shall always be a twofold seed in the world, — the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman; they shall never fail while this world stands. (2.) That these two seeds shall always be at enmity; there shall be an everlasting conflict, from the entrance of sin to the end of it. "I will put enmity," saith God, and such an enmity as shall be carried on by the highest and most severe warfare. The enmity is spiritual, but the warfare oftentimes is outward. The first manifestation of this enmity was in blood. Cain slew Abel. Why? Because he was of the evil one. And so it hath been carried on by blood from that day to this. (3.) That either seed hath a leader: there is "he and thou," "it and thou;" that is, Christ and Satan. Christ is the leader of the seed of the woman, the captain and head of it in this great conflict; and Satan, as he was the head of the apostasy from God, continues the head of his seed, the generation of vipers, to try out the contest with Christ unto the end. (4.) The victory shall always be to the seed of the woman. It is said, indeed, "Thou shalt bruise his heel," — Christ's heel, in his sufferings, both in his own person and those of the church. But on the contrary, it is said likewise, "He shall bruise thy head;" — break thy power and strength, — conquer thee. Then Zion is safe. This was the foundation of the Old Testament: and though things oftentimes were brought to great distress, — sometimes by



apostasy, and sometimes by persecution, — yet this promise carried it, and delivered over the church safe into the hand of Christ.

Now, when Christ takes the church, and goes to new-form it, and fashion it more for the glory of God, there is the foundation-promise made in the New Testament: “Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” [Matt. xvi. 18](#). If that obscure promise under the Old Testament did secure Zion, as to all those things before mentioned, four thousand years, shall not we trust to this promise of our Saviour for half the time? though it is, indeed, the continuance of the same promise; for “the gates of hell” is the seed of the serpent, and the “rock” is Christ. That is the second bulwark of Zion. We may be shaken in our faith and confidence, but we have the promise of God, that hath supported it thus far in the world, and will certainly preserve it to the end.

3. There is the watchful providence of God over the church. It is expressed, [Deut. xi. 12](#), where the land of the church is said to be “a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year unto the end of the year.” That land which is the possession of the church, the seat of God’s worship, the church itself, is what the Lord careth for. And it is expressed again to the same purpose, [Isa. xxvii. 3](#), where this land is called God’s vineyard, “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” There is the watchful providence of God over the church, night and day preserving it; which providence, indeed, we live upon, though it is secret and invisible to us. There is power in it; but “God hides his power.” We see little, we are not able to discern any thing to purpose, of the secret emanation of divine power and wisdom through the hearts and counsels of all mankind, to this end, that God may preserve his church, governing their affections, ruling their thoughts, turning and overturning their counsels; — things that will never appear nor come to light, what was their occasion and ends, till the great day when the thoughts of all hearts shall be discovered. The Lord will keep and preserve his church, that none may hurt it.

4. Another bulwark is God’s special presence. God is in an especial manner present in his church. I have treated concerning the nature and special presence of God and Christ in the church, and proved it from many promises, and showed the effect of it; which I shall not now insist upon, but only show that this is a bulwark of the church. In [Isa. viii. 9, 10](#), there is a gauntlet thrown out to all the adversaries of the people of God, and a challenge to do their worst: “Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand.” What is the reason? “For God is with us.” The presence of God is with his church. Every thing of force, of counsel, of association and agreement, — all shall be broken and come to nought; they shall have no effect. And he gives this only reason, “Because God is with us.” While God is with his church, it may be exercised with great trials, so that they may think they have lost

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the presence of God; as in [Judges vi. 12](#), “The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee. Oh my Lord,” saith he, “if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” — “Whence is all this evil come upon us, that we should be under the power of the Midianites, oppressed and destroyed by them?” He could not believe that if God was with them, according to his promise, they could be so prevailed upon by their enemies. Great things of trouble may befall the church of God while God is present with them; so as they may be ready to say sometimes, “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God: the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” “It cannot be,” saith Gideon, “that God is with us, if we be thus ruined.” But he will appear and manifest himself, for the protection of Zion.

5. The last bulwark, unto which all others may be reduced, is the covenant of God: “For this God is our God.” — “That God who hath fortified Zion in all other generations, and wrought these deliverances, he is our God in covenant.”

I shall not need to reckon any more than these five bulwarks of the church. Ponder and consider whether they are like to work out its preservation and protection. And if God gives us wisdom to single out these things, and consider them aright, we shall soon see what encouragement we have to pray for the preservation and protection of the church, however it may be attacked and attempted, even this day; — which is our present business.

IV. Why should we make this inquiry into these causes and means of the preservation and protection of the church?

The reason is, to deliver ourselves from our own sinful fears, and that by a discovery of the great mistake which all the adversaries of the church run upon. The reason why, the ground whereupon, they attempt the church, is that, and no other, which you have, [Ezek. xxxviii. 10, 11](#), “Thus saith the Lord God; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: and thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.” Here is the very ground of the undertaking of the world against the church in any age, — that they have no defence, are a poor people that dwell in unwalled villages, and have neither bars nor gates. It is a miserable disappointment, for men to go and undertake to destroy or oppress any place, thinking they are unprovided, and, when they come there, to find it quite otherwise. At this day there would not any move a tongue against the people of God, but upon this very account, that they have no defence, no protection. And sometimes they proceed so far as that they begin to discover the bulwarks of Zion, — if not in the causes, yet in the effects. The old world saw not God in the cause of what he did; but when the waters began to roll upon them, the psalmist tells us, “They saw it, and were afraid; and fearfulness took hold upon them.” — “Is this the people that dwell in unwalled villages, that have neither bars nor gates? See their towers! behold their bulwarks! there is no attacking them.” When once God

makes them to see this, that the power of Christ is engaged for his people, they will then cry to the mountains and to the rocks to hide them from the day of his wrath; they will be surprised with fear.

Now, seeing the adversaries of the church of God are certainly upon this mistake attempting the church, — because, as they imagine, it hath no guard (and they will certainly find at last that they have a guard, which they saw not and were not acquainted with), — why should we be afraid in such a case? Nothing more encourages persons, than when they know their enemies do clearly mistake their condition. This is enough to make the veriest coward in the world valiant. Let us be sure to be found within this garrison and place of defence, and certain that we have to do in the concerns of Zion, and not of the world; and then shall we see the mountains all full of chariots and horses of fire round about us, — Christ reigning, the promise of Christ engaged, and the watchful eye of God upon the church continually. Our fears arise from the want of considering these things, and taking a carnal view and measure of things that are seen.

V. The last inquiry is, — What testimony are we to give over to the generation that is to come after us?

This testimony consists of two things:—

1. The exercise of faith and patience in all our own trials that may befall us, that there may be a remembrance of it in the generations that are to come. The martyrs that suffered here so long ago do still tell us in this generation, by their faith and patience, that Zion had walls and bulwarks round about her, and that God was her God and Guide. Had they not believed it, do you think they would have given up their bodies to the flames in this city and other parts of the nation? In like manner, that faith and patience which we shall exercise in any trial that may befall us in the behalf of Zion, is to tell the generations to come what God hath done, and how we have found it ourselves.

2. It is our duty to give it over by instruction to those that we bring up. Our fathers have told us what God did in their days; and we are to give in this testimony to God, — to tell our children what God hath done in our days:— “So long have we lived and been professors; so long have we walked in Zion; and we have found God faithful in his promise, — not one word or tittle hath failed that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken.” Thus are we to instruct the generation that is growing up, that hath not seen those things which we have seen.



## Sermon XXVI.<sup>383</sup> Perilous times.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” — [2 Tim iii. 1.](#)

You know, my way and manner upon these occasions is to speak as plainly and familiarly as I can unto what is of our present concernment; and so I design to do at this time, if it shall please God to help under infirmities.

The words contain a warning of imminent dangers. And there are four things in them:— First, The manner of the warning: “This know also.” Secondly, The evil itself that they are warned of: “Perilous times.” Thirdly, The way of their introduction: “They shall come.” Fourthly, The time and season of it: “They shall come in the last days:—

First. The manner of the warning: “This know also;” — “Thou Timothy, unto the other instructions which I have given thee how to behave thyself in the house of God, whereby thou mayest be set forth as a pattern unto all gospel ministers in future ages, I must also add this, ‘This know also.’ It belongs to thy duty and office to know and consider the impending judgments that are coming upon churches.”

And so, as a justification of my present design, if God enable me unto it, I shall here premise, that it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to foresee and take notice of the dangers which the churches are falling into. And the Lord help us, and all other ministers, to be awakened unto this part of our duty! You know how God sets it forth ([Ezek. xxxiii.](#)) in the parable of the watchman, to warn men of approaching dangers. And truly God hath given us this law:— If we warn the churches of their approaching dangers, we discharge our duty; if we do not, their blood will be required at our hands. The Spirit of God foresaw negligence apt to grow upon us in this matter; and therefore the Scripture only proposeth duty on the one hand, and on the other requires the people’s blood at the hands of the watchmen, if they perform not their duty. So speaks the prophet Isaiah, [Isa. xxi. 8](#), “He cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower.” A lion is an emblem of approaching judgment. “The lion hath roared; who can but tremble?” saith the prophet Amos. It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to give warning of impending dangers.

Again; the apostle, in speaking unto Timothy, speaks unto us also, to us all, “This know ye also.” It is the great concern of all professors and believers, of all churches, to have their hearts very much fixed upon present and approaching dangers. We have inquired so long about signs, tokens, and evidences of deliverance, and I know not what, that we have almost lost the benefit of all our trials, afflictions, and persecutions. The duty of all believers is, to be intent upon present and imminent dangers. “O Lord,” say the disciples, [Matt. xxiv.](#), “what shall be the sign of thy coming?” They were fixed upon his coming. Our Saviour answers,

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383 This sermon was preached November 3, 1676, being a day set apart for solemn fasting and prayer.

“I will tell you: 1. There shall be an abounding of errors and false teachers: many shall say, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ and, ‘Lo, there is Christ.’ 2. There shall be an apostasy from holiness: ‘Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.’ 3. There shall be great distress of nations: ‘Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.’ 4. There shall be great persecutions: ‘And they shall persecute you, and bring you before rulers; and you shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.’ 5. There shall be great tokens of God’s wrath from heaven: ‘Signs in the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars.’” The Lord Christ would acquaint believers how they should look for his coming; he tells them of all the dangers. Be intent upon these things. I know you are apt to overlook them; but these are the things that you are to be intent upon.

Not to be sensible of a present perilous season, is that security which the Scripture so condemns; and I will leave it with you, in short, under these three things:— 1. It is that frame of heart which, of all others, God doth most detest and abhor. Nothing is more hateful to God than a secure frame in perilous days. 2. I will not fear to say this, and go with it, as to my sense, to the day of judgment: A secure person, in perilous seasons, is assuredly under the power of some predominant lust, whether it appears or not. 3. This secure, senseless frame is the certain presage of approaching ruin. This know, brethren, pray know this, I beg of you, for yours and my own soul, that you will be sensible of, and affected with, the perils of the season whereinto we are cast. What they are, if God help me, and give me a little strength, I shall show you by-and-by.

Secondly. There is the evil and danger itself thus forewarned of; and that is, *καίροι χαλεποί*, — hard times, perilous times, times of great difficulty, like those of public plagues, when death lies at every door; times that I am sure we shall not all escape, let it fall where it will. I will say no more of it now, because it is that which I shall principally speak to afterward.

Thirdly. The manner of their introduction, *ἐνστήσονται*, — “shall come.” We have no word in our language that will express the force of *ἐνίστημι*. The Latins express it by “*immineo, incido*,” — the coming down of a fowl unto his prey. Now, our translators have given it the greatest force they could. They do not say, “Perilous times will come,” as though they prognosticated future events; but, “Perilous times shall come.” Here is a hand of God in this business; they shall so come, be so instant in their coming, that nothing shall keep them out; they shall instantly press themselves in, and prevail. Our great wisdom, then, will be, to eye the displeasure of God in perilous seasons; since there is a judicial hand of God in them, and we see in ourselves reason enough why they should come. But when shall they come?

Fourthly. They “shall come in the last days,” — *ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις*. The words “latter” or “last days” are taken three ways in Scripture; — sometimes for the times of the gospel, in opposition to the Judaical church-state; as in [Heb. i. 2](#), “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;” — and elsewhere it may be taken (though I remember not the place) for days



towards the consummation of all things and the end of the world; — and it is taken often for the latter days of churches; 1 Tim. iv. 1, “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.” And so the apostle John 1 Epist. ii. 18, “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” And that is the season here intended. But yet you may take it in what sense you will: the last days, the days of the gospel; the last days, towards the consummation of all things and the end of the world; the last days, following the days of the profession of churches, those called Reformed Churches, or our own churches, in the ways wherein we walk; and the last days with many of us, with respect to our lives. In whatever sense the words are taken, it is time for us to look what shall come in these last days.

But the observation which at present I shall insist on from the text is this:—

*Observation.* When churches have been continued for a while in their profession, and begin to fall under decays therein, perilous seasons shall overtake them, which it will be hard for them to escape: “This know also, that perilous times shall come.”

My design is only to dispose your minds a little to the work of the day: and all I shall do is, to show, in several instances, what are the things that make a season perilous; and what is our duty with reference unto such perilous seasons, both as to particular perils and perilous times in general. And it must not be said, as once it was of the prophet Ezekiel, “He prophesied of things a great way off.” We do not prophesy of things a great way off; no, we shall speak of things that are even upon us, — what we see and know, and is as evident as if written with the beams of the sun.

I. The first thing that makes a season perilous is, when the profession of true religion is outwardly maintained under a visible predominancy of horrible lusts and wickedness. And the reason why I name it in the first place is, because it is what the apostle gives his instance in, in this place, “Perilous times shall come.” Why? “ ‘For many shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false-accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness;’ — maintaining their profession of the truth of religion under a predominancy, a visible, open predominancy, of vile lusts, and the practice of horrible sins.” This rendered the season perilous. Whether this be such a season or not, do you judge. And I must say, by the way, we may and ought to witness against it, and mourn for the public sins of the days wherein we live. It is as glorious a thing to be a martyr for bearing testimony against the public sins of an age, as in bearing testimony unto any truth of the gospel whatsoever.

Now, where these things are, a season is perilous, —



1. Because of the infection. Churches and professors are apt to be infected with it. The historian<sup>384</sup> tells us of a plague at Athens, in the second and third years of the Peloponnesian war, whereof multitudes died; and of those that lived, few escaped but they lost a limb, or part of a limb, — some an eye, others an arm, and others a finger, — the infection was so great and terrible. And truly, brethren, where this plague comes, — of the visible practice of unclean lusts under an outward profession, — though men do not die, yet one loses an arm, another an eye, another a leg by it: the infection diffuses itself to the best of professors, more or less. This makes it a dangerous and perilous time.

2. It is dangerous, because of the effects; for when predominant lusts have broken all bounds of divine light and rule, how long do you think that human rules will keep them in order? They break through all in such a season as the apostle describes. And if they come to break through all human restraints, as they have broken through divine, they will fill all things with ruin and confusion.

3. They are perilous in the consequence; which is, the judgments of God. When men do not receive the truth in the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, God will send them strong delusion, to believe a lie. So [2 Thess. ii. 10, 11](#), is a description how the Papacy came upon the world. Men professed the truth of religion, but did not love it, — they loved unrighteousness and ungodliness; and God sent them Popery. That is the interpretation of the place, according to the best divines. Will you profess the truth, and at the same time love unrighteousness? The consequence is, security under superstition and ungodliness. This is the end of such a perilous season; and the like may be said as to temporal judgments, which I need not mention.

Let us now consider what is our duty in such a perilous season:—

(1.) We ought greatly to mourn for the public abominations of the world, and of the land of our nativity wherein we live. I would only observe that place in [Ezek. ix.](#), God sends out his judgments, and destroys the city; but before, he sets a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof. You will find this passage referred in your books to [Rev. vii. 3](#), “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” I would only observe this, that such only are the servants of God, let men profess what they will, “who mourn for the abominations that are done in the land.” The mourners in the one place are the servants of God in the other. And truly, brethren, we are certainly to blame in this matter. We have been almost well contented that men should be as wicked as they would themselves, and we sit still and see what would come of it. Christ hath been dishonoured, the Spirit of God blasphemed, and God provoked against the land of our nativity; and yet we have not been affected with these things. I can truly say in sincerity, I bless God, I have sometimes laboured

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with my own heart about it. But I am afraid we all of us come exceeding short of our duty in this matter. “Rivers of waters,” saith the psalmist, “run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law.” Horrible profanation of the name of God, horrible abominations, which our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, and yet our hearts been unaffected with them! Do you think this is a frame of heart God requireth of us in such a season, — to be regardless of all, and not to mourn for the public abominations of the land? The servants of God will mourn. I could speak, but am not free to speak, to those prejudices which keep us off from mourning for public abominations; but they may be easily suggested unto all your thoughts, and particularly what they are that have kept us off from attending more unto this duty of mourning for public abominations. And give me leave to say, that, according to the Scripture rule, there is no one of us can have any evidence that we shall escape outward judgments that God will bring for these abominations, if we have not been mourners for them; but that as smart a revenge, as to outward dispensations, may fall upon us as upon those that are most guilty of them, no Scripture evidence have we to the contrary. How God may deal with us, I know not.

This, then, is one part of the duty of this day, — that we should humble our souls for all the abominations that are committed in the land of our nativity; and, in particular, that we have no more mourned under them.

(2.) Our second duty, in reference to this perilous season is, to take care that we be not infected with the evils and sins of it. A man would think it were quite contrary; but really, to the best of my observation, this is, and hath been, the frame of things, unless upon some extraordinary dispensation of God’s Spirit:— as some men’s sins grow very high, other men’s graces grow very low. Our Saviour hath told us, [Matt. xxiv. 12](#), “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” A man would think the abounding of iniquity in the world should give great provocation to love one another. “No,” saith our Saviour, “the contrary will be found true: as some men’s sins grow high, other men’s graces will grow low.”

And there are these reasons for it:—

[1.] In such a season, we are apt to have light thoughts of great sins. The prophet looked upon it as a dreadful thing, that upon Jehoiakim’s throwing the roll of Jeremiah’s prophecy into the fire, till it was consumed, “yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words,” [Jer. xxxvi. 24](#). They were grown senseless, both of sin and judgment. And where men (be they in other respects never so wise) can grow senseless of sin, they will quickly grow senseless of judgments too. And I am afraid, the great reason why many of us have no impression upon our spirits of danger and perils in the days wherein we live, is because we are not sensible of sin.

[2.] Men are apt to countenance themselves in lesser evils, having their eyes fixed upon greater abominations of other men, that they behold every day; nay, there are those who





pay their tribute to the devil, — walk in such and such abominations, and so countenance themselves in lesser evils. This is part of the public infection, — that they “do not run out into the same excess of riot that others do,” though they live in the omission of duty, conformity to the world, and in many foolish, hurtful, and noisome lusts. They countenance themselves with this, that others are guilty of greater abominations.

[3.] Pray let such remember this, who have occasion for it (you may know it better than I; but yet I know it by rule, as much as you do by practice), that general converse in the world, in such a season, is full of danger and peril. Most professors are grown of the colour and complexion of those with whom they converse.

This is the first thing that makes a season perilous. I know not whether these things may be of concern and use unto you; they seem so to me, and I cannot but acquaint you with them.

II. A second perilous season, and that we shall hardly come off in, is, when men are prone to forsake the truth, and seducers abound to gather them up that are so; and you will have always these things go together. Do you see seducers abound? You may be sure there is a proneness in the minds of men to forsake the truth: and when there is such a proneness, they will never want seducers, — those that will lead off the minds of men from the truth; for there is both the hand of God and Satan in this business. God judicially leaves men, when he sees them grow weary of the truth, and prone to leave it; and Satan strikes in with the occasion, and stirs up seducers. This makes a season perilous. The apostle describes it, [1 Tim. iv. 1](#), “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times” (these perilous days) “some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” And so Peter warns them to whom he writes, [2 Pet. ii. 1, 2](#), that “there shall come false teachers among them, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction: and many shall follow their pernicious ways.” There shall come times full of peril, which shall draw men off from the truth into destruction.

If it be asked, how we may know whether there be a proneness in the minds of men in any season to depart from the truth? there are three ways whereby we may judge of it:—

1. The first is that mentioned, [2 Tim. iv. 3](#), “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” When men grow weary of sound doctrine, — when it is too plain, too heavy, too dull, too common, too high, too mysterious, one thing or other that displeases them, and they would hear something new, something that may please, — it is a sign that there are in such an age many who are prone to forsake sound doctrine: and many such we know.

2. When men have lost the power of truth in their conversation, and are as prone and ready to part with the profession of it in their minds. Do you see a man retaining the profes-



sion of the truth under a worldly conversation? He wants but baits from temptation, or a seducer, to take away his faith from him. An inclination to hearken after novelties, and loss of the power of truth in the conversation, is a sign of proneness unto this declension from the truth. Such a season, you see, is perilous. And why is it perilous? Because the souls of many are destroyed in it. The apostle tells us directly, [2 Pet. ii. 1](#), of “false prophets among the people, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” Will it abide there? No: “And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” Brethren, while it is well with us, through the grace of God, and our own houses are not in flames, pray do not let us think the times are not perilous, when so many turn unto Popery and Quakerism, into pernicious errors, and fall into swift destruction. Will you say the time of the public plague was not perilous, because you are alive? No. Was the fire not dreadful, because your houses were not burned? No; you will, notwithstanding, say it was a dreadful plague, and a dreadful fire. And pray consider, is not this a perilous season, when multitudes have an inclination to depart from the truth, and God, in just judgment, hath permitted Satan to stir up seducers to draw them into pernicious ways, and their poor souls perish for ever.

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Besides, there is a great aptness in such a season to work indifferency in the minds of those who do not intend utterly to forsake the truth. Little did I think I should ever have lived in this world to find the minds of professors grown altogether indifferent as to the doctrine of God’s eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace in the conversion of sinners, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; but many are, as to all these things, grown to an indifferency: they know not whether they are so or not. I bless God I know something of the former generation, when professors would not hear of these things without the highest detestation; and now high professors begin to be leaders in it: and it is too much among the best of us. We are not so much concerned for the truth as our forefathers; I wish I could say we were as holy.

3. This proneness to depart from the truth is a perilous season, because it is the greatest evidence of the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from his church: for the Spirit of God is promised to this end, “to lead us into all truth;” and when the efficacy of truth begins to decay, it is the greatest evidence of the departing and withdrawing of the Spirit of God. And I think that this is a dangerous thing; for if the Spirit of God departs, then our glory and our life depart.

What, now, is our duty in reference to this perilous season? Forewarnings of perils are given us to instruct us in our duty.

(1.) The first is, not to be content with what you judge a sincere profession of truth; but to labour to be found in the exercise of all those graces which peculiarly respect the truth.

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There are graces that peculiarly respect the truth that we are to exercise; and if these are not found in our hearts, all our profession will issue in nothing. And these are, —

[1.] Love: “Because they loved not the truth.” They made profession of the gospel; but they received not the truth in the love of it. There was want of love of the truth. Truth will do no man good where there is not the love of it. “Speaking the truth in love,” is the substance of our Christian profession. Pray, brethren, let us labour to love the truth; and to take off all prejudices from our minds, that we may do so.

[2.] It is the great and only rule to preserve us in perilous times, — to labour to have the experience of the power of every truth in our hearts. If so be ye have learned the Lord Jesus. How? So as to “put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;” and to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” [Eph. iv. 22–24](#). This is to learn the truth. The great grace that is to be exercised with reference to truth in such a season as this, is to exemplify it in our hearts in the power of it. Labour for the experience of the power of every truth in your own hearts and lives.

[3.] Zeal for the truth. Truth is the most proper object for zeal. We ought to “contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints;” to be willing, as God shall help us, to part with name and reputation, and to undergo scorn and contempt, all that this world can cast upon us, in giving testimony unto the truth. Every thing that this world counts dear and valuable is to be forsaken, rather than the truth. This was the great end for which Christ came into the world.

(2.) Cleave unto the means that God hath appointed and ordained for your preservation in the truth. I see some are ready to go to sleep, and think themselves not concerned in these things: the Lord awaken their hearts! Keep to the means of preservation in the truth, — the present ministry. Bless God for the remainder of a ministry valuing the truth, knowing the truth, sound in the faith; — cleave unto them. There is little influence upon the minds of men from this ordinance and institution of God, in the great business of the ministry. But know there is something more in it than that they seem to have better abilities to dispute than you; more knowledge, more light, better understandings than you. If you know no more in the ministry than this, you will never have benefit by it. They are God’s ordinance; the name of God is upon them; God will be sanctified in them. They are God’s ordinance for the preservation of the truth.

(3.) Let us carefully remember the faith of them who went before us in this nation, in the profession of the last age. I am apt to think there was not a more glorious profession for a thousand years upon the face of the earth, than was among the professors of the last age in this nation. And pray, what faith were they of? Were they half Arminian and half Socinian; half Papist and half I know not what? Remember how zealous they were for the truth; how little their holy souls would have borne with those public defections from the doctrine of truth which we see, and do not mourn over, but make nothing of, in the days wherein we

live. God was with them; and they lived to his glory, and died in peace: “whose faith follow,” and example pursue. And remember the faith they lived and died in: look round about, and see whether any of the new creeds have produced a new holiness to exceed theirs.

III. A third thing that makes a perilous season is, professors mixing themselves with the world, and learning their manner, And if the other perilous seasons are come upon us, this is come upon us also. This was the foundation and spring of the first perilous season that was in the world, that first brought in a deluge of sin and then a deluge of misery. It was the beginning of the first public apostasy of the church, which issued in the severest mark of God’s displeasure. [Gen. vi. 2](#), “The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” This is but one instance of the church of God, the sons of God, professors, mixing themselves with the world. This was not all, that they took to themselves wives; but this was an instance the Holy Ghost gives that the church in those days did degenerate, and mix itself with the world. What is the end of mixing themselves in this manner with the world? [Ps. cvi. 35](#), “They mingled themselves with the nations.” And what then? “And learned their manners.” If any thing under heaven will make a season perilous, this will do it, — when we mingle ourselves with the world, and learn their manners.

There are two things I shall speak to on this head:— 1. Wherein professors do mingle themselves with the world. 2. The danger of it.

1. Professors mingle themselves with the world in that wherein it is the world, which is proper to the world. That which is more eminently and visibly of the devil, professors do not so soon mingle themselves withal; but in that wherein it is the world, in its own colours; — as in corrupt communication, which is, the spirit of the world, the extract and fruit of vanity of mind, — that wherewith the world is corrupted, and doth corrupt. An evil, rotten kind of communication, whereby the manners of the world are corrupted, — this comes from the spirit of the world. The devil hath his hand in all these things; but it is the world and the spirit of the world that is in corrupt communication. And how hath this spread itself among professors! Light, vain, foolish communication! — to spend a man’s whole life therein; not upon this or that occasion, but almost always, and upon all occasions everywhere! — Vain habits and attire of the world is another instance. The habits and attire of the world are the things wherein the world doth design to show itself what it is. Men may read what the world is by evident characters, in the habits and attire that it wears. They are blind that cannot read vanity, folly, uncleanness, luxury, in the attire the world putteth upon itself. The declension of professors in imitating the ways of the world in their habits and garb, makes a season perilous: it is a mixture wherein we learn their manners; and the judgments of God will ensue upon it. — In this, likewise, we are grown like the world, that upon all occasions we are as regardless of the sins of the world, and as little troubled with them, as others are. Lot lived in Sodom, but “his righteous soul was vexed with their ungodly deeds

and speeches.” Live we where we will, when are our souls vexed, [so] that we do not pass through the things of the world, the greatest abominations, with the frame of spirit that the world itself doth? Not to speak of voluptuousness of living, and other things that attend this woeful mixture with the world that professors have made in the days wherein we live, — corrupt communication, gaiety of attire, senselessness of the sins and abominations of the world round about us, are almost as much upon professors as upon the world. We have mixed ourselves with the people, and have learned their manners. But, —

2. Such a season is dangerous, because the sins of professors in it lie directly contrary to the whole design of the mediation of Christ in this world. Christ gave himself for us, that he might purge us from dead works, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, [Tit. ii. 14](#). “Ye are a royal nation, a peculiar people.” Christ hath brought the hatred of the devil and all the world upon him and against him, for taking a people out of the world, and making them a peculiar people to himself; and their throwing themselves upon the world again is the greatest contempt that can be put upon Jesus Christ. He gave his life and shed his blood to recover us from the world, and we throw ourselves in again. How easy were it to show that this is an inlet to all other sins and abominations, and that for which I verily think the indignation and displeasure of God will soonest discover itself against professors and churches in this day! If we will not be differenced from the world in our ways, we shall not long be differenced from them in our privileges. If we are the same in our walkings, we shall be so in our worship, or have none at all.

As to our duty in such a perilous season, let me leave three cautions with you, and the Lord fix them upon your hearts:—

(1.) The profession of religion, and the performance of duties, under a world-like conversation, are nothing but a sophistical means to lead men blindfold into hell. We must not speak little things in such a great cause.

(2.) If you will be like the world, you must take the world’s lot. It will go with you as it goes with the world. Inquire and see, in the whole book of God, how it will go with the world, — what God’s thoughts are of the world, — whether it saith not, “If it lies in wickedness, it shall come to judgment,” and that “the curse of God is upon it.” If, therefore, you will be like the world, you must have the world’s lot; God will not separate.

(3.) Lastly, consider we have by this means lost the most glorious cause of truth that ever was in the world. We do not know that there hath been a more glorious cause of truth since the apostles’ days, than what God hath committed to his church and people in this nation, for the purity of the doctrine of the truth and ordinances; but we have lost all the beauty and glory of it by this mixture in the world. I verily think it is high time that the congregations in this city, by their elders and messengers, should consult together how to put a stop to this evil, that hath lost all the glory of our profession. It is a perilous time, when professors mix themselves so with the world.



There are other perilous seasons that I thought to have insisted on; but I will but name them.

IV. When there is great attendance on outward duties, but inward, spiritual decays. Now herein, my brethren, (most of this congregation are so in a peculiar manner, I hope, through the goodness of God, — in sincerity, though in much weakness, “*Liberavi animam meam,*”) you know how long I have been treating of the causes and reasons of inward decays, and the means to be used for our recovery; I shall not, therefore, again insist upon them.

V. Times of persecution are also times of peril.

Now, I need not tell you whether these seasons are upon us or not; it is your duty to inquire into that. Whether there be not an outward retaining of the truth under a visible prevalency of abominable lusts in the world; whether there be not a proneness to forsake the truth, and seducers at work to draw men off; whether there be not a mingling ourselves with the world, and therein learning their manners; whether there be not inward decays, under the outward performance of duties; and whether many are not suffering under persecution and trouble, judge ye, and act accordingly.

One word of use, and I have done.

*Use 1.* Let us all be exhorted to endeavour to get our hearts affected with the perils of the day wherein we live. You have heard a poor, weak discourse concerning it, and perhaps it will be quickly forgotten. O that God would be pleased to give us this grace, — that we may find it our duty to endeavour to have our hearts affected with the perils of these seasons! It is not time to be asleep upon the top of a mast in a rough sea, when there are so many devouring dangers round about us. And the better to effect this, —

(1.) Consider the present things, and bring them to rule, and see what God’s word says of them. We hear this and that story of horrible, prodigious wickedness; and bring it in the next opportunity of talk, and there slightly pass it over. We hear of the judgments of God abroad in the world; and bring them to the same standard of our own imaginations, and there is an end. And so we do with the distresses of others; we talk of them, and there is an end. But, brethren, when you observe any of these things, how it is with the world, if you would have your hearts affected, bring it to the word, and see what God saith of it: speak with God about it; ask and inquire at the mouth of God what God saith unto these prodigious wickednesses and judgments, — this coldness that is upon professors, and their mixtures with, and learning the manners of the world. You will never have your hearts affected with it, till you come and speak with God about it; and then you will find them represented in a glass that will make your hearts ache and tremble. And then, —

(2.) If you would be sensible of present perilous times, take heed of centring in self. While your greatest concern is self, or the world, all the angels in heaven cannot make you sensible of the peril of the days wherein you live. Whether you pursue riches or honours,

while you centre there, nothing can make you sensible of the perils of the day. Therefore do not centre in self.

(3.) Pray that God would give us grace to be sensible of the perils of the day wherein we live. It may be we have had confidence, that though thousands fall at our right hand and at our left, yet we shall be able to carry it through. Believe me, it is great grace. Point your private, closet prayers, and your family prayers this way; and the Lord help us to point our public prayers to this thing, that God would make our hearts sensible of the perils of the time whereinto we are fallen in these last days!

*Use 2.* The next thing is this, that there are two things in a perilous season, — the sin of it, and the misery of it. Labour to be sensible of the former, or you will never be sensible of the latter. Though judgments lie at the door, though the heavens be dark over us, and the earth shake under us at this day, and no wise man can see where he can build himself an abiding habitation, — we can talk of these things; and hear of other nations soaking in blood; and have tokens of God's displeasure, — warnings from heaven above and the earth beneath; and no man sensible of them! Why? Because they are not sensible of sin; nor ever will be, unless God make them so.

I shall range the sins that we should be sensible of under three heads:— the sins of the poor, wretched, perishing world, in the first place; the sins of professors in general, in the second place; and our own particular sins and decays, in the third place. And let us labour to have our hearts affected with these. It is to no purpose to tell you this and that judgment is approaching; — for your leaders, and those that are upon the watchtower, to cry, “ ‘A lion; my lord,’ we see a lion.” Unless God make our hearts sensible of sin, we shall not be sensible of judgments.

*Use 3.* Remember there is a special frame of spirit required in us all in such perilous seasons as these are. And what is that? It is a mourning frame of spirit. O that frame, that jolly frame of spirit that is upon us! The Lord forgive it, the Lord pardon it unto us; and keep us in a humble, broken, mournful frame of spirit: for it is a peculiar grace God looks for at such a time as this is. When he will pour out his Spirit, there will be great mourning, together and apart; but now we may say there is no mourning. The Lord help us, we have hard hearts and dry eyes under the consideration of all these perils that lie before us.

*Use 4.* Keep up church watch with diligence, and by the rule. When I say rule, I mean the life of it. I have no greater jealousy upon my heart, than that God should withdraw himself from his own institutions because of the sins of the people, and leave us only the carcase of outward rule and order. What doth God give them for? for their own sakes? No; but that they may be clothing for faith and love, meekness of spirit and bowels of compassion, watchfulness and diligence. Take away these, and farewell to all outward rule and order, whatever they are. Keep up a spirit that may live affected with it: get a spirit of church watch; which is not to lie at catch for faults, but diligently, out of pure love and compassion to the



souls of men, to watch over them, — to wait to do them good, all we can. As it was with a poor man, who took a dead body and set it up, and it fell; and he set it up again, and it fell; upon which he cried out, “Oportet esse aliquid intus,” — “There wants something within,” to enliven and quicken it; — so is it with church order and rule; set them up as often as you will, they will all fall, if there be not a love to one another, a delighting in the good of one another, “exhorting one another while it is called To-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Use 5. Reckon upon it, that in such times as these are, all of us will not go free. You find no mention of a perilous season in Scripture, but it follows some shall have their faith overthrown, others shall follow pernicious ways, and others shall turn aside. Brethren and sisters, how do you know but you or I may fall? Let us double our watch, every one; for the season is come upon us wherein some of us may fall, and fall so as to smart for it. I do not say we shall perish eternally; — God deliver us from going into the pit! but some of us may so fall as to lose a limb, some member or other; and our works will be committed to the fire that shall burn them all. God hath kindled a fire in Zion that will try all our works; and we shall see in a short time what will become of us.

Use 6. Lastly, take that great rule which the apostle gives in such times as those wherewith we are concerned, “Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure,” — O blessed be God for it! — “God knows who are his.”

What, then, is required on our part? “Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from evil.” Your profession, your privileges, your light, will not secure you; you are gone, unless every one that nameth the name of Christ departs from all iniquity. What multitudes perish under a profession every day! O that our hearts could bleed to see poor souls in danger of perishing under the greatest profession!

Will you hear the sum of all? Perilous times and seasons are come upon us; many are wounded already; many have failed. The Lord help us! the crown is fallen from our head, — the glory of our profession is gone, — the time is short, — the Judge stands before the door. Take but this one word of counsel, my brethren: “Watch, therefore, that none of these things may come upon you, but that you may escape, and be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of God.”

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## Sermon XXVII.<sup>385</sup> **The Christian's work of dying daily.**

"I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily."

[1 Cor. xv. 31.](#)

These words have a great vehemency and emphasis in them, and discover an uncommon earnestness upon the spirit of the apostle when he wrote them; and indeed they carry a greater appearance of such a vehemency in the original than in our translation. For the words we put in the last place, "I die daily," are the first in the original: Καθ ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω, "I die daily;" Νῆ τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν ἣ ἔχω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, — "Yea, I do so by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." And there is no expression used by the apostle that hath a greater ardour of spirit in it than this hath.

The special reason of using it in this place is, to evidence the stability of his faith about the resurrection of the dead. That, you know, is the dispute he is upon. And he proves here that it was not an opinion that he had; but a firm-rooted faith, that carried him through all difficulties and sufferings. "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." "I do evidence my faith," saith he, "of the resurrection, by my readiness to suffer all things in the confirmation of the truth of it." And it is the great duty of ministers to be ready at all times to evidence the stability of their own faith in the things which they preach to others, by a cheerful suffering for them.

There are two things in the words: An assertion; and the confirmation of it. The assertion is this, "I die daily." The confirmation of it, "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There are two or three difficulties in these words. I shall very little trouble you with conjectures, but give you what I think the sense of the Holy Ghost in them.

The one is from the ambiguous signification of the word καύχησις, which we render here "rejoicing." But in other places it is rendered sometimes by "confidence," sometimes by "boasting," and sometimes by "glorying." "Gloriation" is the word: I would use, if our language would bear it. "And your gloriation;" — which is an exultation of joy.

There is another difficulty, in the transposition of the words, such as are not in the Scripture again. "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus." This hath afforded variety of conjectures unto many; but plainly the sense of it is this, "By the rejoicing which you and I have in the Lord." And I could give instances of the like trajections in the Greek tongue, from one person to another, if it were to your education.

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385 This sermon was preached September 26, 1680.



There is yet a third difficulty. The particle *vñ* here is a note of an oath, or swearing; as much as *בְּ* in the Hebrew tongue; or in our language, “by;” yet sometimes it is used as a note of strong asseveration. And we have chosen to express it by a middle word, “I protest.” If it be a note of an oath, then the word is used to denote the object, “I swear by your rejoicing in the Lord;” that is, “by the Lord in whom you rejoice.” As it is said expressly, “Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac;” that is, “by Him whom his father Isaac feared.” But I rather take it here as a note only of vehement asseveration; and so, says he, “It is as true as that you and I do glory in Christ, and rejoice in him, I die daily.”

It may have a double sense, “I am every day, by reason of preaching the gospel, exposed to dangers and death.” For he doth speak both before and after of the dangers he underwent in the work of preaching the gospel. “I die daily;” or, “I die daily;” by continually preparing myself to die; I am always in a preparation to die; through the faith of the resurrection, I am always prepared to die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God.” And this is the sense I shall fix upon. And it being in a necessary duty, I may raise a general rule from a special instance, in this example of the apostle.

*Observation.* It is the duty of all believers to be preparing themselves every day to die cheerfully, comfortably, and, if it may be, triumphing in the Lord.

Observe only this, that there may be a dying safely, where there is not a dying cheerfully and comfortably. Every believer, whoever he be, shall die safely; but we see many believers do not die cheerfully and comfortably. I do not speak of the first, how all persons may come to die safely; but of the latter, how believers may die comfortably and cheerfully.

And there are two ways of dying cheerfully and comfortably:—

1. The one is in outward expressions, to the comfort of them that are about us. This depends much on the nature of the distemper whereof men may die, which may oppress the animal spirits, and cloud the mind; and therefore it falls not under rule, but is left to the providence of God.

2. But there is also a dying cheerfully and comfortably in persons' own souls; which, it may be, in their dying moments they cannot manifest, when they are thoroughly prepared for it.

Truly, brethren, all I can say is, that I am speaking to you of the things which I have considered on my own account, before ever I thought of considering them upon yours; and I cannot declare unto you what I have attained, which may be little or nothing; but only what I have aimed at, if it may be of use to us in this dying time, especially among good ministers, one or another [dying] almost every day.<sup>386</sup>

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386 At this time many eminent servants of Christ, who had been associated with Owen in the Christian ministry, and in important public duties, during the eventful times of the Protectorate, were passing into their eternal rest. In 1679, Thomas Goodwin, President of Magdalene College, a member of the Westminster Assembly,

I shall mention three things that, in my judgment, are requisite unto every believer who would die cheerfully, and come in a fit and full season into the presence of God:—

I. The constant exercise of faith, as to the resignation of a departing soul into the hand and sovereign will of God. "I die daily." How? Exercising faith constantly, in the resignation of a departing soul, when the time comes, unto the sovereign grace, good pleasure, power, and faithfulness of God. The soul is now taking its leave of all its concerns in this world; all that it sees, all that it knows by its senses, all its relations, everything it hath been acquainted withal, to have an eternal, absolute unconcern in them. It is entering into an invisible world, whereof it knows nothing but what it hath by faith. When Paul was taken up into the third heaven, [2 Cor. xii. 2](#), we should have been glad to have heard some tidings from the invisible world how things were there. He saw nothing; only he heard words. Why, blessed Paul, may we not hear those words? No; "They are not lawful to be uttered," saith he. God will not have us know any thing in the invisible world but what is revealed in the word, while we are here. Therefore the souls of them departed, who have died and lived again, as the soul of Lazarus, I doubt not but God supported in their being, but restrained all their operations. For if a separate soul had one natural, intuitive view of God, it would be the greatest misery in the world to send it back into a dying body. God will keep those things to be objects of faith. Lazarus could tell nothing of what was done in heaven; his soul was kept in its being, but all its operations were restrained. I bless God I have peculiarly exercised my thoughts, according to the conduct of the word, about the invisible world; whereof, in due time, you may hear something: but in the meantime, I know we have no notion of it but what is by pure revelation.

Whither now is the soul going? what will be the issue within a few moments? Is it annihilated? doth death not only separate the body and soul, but destroy our being, so that we shall be no more to eternity? So some would have it; for it is their interest it should be so. Is the soul going into a state of wandering in the air, under the influence of more powerful spirits? — which was the opinion of the old pagan world, as that which caused appearances of the dead so frequently upon the earth.

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a happy expositor of Scripture, and, according to Anthony Wood, "one of the Atlases and Patriarchs of Independency," — was removed from this world, and became, in the highest sense of his own phrase, "a child of light." It was but two months before this sermon was preached that Stephen Charnock died. He had been Senior Proctor in the University of Oxford during the Protectorate; and left behind him manuscripts, from which two large folios of posthumous works have been published, — works held in such estimation, that besides the detached issue of particular treatises, they have been, in their collected form, four times reprinted. Others might be mentioned who died about this period, such as Matthew Poole, author of the "*Synopsis Criticorum*;" and Theophilus Gale, author of "*The Court of the Gentiles*." Such facts may help to account for the touching and solemn tone of these discourses on preparation for death, as well as for the particular allusion in the paragraph above. — Ed.

And this persuasion was taken into purgatory by the Papists; from whence they concluded that there were great appearances of them that were departed continually. And you have a thousand stories of them, which we know to be all the actings and deceits of evil spirits. And such is our darkness as to the invisible world, that the greatest part of Christians have feigned a third state, that is not in it, but the fruit of superstition and idolatry. For this is superstition, to invent things in religion suited to men's natural affections, or to gratify their lusts for their own profit; both which were designed in this case. For when persons thought the souls of men that were gone into an eternal condition were lost, and that for ever, — “No, there is another venture for them,” say they; and so they pacified them, that if they were the worst of men, yet there might be hope for them after death. Nor has it a less tendency to gratify men in their lusts, and encourage them to live at their pleasure. And the whole of this they turn to their own profit who invented it. This by the way, — only to manifest the darkness that mankind is in as to this invisible world. To proceed, therefore:—

Doth the soul go into a state wherein it is capable of no joy, no consolation? Brethren, let men pretend what they will, he that never received any joy or consolation in this world but by his senses, or his reason exercised about the objects of his senses, doth not know, nor can believe, the soul itself should be capable of any consolation in another world. He alone who hath received immediately into his soul spiritual comfort in this world, can believe that his soul is capable of it in another. But, however, this is certain, no man can undertake any thing about the conduct of his soul in another world.

What is your way, then, in this state and condition? what is your wisdom? Truly, to resign this departing soul unto the sovereign wisdom, pleasure, faithfulness, and power of God (which is the duty we have in hand), by the continual exercise of faith. So the apostle tells us, [2 Tim. i. 12](#). “For I know,” saith he, “whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” It is a mighty thing to keep a separate soul to the day of the resurrection. Why, saith the apostle, “I know whom I have trusted with it; I trust it with almighty power.” The Lord help us to believe that there shall be an act of almighty power put forth in the behalf of these poor souls of ours, when departed into the invisible world, to keep them to that day when body and soul shall be united, and come to enjoy God.

We have a glorious example for this duty and exercise of faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ died in the exercise of it. It was the last act of faith Christ put forth in this world, [Luke xxiii. 46](#), “When Jesus had cried with a loud voice” (this was the voice of nature, but now he comes to the words of faith), “he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (my departing soul): “and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” Here was the last exercise of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world, — the committing of his departing soul into the hands of God. And to what end did he do it? We are told, [Ps. xvi. 8–11](#), “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad,



and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." These are the words of David, which our Lord Jesus Christ made use of himself, when he said, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." And the psalmist adds, "Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth," [Ps. xxxi. 5](#). An experience of the work of redemption, communicated to us by the truth of the promise, is the greatest encouragement to commend a departing soul into the hands of God.

This to me now (considering the vanishing of all these shadows and appearances, and the eternal dissolution of all relation to things below, and the subsisting of a soul in a separate condition, which we are not acquainted withal), is one of the first things we have to consider, if we will die cheerfully and comfortably, — namely, how we can resign a departing soul into the hand and sovereign disposal of God.

It is both a great and eminent act of faith, and is the last victorious act of faith, so to do:—

1. It is a great and eminent act of faith. [See] [Heb. xi.](#), where the mighty efficacy and great success of faith is spoken of. One of the particulars, and that wherein many of the rest did centre, is, "These all died in faith." It was a great thing to die in faith under the Old Testament, when they were encompassed with so many shadows, and so much darkness, and when their view into things invisible, within the vail, was exceeding much beneath what God hath communicated unto us. Nay, the state of things within the vail was not the same then as now; there was not Christ upon the throne, administering his office. Notwithstanding, faith carried them through all this darkness, and caused them to make a believing venture of their souls upon God, his faithfulness, mercy, and grace.

When it comes to this consideration, it lays all things in the balance:— in the one scale, our being, our walking, and life in this world; our sins, and their guilt; our fears, uncertainties, and darkness of a future state; our abhorrence of a dissolution, the consideration of all things that are round about us; — in the other, the power, faithfulness, and mercy of God, and his ability to receive, preserve, and keep us to that day, and to be better to us than all these things. "Here shall be my portion," saith faith; "all things in the other scale are of no value, of no weight to this exceeding weight of power and goodness of God." This is a glorious exercise of faith! Have you tried it, my brethren? Lay things on the one side and the other in the balance, and see which way the scale will draw, — what faith will do in such a case.

2. It is the last victorious act of faith, wherein it hath its final conquest over all its adversaries. Faith is the leading grace in all our spiritual warfare and conflict; but all along while we live, it hath faithful company that adheres to it, and helps it. Love works, and hope works, and all other graces, — self-denial, readiness to the cross, — they all work and help faith. But when we come to die, faith is left alone. Now, try what faith will do. The exercise

of other graces ceases; only faith comes to a close conflict with its last adversary, wherein the whole is to be tried. And, by this one act of resigning all into the hand of God, faith triumphs over death, and cries, “ ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ Come, give me an inlet into immortality and glory; the everlasting hand of God is ready to receive me!” This is the victory whereby we overcome all our spiritual enemies.

I thought to have made some use of what hath been said; to examine whether we do live in the exercise of this grace or no, and what benefit we have thereby: and I should have touched especially upon this one thing, — this alone will keep us from all surprisal of death. Not to be surprised with any thing is the substance of human wisdom; not to be surprised with death is a great part of the substance of our spiritual wisdom.

### Sermon XXVIII.<sup>387</sup>

I made an entrance upon this portion of Scripture the last Lord's day, and I judged the subject very suitable, because of the warnings God hath variously given us to be exercising ourselves unto this duty. God hath since increased the seasonableness, by taking away a great and eminent servant<sup>388</sup> of his from among us; concerning whom I will say this one word, and no more:—

As far as I know by thirty years' acquaintance and friendship, and half that time in church-fellowship, it may be the age wherein he lived did not produce many more wise, more holy, more useful than he in his station, if any. And so I leave him at rest with God.

I proposed to insist upon those things which are necessary for us, to obtain a peaceable and comfortable departure out of this world. And I have spoken to one head; which was, the daily exercise of faith, in the resignation of a departing soul, to the sovereign power and will of God, to be treated and entertained by him according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

I will not leave this point till I have made some use of it. And I shall take no other measure of my time but the strength God is pleased to give me.

*Use 1.* It may be worth our while to inquire into the especial nature of this duty which we are exhorted unto; for we may every day more and more understand the weakness of many, who think, it may be, they know something of it, when they know not what it means. We may, therefore, consider three things in it:— (1.) What is the special and immediate object of this exercise of faith; (2.) What is the form or special nature of it; and, (3.) What is the way and manner of its performance.

(1.) As to the especial and immediate object of this exercise of faith, and which must take with it a special motive, — that, I say, is God, under the consideration of his sovereignty,

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387 This sermon was preached October 3, 1680.

388 The decease to which Dr Owen refers must have occurred between September 26 and October 3. Colonel Desborough, a member of his congregation, brother-in-law to Oliver Cromwell, and one of the heroes of the Commonwealth, died on the 10th September 1680. He refused to sit on the trial of Charles I.; and though so nearly related to Cromwell, opposed him when he sought to become king. But it is evident, from the dates, that the allusion cannot be to him. The quaint and pious Thomas Brooks, a preacher of distinguished pathos and usefulness, and author of some well-known treatises, such as "*Heaven upon Earth*," "*The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*," "*Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver*," etc., died on the 27th of September 1680. The date would answer to the allusion in the discourse, if the terms of it did not leave an impression that Owen refers to a member of his own congregation. Brooks was a zealous Congregationalist; but this could hardly be all the "church-fellowship" to which Owen refers. In his work, "*The Golden Key*," he subscribes himself "late preacher of the word at Margaret's, New Fish Street." — Ed.

power, and faithfulness; and this upon the motive of some experience of his kindness and grace. So speaks the psalmist, [Ps. xxxi. 5](#), "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." What was it that gave him confidence so to do? "Thou hast redeemed me," saith he, "O Lord God of truth." A sense of redeeming grace, conveyed by the truth of the promises, is required in all that would commit their spirits into the hand of God. And therefore, brethren, when you come to the exercise of this great duty, you must lay this foundation in some sense and experience of the grace and kindness of God, or you can never perform it in a due manner. And, —

[1.] Upon this motive, the first thing we consider in God, in the resignation of our souls to him, is his sovereignty. It is mentioned in two places in the Psalms, in both which this duty is proposed unto us. [Ps. xvi. 1, 2](#), "Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord" (thou hast said unto Jehovah), "Thou art my Lord."

He doth not use the word יהוה again, — but אֲדֹנָי, "Thou art my Lord," (אֲדֹנָי אֱתָהּ) "who hast the sovereign disposal of me. I am going to give up my spirit to thee; and I do it upon the consideration of thy sovereignty, that 'thou art my Lord.'" So [Ps. xxxi. 14, 15](#), "I trusted in thee, O Lord." Why so? "I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand." — "It is because of thy sovereignty. 'Thou art my God,' who hast the sovereign disposal of me; therefore I commit myself to thee." It follows those words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Faith regards the glorious sovereignty of God, as the absolute free disposer of all things here, and unto eternity, without any reserve but his own pleasure, when it makes this resignation of the soul unto him.

[2.] It hath a peculiar respect unto the power of God, [2 Tim. i. 12](#), "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." It is common for persons to go through it in a customary manner. Die they must; but there is nothing can encourage them to yield up their souls to God, but an apprehension of such an infinite power that is able to preserve them in eternal being in the invisible world, especially to the day of the resurrection.

[3.] It respects the faithfulness of God, as one who hath promised that he will take care of us when we are gone out of this world, [1 Pet. iv. 19](#), "Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator;" that is, as a God who is omnipotent, who made all things, and is faithful in the accomplishing of his promises.

So, then, this duty I exhort unto is an immediate address unto God, an exercise of faith upon him, with special respect unto his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, upon an experience we have, in some measure, of his goodness and grace.

The seat before my eyes is very much changed in a short time, and I know not, brethren, how soon it may be the lot of any of you to stand in need of understanding this thing and



bringing it into practice. You may, if you please, remember it, for it is of great importance to have immediate converse with God with respect unto those great and awful attributes of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. That is the first thing.

(2.) As to the special form of this duty, there are two words wherein it is expressed, and both of the same import: for in one place it is rendered, "commending;" in another, "committing," [Luke xxiii. 46](#), and [Ps. xxxi. 5](#). But it is a re-commending or committing, as men commit a trust. If a man lay a-dying, and had an only child, and an estate to leave him, with what solemnity would he commit him to the trust of his friend, to take care of him! "I commit this poor child, who is helpless and fatherless, — I commit him to your trust," saith he, "to your love, care, and power, to look after him." He doth it with great solemnity. The psalmist calls his soul his "darling," and "only one:" "Deliver 'my darling' from the dog, and 'my only one.'" And now when a person is about to leave this world, he is to commit his soul, and leave it in trust somewhere. Then this exercise of faith is a leaving in trust or committing our "darling," our "only one," that is departing out of this tabernacle, unto God, under the consideration of his sovereignty, power, and faithfulness. I do not yet speak unto the life of this duty; which consists in committing the trust of our souls unto God, to be dealt withal, not according to our choice, but according to the terms of the covenant of grace, let it fall where it will, to all eternity: that is the solemn committing.

(3.) As to the manner of it, it ought to be done expressly in words that we should say to God. I do not give instructions to them who are dying, but to them that live, that they may be prepared to die. We should say to God, "Lord, I have been thus long in this world; I have seen much variety in the outward dispensation of things in the world, but a thousand times more in the inward frame of my spirit; and I am now leaving the world upon thy call: I am to be here no more. O Lord, after all, being to enter into a new, eternal state, I commit my soul unto thee, — I leave it with thee, — I put all my trust and confidence in thy faithfulness, power, and sovereignty, to be dealt withal according to the terms of the covenant of grace. Now I can lie down in peace."

Use 2. What benefit shall we receive hereby, if we do thus exercise our souls? I answer, We shall receive these advantages:—

(1.) I know nothing that is more meet to keep our souls in a constant reverence of God; which is the very life and soul of holiness and obedience. And the best profession, where this is not, is of no value. Now, nothing is more suited to this than an immediate access unto God every day (frequently at least), under the consideration of his glorious sovereignty, power, and faithfulness, as if you were immediately going into his presence, and into his hands. The more you abound in it, the greater will your reverence of God be. We have deceitful hearts, and a very crafty adversary to deal withal. We are commanded to draw nigh, and to have our access unto God with boldness, [Heb. x.](#); — to "come boldly to the throne of grace," [Heb. iv. 16](#). And we should do it frequently. Now, nothing in this world is so suited

to take off reverence, as boldness and frequency. Where men make bold, and where they [are] frequent, — as in a multitude of duties many are bold and frequent, — it works off the reverence of God. That is carnal boldness. But the more frequently you make your accesses unto God with spiritual boldness, the more will your hearts be filled with a reverence of God continually. And the more frequently you make your approaches unto God in outward duties without this holy and humble reverence, whatever your gifts be, reverence of God will decay. What poor, slight, withering things, have I seen some men grow to be, under a fair outward conversation, and multiplication of duties! And you may take this measure with you in all your duties; — if they increase a reverence of God, they are from grace; if they do not, they are from gifts, and no way sanctify the soul wherein they are.

(2.) It will support us under all our sufferings. The soul that is accustomed to this exercise of faith, will not be greatly moved in any of its sufferings. The Lord knows we are all moved and shaken, — and ready to be so, sometimes, very unhandsomely and unduly, — as the leaves of the forest; but it will keep us from being greatly moved. “I shall not be greatly moved,” saith the psalmist. And elsewhere it is enjoined, “Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator.” This will support you under all your sufferings. It is the very case and state in [Ps. xxxi.](#), from whence I have taken my principal testimony: “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed,” etc. “For I have heard the slander of many; fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.” What course doth he then take in all these distresses, sufferings, and persecutions? Why, saith he, “I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand.” He makes a resignation of himself to the sovereignty of God, and so was at peace.

I have showed you now how you may exercise this duty; and I do reckon myself to be near my account, and speak as one that is sensible of it. Would I could prevail with you to bring it more or less into actual exercise, before you give rest to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids!

*Use 3.* In the next place, who are they that do or can perform this duty as they ought, to live in this exercise of faith?

I am certain that they do not do so who live as if they were to live here for ever. But this is an evident proof of that distemper and confusion which is come upon the mind and soul of man. Truly, if a man of sobriety and reputation did come to such kind of men, who live in their sensuality and wickedness, as the world is full of them, and tell them, “Sirs! what do you do? I am persuaded that there is a death to come, and an eternal state of blessedness or woe near approaching: the way wherein you are will certainly engulf you in eternal destruction;” they would say to him, “This is your opinion.” Yet one would think a wise man



should prevail with them to do something according to his opinion. But it is not so. They have convictions in their minds they must die; they will not only say it is mine or your opinion, but they themselves are convinced of a future state, and profess it. But will they do any thing from an influence of this conviction? Nothing at all; no more than if they were brute beasts. These are not able to come to the exercise of their duty.

Nor those who walk at all peradventure. They know they must die; but they are apt to think they have other things to do before they die, and it will be time enough hereafter, at one season or another, to be preparing to die. The apostle did "die daily" indeed; but they have something else to do. When death knocks at their neighbour's door, and they hear such a one is dead, and it comes to their own families, and takes away this or that person, then they have some thoughts for a little while; but they quickly wear off, and they return to their common frame of spirit again. "Yet a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands to sleep;" — a little more secure converse in the world, attending unto our affairs." But death will come as an armed man, and they shall not be able to escape.

There are, therefore, two things required of every one that would be found in the exercise of this duty:—

(1.) That he lay the foundation of it in some comfortable persuasion of an interest in Christ; which alone will enable him to die safely: and having obtained that, he may labour after that which will enable him to die comfortably and cheerfully. Some men die safely; but, upon many considerations not now to be mentioned, they do not appear to die comfortably. And some men die very comfortably, to all outward appearance, that do not die safely. This, therefore, is necessary, that there be this foundation laid, — some comfortable persuasion of our interest in Christ, that we may die safely; or else it is to no purpose to expect to die comfortably.

(2.) Many think a few words at last will do it, and there is an end; but let me assure you, not only upon principles of Scripture truth, but of nature, there is no man can do it that hath not a view into the glory of spiritual and eternal things, outbalancing all his soul parts withal in this world. I hear men willing to die, and I find others do; but it is to go contrary to the principles of nature. No man under heaven (it implies a contradiction) can part with that which appears good to him, unless it be upon motives of a greater good. He must part with it; but he cannot willingly and cheerfully part with it. If you would be thus able willingly and cheerfully to resign a departing soul unto God, labour to have a view of those better things which are infinitely more great and glorious, which your souls shall come to the enjoyment of upon this departure.

The calls of God are great upon us, both public and private, and special to this congregation. God expects a special compliance with his calls from us; or else we shall yet be exercised with farther tokens of his displeasure.

## Sermon XXIX.<sup>389</sup>

That which I have been treating upon from these words is, to declare the ways and duties whereby a believer may come to die, not only safely, which all believers shall, but also cheerfully and comfortably, — so as to have a free and abundant entrance into the kingdom of God in glory.

I have spoken but to one thing; which is, the exercise of faith in the resignation of a departing soul entering into the invisible world into the sovereign hand and pleasure of God, to be disposed of according to the tenor of the everlasting covenant.

There are two things yet remaining necessary to the same end, — at least I find them so; which, if God will, I shall despatch at this time.

II. There is required, unto this great end, a readiness and willingness to part with this body which we carry about us, and to lay it down in the dust. The soul's natural aversion to let go this body, is that which we call an unwillingness to die; that hath made some say, like him of old, "Mori nolo," etc., — "I can be content to be dead, but I would not die."

There are two reasons why the soul hath a natural unwillingness to part with the body:—

1. Because it is, and hath been ever since it had a being, the only instrument of all the operations and actings of its faculties and powers. The whole privilege of a being consists in its powers and acts. Now, from the first moment of its being, the soul hath had no instrument to act by but the body; and that not only in the outward actions that the body performs, but in all its internal, rational actings, it cannot act without the instrumentality of the body. Therefore we know a hurt in the body, as oftentimes in the head, hath utterly deprived the soul of the exercise of all its powers and faculties during life. It cannot act rational, internal actings but by the body, and how it can act without the body it knows not. This hath ingrafted a natural unwillingness in the soul to let go the body, whereby, from the first instant of its being, it hath constantly acted. This is but one reason of it; there is yet a greater.

2. The other reason is, that strict, near, unparalleled union and relation between the soul and the body. There is a near union between parents and children, a nearer between husband and wife; but they are nothing to this union between the soul and body. There is an ineffable, inconceivable union between the two natures, the divine and the human, in the person of the Son of God; but this union was eternally indissoluble from the first moment of it: when the body and soul of Christ were separated, yet they continued in their union with the person of the Son of God as much as before, or as now in heaven. But here is a union that is dissoluble between a heavenly spirit and an earthly, sensual body; that is, two essential parts of the same nature. Pray give me leave to speak a little to it. I have considered what it is to die, and examined whence ariseth the difficulty. Now, I say it ariseth from this

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389 This sermon was first preached October 10, 1680.

peculiar constitution of our nature; there being no such thing in all the works of God, in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. The angels are pure, immaterial spirits; they have nothing in them that can die. God can annihilate an angel, — he that made all things out of nothing, can bring all things into nothing; but an angel cannot die, from the principles of his own constitution; — there is nothing in him that can die. A brute creature hath nothing in it that can live when death comes. “The spirit of a beast” Solomon speaks of as that which “goeth downward.” It is not the object of almighty power to preserve it, because it is nothing but the act of the body in its temperature and constitution. But now man is “medium participationis;” — he hath an angelical nature from above that cannot die, and a nature from beneath that cannot always live, since the entrance of sin, though it might have done so before. And therefore, in the product of man there was a double act of creation, and but a single act in any other creature’s. The creation of angels is not mentioned, unless in that, “Let there be light, and there was light;” but in all other things there was but one single act for its production. But when God came to make man, there were two distinct acts of creation. “God made man of the dust of the earth.” And what then? “And breathed into him the spirit of life.” Here is something that is not in all God’s creation beside. And now, upon this dissolution, all the actings of this nature, as it was one person, must cease unto the day of the resurrection. A wonderful change it is, that there shall be no more acting of the entire nature of man until the resurrection; only one part of this nature continues to act itself, according to its own powers. And one end of God’s work upon us in the grave is, to free our bodies from all alliance, and relation, and likeness unto the bodies of beasts. So our Saviour tells us, [Luke xx.](#) “Do not mistake,” saith he, “ ‘you shall neither marry nor give in marriage,’ nor have any one action common to brutes; but the whole man shall be *ισάγγελοι*, — ‘like unto the angels.’ ” This is the great privilege of our nature, as the wise man declares, [Eccles. iii. 19](#), where he answers the objection of an epicure: “That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: all go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” “As far as I can see it is so,” saith the man. But what saith the wise man? “Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” “Alas! you are mistaken: the difference doth not lie in this outward nature, wherein man and beast have a near alliance one to another; but in the spiritual, heavenly nature, that is from above; — and unless you know that, you will think all are as beasts indeed.” This, then, is the foundation of the unalterable aversation in the mind and soul to part with the body, — this strange constitution of our nature, which has nothing like it in the whole work of God, nothing to give us any representation of it, but it is peculiar unto us. And then this dissolution is but once to be made. They observe of the old heroes, who would freely venture their lives, and cast them away in any great attempt, that when they came to die, when they had killed themselves, or were



killed by others, their souls went away with groaning and indignation: they knew not how to bear the dissolution of the union.

And therefore this is in us all, brethren; it is our first desire, which we have upon a prospect that we cannot continue here, "to be clothed upon;" and, as the apostle says, "that mortality may be swallowed up of life," — that the body and soul together may go into immortality and glory. But this is not God's way; this is that he will bring us to, — that we be ready and willing to part with these bodies of ours, notwithstanding this union, or we cannot die cheerfully and comfortably.

Upon what grounds, then, can a man be ready and willing to lay down his tabernacle in the dust?

I shall fix upon two reasons, both given us by the same apostle:—

(1.) The first is that which he gives us, [Phil. i. 23](#), "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." Ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχω, "I have a strong bent and inclination of spirit." The word is that which in Scripture is used for "lust" and "concupiscence;" that is, always working with strong bent and inclination. "It is not a desire that sometimes befalls me, now and then, when in trouble, sickness, or pain; but I have an habitual, constant inclination." Unto what? Ἀναλῦσαι, "to depart," to leave this body. "It is usually translated in the passive; "I have a desire to be dissolved." But the plain meaning of the word is this, "I do desire that the contexture of my nature may be reduced unto its distinct principles, — may be analyzed." Now, analysis is the reducing of a speech from the present contexture into its proper, distinct principles. Then, here lies the difficulty. I told you the soul hath an aversation to this dissolution; and yet the apostle saith, "I have a continual, strong inclination to it." To what? Pray observe it, — "To be with Christ." I have no inclination to be dissolved as the end, but only as the means for another end, that without it I cannot be with Christ. There is my end. And so far with respect unto that end, that which is in itself no object of inclination becomes an object of desire. Brethren, I know no man dies willingly, — no man living can have an habitual inclination to close cheerfully with this dissolution, — but by looking upon it as a means to come to the enjoyment of Christ. I tell you, your bodies are better to you than all the world, than all your goods, or any thing else; but Christ is better to the soul than any thing: and therefore, unless it be for the enjoyment of Christ, let men pretend what they will, there is no man willing to part with the body, — to be dissolved. Grow in that desire of coming to Christ, and you will conquer the unwillingness of death.

(2.) The second reason is given us, [Rom. viii. 10](#), "The body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." The body is not only doomed to death by reason of original sin, as death entered upon all on that account; but the body must be brought to death, that sin may be rooted out of it. Sin hath taken such a close, inseparable habitation in the body, that nothing but the death of the body can make a separation. The body must be dead because of sin. Saith the sincere soul, "God knows that I have a thousand times at-



tempted a thorough and absolute mortification of every sin, and God hath helped me to endeavour that it should abide no more in me. I have sometimes thought myself near an attainment, but I have found a disappointment; and I am perfectly satisfied in it, that as long as I have this body I shall never be without sin: it must be dead by reason of sin, or the fibres and roots of it will never be plucked up, — the nature of it can never be extinguished, — it can never be separated utterly from it.” Here lies the great mystery of the grave under the covenant of grace, and by virtue of the death of Christ. What is it? worms and corruption? No; it is God's fining-pot, his way to purify: and there is no other way to make an eternal separation between sin and the body but by consuming of it in the grave. A secret virtue shall issue out from the death of Christ unto the body of a believer laid in the grave, that shall eternally purify it, at its resurrection, from every thing of sin. I will not say what apprehensions some have had concerning the state of souls upon the consumption of the body in the grave; because I will speak nothing unto you that is questionable.

This, then, is the second reason, — that all other attempts to eradicate sin have failed, and not had their issue; they have brought me to be ashamed of myself, in the forwardness, darkness, and unbelief of my nature; I will therefore be willing to part with my body. Such a one, then, will say, “This is that which God calls me unto. Go, then, thou poor, mortal, sinful flesh, ‘Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.’ I give thee up unto the doom of the Holy One, whose mouth hath spoken it, that thou must return to the dust. And there he will refine thee, and purify thee; [so] that notwithstanding this departure, ‘my glory shall rejoice,’ and thou, ‘my flesh, shalt rest in hope;’ for the time will come when ‘he will have a desire to the work of his hands;’ and ‘will call, and thou shalt answer him’ out of the dust;” — as [Job xiv. 15](#), “Be not afraid to enter into darkness: as there is no sting in death, so there is no darkness in the grave, whither thou art going. It is but lying so long in the hands of the great Refiner, who will purge, purify, and restore thee. Therefore, lie down in the dust in peace.”<sup>390</sup>

This is the second thing that is required in men that would die with their eyes open, that would die cheerfully and comfortably, according to the will of God, — to be willing to leave the body to God's disposal, to be laid up in the dust; because thereby it shall come to see Christ, and likewise shall have an end of sin.

I shall name but one thing more, and that very briefly; but it is the great thing that I would give in charge to my own soul: I pray God help me so to do; and it is this:—

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390 There is a similar strain of exhortation and reasoning, in which Christian faith and hope shine triumphant over the fears natural to all men in the prospect of dissolution, in the author's preface to his “*Meditations on the Glory of Christ*,” vol. i., p. 280. The reader will find the paragraph to which this note is appended on p. 283, wrought up and refined, with the author's last touch and corrections, into a high degree of Christian eloquence. — Ed.

III. Let us take heed of being surprised with death.

This is that peculiar wisdom which God calls us all unto at this day. We know not how soon we may be called upon by death. It may not come in an ordinary course, by long sickness, and give us warning; nor when we have lived to the age of a man, which is “threescore years and ten,” as the psalmist speaks; but we may be surprised with it when we look not for it. He that hath not learned it for himself from the dealings of God at this present in the world, and in this congregation, will not believe it if one should come from the dead and tell him so. Let this, then, be fixed upon our minds, that whatsoever be our state and condition, some are strong, young, and healthy, and some of us are old and feeble, going out of the world; but there are none of us but may be surprised with it. Take heed, therefore, that you be not surprised in an ill frame. I hope there are none of you but do understand that there is great variety in the frames of believers; sometimes they are in a good frame, — grace is active and quick, — they are ready to take impressions by the word and warnings, delighting in holy thoughts; and sometimes, again, it may be the world, temptations, or self-love, comes in, or over-valuation of our relations, and indisposes them again, and they are very unfit and lifeless for the performance of duties with delight and vigour of spirit; and these they lose, though they keep up to all their duties. I persuade myself you will confirm this with your own experience. There is no maintaining (though there may be impressions) of a quick, holy, lively frame, but by a sedulous contemplation and constant view of things that are above. Many will tell you, that when God hath been pleased to keep up their minds unto the thoughts of things above, and draw out their affections to cleave unto them, all things have gone well with them, — every prayer had life in it, and every sermon and duty, pleasure and joy; and their hearts have lain down and arisen in peace. But when they have lost their view of spiritual things, all other things continue, but there is a kind of deadness upon them. Why, then, our wisdom in this case is, to labour to keep up this spiritual view of eternal things, in a holy contemplation of and cleaving to them in our affections, or death will be surprising; come when it will, you will be surprised by it. But if this be our frame, what comes this messenger for? Death is a messenger sent of God; he knocks at the door, and what comes he for? To perfect the frame you are in, that you may see heavenly things more clearly. He is come to free you from that deadness you are burdened withal, that darkness you are entangled with, and to set you at perfect liberty in the enjoyment of those things your souls cleave unto. How, then, can your souls but bid this messenger welcome? Pray, then, that God would keep up your souls, by fresh supplies of his Spirit, unto a constant view of heavenly things. And you must do it by prayer, that God would give you fresh oil, to increase light in your minds and understandings. Some can tell you by experience, that, having made it their business with all their strength and study to live in that frame, they have found their own light decay, so that it would not be so fixed and constant towards heavenly things, nor so affect the heart as it had done before. Their light would work no





more, until fresh supplies from the Holy Ghost gave quickness to it, and fresh oil to increase, to discern the beauty of spiritual and heavenly things. In plain terms, I speak to dying men, that know not how soon they may die. God advise my own heart of this thing, that I should labour and watch, that death might not find me out of the view of spiritual things! If it do, — if our bellies cleave unto the dust, and our eyes are turned to the ground, — if we are filled with other things, and death approaches, — do you think it will be an easy thing to gather in your minds and affections to a compliance with it? You will not find it so. When David was in a good frame, he could say, “Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth: O Lord, into thine hand I commit my spirit;” — “I am willing to come and lay down my tabernacle, and embrace this messenger. But David falls from his good frame, under some decays of spirit, [Ps. xxxix.](#), and there makes great complaint of it. Where is the readiness now of the good man, and where is his willingness of giving up his spirit into the hand of God? “Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength,” [verse 13](#). Not his outward strength, but a better frame, fit to die in. And if death overtake us in such a frame, the best of us will be found to cry so: “O spare me a little, to recover my strength.” — “O the entanglements that have been brought upon me by this and that temptation, and diversion; by this coldness and decay! O Lord, spare me a little.” There is mercy with God for persons in this frame; but if it were the will of God, I had rather it should be, “Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit; for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.”

### Sermon XXX.<sup>391</sup> **The evil and danger of offences.**

“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” — [Matt. xviii. 7.](#)

It is very evident that our Lord Jesus Christ lays very great weight upon this matter of offences, He represents them like a two-edged sword, that cuts both ways: “Woe unto the world because of offences! woe to them by whom offences come!” He knits these two things together. It must needs be that there be offences; God hath appointed it, and it must be so. He doth not merely tell us, it will be; but, “it must be.” God hath ordered that so it shall be.

I will speak a few things in reference to offences, that may be of use unto us, without looking into the depth of this great matter of offence and scandal; than which, I must needs say, I never yet saw any thing less inquired into, though there is no subject more written upon and spoken to. We should consider for ourselves the time wherein we may be sure offences will abound. It is necessary, from this wonderful caution of Christ here given, “Woe, woe! — it must be,” that we should consider the times wherein it is likely offences will abound. And if all those times should prove to be upon us, certainly it is our duty to be wary.

First. The first is a time of persecution. Offences will abound in a time of persecution, to the ruin of many professors. So our Saviour tells us, [Matt. xiii.](#), “One received the seed of the word, and it sprang up; but when persecution for the word arose, immediately he was offended.” “Woe unto him, he is gone!”

Secondly. A time of the abounding of great sins is a time of giving and taking great offence. This the Holy Spirit speaks expressly, that “in the latter days there shall be perilous times.” All perils arise from offences. And why? Men’s lusts shall abound. When there is an abounding of lusts, there will be an abounding of offences, that make the times perilous.

Thirdly. When there is a decay of churches, when they grow cold, and are under decays, it is a time of the abounding of offences: “Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.” That is a time when offences will abound; such as all the churches of Christ seem to be under at this day. All the virgins, wise and foolish, are asleep. It is what I have told you often, and I wish I could say I have told you with weeping, that we are under woeful decays, — falling from our first faith, love, and works.

Now, if all these times should be upon us:— a time of persecution, as it is now throughout the world (saith the apostle, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, or all that befalls you, brethren, in the world”); a time of the abounding of great sin in men (I need not large upon this); and a time of great decays in all churches; — if it be thus with us, certainly it is very proper for us to took upon this warning of our Saviour, “Take heed of offences.”

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391 This sermon was preached September 30, 1681.

Offences are of two sorts:— I. Such as are taken only, and not given. II. Such as are given, and taken also:—

I. Such as are taken only, and not given. The great offence taken was at Jesus Christ himself. God appointed Christ to be the greatest offence in the world, [Isa. viii](#). He had designed him to be a stumbling-block, and a rock of offence, — an insuperable offence. The poverty of Christ in the world and his cross were the rock of offence whereat both Jews and Gentiles stumbled and fell, and ruined themselves unto eternity. How the apostle disputes, [1 Cor. i.](#), that this was an offence taken, and not given. How does he prove it? Why, that wherein God puts forth his wisdom and his power is no offence given, but merely taken; but in Christ crucified God put forth his power (let him be as poor in the world as he will, let him be crucified, there is the wisdom and the power of God in it): and therefore, there can be no just offence.

This offence taken, and not given, is increased by the poverty of the church. “You see your calling, brethren; — not many great, not many wise, not many noble.” In plain English, “You are a company of poor, weak, persecuted people.” But saith the apostle, “This is no offence given; ‘God chooses the things that are not, to bring to nought things that are.’ These things are an offence taken, and not given.”

II. There are offences given and taken:—

1. Offences given: and they are men’s public sins, and the miscarriages of professors, that are under vows and obligations to honourable obedience. Men may give offence by errors and miscarriages in churches, and by immoralities in their lives. This was in the sin of David. God would pass by every thing but offence given: “ ‘Because thou hast made my name to be blasphemed,’ therefore I will deal so and so.” What a talk did it occasion throughout the world! “There is your holy man, your godly man, your David! — a praying man! do you hear what a noise there is concerning him?” — “Thou hast made my name to be blasphemed,” saith God; and this is a great provocation. So God speaks of the people of Israel: “These were my people; by reason of you my name is profaned among the Gentiles.” — “These are the people of the Lord! see now, they are come into captivity! what a vile people they are!” Such things are an offence given.

2. Offences taken. Now offences are taken two ways:— (1.) As they occasion grief; and (2.) Sin. A given offence may be taken either of these ways:—

(1.) As they occasion grief. [Rom. xiv.](#), “See that by thy miscarriage ‘thou grieve not thy brother.’ ” Men’s offences who are professors are a grief, trouble, and burden, to those who are concerned in the same course of profession. But herein appears the wisdom of God, — when he doth, in his sovereignty, sometimes suffer persons to give offence, that may be sanctified unto the great advantage of the church. I am persuaded the church of Corinth



was in so much disorder, that it had gone near to have been lost, if God had not suffered one among them to fall into a scandalous sin. But see what the end was! You find in the First Epistle the disorder they were in, and what a scandalous sin fell out among them; and in the Second Epistle, the sorrow upon it. When they knew it, they took offence, and were grieved at it: “For behold, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things,” saith the apostle, “ye have approved yourselves to be dear in this matter.” I look upon it to have been the greatest sanctified means that God appointed for the humiliation, recovery, and saving of that church, that he suffered, in his sovereign wisdom, such an offence to fall out among them. That is the first thing; and let us lay it up in our minds, that we may not be moved and shaken; for I speak with a prospect of what is to come, and not of what is come: “Offences will come;” and therefore let us remember that God can sanctify the greatest offences to our humiliation and recovery, and to the saving of our church. Such is his infinite wisdom.

(2.) Given offences occasion sin. There comes the woe, as to the world; for there is no woe from offences to them who are truly humbled for them, grieved at them, and made thereby watchful over themselves and their own ways. But now, when offences are made an occasion of sin, as in the world, the world takes no offence at all by their own sins, nor by the sins of one another. Let them be what they will, let their teachers be as scandalous in their lives as possible, they are not grieved nor concerned. And the reason is in that saying of David, [1 Sam. xxiv. 13](#), “As saith the proverb of the ancients” (it was a saying from the flood, if not from the beginning of the world), “Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked;” — “Look for nothing but wickedness from wicked men.” So that it is no offence at all, to see wicked men do wicked things. They do not take offence at one another; nor doth the church of God take offence: for, as saith the proverb, they can do no otherwise. To show you how men are hardened in their prejudices against the truth, and confirmed in all their course by offences, would be too long a work for me to declare. But offences given are an occasion of sin, even among professors and believers themselves.

The worst way whereby a given offence is thus taken, is, when men countenance themselves in private sins by others’ public sins; and go on in vices because they see such and such commit greater. Woe unto us if we so take offence! Again, a given offence is taken when our minds are provoked, exasperated, and carried off from a spirit of love and tenderness towards those that offend, and all others; and when we are discouraged, and despond, as though the ways of God would not carry us out. This is to take offence to our disadvantage.

Thus I have showed you the great weight and import that is to be laid upon this matter of offence, as being the greatest aggravation of sin.

I have showed you the times wherein offences will abound: a time of persecution; a time of the increase of abominable sins; and a time of the decay of churches, — such as are upon us.

I have likewise showed you, there are offences taken only, and not given: Christ and his cross, the poverty of the church, its persecution and distress in all places, and the hopes and fears of all mankind at present that it will be ruined; — these are offences taken only, and not given, being all suited to the wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God. There are offences, also, that are given, by outward, known, public sins of persons who are under evangelical obligations to more honourable obedience. And under this head we might bring in every thing we see or hear; but some more gross than others. And these offences occasion either grief and sorrow; and then they prove a sanctified means in the hand of God for the church's good, making them more watchful and careful for the future: or they occasion sin, both by the world and by professors; and there comes the woe.

I shall give you a few rules from hence, and so conclude:—

*Rule 1.* The giving offence being a great aggravation of sin, let this rule lie continually in your hearts, — that the more public persons are, the more careful they ought to be that they “give no offence either to Jew or Gentile, or to the church of God.” Why doth the apostle put Jew and Gentile before “the church of God?” Because more evil will ensue upon it, and more disadvantage, unto the souls of men. Let this be our rule in walking, especially those of us whose occasions do call us unto more converse in the world, — let us always endeavour to give no offence to Jew or Gentile, or to the church of God.

2. If what I have laid down be your first and your main rule (I doubt, where this is neglected, there is want of sincerity; but where it is your principal rule), there is nothing but hypocrisy. Men may walk by this rule, and have corrupt minds, and cherish wickedness in their hearts. If this be the principal rule that guides you, that you will carry it so complyingly, that you will give no offence, — this is worse than neglecting the rule in the first case: that argues want of sincerity; this is a certain predominancy of hypocrisy. The principal rule commands conscience to God in all sincerity; and the second, to give no offence; — and if we make this our first rule, we are not upright with God. And therefore let none please themselves that they walk according to rule, if the internal power of God be not found in their souls.

3. Be not afraid of the great multiplication of offences at this day in the world. The truths of the gospel and holiness have broke through a thousand times more offences. They have broke through heresies and blasphemies, and poverty and persecution. God hath still preserved his people, who have broke through and got the conquest over the greatest offences; — over offences taken, in the cross of Christ, in the poverty of Christ, in persons that have preached the gospel, and in those who have professed it; — over offences given, in innumerable swarms of blasphemous heretics who have professed the name of Christ from the be-



ginning; in false reports that have been cast upon Christians, — being reported generally throughout the world to be a vile generation of wicked persons. The truth and grace of God have conquered all these offences, and prevailed over them all, and will do so again, if we keep close unto truth and the power of religion.

4. Beg of God wisdom to manage yourselves under offences: and of all things take heed of that great evil which professors have been very apt to run into, — I mean, to receive and promote reports of offence among themselves, taking hold of the least colour or pretence to report such things as are matter of offence, and give advantage to the world. Take heed of this; it is the design of the devil to load professors with false reports. And if so, he is not a wise man, nor she a wise woman, that stand not upon their guard, when they see an engine the devil often makes use of; — who, when he hath raised false reports and wounded divers, is greatly pleased, and careth not if afterward they be discovered to be false, as knowing that he hath done his work; for hereby he hath drawn out and embittered the spirits of men one against another. And therefore stand upon your guard, and know it is the devil's engine, though you see not his hand in the managing of it.

Posthumous sermons

Part iii.

Sermons published MDCCLVI.

“He being dead yet speaketh.” — [Heb. xi. 4.](#)



### **Prefatory note.**

All the information needed in regard to the following thirteen Discourses is given in an advertisement prefixed to them when they were first published, in 1756. It is as follows:—

“To the Reader, — The following Discourses were preached by that truly venerable divine in the last century, Dr John Owen: and, in order to be fully satisfied they are genuine, Mrs Cooke of Stoke Newington, by this means informs the reader that her pious grandfather, Sir John Hartopp, Bart., wrote them in shorthand from the Doctor’s own mouth, and then took the pains to transcribe them into long-hand; as thinking them worthy of being transmitted down to posterity. It is from his manuscripts this collection is now made public.”

With the exception of the fourth and fifth, which are given in connection with the third, as these three Discourses relate to the origin, qualifications, and duties of the Christian minister, the rest of the Discourses under this division appear in chronological order. The division thus contains two Sermons on “the Everlasting Covenant the Believer’s Support under Distress;” three Sermons preached at the ordination of ministers; four on “the Excellency of Christ;” and four on “the Use and Advantage of Faith.” — Ed.





Posthumous sermons.



## Sermon I.<sup>392</sup> The everlasting covenant, the believer's support under distress.

“Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” — 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

Before I open these words, I shall read the whole context, from the [1st verse unto the end of the 7th](#): “Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was,” etc.

“Now these be the last words of David;” — not absolutely, for you will find, both in the book of Samuel and also in the book of Chronicles, that David spake many words after these: but these were the last prophetic words of David; or this is the last prophecy of David. And he gives an account in this prophecy of all the faith and experience he had had in the world; and it comprises also the sum and substance of all he had prophesied of; — prophesied of as a king, the anointed of the God of Jacob; and prophesied of as a psalmist, as he was “The sweet psalmist of Israel.”

Now there are three parts of this last prophecy of David:—

The first of them concerns the subject of all prophecy and promises that he had preached about and declared; and that is Christ himself, in [the 3d and 4th verses](#); the second of them concerns himself, as he was a type of Christ, [verse 5](#); and the third part concerns Satan and the enemies of the church, in opposition unto the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The first part of his prophecy concerns Christ himself, [verses 3, 4](#), “The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” So we have rendered the words; but if you look into the Bible, that “must be” is put into the text by the misunderstanding of them by interpreters. The words are, מוֹשֵׁל בְּאֶדְוֶם צַדִּיק — “The ruler in or over men is the Just One;” which is Christ himself, who alone is this מוֹשֵׁל, — this “ruler.” The word may be two ways interpreted (for to interpret it of a man that ruleth over men, the word will no way bear it, nor the prophecy); — the בְּאֶדְוֶם; must be, either, “He that rules in the human nature is the Just One;” or, “He that rules over the human nature” (in all saints), “he is just,” saith he; “and he rules in” or by” the fear of God.” As, in [Isa. xi. 3](#), it is prophesied of him, “He shall be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord;” so here it is prophesied of him, that he shall rule in or by the fear of God; — that is the sceptre he shall have in the hearts of men, — that is the law



392 This sermon was preached June 27, 1669.

he shall put upon the souls of his subjects: he shall rule them neither by outward violence nor force, nor any thing of that nature; but he shall rule them by the fear of God. [Verse 4](#) declares, by sundry comparisons, what he shall be: Why, saith he, "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." You know how often these things are applied unto Christ. He is called in Malachi, "The Sun of righteousness that ariseth," [chap. iv. 2](#); he is called "The Day-spring from on high," [Luke i. 78](#); and he is called "The bright and morning Star," [Rev. xxii. 16](#). He is both a sun, and morning star, and day-spring. He shall be as the morning, that brings light, comfort, joy, refreshment to the church. "He shall be as a morning without clouds;" — there is no darkness in the kingdom of Christ. And "he shall be as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain;" — the same with that in Isaiah, "He shall spring up as the tender branch out of the earth." You know the reason of the allusion: when the grass hath been long dried, and there comes a great rain upon it, and clear shining upon that rain, how will the grass spring up! There was to be a great drought upon the church; but Christ comes, and he was as the rain, and as the sun shining upon the rain; then there was a springing up with great glory, and unto great fruitfulness.<sup>393</sup>

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393 It is a duty to apprise the reader, that the passage from which the text of Owen is selected has occasioned much embarrassment to critics. On the strength of a patient collation of old manuscripts, Kennicott has proposed important changes on the present rendering in our authorized version. The changes principally relate to the insertion of "Jehovah" in [verse 4](#), the omission of the negative in the first clause of [verse 5](#), and the connection of the last words of the same verse with the first words of the verse that follows. Michaelis affirms, "that, in the latter chapters of the Second Book of Samuel, the manuscripts have come down to us more disfigured with mistakes than in any other part of the Old Testament." The alterations proposed in the present instance serve to evince the prophetic character of the passage, as descriptive of the Messiah, and to strengthen the evidence of his divinity. The reader must be referred to the discussion of this passage by a master in Israel, Dr Pye Smith, in his profound and exhaustive work on "*The Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*," etc. We add his proposed version of the passage; which agrees substantially with the version proposed by Kennicott:— 4. "Ruling over man is a Righteous One, Ruling in the fear of God: Even as the light of the morning shall he arise, Jehovah, the sun; A morning without clouds for brightness, [As] after rain the herbage from the earth. 5. Truly thus is my house with God; For an everlasting covenant he hath fixed with me, Ordered in every thing and secured; For [this is] all my salvation, and all [my] desire: 6. But the wicked shall not grow." Owen himself, as will be seen above, very properly corrects the authorized version in one point; and thus warrants our reference to subsequent discoveries, by which greater accuracy has been imparted to the original text in this part of Scripture. His own reasoning in the discourse principally depends upon the negative in the beginning of [verse 5](#), which Kennicott would omit, on the slender authority, as it appears, of one manuscript dating from the close of the thirteenth century. It is a fair question, therefore, if the external evidence for the rejection of the negative be as strong as for the insertion of "Jehovah" in the preceding verse. Boothroyd, attaching an interrogative sense to the particle

I will at present overlook the [5th verse](#), to which I am to return; and only show that [the 6th and 7th verses](#) do contain a prophecy of the enemies of the church; as this does of Christ. "Belial shall be thrust away as thorns." We render it, "The sons of Belial;" but it is only Belial; — "Belial, all of it, the whole name of Belial." Sometimes the word is taken for wicked men, and sometimes for the prince of wicked men; as here for the devil and all his agents. And he follows on his allusion, that "they cannot be taken with hands;" Satan and his seed are so full of thorns and prickles against the church, that you can never seize them by the hand to bring them to any order. And [the next verse](#) gives caution how well we must be fenced if we touch them. This is the design of the prophecy.

I now return unto that part which I shall a little more distinctly open unto you, that concerns David himself, as he was chosen to be the great type of Christ. Saith he, "This Ruler of men, he shall be as the clear morning without clouds; although my house be not so with God."

There are two things in the words:— First, A supposition of a great disappointment and surprisal. Secondly, A relief against and under that disappointment and surprisal.

First. A great surprisal and disappointment: "Although my house be not so with God." "I have looked that it should be otherwise," saith he, — "that my house should have a great deal of glory, especially, that my house should be upright with God; but I begin to see it will be otherwise." You may observe, David's heart was exceedingly set upon his house; therefore, whenever God spake to him concerning his house, it mightily wrought upon him; as [2 Sam. vii. 18, 19](#), "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" [Verse 25](#), "And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said." I am sometimes afraid that David had (as under the Old Testament they generally had) some carnal apprehensions of those spiritual promises that God gave to David's house, — which were, principally, to bring Christ out of his loins, that should reign for ever: but David thought all things would come well out of his house also. How stands the case now? Now David sees that in his house Amnon had defiled Tamar, Absalom had slain Amnon for his sin, and he was cut off in his rebellion; and he foresaw, by a spirit of prophecy, that his whole house was like to perish and be cut down: and so comes to that now, "Although my house be not so with God." So that from hence we may take this observation, —

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יִשְׂרָאֵל, throws the clause into the form of a question, and elicits the best meaning with the least violence to the text, — "Is not my house thus with God?" It will be found, however, that the chief aim of Owen is to educe from the covenant of grace considerations fitted to sustain and console the minds of Christians under the grief of blighted hope. His argument is conclusive, whatever becomes of the mere criticism of his text. — Ed.

That the best of the saints of God do oftentimes meet with great surprisals and disappointments in the best of their earthly comforts: their houses are not so with God.

I will give you one or two places for this:— [1 Chron. vii. 23](#), “Ephraim went in to his wife, and she conceived, and bare a son, and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house.” Ephraim had received a special blessing from God by Jacob, for the multiplying of his house: “He also shall be great, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations,” [Gen. xlviii. 19](#). Now, in Ephraim’s old age, some of the chief of his sons are killed, [1 Chron. vii. 21, 22](#), “There were Zabad, and Shuthelah, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days.” And he called his other child Beriah, “because it went evil with his house.” It was a great surprise unto him, because he had a promise for his house; though God afterwards retrieved it.

You know how great a surprisal befell Job. See what his thoughts were, [Job xxix. 18](#). After, in all the foregoing part of the chapter, he had related the manifold blessings of God upon him in his prosperity, the uprightness of his own heart, his righteousness in his way, as he declares them to the utmost in the beginning of that chapter, he tells you his thoughts: “Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.” He expected, from the blessing of God, long life and peace. You know what surprisal befell him, and disappointment to all his comforts in this world, — that never man fell into greater; and he gives you an account how great his surprisal was throughout the next chapter.

The reasons hereof, why it may be thus, are, —

First. Because there is no promise of the covenant to the contrary; there is no promise of God secures absolutely unto us our outward comforts. Be they of what nature they will, — be they in our relations, in our enjoyments, in our persons, — of what kind they will, why, yet we may have a surprisal befall us in reference to them all; because there is no promise of God to secure the contrary, therefore it may be so.

Secondly. Sometimes it is needful it should be so, though we are apt to think the contrary; — and that for these three reasons:—

1. To keep continually upon our hearts a due awe of the judgments of God, — of the actings of God’s providence in a way of judgment; which otherwise we should be apt to think ourselves freed from. David testified that this frame was in himself, [Ps. cxix. 120](#), “My flesh,” saith he, “trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.” There ought to be in our hearts an awe of the judgments of God; “for our God is a consuming fire:” and if we were secured from surprisals in our own concerns, so fleshly are we, so selfish and carnal, it would be impossible we should keep up a due awe and reverence of the judgments of God. But when these judgments of God may reach our nearest concerns, — our lives, and all we enjoy; then doth our flesh tremble in a due manner for fear of him: and we may



be afraid of his judgments. A due fear of the judgments of God is a necessary balance upon the minds of the best of the saints.

2. It is needful, to keep us off from security in ourselves. There is such a treachery in our hearts, that we are able to build carnal security upon the spiritual dispensations of God's kindness and love. "I said, I shall never be moved," saith David; — an expression of carnal security. What was the ground? "Thou, Lord, hast made my rock so strong." He built up carnal security upon God's dispensations. It is needful, therefore, God should sometimes break in upon our concerns, that we may not turn a constant course of his kindness into a sinful security of our own.

3. They are sometimes actually needful, to awaken the soul out of such deep sleep of present satisfaction, or love of this world; which nothing else will do. Sometimes we so fall asleep in our own ways, either in our satisfaction or projects and desires, and are so earnest in the pursuit of them, that no ordinary jog will awaken us; it is necessary God should break in upon us in the best of our concerns, and make us put in an "although" in our course. "Although my children live not, and my house be not so with God;" "Although my house be destroyed," etc.

That which we should learn from hence, by way of use, is, —

1. Not to put too great a value upon any contentment, whatever we have in this world, lest God make us write an "although" upon it. David seems to have put too great a valuation upon his house, the carnal flourishing of his house; but in his last words he is forced to come to that, "Although my house be not so with God;" as if he had said, "What I placed all my hope and expectation upon, that I find is not so with God."

2. Let us be in an expectation of such changes of providence, that they may not be great surprisals unto us. When we are in peace, let us look for trouble; when we are at liberty, let us look for restraint; and when our children are about us, let us look for the removal of them; and be content to see all our comforts in their winding-sheet every day. It is impossible but our hearts will be too much upon them, unless we keep them in this frame.

The second general observation is this:—

That the great reserve and relief for believers, under their surprisals and distresses, lies in betaking themselves to the covenant of God, or to God in his covenant. " 'Although my house be not so with God,' — what shall I then do? what will become of me? Yet 'he hath made a covenant with me, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. This is all my desire, and all my salvation, although he make not my house to grow.' " I say, the great relief and only reserve of believers in their distresses and surprisals, such as may befall them in a very few days, is, to betake themselves to God in his covenant.

I will give you some instances of it:— [Gen. xv. 1, 2](#). There God leads us to this I now mentioned. Abraham was in a perplexed condition; God comes to him in [the 1st verse](#), and renews his covenant with him: "The word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying,

Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” He minds him of the covenant, and bids him not fear. What is the matter, that God comes to Abraham with this, “Fear not, Abram”? [The next verse](#) discovers it: “And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” He was afraid that all the travail he had taken, in reference to the promise, would come to nothing; and he must leave it to Eliezer of Damascus. Now, God comes to give him relief, in minding him of his covenant.

Jacob also relieved his dying spirit with this, upon the foresight of great troubles in his blessing of Dan, [Gen. xlix. 16–18](#), “Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.” He alludes to the name Dan, which signifies in Hebrew “to judge.” When did Dan judge his people? Why, in Samson. This is matter of joy to Jacob. But what shall follow? “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.” “He shall be a serpent and an adder,” saith he; that is, idolatry shall be set up in the tribe of Dan, and continue. The first idolatry that was set up in Israel (the work of the serpent), was in the tribe of Dan, [Judges xviii. 30](#), when the Danites took away the graven image, etc., from Micah, and set it up, and made priests, until the day of the captivity of the land; — not the captivity by the Assyrians, but the captivity by the Philistines, when they overcame them and took away the ark; for then were all those things destroyed at Dan. And afterwards Jeroboam comes and sets up the calf in the same place, and that continued to the last captivity. With what, now, doth Jacob relieve himself? “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord:” he betakes himself to the covenant, and therewith relieves himself against all the trouble which he foresaw was coming upon his posterity in that tribe; which, upon that account, when the other tribes were sealed in the Revelation, was left out, because idolatry first began and ended in Dan.

David expresseth the same course to the height, [Ps. xxxi. 10–15](#). He describes a very sad condition upon all hands: “My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed, I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance,” etc. Here is sin, and reproach, and contempt, and persecution, and danger of his life, all at once fallen upon him. What doth the man do? Why, in [the 14th and 15th verses](#) he tells you, “But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand.” He betakes himself to the covenant against all these troubles within doors and without doors, from sin, the world, wicked men, in reproach, contempt, persecution, that had almost slain him: he hath but this relief, — he goes to God and saith, “‘Thou art my God;’ thou shalt undertake for me against all these. I am not in the hand of sin, nor in the hand of my enemies; but my times of suffering, my time of life and death, are in thy hands.” He betakes himself unto God’s covenant, and there he finds rest. I might multiply instances.



Take one more, wherein the doctrine is plainly held out, [Hab. iii. 17, 18](#), “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” “‘Though my house be not so with God;’ there is my family gone, the fruits of the earth gone, all is gone; — it is no matter,” saith the believer, “‘I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.’” Every word expresses the covenant of God. By these instances it doth appear that, in the most surprising trouble and disappointments, believers do, as David here doth, betake themselves unto God in covenant.

Why do they so? I will give no reason for it but what lies in the words:—

First. They do it because of the Author of the covenant. They consider who it is that makes it with us: “Because He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,” saith David. There is a great emphasis upon that he; who is that? Why, it is the Rock of Israel, the God of Israel, — he hath made it. “It is not a covenant that man hath made with me, nor an angel; but it is a covenant that God hath made with me.” And you may observe that God, whenever he would require our faith or obedience, doth signally preface his commands and promises with himself. You must know who it is that commands, and who it is that promises. So in the decalogue, the rule of commands, he prefaceth them with that, “I am the Lord thy God;” which influences the minds of men unto obedience, and brings them under his authority. And when he made this covenant that David speaks of here, he doth it thus, [Gen. xvii. 1](#), “I am God Almighty.” This David regards here, when he saith, “He hath made with me this covenant.” He; who? “God Almighty, God All-sufficient; hither I retreat in all my wants and straits.” Now, if we make a covenant one with another, we engage all that is in us to make good that covenant; we engage our power and ability, and reputation and faithfulness. If I have a covenant with any of you, I would reckon upon this covenant just according unto the esteem I have of your persons, your abilities, reputation, faithfulness; for when you engage in covenant, all you have is engaged. Now, God making this covenant, he engages according to his power, goodness, faithfulness; so that we have the reputation of God to secure us in the things of this covenant, — his all-sufficiency to assure us of the making good this covenant. So saith the soul, “I will retreat unto the covenant, because God hath made it, who is all-sufficient.” This makes it a very honourable covenant, it is a covenant made by God; and it makes it a very satisfactory covenant, — if all that is in God can give satisfaction unto the soul of a poor creature; and it makes it also a sure covenant, as we shall see afterwards.

This is the first reason why David makes his retreat in straits and difficulties unto this covenant, — because of the author of it, God himself, who made this covenant.





Secondly. The second reason is taken from the properties of the covenant, — what kind of one it is; and they are three:— It is an “everlasting” covenant; it is a covenant that is “ordered in all things;” and it is a covenant that is “sure:” —

1. It is the great relief of our souls, because it is “an everlasting covenant.” The things we are troubled about, wherein our comforts consist in this world, are but temporal things; and an everlasting relief against temporal distresses will quite out-balance them.

How is this everlasting? It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is everlasting in respect of the end of it; and it is everlasting in respect of the matter of it:—

(1.) It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is a covenant that comes from everlasting love, [Jer. xxxi. 3](#), “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” What then? “Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” This drawing with loving-kindness is the covenant here mentioned. And whence doth it proceed? From everlasting love. We had never had the drawing of the covenant, had not that been the spring. I will betake myself unto that covenant which hath its spring in eternity. This covenant had not its beginning when first I laid hold upon it; but it had its beginning in God's love from all eternity.

(2.) It is everlasting in respect of the end of it: it ceases not until it brings the whole person, soul and body, into everlasting glory. So our Saviour manifests, [Matt. xxii. 32](#). There arose a question whether the dead should arise or no, and so the whole person be brought to God in glory; and the Sadducees came to Christ with a pitiful, sophistical question about a woman that had had seven husbands, — whose wife she should be in the resurrection? Christ answers them; but how doth he prove that there shall be a resurrection? No otherwise but by the words of the covenant, [verse 32](#); “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” They live unto God by virtue of the covenant unto this day; and by virtue of the covenant shall be raised again.

(3.) It is an everlasting covenant upon the account of the matter of it, — the things concerning which it is. It is not a covenant about corn, and wine, and oil, — about the growing of our houses, the increase of our families or selves in the world; but it is a covenant about everlasting things, — “things which are not seen,” [2 Cor. iv. 18](#). Grace is eternal, mercy eternal, spiritual life, and joy, and comfort, are all eternal things. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,” [John xvii. 3](#). Not only eternal glory, but the grace we have here by virtue of the covenant, is eternal. “It is not about the land of Canaan, thrones and kingdoms, — it is not about the prosperity of our families,” saith he; “but about everlasting things.”

Now, is there not here great ground for retreat unto this covenant in all our straits, that hath its rise in everlasting love, its end in everlasting rest, and the matter whereof are all everlasting things. This is the first property of it, and a reason why we ought to make it our relief, — because it is an everlasting covenant.

2. The second property of this covenant is, — that it is “ordered in all things.” What is order? Order is the disposition of things into such a way, — such a relation one to another, and such a dependence one upon another, — as they may all be suited to attain their proper end. This is order. Now saith he, “This covenant is ordered.” The truth is, order is the beauty of all things, — the glory of all things; and it is but a little, I acknowledge, that I am able to look into of the order of this covenant, which renders it exceeding beautiful and glorious; and much less that I shall now speak to you.

I would refer the order of the covenant to these three heads:— to its infinitely wise projection; to its solemn confirmation; and to its powerful execution. These three things give this covenant its order. Its infinitely wise projection, in the love and eternal wisdom of the Father; its solemn confirmation, in the blood and sacrifice of the Son; and its powerful execution, in the efficacy of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of grace; — these are the heads of the glorious order of this covenant, that give it its life, beauty, and glory.

(1.) Its projection was in the wisdom and love of the Father. Whatsoever is spoken concerning the love, grace, and wisdom of the Father before the world was, was laid out in the projection of this covenant. Take it as it wraps Christ in it, — as it bring forth the forgiveness of sin, — as it is the centre of grace; and it compriseth the whole effect of divine wisdom, as far as the infinitely holy God ever manifested, or ever will manifest to eternity.

(2.) It had a solemn confirmation in the blood of the Son; hence the blood of Christ is called “The blood of the covenant.” The covenant was solemnly confirmed in the blood of Christ. It is the design of the apostle, in [the 10th chapter of the Hebrews](#), to prove the solemn confirmation of the new covenant in the blood of the Son of God. That makes it irrevocable and unchangeable.

(3.) But when all this is done, how shall this covenant be executed? Why, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. He hath undertaken two things:— [1.] To assure our souls of all things on the part of God; — to reveal the terms of the covenant, and make known unto us the end of God in it. And, [2.] To undertake on our part to give us hearts that we shall love him and fear him; — to write the terms of the covenant on our part in our souls, so that it shall have an infallible execution. If any thing had been wanting in this order, we could never have had benefit by this covenant.

There is an addition of order, in reference to the matter of it, here expressed. As it is “ordered,” so it is “ordered in all things;” — it is ordered in all the things “of grace on the part of God;” it is ordered in all the things “of sin on our part.” 1st, It is ordered in all the things “of grace on the part of God,” — that all grace whatsoever, that is needful for the covenanters, shall be given out unto them. If there were any needful grace that we should come short of, in reference unto the end of this covenant, it would not be “ordered in all things.” If the covenant had been ordered but in some grace, in quickening grace, and not in persevering grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant: if in pardoning grace,

and not renewing grace, we had never come to the end of the covenant; “for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” But whatsoever grace is needful to bring us to the enjoyment of God, it is ordered in all grace. The first covenant with Adam was ordered in grace, but not in all grace; it was ordered in righteousness, holiness, and innocency, but not ordered in the grace of perseverance: and failing in that grace, the whole covenant failed. But this covenant is “ordered in all things,” with reference to believers. *2d*, It is ordered in reference unto sin. There was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant; but there was no order taken about sin: [so] that if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more. But this covenant hath taken order about sin; that there shall no sin befall believers but what the grace of the covenant will extend pardon unto. If a believer should fall into any one sin that would deprive him of the benefit of this covenant, it would not be “ordered in all things.” There are sins that, if a believer should fall into, would break the covenant; but the covenant prevents such falls.

This is another motive to rely upon this covenant, — because it is “ordered in all things.” What could God provide more for poor creatures?

3. The last property of this covenant is, that it is “sure.” It is “ordered in all things, and sure.” If it had not been sure, it would not have been a relief unto us. The springs of the security of this covenant are two:— (1.) The oath of God. (2.) The intercession of Christ.

God hath confirmed this covenant by his oath; and that gives surety in itself, and security unto us, [Heb. vi. 17, 18](#).

And it is made sure by the interposition of Christ. He is made the surety of a better covenant, [Heb. vii. 22](#). And he lives for ever to make intercession for them that come unto God by him, and so is able to save unto the uttermost, [verse 25](#).

This is what I have to offer from the opening of the words, and the reasons contained in them, why they are the great relief and reserve of believers in all the surprisals, disappointments, and distresses, that may befall them; and we are marvellously unwise, if we do not live in a constant expectation of such surprisals. To say that we shall die in our nests, and our mountain is so strong that it shall not be moved, — this is carnal security.

I will answer one question, and I have done:—

How do believers betake themselves to this covenant for relief? or, What may we do that we may betake ourselves unto it for our relief in our surprisals and distresses?

I answer, first, The first way is, by faith to get a due and dear valuation of the things of the covenant, above all things we here enjoy in this world. We shall never have relief by it, until we value the things of it as we ought; and those who do so shall never want relief from it.

Secondly, We should seek unto God in covenant, for strength to support us under our surprisals and distresses. When Abraham was going to battle, he took with him Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, who were the men of his covenant, [Gen. xiv. 13](#). When our souls are en-



gaged in battle with our sins, oppositions, and fears, let us take with us the men of our covenant; I mean, take God with us, — seek strength from the covenant: it is the way to support under soul-surprisals.

Thirdly and lastly, We must resolve, finally, to take up our rest in the covenant of God, and not in other things. In [Isa. xxx. 15](#), God brings it to this, “Thus saith the Lord God; the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall, be your strength.” God, when he proposes the covenant unto us, doth it that we should take up our rest and confidence alone in that. “But ye would not, but said, We will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee.” If we have other reserves, the covenant will never be a stable reserve unto us.

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## Sermon II.<sup>394</sup> On the everlasting covenant.

“Although my house be not so with God,” etc. — 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

I do remember I have spoken in this place formerly from these words; and delivered somewhat concerning the covenant of God, so far as the exposition of the words did lead me.

I shall now add only one consideration, which is taken from the introduction of David's retreat unto, and assertion of, the everlasting covenant in this place; and that is in these words, “Although my house be not so with God.”

David took a prospect now, in his latter days, of all the distresses and calamities that should assuredly come upon his family; and, it may be, he had regard unto those great and dreadful breaches that had before been made upon it, in the sins and judgments that ensued upon some of his children. This was enough to work in him a consternation of spirit and trouble of mind; and, in the view and prospect of it, he repairs for his relief unto the covenant of God: “Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” What I would observe from it is this:—

Under present distresses and the saddest prospect of future troubles, it is the duty, and wisdom, and privilege of believers, to betake themselves for relief and support unto the covenant of God. Nothing can befall them, no case happen, for which there is no relief provided; and it is the greatest and best relief that can be provided, for any case whatsoever.

Having laid down this assertion, the substance of what I shall do at present is but to confirm it with some *Scripture instances*, and the *practice of believers* in former ages.

We have *one* instance in [Gen. xxviii. 3, 4](#):— Isaac was sending away his son Jacob unto Padan-aram, to take him a wife; and he might easily know, and did, no doubt, what troubles, and distresses, and dangers, would befall Jacob in that great undertaking. And one would somewhat wonder why so great a man as Isaac was should send away his son with no better provision than Jacob was sent away with. He gives this account of it, — “I had nothing but my staff. “With my staff,” saith he, “I went over Jordan.” But it seems that temporal blessings being then a great token and evidence of God's covenant mercies, he would have Jacob work for himself, that he might have experience of God's blessing him in what he did. He should try God by his own experience. And what provision doth he give him, besides his staff, for this great undertaking? It is this, [verses 3, 4](#), “God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham.” Why does he say, “God Almighty”? Because that was the name whereby God revealed himself to Abraham when he entered into covenant with him, in [Gen. xvii. 1](#), “I am the Almighty God.” Isaac calls his son Jacob to renew his covenant interest with God, and to betake himself unto the blessing of the covenant, against that long and



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394 This sermon was preached January 1, 1670.

hazardous journey he was to go, — against the hard, false, oppressive, deceitful dealing he was to meet with, — against the dangers he was to encounter. He gives him the covenant for his security. And Jacob was not wanting to take the same course himself, [Gen. xxxii. 9](#), and so onward. He was in as great a distress, and under as just a fear, as ever man was in this world, or could be in; and so he expresses his fear unto God, [verse 11](#), “Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.” He feared the universal destruction of himself and family, and so the failing of the promise he had received, and which he had pursued through so many difficulties and dangers. What course now doth Jacob take? Why, he appeals to the covenant, [verse 9](#), “O God of my father Abraham, and God of my Father Isaac;” which was the plea whereby they did plead the covenant that God entered solemnly into with them. Two things, it is evident, Jacob pleaded in this very great distress:— one was the covenant that God made with Abraham; that is, the covenant of grace: for so he doth, [verse 9](#). He refers unto what blessing Isaac gave him when he went away; — “God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham.” And, secondly, he appeals unto that particular covenant engagement which he himself had made unto God; for in [chap. xxviii. 13](#), God comes unto him, and renews his covenant: “And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac;” and thereupon Jacob renews his covenant in particular with God, [verse 20](#), “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way, then shall the Lord be my God.” These two things doth Jacob in his great distress, — he minds the covenant in general, and the particular covenant engagement God had brought him into; for so he pleads, “Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.” Where did he say so? He said so in [chap. xxxi. 13](#). When Jacob made his covenant with God, he pleaded these two things, in the greatest distress that could befall him in this world.

Shall I give you one instance more? David gives it us in his own person, [Ps. xxxi. 9–13](#). He makes as sad a complaint of such a complication of distresses upon him as there is anywhere extant in the whole book of the Psalms. “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly,” etc. I could easily manifest what a confluence of evil this holy man was now under. Within, iniquities prevailed, and the fear of them; and without, friends forsook him, and enemies took counsel to take away his life. Whereunto doth he retreat? what doth he seek for relief in? what is the contrivance of this man of wisdom, and courage, and interest in the world? See [verse 14](#), “But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God;” and this put an end to all his difficulties. But this matter I have hinted in a former sermon.

It were an easy thing to multiply instances, both of particular persons and the church in general, who were taught this wisdom of God, and knew this to be their duty, — to let go

all other vain contrivances, and to take up their relief only in the covenant of God; as David doth here in the text.

Let us see a little more into the nature of it, that it may give us encouragement to our duty. And, —

First. When a man betakes himself for relief unto God's covenant, "he doth put God in mind of it," wherewith he is greatly delighted; because therein he hath wrapped up his greatest glory in this world, and God is greatly delighted to be put in remembrance of that wherein he hath wrapped up the glory of his grace. It was Jacob's argument, when he wrestled with God, and prevailed; as signal an instance of the work of faith, and the deportment of a believer under great distresses, as the whole Old Testament affords us (and is given as an example to confirm our faith, [Hos. xii. 4](#)): "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," [Gen. xxxii. 12](#). He put God in mind of what he had said to him when he made the covenant with him; and you know what a glorious issue it had. Jacob could not have done any thing more pleasing and acceptable unto God than to put him in remembrance of what, out of his goodness, grace, and bounty, he had promised; for he professes that "he was not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which God had showed unto him." "I plead not any thing," says he, "of my own deservings; but, Lord, didst thou not say thou wouldst do me good?" God is greatly pleased with being remembered of the effects of his own grace, and wherein he hath wrapped so much of his own glory.

Secondly. As God would have us mind him of the covenant, "so his remembrance of it is still laid at the bottom of all the good he doth unto us," and of all the dispensations of his love and grace.

God made a covenant with Noah, and with all the world in him; wherein he gave the preservation of the world from a universal destruction in covenant unto his saints; for the world is at this day, and to the last will be, preserved upon this account, that God hath given the preservation of it in covenant unto Noah, and to them that succeed in the faith of Noah. But how comes it to pass that God will destroy this world no more with a flood, when he had made this covenant? Saith God, "I will set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of the covenant; and the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature." It is spoken after the manner of men, when they have made an engagement that they will do such a thing; it may be out of their mind, but if you remind them of it by a token, then they will recover their memory, and do according to their engagement. Now, saith God, "I will take it upon myself to remind myself." And when he remembers the covenant, what will he do? "Then I will restrain my wrath and indignation, and I will destroy the earth no more." The withholding of troubles, judgments, and desolations, is laid in God's remembering of the covenant. It is all comprised together, [Luke i. 72–75](#), "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Ab-

raham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." All deliverance from our enemies, of whom we are afraid; all communication of grace, and of spiritual strength, to enable us to serve God in holiness and righteousness; it all springs from this, — God's remembering of his covenant.

Now, he that retreats to God in his distresses, reminds God of his covenant: "Thou saidst thou wouldst do me good." And the bringing forth of God's word of promise is as good a token as his own bringing forth the bow in the cloud. And this is the foundation of all the good he doth *for* us, or *in* us.

Thirdly. What is there in the covenant, that God doth thus remember, that will give us relief in times of distress, and in our prospect of future calamities that may befall us? and what are we to have regard unto that may give us that relief? I answer, —

1. *God himself is in it*; there lies the nature of it. When he came to make it with Abraham, "I am God Almighty," saith he. He doth not speak a word there what he will do for Abraham; but, "I am God Almighty." He leaves it there; then requires his obedience: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Abraham shall rest in this, that God himself is in the covenant: "For the rest that is to be done, trust me with it; I take that upon myself." And saith he, [Hos. ii. 23](#), "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." Here we have the eternal fountain and spring of all relief (if our houses are not so as we could desire), — that is, God himself. So that, if there be any thing in the nature of God, in his infinite, eternal excellency, that is suited to the relief of a soul, he hath made his covenant sufficient to convey it unto the souls of believers. And what we come short of is not for want of fulness in the fountain, and ability in the means of conveyance; but for want of faith to receive it.

2. *Christ is in the covenant*, [Gal. iii. 16](#). "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." In all the promises made to Abraham, Christ, as the seed, was intended; so that Christ shall be theirs, with all his benefits. This is also in it. And, —

3. All the *promises* of God are in it; which are in unspeakable variety, as effects of infinite wisdom, suited unto the wants that may befall us in this world: so as that it is utterly impossible that any believer should ever want any thing, that there is not grace in one promise or other suited unto that want. They all belong unto the covenant. Consider the *fountain* of it, — God himself, who is inexhaustible in stores of help and grace; consider the *means of procuring*, — Christ is in it, who hath purchased for us every thing that is needful; and, lastly, consider the *means of communication*, — which are the promises: so that there is nothing wanting for our relief.

Fourthly. If we would have relief in the covenant, let us consider our own entering into covenant with God, and what is comprised therein.



Whosoever entereth into covenant with God, he doth accept God to be his God, for all the ends of the covenant whatever; and he that will retreat for relief unto the covenant, must stand to the covenant. And in this acceptance of God to be our God there are two things:—

1. An absolute *renunciation* of all expectation of any help for the ends of the covenant from any other thing whatsoever. For what we look for therein (and therein we look for all), there is to be an express renunciation of any expectation from any thing else to that end and purpose. So do they in [Jer. iii. 22, 23](#), “Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.” Things are called hills and mountains, because they make a great and goodly appearance of help and relief. The people here are directed to take up their relief in God alone: “We come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God.” What is required hereunto? Why, an absolute renunciation of all help and assistance from the hills and from the mountains. And one great reason why we are so slow in drinking in that relief, which God is so willing to give out unto us, is, because we are still casting our eyes towards the hills and mountains, — looking this way and that way for something that may give us relief. But it is in vain; there is an absolute renunciation of all other help included in accepting of God to be our God in covenant. So [Hos. xiv. 3](#), “Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” And if there hath not been a solemn renunciation of other helps in our covenant with God, it is no wonder we do so halt as we do between God and the world, when we come to our straits and distresses. Where this hath been firm in the soul, and he is nakedly cast upon God as a poor, fatherless creature, to find mercy in him, and goes to him and saith, “Truly thou art our God, in thee is our help;” — that soul shall not fail of such supplies as shall be needful for him in his condition. This leads me to observe [that], —

2. The next thing to be done is, *an actual resting upon God*, or casting of ourselves upon him for all things.

Where these things are not, we do, in speaking of the covenant, but flatter God with our lips. There is no solemn covenant between God and us. This God required when he came to Abraham. Saith he, “Fear not, Abram.” Why so? “I am thy shield, and exceeding great reward.” Why so? Consider the condition of Abraham, and you will see what reason there was for God to give himself that title in this renewing of the covenant unto him. Abraham was in a wandering condition up and down the world, — exposed to dangers, injuries, distresses, from every hand. He knew not whether there was the fear of God in any place where he came. “Fear not, Abram,” saith God; “I am thy shield;” — “Trust me for thy protection, trust me for thy deliverance out of danger.” But saith Abraham, “I am engaged in a long and wearisome pilgrimage; and now, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” Men will labour and take pains for their posterity in an ordinary way. Abraham



had not only that thought about his posterity, but also about the promise. Why, saith God, "I am thy reward, — a sufficient reward unto thee for all thy labour, and travel, and sufferings." We would be glad to be freed from danger, freed from trouble in our pilgrimage, which encompasses us on every hand; and there is none of us but would be glad to see some reward, — some prosperity of the church of God in this world, and deliverance from trouble. But if we truly enter into covenant with God, we are to take him as a full satisfaction for all our dangers, for all our labours, though we see not the fruit of them in this world. He that enters into covenant with God, takes God for his protection and reward, and him alone. Had we but the power of these things in our hearts, it would alleviate all our troubles, and ease us under all our dangers, fears, distresses, and disappointments.

Fifthly. If we would find relief in the covenant, we may do well to consider *upon what terms* we did enter into covenant with God. Now, entering into covenant with God is twofold:—

1. It may be explicit, — as when it comes to these express terms mentioned, [Hos. iii. 3](#), "Thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee." Some persons have laid the foundation of their obedience in direct, express covenanting with God. And, —

2. Sometimes it is implicitly wrought; as where God, in the conversion of men, deals with them as he saith he will do with the church, [Hos. ii. 14](#), "I will allure them into the wilderness, and there speak comfortably unto them." God, by little and little, various workings and reasonings of the Spirit by the word upon the heart and affections, doth allure them from their former state, draws them aside to himself in the wilderness, there treats with them, and by little and little speaks comfort unto them; and so at length makes up the marriage covenant, which he mentions in [verse 19](#), and "betroths them to himself for ever." So it is with many: God hath, as to this covenant with himself, allured them; though it would be useful, if not needful, for such persons solemnly and expressly, upon some occasions, to renew their covenant with God, as Jacob did.

Now, as to those whom God hath thus taken into covenant, whom he hath thus allured, there are always these two things upon their minds, in their thus entering into covenant with God, which we may do well to consider and remember, —

(1.) That they do surely accept God in Christ for himself, and make no conditions about peace, and prosperity, and freedom from trouble, in this world. Naaman made a reserve, that he would bow in the house of Rimmon; and that spoiled his whole covenant. Whoever hath in sincerity thus engaged in covenant with God, his own soul will bear him witness that he made no condition, had no reserve: and the proffer of any one condition to God or Christ whatever, is enough to ruin the whole marriage contract he tenders to us. Now, for a man to faint and sink under any thing that befalls him, let him retreat unto the covenant, and inquire there whether ever he made a condition against it, — against imprisonment, banishment, poverty, losses, troubles, distresses. Did he say, "If God would keep him from

all these?" God made no such condition with him. What God hath actually engaged before in promise, that we may plead with him as a condition, — for Jacob did so, "If thou wilt be with me, and bless me:" God had given him that promise, "Thou saidst, I will deal well with thee, and I will surely do thee good," — but not else.

(2.) You may remember *with what affections* you engaged unto God. It is a marriage covenant, [Jer. iii. 14](#), "I am married unto you," saith God; and [Isa. liv. 5](#), "Thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of hosts is his name." And there is nothing more eminent in the marriage covenant than a mighty prevalency of affection. I should much doubt whether I had really entered into covenant with God, if I had never found any thing of entire marriage affections towards God in Christ for himself. That soul that can, under his distresses, repair to some sense and experience of the prevalency of his affections in it formerly, — it will relieve him against all his troubles, and only make him cry out for such affections unto God again, that will fully satisfy, when they are drawn out unto him. The remembrance and calling over of these things will greatly relieve and support a soul, whatever its distress or perplexity may be.

Sixthly. I have one consideration more, which is the last I shall insist upon; and that is, to consider in this covenant, whereunto I make my retreat, — *who it is that hath made it with me*. And therein I would consider two things; — the one whereof will have the endearment of admiration, and the other will have full and plenary satisfaction.

Why, it is God that hath made this covenant with us: "He hath made with me," saith David. If a great, a mighty king or prince of the earth, had made a covenant with us, and confirmed it solemnly by his oath, to take care of all our concerns; so carnal and so fleshy are we, that it would give us great relief against imminent danger and hazards. But who hath made this covenant with us? God hath made it; and two things are considerable in this:—

1. His condescension in entering into this covenant. 2. His sufficiency to satisfy us in it.

(1.) Upon the account of his *greatness*. You may observe in sundry places, that where God doth mention his covenant, or the fruits of his covenant, he doth oftentimes mention his greatness with it. So, [Isa. lvii. 15](#), "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity; I dwell with him also" (which is God's covenant) "that is of a contrite and humble spirit." The high and lofty One will condescend to dwell with the poor and humble. And Stephen, [Acts vii. 2](#), mentioning God's calling of Abraham, saith, "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." That the high and the lofty One, the great and the glorious God, should enter into this covenant with poor dust and ashes, worms of the earth as we are! — the Lord help us to understand it. Condescension is endearing and satisfying, — we find it so among men. If a man that is great in the world doth but condescend to respect and be



familiar towards them that are poor, that are beggars, it is looked upon as a very great matter, and doth wonderfully engage such persons to them that thus condescend: but let that distance be what it will that is between the highest and greatest king and the meanest beggar, they are men still; and, upon some accounts, the meanest may be the better. But there is an infinite distance between God and us, between the high and the lofty One, the glorious God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and poor dust and ashes. That he should take us into covenant, and engage himself by oath for the accomplishment of it; and should accept of our answering of his covenant, and engaging of our hearts unto him, that he should be ours, and that we should be his; — no heart can fully conceive this condescension. But, —

(2.) There is greater condescension yet; and that is, his great condescension with respect unto his *holiness*. It is a great condescension of God, upon the account of his greatness, to enter into covenant with man; but it is a greater condescension for the holy God to enter into covenant with sinful man; and therefore, though there was great grace, and great excellency in the first covenant, wherein the Creator entered into covenant with the creature, yet the second covenant is far more excellent and mysterious, where the holy God entered into covenant with sinners. In the first covenant there was no need of a mediator; but when a covenant is made between the holy God and sinners, there comes in the person of Jesus Christ; which shows infinite condescension on the part of God.

(3.) Consider his condescension upon the account of his *self-sufficiency*. Though God be thus great, and though he be thus holy, yet may he not, however, have some use of poor man? may he not have some need of his service, as the greatest men upon earth have some need of their subjects and tenants? They have a revenue out of them; but God had no need of us at all, or of that service we tender him by virtue of this covenant. **Ps. xvi. 2**, “O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord.” What, then, will he do for God? “My goodness extends not unto thee.” — “It is true, thou art my God in a way of mere sovereign grace, but what I can do reaches not unto thee.” So he saith, **Job xxxv. 6–8**, “If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.” God receives no profit, no advantage by it; so that it is an infinite condescension in God with respect to his self-sufficiency, and that upon two accounts:— [1.] Upon the absolute, eternal self-sufficiency of his own nature. All the creatures in the world add nothing to God’s state of blessedness. He made them, not that he might have advantage by them, but that he might communicate of his own goodness unto them. He was no less infinitely, eternally blessed before a creature was made to contemplate his glory, than he is now. [2.] Suppose all those he takes into covenant should fail him, “he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham;” — he can bring up another people that may serve him to his praise and glory.

That is the first thing that will greatly refresh our souls under distresses, if we consider God's gracious condescension in taking us into covenant with him, upon the account of his greatness, his holiness, and his self-sufficiency; and it is an endearing condescension. "What am I," said Elisabeth, "that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?" Much more may we say, "What are we, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ should thus come unto us, to take us into covenant with himself?"

2. It will be a relief, if we consider God's all-sufficiency to *satisfy our souls* in every state and condition. This he made the ground of his covenant with Abraham, — "I am God Almighty." And if there be any want in God, we are freed from the terms of the covenant; — that I may speak it to aggravate the sin of our instability, and the not taking up full satisfaction in him. "But is it so?" saith God, "Have I been a wilderness unto you, or a barren heath? as waters that fail?" Have we, at any time in our own experience, failed of any thing all our life long hitherto? have we wanted any thing? Our want arises because we will not admit, we will not receive; or we long after other things, which God is not pleased we should have. There is in God an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy to pardon us; there is an all-sufficiency of spiritual strength to support us and carry us through all our difficulties; there is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty to satisfy us; and there is an all-sufficiency of power and glory to reward us.

(1.) There is in God, to meet with our wants, an all-sufficiency of *grace and mercy to pardon us*, [Tit. iii. 3, 4](#). The apostle having made a description of what we were before our conversion to God, and notwithstanding all the paint we put upon ourselves, has given us a character as black as hell: "We ourselves were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." How were we delivered? "The kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared." God, who is rich in grace, of his mercy wherewith he loved us in Christ, notwithstanding that cursed condition of ours, pardons, sanctifies, and saves us. There is an all-sufficiency of grace and mercy in God, I say, to pardon us. Where is there a believer that cannot say, he has found God all-sufficient to pardon sin?

(2.) There is an all-sufficiency of spiritual *strength in God to support us*. Here lies our great strait and perplexity, — the experience of our own weakness, of the unspeakable variety of temptations wherewith we are exercised, of oppositions that we meet withal, especially in such a time, wherein the floods lift up their voice, and rage. Who shall be able to go through all these difficulties, — these remaining trials, temptations, troubles of our pilgrimage? how shall we be able to withstand them? I know not how it is with others, but it is a wonder to myself that my soul is alive, considering what is come already: but "there is the residue of the Spirit with God." He tells you, [Isa. xl. 28](#), to the end, that he will not faint in this work of giving out grace and spiritual strength, "He giveth power to the faint; and to



them that have no might he increaseth strength." He is able to carry us through all, and cause us to sing, because of his majesty, in the very fire.

(3.) There is an all-sufficiency of goodness and beauty in God to *satisfy our souls*. We are scattering away our affections "upon every high hill, and under every green tree," [Jer. ii. 20](#), — looking for, and seeking after satisfaction from, perishing things; but we find them all vanity and vexation of spirit: they will appear so unto us. But, "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" [Zech. ix. 17](#). O the excellency and desirableness of God, to satisfy and fill all the affections of our hearts, in every state and condition!

(4.) And lastly, there is an all-sufficiency in God to *reward us* when we shall be here no more. The lion lies at the door, — death is ready to seize upon us; — let our condition be what it will, we are entering into eternity: but God hath engaged himself by covenant to be our God; he hath promised to carry us through the dark shade, and to crown our souls with glory. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."



### Sermon III.<sup>395</sup>

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” — Eph. iv. 8.

The design of these words is to show that the gift of the ministry, and of ministers, — of the office, and persons to discharge that is an eminent fruit of the exaltation of Christ, and a great expression and pledge of his care and love towards his church; and that is my doctrine, which I shall speak unto from them.

First. It is a gift, *Αὐτὸς ἔδωκε*, [verse 11](#), “He himself gave.” The foundation of the ministry is in the gift of Christ. Let me answer that question which he put once to the Pharisees, “The baptism of John, is it from heaven? or is it of men?” In like manner, I say, The ministry, is it from heaven? or is it of men? The answer is in the text, “He gave;” — it is the gift of Christ. It is also the great promise that he would do so, [Jer. iii. 15](#), “I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” When shall that be? “When,” saith he, “I shall take you one of a city, and two of a family, and bring you to Zion,” as it is said in [verse 14](#); or, “When I shall call you by the gospel, then I will give you pastors according to my own heart.” And that this is a promise of the gospel, and so intended in that place of Jeremiah, you may see, [chap. xxiii. 4](#), where the promise is repeated, “I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them.” [Verse 5](#), “When I raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper.” It is the great promise, that, under the gospel, Christ would give ministers to his church.

It may be said, “We know how Christ gave apostles when he was on earth; he called them, chose them, sent them: but how doth Christ now continue to give ministers to his church?” That we may not claim an interest in a gift, and a privilege that we have no right unto, I say, by four ways or means doth Christ continue to give ministers, in all ages, unto his church. The church is to consider them as that which is the bottom and foundation of the duties they perform and of the work undertaken this day.

First. He doth it “by the standing law, ordinance, and institution of the gospel,” whereby he hath appointed this office of the ministry in the church, as the great Mediator of it. All the saints in the world, all the disciples of Christ, neither could nor ought (whatever necessity they could have thought they had seen of it, — whatever congruity from the light of nature) to have appointed teachers nor officers among them, neither could it ever have been blessed unto their advantage, if Christ had not, by a standing ordinance and law, appointed such an office. And if that law comes to an end, — if its obligation ceases, — the work of the ministry, and the whole office of it, must cease also; but if this ordinance be “as the ordinances of heaven,” of the sun, moon, and stars, that change not, it shall never be altered in this

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395 This sermon was preached at the ordination of a minister, January 23, 1673.

world. It is plain, then, the neglect of the work and office of the ministry is so far a rebellion against the authority of Christ. “All power,” saith he, [Matt. xxviii. 18, 19](#), “is given unto me in heaven and in earth; therefore go preach the gospel: and, lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world.” He is exalted, and he gives some to be pastors and some to be teachers, until all the elect of God are brought unto the unity of the faith, and unto a perfect man, — unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Secondly. The second thing he doth is, “the giving spiritual gifts” unto men, whereby they may be enabled unto the discharge of the office of the ministry, as to the edification of the church in all the ends of it. *Gifts make no man a minister; but all the world cannot make a minister of Christ without gifts.* If the Lord Jesus Christ should cease to give out spiritual gifts unto men for the work of the ministry, he need do no more to take away the ministry itself; it must cease also: and it is the very way the ministry ceases in apostatising churches, — Christ no more giving out unto them of the gifts of his Spirit; and all their outward forms and order, which they can continue, are of no signification in his sight.

Thirdly. Christ doth it by giving power unto his church to call persons to that office, by him appointed and prepared by the gifts to bestows. And you may observe three things concerning this power:—

1. That this power in the church is not despotical, lordly, and absolute. It is not from any authority of their own; but it consists in an absolute compliance with the command of Christ: it is but the doing what Christ hath commanded; and that gives virtue, efficacy, and power unto it. “Look not upon us as though, by our power and our virtue,” may the church say, “we have made this man a minister this day. It is in the name and authority of Jesus Christ alone, by which we act; in obedience unto that, he is so constituted and appointed.”

2. There is no power in any church to choose any one whom Christ hath not chosen before; that is, no church can make a man *formally* a minister, that Christ hath not made so *materially*, if I may so say. If Christ hath not pre-instructed and prefurnished him with gifts, it is not in the power of the church to choose or call him. And where these two things are, — where the law of Christ is the foundation, and where the gifts of Christ are the preparative, — thereupon the church calls, and persons are constituted elders by the Holy Ghost, and overseers of the flock; as in [Acts xx. 28](#). Because he gave the law of the office, and because he gave these gifts to the officers, therefore are they constituted by the Holy Ghost. They were the ordinary elders of the church of Ephesus to whom the apostle gives in charge “to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers.”

3. The way whereby the church doth call or constitute any person unto this office thus appointed, is, by giving themselves up unto him in the Lord; which they testify by their solemn choice and election by suffrage: the way, I say, is, by submitting themselves unto him in the Lord, witnessing it by their solemn suffrage in the choice of him. [2 Cor. viii. 5](#), “And this they did,” saith the apostle (namely, the saints of Macedonia), “not as we hoped”





(much beyond our expectation), “but first gave their ownelves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” It is the great work you have to do, let me tell you of this church, in your calling of an officer, to give up yourselves unto him by the will of God, to be led, guided, instructed, directed, — to have the work of the ministry fulfilled among you to your edification: and this submission wherein (as I could evince by arguments sufficient) the essence of the call doth consist, is to be testified by suffrage or by choice. When God ordered the Levites to be set apart unto the service of the tabernacle, in the name and on the behalf of the whole congregation, to show what weight he laid upon the consent and suffrage of the people, he caused all the people to come together, and to lay their hands upon them, [Num. viii. 9, 10](#), “Thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together” (all the church): “and thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord; and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites:” namely, to testify their consent in their solemn dedication to the Lord to minister in the tabernacle in their name, and on their behalf.

We have, in the New Testament, thirteen times mentioned the setting apart of ministers unto their office; some of which I shall mention. The first account is in [Acts i. 15](#), unto the end. It was while they were praying — upon a sermon of Peter’s which he preached unto them — that they went about their work; “for every thing is sanctified by the word and prayer.” There was an apostle to be called. But here God was to have a peculiar, sovereign interposition, and to give a special manifestation of his own divine choice; so that it could not be absolutely left unto the choice of the church. Yet thus far they went, that antecedently unto God’s choice, “they appointed two,” [verse 23](#). This was the first church act that ever was performed in the New Testament. There was in it a pattern to be laid for after times and ages. Let the church proceed as far as possible with a reserve to the sovereignty of God. “They appointed two;” so far, I say, they went; and then God took his man. But still, to preserve the liberty of the church herein, it is added, when God had taken him, *συγκατεψηφίσθη*, — he was by common suffrage, as the word signifies, reckoned among the apostles. There was antecedently allowed them the choice of two; and, consequently, their common suffrage that he should be among the number of the apostles. The next call we have is in [Acts vi.](#), which is the “call of deacons;” where the whole matter is, by the assembly of apostles, referred unto the body of the church. One would wonder how such a forgetfulness should befall a world of men who call themselves Christians, to do all these things without them, as though the church had no concern in them, when the whole body of the apostles, being assembled together (who had all the power: and authority in their hands Christ had committed unto any of the children of men), direct the church to use what power Christ had intrusted them with. “Brethren,” say they, “look out from among yourselves,” [verse 3](#). “And the saying pleased the whole multitude,” [verse 5](#): “and they chose Stephen, a man full of the Holy Ghost;” and so the rest who were afterward set apart. If all

the apostles were upon the earth together, where there was in truth a church of Christ., called according to his mind, they would not undertake to deprive the church of their liberty; which any man now, who is far from an apostle, you know, will take upon him at any time. A third Scripture where it is mentioned, is [Acts xiv. 23](#), “And when they had ordained them elders in every church,” etc. I confess I am not free to manage the argument now from this place, although it is the most cogent; because it depends merely and purely upon the signification of the original word. Only this I would *recommend* to you, that before *interest* had guided men in what they had to do, all the translations that were extant in English did read this text, “And ordained them elders by election,” as the word doth signify: so you will find it in your old translations. But since, it was left out to serve a turn. We may freely say, there is no one instance to be found in the whole New Testament concerning the practical part of communicating an office unto any person, but it is peculiarly also declared that it was done by the election of the multitude, or the body of the church.

This is the third way whereby Christ continues to give these gifts unto men.

Fourthly. The fourth way is, by his law, ordinance, and institution, that the person so qualified, and so called, should be solemnly “set apart by fasting and prayer.” So you have it, [Acts xiv. 23](#), “And when they had ordained them elders” (chose them elders) “in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.” And upon the like occasion, when Paul and Barnabas were to be separated anew unto a special work, it is said, [Acts xiii. 3](#), “When they had fasted and prayed, they sent them forth.”

These, then, are the four ways to answer that great inquiry, How doth Christ continue to give ministers unto the church? He doth it by his law constituting the office, — the law in the gospel, which is an everlasting ordinance; — he doth it by his Spirit, communicating gifts unto persons; — he doth it by his church calling of them, and by a submission to them according to the will of God, and testifying that submission by their suffrage; — he doth it by his ordinance of solemnly setting them apart with fasting and prayer. And these, my brethren, are things that we are come together about this day. This is our faith, this is our warrant; wherein we do not pursue our own imaginations, nor the inventions of other men, nor follow cunningly-devised fables, but, from first to last, have our warrant from Christ. The good Lord pardon us wherein we come short of the preparation of the sanctuary, and accept us according to the desire of our hearts, to do the service of his house and tabernacle!

I will but speak a word or two of use to this part, and then we will proceed to that work which is your part this day; whereunto, if God give strength, I shall add some farther instructions, and then desire the help of our brethren present to carry it on.

First, then, if there be any office, let it be under never so glorious or so specious a title, if Christ hath not appointed that office by virtue of gospel ordinance and institution, there is a nullity in it, — it is no gift of Christ; let who will bear it and discharge it, with what formality soever they come unto it, — popes and cardinals, metropolitans and diocesans,

— there is a nullity in the office, by reason there is no law, ordinance, or institution of Christ appointing of it. All the outward order and solemnity in the world, and all the holiness of persons, when engaging in such an office, cannot give it a right and title; because it wants the law of Christ for its foundation.

And where the office itself is appointed by Christ, if there be no communication of gifts unto the person, there is not a nullity in the office, absolutely; but there is a nullity as to the person. It is essential to the office, that Christ choose the person by communicating of gifts unto him. Where this is not, I will not say that there must always (for things are greatly varied with circumstances) be a nullity in all administrations; but there is a nullity in the person ministering before Christ.

Secondly. Let the church consider aright how they are to receive, and what apprehensions they have of, a minister that comes to them according to this law, order, and institution of Christ, which I have unfolded to you. He is a gift of Christ. It requires wisdom and prudence in a man to receive a gift (consider what he doth, — he takes an obligation upon himself); much more to receive a gift from a prince. But to receive a gift, and so great a gift, from Christ! — certainly there ought to be some particular preparation of our hearts for it. How great a mercy, how great a gift this is, I could easily demonstrate.

There are two things that I will but name:— 1. Valuation and thankfulness. 2. Improvement. As soon as, we are a church of God, these things are expected of us. When we receive so great a gift from Christ, he expects that it be valued, that it be thankfully received, and that it be duly improved.

And on the part of him, or of any of us who are called to the ministry, undoubtedly it is incumbent upon us so to behave ourselves, and so to approve ourselves, as that we may own ourselves to be a gift of Christ unto the church, and be owned by the church as a gift of Christ. I do not know, for my own part, a more trembling thought that a minister hath, or can have, in the consideration of his office, work, and duty, whereunto he is called, than this one, “How shall I approve myself, so as to be looked on as a gift from Christ given unto the church?”

There are three things that are required in every one who may be esteemed to be a gift given by Christ unto the church:— 1. An imitation of Christ; 2. A representation of him; and, 3. Zeal for him:—

1. *An imitation of Christ*, as the great shepherd of the flock, in meekness, in care, in love, in tenderness towards the whole flock. So Christ is described, [Isa. xl. 11](#), “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” Here is the great pattern, here is an example for all who are shepherds of the flock under Christ (who intend to give an account with comfort unto the great shepherd of the sheep, when he shall appear at the last day), — in meekness and condescension giving out help and assistance, bearing with all things, that



cannot particularly be insisted upon; and especially conforming unto him who knows how to have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.

2. There is required *a representation of Christ*, and that in all his offices; —

(1.) A representation of him in the rule and conduct of the church; that the church, under our rule and conduct, may be sensible that the government of Christ is spiritual and holy. What a woeful presentation of Christ is made by men who undertake to rule the church of God with rods and axes, with fire and fagot! Is this to represent the meek and holy King of the church, or rather a devouring tyrant, unto the world? It is our great work, in what interest Christ hath given us in the rule of the church, to represent him as spiritual, as holy, as meek, — as universally tending to edification, and not to destruction.

(2.) To represent Christ in his prophetic office. He was the great teacher of the church; and the principal work of ministers is, “to preach the word in season and out of season;” — by all means to carry on the church in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. “I will give them ‘pastors that shall feed them with knowledge and understanding.’” Those who take upon themselves to be pastors, and neglect this work of feeding the flock, may, at as cheap a rate, and with equal modesty, renounce Jesus Christ.

(3.) Christ is to be represented in the imitable part of his sacerdotal office; which is, to make continual prayers and intercession for the church, — and that church, in particular, whereunto we belong. So the apostle speaks, [Col. iv. 12](#), “Epaphras, who is one of you” (that is, he was one of their elders and teachers), “a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” It is a great work thus, in all these things, to represent Christ in all his offices unto the church; and, indeed, who is sufficient for these things? I might add.

3. *Zeal for Christ*. He that comes as an ambassador from Christ, in Christ’s stead, will have zeal for all the concerns of Christ in the church; for his worship, for the purity of his ordinances, for the conversion of souls, and for the building up of the saints. This is required of them who are thus a gift from Christ.

This is the first thing that my text doth suggest unto me, — namely, that the ministry is the gift of Christ.

And having proceeded so far, I will here stay a little, and desire the church would attend to *their* work and duty. After which, if God give strength, I will speak somewhat more unto the eminency of this gift, according as it is set out in this text.

[Then the church assented to the election, by the lifting up of their hands; and the Doctor went on.]

I have showed you that the ministry and ministers are a gift that Christ himself gave the church. I shall now show you (which was the second part of my proposition), *that it is a great and eminent gift*, or an eminent fruit of the exaltation and mediation of Christ:—

First. It appears to be so from the “great and glorious preparation” that was made for it. When did Christ give this gift? “When,” saith he, “he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” The words are taken out of [Ps. lxxviii. 17, 18](#), “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men.” The words, you see, in the first place are spoken of God himself, and applied by our apostle to Christ, upon these two grounds:— 1. Because it was peculiarly the Son of God who appeared so to the fathers under the Old Testament. It was he who appeared to Abraham, and gave him the promise; and to Moses in the bush; it was he who gave the law at mount Sinai; and appeared to Joshua for the conquest of Canaan, where the church was to be set up; — so it was still the same person, though the articles were varied. 2. Because whatever was done in a way of solemnity under the Old Testament, was a representation, or a means of introducing of things that were to be done under the New. How did God lead “captivity captive,” on the glorious giving of the law upon mount Sinai? That was the day wherein he made his people free. They had no rule, no order, no polity before that, but were under the relics of that captivity which they underwent in Egypt. God now had conquered Pharaoh, and triumphed gloriously over him in the Red sea, — over him and his host who had kept the people so long in bondage. He led captivity captive, and brought forth his people into liberty, — though it was but an initial liberty: it was a bondage in comparison of what was to ensue; but it was the beginning of liberty to them. And all this was to represent the glorious conquest at the ascension of Christ, expressed, [Col. ii. 15](#), “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it,” or in himself. When he spoiled Pharaoh, he triumphed over him gloriously, — “The horse and his rider hath he cast into the sea.” It was the same divine person, who did that as a type of what he would do when he should spoil principalities and powers, — Satan, death, hell, sin, and all the spiritual adversaries of the church, — triumphing over them: then did he lead captivity captive. And therefore you may observe the change of the words, which all do who speak to this thing. In the Psalms, it is said, “Thou hast ascended, on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.” In my text it is said, “He ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Though Christ be spoken of as God in the 68th Psalm, wherein he was incapable of receiving gifts, yet it was in a mystery and prophecy that he should be in that state and condition wherein he should receive them, and receive them that he might give them; as in [Acts ii. 32](#). When he was exalted on the right hand of God, and received the gift of the Spirit, he then gave it out unto men.

What is all this great preparation now for? what is it the apostle ushers in upon this theatre of glory? Nothing less than the giving of ministers unto the church. “He ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” What, I pray? Some to be pastors and teachers. *There is a greater glory in giving a minister to a poor congregation, than*

*there is in the instalment and enthroning of all the popes, and cardinals, and metropolitans, that ever were in the world: let their glory be what it will, Christ is upon his theatre of glory in the communication of this office and these officers.*

Wherein, will you say, is this glory? You see no beauty, no comeliness in it: no more did the unbelieving world in the person of Christ, nor ways of Christ. Was there not a great deal of glory in the setting apart of Aaron unto his service, in all his glorious garments and ornaments, with all the solemnity of sacrifices that was used therein? doubtless there was. But saith our apostle, "It had no glory in comparison of the ministry of the Spirit. This is a glory that doth excel," [2 Cor. iii. 10](#). The reason why we see not the glory of it is, because we are carnal. It is a spiritual glory. God himself presides over the work of this day. "I will place my tabernacle with them, and I will walk with them, and be their God," [Lev. xxvi. 11, 12](#). If we are the church and tabernacle of God, God walks among us this day; Christ is among us by his special presence. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," [Matt. xviii. 20](#). And much more may his presence be expected in so great a transaction of his authority as this we are now engaged in. The holy and elect angels are present with us, to give glory to the solemnity. Hence our apostle charges Timothy, [chap. v. 21](#), "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things. Why before the elect angels? Because they are present as *witnesses* in the collation of authority from Christ. Thou hast thousands of witnesses more than thou seest; there are more eyes upon thee that thou takest notice of; — God is present, Christ is present, the elect angels are present. These things are the true and faithful sayings of God. Here, then, is glory and beauty, in that it is not only a gift, but an eminent gift. That is the first thing in my text.

Secondly. It is glorious and eminent from *the foundation* and spring of it, — which is the humiliation and death of Christ. "Now that he ascended, what is it, but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" Why doth the apostle mention here Christ's descending? Was it to take the advantage of a word because having mentioned his ascension, will he mention also descension? No; that is not the way of the Holy Ghost. There was no reason to mention it absolutely in this place: it must be with reference to the end that was under consideration. "There is something," saith he, "in Christ's descending into the lower part of the earth that doth contribute to this great gift of the ministry."

The lower part of the earth may have a double interpretation:— 1. The earth may be spoken of with reference to the whole world. 2. Some part of the earth may be spoken of with reference to some other part.

1. If you take it in the first sense, Christ's descending into the lower part of the earth, — that is, into this lower part of the creation, which the earth is, — then it is the incantation of Christ and his humiliation that he intends: which is so expressed, [John iii. 13](#), "No man hath ascended, up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man,"



etc. Christ's descending and coming down, was by taking our nature upon him. So it may be here. "He descended into the lower parts of the earth," that is, "He came and assumed our nature, and was here in a state of humiliation."

Or, 2. The lower part of the earth intends a comparison between some part of the earth itself; and so may be taken for the grave; — "He descended into the grave." The burial of Christ, which was a great and evident testimony of his real death, is that which is intended; and so I look upon it in this place. The very descent of Christ into the grave, which is the lowest part of the earth that mankind descend into, is the apostle's meaning.

And observe from hence, that the death of Christ hath a influence into this gift of the ministry. It is a branch that grew out of the grave of Christ: let it be esteemed as lightly as men please, had not Christ died for it, we had not had a ministry in the world.

And two ways the ministry relates to the death of Christ:— 1. Because it was necessary unto his receiving of that power whereby alone he was able to give ministers. See that at large, [Phil. ii. 6–11](#). It was his humbling himself unto the death, even the death of the cross, that was required to that exaltation whereby he had power to give ministers. The mediatorial authority of Christ, whereby he was enabled to give ministers to the church, was founded on his death. And, 2. It respects his death, because the very end of the ministry is, to preach that peace to mankind which was made by the death of Christ, [Eph. ii. 14](#), "He is our peace," — he hath made peace for us; and in [verse 17](#), "Came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." How did Christ come and preach peace to the Gentiles, — to them that were afar off? It was no otherwise than by instituting the office of the ministry, and sending his ministers to preach peace to them. And we that are ministers may know the near relation of our office to the death of Christ, which will greatly direct us in the work we have to do; which is, I say, to preach that peace that was made with God by Christ. This is another thing in the text that sets forth the beauty, glory, and eminency of this great gift of Christ.

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## Sermon IV.<sup>396</sup>

“But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” — 1 Cor. xii. 11.

You are a church of ancient standing, and therefore are acquainted both with the duty and practice of it. God hath guided you to call *them* to office over and among you who have been long experienced in the work of the ministry; so that I am sure neither they nor you stand in any need of my instruction, as to particular duties. Therefore I shall speak a word in general unto that which is the foundation of all our station, work, and duty, from these words, in 1 Cor. xii. 11, “But all these worketh,” etc.

There is this disadvantage in preaching upon a particular occasion, especially for one who hath no more strength than I, that either we must omit insisting on the particular explication of the text, or be prevented in that which we aim at particularly from it. Both cannot be done; therefore I shall only give you the substance of the words, in that proposition which I intend to insist upon; namely, —

That it is the work of the Spirit of God, in all ages of the church, to communicate spiritual gifts and abilities to those who are called according unto his mind to the ministry of the church, to enable them unto all evangelical administrations, to his glory, and the edification of the church.

Had I time, I would inquire into these two things:— 1. Whether the Holy Ghost doth indeed continue to communicate *spiritual gifts*, distinct from *natural* endowments and *acquired* abilities, to the discharge of the work of the ministry, to his glory, and the edification of the church. And, 2. Whether these spiritual gifts and abilities, so communicated, be not the material call to the work of the ministry, antecedently required to the formal call thereunto.

As to the first it is opposed by them who say that these spiritual gifts we talk of are nothing, indeed, but men’s natural and acquired abilities, with an ordinary blessing of God upon their ministry; and for other spiritual gifts there are none.

As to the second, it is denied that there is, or ought to be, an outward way and order for calling men to the office of the ministry; and that a compliance therewith makes their call good, valuable, and lawful, whether they have of these gifts we talk of or no. And in these two lie all the contests about church order and worship that we have in the world.

But I shall only speak in the general unto the above proposition, — namely, that it is the work of the Holy Spirit, in providing of an able ministry of the New Testament, for the use of the church to the end of the world, to communicate to them who are called according to his mind spiritual gifts and abilities, to enable them to the discharge of their duty in the

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396 This sermon was preached at an ordination, April 3, 1678.



administration of all ordinances, to the glory of Christ and the edification of the church. The proving of this one proposition, in which is the life of all gospel order, is all I shall do at this time.

And I shall do it in these following observations, principles, and deductions from it:—

First. Our Lord Jesus Christ hath faithfully promised, [Matt. xxviii. 20](#), that he will be present with his church “unto the end of the world.” It is his temple and habitation, “wherein he dwells, and in which he walks.” And this is that which essentially and fundamentally differenceth his church from any other assembly or society of men whatever. Let men cast themselves into what order they please, and let it be the order that they apprehend prescribed unto them in the Scripture; or let them invent a better for themselves, as they think; and let them derive their title to power and authority whence they will; if Christ be not present with them, when they have done, they are *no gospel church*. They want a foundation; and where there is no foundation, the higher they raise the building, or the more glorious they make the appearance of it, the sooner it will tumble down and come to nothing. I shall not repeat those promises of Christ’s presence now; they are known unto you: and this is the great interest of any church, to secure the promised presence of Christ with them. You have, I hope, under the conduct of the Holy Spirit of God, been guided in your choice of *such persons* as are able and faithful, to go before you in the work of the Lord: but your design ought to be, that thereby you might receive pledges of the presence of Christ with you; else all other things will be of no value. There are some who are little solicitous about these things. Do but build a house in such a frame, and say certain words, and suppose Christ is immured there; and there is a church built and made! But the observance of all outward rules and order, according to the gospel, will not constitute a church, unless Christ be taken into it. Moses built a tabernacle according to the mind of God; “according unto all that God commanded him, so did he,” [Exod. xl. 16](#); — but when he had framed it exactly, and set it up, and put every thing in its place, it was but an ordinary tabernacle, till the glory of God entered into it. And so it was with Solomon’s temple; it was but an ordinary house, until the glory of God entered into it. And suppose we could frame our church societies according to the rule of the gospel, as Moses framed the tabernacle according to the pattern showed him in the mount; they would be no churches of Christ, unless *the glory of Christ* enter into them. Here is our difference and advantage:— the glory of God entered into the tabernacle and temple of old in clouds and darkness; but the glory of God enters into the gospel church, under the New Testament, in light. This is the first head, — Christ hath promised to be with his church to the end and consummation of all things.

Secondly. Christ is thus present with his church, principally and fundamentally, *by his Spirit*. There are three ways of the presence of Christ:— 1. He is everywhere *essentially* present; present with all things by the immensity of his divine nature. Christ did not promise this, for it is not a subject for a promise. The promises are of *what may be*, and not



of *what cannot but be*. This presence is necessary, and cannot be otherwise; neither doth it make any alteration. It doth not make a church; it doth not make one place heaven, another hell. I speak of the immense presence of the divine nature. Again, 2. Christ is, or may be, present in his *human nature*: this was that which brought a great entanglement on the spirits of his disciples. He told them he would never leave them; and where but two or three of them were assembled in his name, he would be among them, [Matt. xviii. 20](#). At length he comes and tells them, "It is expedient for you that I go away," [John xvi. 7](#). This filled their hearts with trouble; they knew not how to reconcile these things. Afterward, they were told that he was so gone from them as that they must not look for him till the day of judgment, [Acts iii. 21](#). There must be, therefore, some other presence of Christ besides the essential presence of his divine nature, and besides the presence of his human nature; how else shall the promise be accomplished? Saith Christ, "I will tell you what that presence is; I will send you the Holy Ghost, to supply the presence of my human nature." It is the substance of [the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John](#), to declare this. "I will send you the Comforter to abide with you, to enable you to all church work. Therefore, though I am with you, and have instructed you, yet you can perform no church work at all, until the Holy Ghost comes. Abide at Jerusalem, till you have the promise of the Spirit." After the ascension of Christ, the apostles went about no church work till they had received the Holy Ghost. And Christ hath no vicar, but the Spirit. The truth is, the world grew weary of him, and took the work out of his hands for which he was promised; and he would have nothing to do in that which they call "the church." I need not prove this; it hath been the faith of the *catholic church*, from the first foundation of it, that the promised presence of Christ with his church was by *his Spirit*. Some begin to say in our days, that Christ is no otherwise present than by the outward ordinances of it., — his word and sacraments. I grant he is present with them, as pledges of his presence, and instruments wherewith, by his Spirit, be doth effectually work; but to make them the whole presence of Christ with us, I do not know what better church-state we have than the Jews, when they had the law of old.

Thirdly. This presence of the Spirit is promised and given unto the church by *an everlasting covenant*, [Isa. lix. 21](#): "As for me, this; is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." To whom is this promise made? It is made unto the gospel church. In [the verse foregoing](#), "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them." With whom? With them the Redeemer comes to in Zion, to redeem from iniquity. What is God's covenant with them? It is his word; *his word shall be in them*. Suppose



*this* promise to cease, and God doth not continue his word to any people; will not their church-state cease, which is built upon the doctrine of the prophets and apostles, which is the word of God? Yes, take away the foundation, the state must fall. God's covenant is broken with a people, where he doth not continue his word. But how is it with the "Spirit of God?" He is also promised in the same covenant. Now, suppose there be not a continuance of this promise, — then I say, all covenant, relation between God and a people must be dissolved; "For this is my covenant, saith the Lord etc.; — as if he had said, "If I maintain a covenant with a people, I will give them my Spirit, to abide with them for ever." That covenant whereby you are joined, is dependent on this great promise; and if this be not made good, your church-state comes to an end, notwithstanding whatever outward order there may be among you. But he hath given his church a covenant which "shall abide for ever."

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Fourthly. It is from hence that the ministry of the gospel is "the ministry of the Spirit," [2 Cor. iii. 6–8](#), "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit." There were never but two ministrations, or two ministries, in the world, that were accepted of God; the one was "the ministration of the letter and of death;" the other was, and is, "the ministration of the Spirit, and of life:" and they were both glorious ministrations. That of the letter and death was glorious from its *institution*. You know what a glorious institution it had at mount Sinai, from the manner of its performance, in a glorious sanctuary or tabernacle, and temple. And from its *signification* it was glorious. "But the ministration of the Spirit is much more glorious." There never were but these two ministrations. If there be a ministration that is not a ministration of the letter and of death, nor a ministration of the Spirit and of life, it is Antichrist's. Now, the first it cannot be: the ministration of the letter and of death is the ministration of the law; and the ministration of the gospel is the ministration of the Spirit. But say some, "It is so, because the Spirit of God hath revealed all gospel dispensations; without which it had not been within the compass of the reason of man to have found them out." But, in answer to this, the Spirit of God revealed all the ordinances and ministrations of old, from first to last, even the little additions that David made after Moses' time. [1 Chron. xxviii. 12, 19](#), "All these things did the hand of God teach me by the Spirit." So that if it be the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit revealed them; so was the law the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit revealed that. The ministration of the Spirit must signify, either that the Spirit is the *efficient* of the ministration, or the effect of it. If the Spirit be the efficient of the ministration, then it is the Holy Spirit of God giving spiritual gifts and abilities to the ministers of the gospel, to enable them to administer all gospel ordinances to the glory of Christ and the edification of the church. Or the ministration of the Spirit may signify the communication of him, and so be the effect of the ministration. [Gal. iii. 2](#), "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" — that is, "Received ye the Spirit by the law, or by the gospel?" Then this follows, that so long as there is the preaching of the gospel, there is the communication of

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the Spirit. Take it which way you will, it is sufficient for my end. If you take the Spirit to be the efficient of the ministration of the church, enabling its ministers to perform their work, or for the effect of the ministration, — he is to abide with the church for ever. For the clearing of this, which is the hinge on which all gospel order turns, we have gone thus far, — that Christ hath promised the Spirit to be with the church; that it is neither the essential presence of his divine or human nature in particular; and that the Spirit is promised to be with the church by an everlasting and unchangeable covenant: from whence it is the gospel is the ministration of the Spirit and of life, and not of death.

Fifthly. Let us consider *the general end* why the Spirit is thus, promised unto the church. God hath promised unto Jesus Christ, that he shall have a kingdom and church in the world while the sun and moon endure. [Ps. lxxvii. 17](#), “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun;” — that is, to the end of the world. [Isa. ix. 7](#), it is said, “Of the increase of his government,” or church, “there shall be no end;” — he shall order it for ever. [Matt. xvi. 18](#), “Upon this rock I will build my church,” — that is, upon himself, — “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now, this promise doth Christ require that we should mix with faith; which we cannot do, unless there be some ground for the infallible accomplishment of it. Whereon, then, doth depend the certain accomplishment of this great promise that God hath made unto Jesus Christ, concerning which we have as much reason to have our faith exercised at this day as ever? It must depend on some work of God or man. Suppose it depends on *some work of man*, — that is, upon the steadiness of the will of man in yielding obedience unto Jesus Christ, and so continuing his church and kingdom in the world, leaving the ordering of the things of the church according to God’s institution of it, — and maintain, withal, that God doth not by effectual grace determine the will of man to obedience; and then God himself can only conjecture. Nor does this lay any ground for us to mix it with faith; but rather faith will depend on men’s doing their duty in the world: which, indeed, can be no real ground of faith; for what happens in one place, in the same circumstances of things, may fall out in another: and we know some places where the gospel hath been embraced, and afterward hath come to nothing. Therefore, certainly, the accomplishment of this promise must depend upon *the work of God*. If you ask, “What work of God that is whereon the certainty of this promise doth depend?” I say, It is this work, and no other, of sending the Holy Spirit.

There are but two things to be considered therein, — its internal form, and its external form. Its *internal* form is union to Jesus Christ by saving grace; its *external* form and constitution is according to the law of the gospel, and its power: and this cannot be continued without the continued ministration of the Spirit of God in and with his church. To suppose the internal form, (that we may have union with Christ, or saving grace) without the effectual work of the Spirit, is at once to blot out all. Therefore, if God should cease to communicate the Spirit, as to an internal, saving work upon the hearts of the elect, the church would

cease as to its internal form. No church would have a relation unto Jesus Christ as the mystical head, if God should cease to communicate the Spirit as to gifts. For the outward administration and form of the church, whatever order you bring into it, cannot be accounted a church of Christ, unless there be the presence of Christ in it. And no man can make confession “that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,” [1 Cor. xii. 3](#). You can make no profession, continue no dispensation of ordinances, or any thing that is acceptable unto God, without the Holy Ghost. The sum of all you do this day is, your acknowledging Jesus Christ to be the Lord, — that you are in subjection unto his authority, that you are in the observation of his appointments, and that you recommend your consciences unto him who is “your Lord and your God.” But you must have the Spirit of God and his presence, in order to this. The Holy Ghost is promised and given for the continuance and preservation of a church here below, and therein for the accomplishment of this promise which God hath made to us, to continue with the church to the end of all things. And *if he should cease* as to either of his operations, — either in working internal saving grace, or spiritual abilities for gospel administrations, — *the church must cease*, both in the internal and external form and power of it.

Having laid this foundation, I come, in the next place, —

Sixthly. To some particular *proof* of the proposition, — namely, that the Holy Ghost thus promised, thus sent, thus given, doth furnish the ministers of the gospel, according to his mind, with spiritual abilities in the discharge of their work; and without it they are no way fitted for nor able to it, — no way accepted with Christ in what they do, nor can give any faithful account of what they undertake. It is that which the Lord Jesus Christ intends to declare unto us, [Matt. xxv. 14–30](#). You have an account there given of the continuance of the church, the kingdom of Christ, in the world to the end of it. The great Lord is gone away, and intends to return again at the end of the world; in the meantime, he hath appointed servants to take care of the administration of the affairs of his house and kingdom: and for this end he gives them talents that they may trade with. He gives them variously, as he pleases; — to one, five; to another, two; and to another, but one; and he provides work for all their talents. Some men have grown so rich in the world that they care not to employ their stock; but it must not be so with us. We shall have trade for all our talents. None have so little but they may trade. He that had but one might have traded, as well as he that had five; and been as well accepted. It is agreed by all, that they are spiritual abilities that Christ gives his servants to trade with in the administration of gospel ordinances. And these three things are plainly held forth in the parable:— 1. That wherever Jesus Christ calls and appoints a minister in his house, for the building work of it, he gives him spiritual abilities to do that work by the Holy Ghost. He set none at work in his house, when he went away, but he gave them talents. 2. For men to take upon them to serve Christ as officers in the work of his house, who have received none of these spiritual abilities to work with, is a high presumption,



and casts reflection of dishonour on Jesus Christ; as if he called to work and gave no strength; as though he called to trade, and gave no stock; or required spiritual duties, and gave no spiritual abilities. Christ will say to such at the last day, “How came ye in hither? 3. This is plain in the parable, also, that those who have received talents, or spiritual gifts and abilities of the Holy Ghost, they are to trade with them. And I do not know a warning that I judge more necessary to be given those who are called this day, than to charge them not to trade too much with their natural gifts, and abilities, and learning. These are talents in their kind; but it is the Spirit must manage all that learning they have, or it will prejudice them and you also. *I have known some good men have been so addicted to their study, that they have thought the last day of the week sufficient to prepare for their ministry, though they employ all the rest of the week in other studies.* But your great business is, to trade with your *spiritual* abilities.

There is another testimony given to this (to name one or two among many), in [Rom. xii. 4–8](#), “For as we have many members one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation,” etc. It is not to my present concern whether offices or duties are intended in this place; but three things are plain to me in this text:— 1. That this discourse and direction doth concern the ordinary state of the church in all ages. I profess to you I had rather a thousand times be of their opinion, bad as it is, who say that all church-state is ceased, than that there may be a church-state when these gifts and graces are not. If I did not see these graces and gifts continued to some, to keep up the ordinances of the church in some measure, I should believe it had ceased. 2. That gifts are the foundation of all church work, whether it be in office or out of office. “Having therefore gifts, let us,” saith the apostle, do so and so. If there be no spiritual gifts, there is no spiritual work. Spiritual gifts are the foundation of office, which is the foundation of work in the church, and of all gospel administrations in a special manner, according to the gifts received. Truly, it may be you may think it lost labour to prove this; but there is nothing more despised or reproached in this world than this one apprehension, that there are spiritual gifts given unto persons, to enable them to perform all gospel administrations. 3. That not only the discharge of duty and work depends on the administration of gifts, but the measure of work depends upon the measure of gifts; it is according to the measure every one hath received: and there are many *measures*. As long as there is any measure of spiritual gifts, let it not be despised among you. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are not only for work, but, I say, for the measure of work, [Eph. iv. 8–13](#). All these spiritual gifts the Holy Ghost doth bestow, to enable persons to perform their work.

Seventhly. As *spiritual gifts* are bestowed unto this end, so they are *necessary* for it. There can be no gospel administration without spiritual gifts; the ministration of the gospel being



the ministration of the Spirit, and all gospel ministrations are spiritual ministrations. The truth is, one reason why they are called so, and are so, is, because they are no way to be administered to the glory of Christ but by the aid and help of these spiritual gifts. If the Lord Jesus Christ had appointed carnal ordinances, such as are suited to the reason and strength of a man, there had been no need for him to promise the assistance of the Spirit. The spirit of a man knows the things of a man, [1 Cor. ii. 11](#). All the things within the compass of a man, the spirit of a man will find them out, and give strength for the performance of them. Saith Christ, [John vi. 63](#), “ ‘My words, they are spirit,’ and all my offices and ordinances are spiritual;’ ” — and thus there is a necessity of spiritual gifts for their administration: so that *spiritual gifts and spiritual administrations live and die together*. And the way whereby the world lost the spiritual ministrations of the gospel, was by the neglect and contempt of spiritual gifts; whereby alone they can be performed. This was the ground of the apostasy of the primitive church; — they grew weary of spiritual ministrations. It is the most difficult and laborious ministry. Men’s hearts waxing carnal, they grew weary of spiritual things; they did not care to wait upon Christ for supplies of grace and the gifts of the Spirit; for these gifts are not grace, and in truth will flourish long in no other soil but where there is grace. As we should not have such a product of sin were it not for original corruption, whence it grows; so flourishing gifts will not long grow but in *the soil of the Spirit*. How many persons with gifts have flourished for a while, and then have withered, because they were planted in no good soil! It will be drudgery, for any man to keep up spiritual gifts where they have not spiritual soil to grow in. The world grew weary of gospel ministrations, and would not keep up *that way*. What then? They found out imaginations suited to their inclinations; they will have prayer-books to read, ceremonies to perform, and a number of inventions to keep up a form of worship without those spiritual gifts. We have an instance in the church of Rome. What various extravagant things they have done to make an outward show, when they had lost spiritual gifts! All forms of worship are nothing but to keep an outward appearance. They did not like to retain these gifts in their minds, whereby alone spiritual worship is to be administered. The principle of the apostasy of all churches in the world is, from a weariness of serving God by the aid and assistance of the Spirit.

Eighthly. That there is a communication of spiritual gifts in gospel ordinances, we plead *experience*. We know how this is derided by profane scoffers; but we plead the experience of those who are humble and holy, and have a spiritual acquaintance with these things. I hope I may plead against the world the experience of this congregation. Have you had no experience of those ministrations? Have you never found in the administrations of those whom God hath called to go before you, evidences of the presence of Christ by his Spirit, in the communication of gifts to them, to make them effectual to your edification and consolation? Have you not had a *proof of the Spirit of Christ speaking in them*? [2 Cor. xiii. 3](#).

It is intolerable presumption, for men to think of carrying on gospel administrations without the supplies of the Spirit; as you who are God's people can testify. And there is no congregation of Christ but can bear testimony to it, that "the Spirit divides to every man as he will;" — gives out as he pleases of his assistance. Let men, therefore, pretend never so much that they are able to be ministers of the New Testament, without any of those aids and assistances whereof we have been discoursing; let them please themselves with the applause they may receive from persons unacquainted with the mystery and glory of these things; let them despise and condemn whatever is testified to the contrary; — it is certain, where the gifts of the Spirit of God, as to the gospel ministrations of the church, are lost or neglected, Christ is so also, the Spirit of God is so also, and all the benefits of the gospel will be so too.

I have but one word to add, and that is of *exhortation*, unto those whom Christ hath called unto the work of the ministry, and whom you have called this day. I told you, at the beginning, I would not give them *instruction*, — but I may give them a word of *exhortation*; and that is, to attend unto the ministry whereunto God hath called them upon this foundation. And there are three motives I shall give them unto the work:—

First. It is *the most difficult ministration* of any that a person can be called unto; — as it is great, so it is difficult. Any way of administration is easy in comparison of this of spiritual gifts; easy to flesh and blood. What an easy ministration, with all their altars and services, hath the church of Rome provided for their ministers! so to read, and so to sing, come as they will, prepared or not prepared, having hearts and minds filled with what they will; — this is a ministry for them easier than any trade; and in this their natural endowments and abilities are employed. But if we intend the ministers by the gifts received from the Holy Ghost, the matter and root wherein alone they will grow must be carefully preserved. If grace decays in our hearts, a ministry in gifts will grow burdensome and unpleasing to ourselves, as well as useless to the congregation. We must look well unto the soil, or it will be of no advantage that we have this ministry committed to us. It is required there be no unuseful ministers. Hand and heart must be always filled with the work: "Meditate on these things," 1 Tim. iv. 15. If you have undertaken the work of the ministry, you must be meditating on it. Unless you are in these things continually, you will not make faithful dispensers of the word. A man may preach a very good sermon, who is otherwise himself; but he will never make *a good minister of Jesus Christ*, whose heart and mind is not always in the work. Spiritual gifts will require continual ruminating on the things of the gospel in our minds; which makes it a difficult ministry, that our hearts and minds may be cast into the mould and form of those things which we are to deliver to others. And it is surprising how a little necessary diversion will unfit the mind for this work.

Secondly. As it is a very difficult work to carry on to a right improvement of it, so it is *a glorious work*, let the world deride it as they will. The great design of the apostle, in 2 Cor.





iii., is to show it is much more glorious than the old ministration was. Really, that was a very glorious ministration; but this ministry that is committed to us hath more glory in it, being “the ministration of the Spirit,” whereby souls are converted by the power of grace, and holy converse with God kept up. It is much more glorious than beholding the high priest in Solomon’s temple; being under the eye of the holy God, who is judge of these ministerial gifts: therefore do not divert from them by any means.

Thirdly. It is the *only* ministry that is indeed effectual unto the edification and building up of the church, Eph. iv. 8, etc. This is the great end for which gospel ministers are appointed, — “Till all are brought,” by their ministry, “to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The Lord prosper it in your hands!

Give me leave to speak one word unto you that are *the church*: — Know what you are to do, in reference unto those you have called and made officers this day. Pray unto God for a fresh communication of gifts unto them; — they are capable of it. It is a renewed act of grace that prepares and opens the soul for receiving new communications of God’s grace, for the administration of the holy things of Christ in the congregation. Pray much for them to that end and purpose.

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## Sermon V.<sup>397</sup>

“And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” — Jer. iii. 15.

All the names of the officers of the church under the New Testament have a double signification, — a *general* and more large signification, and a *special* signification. As, for instance διάκονος, a “deacon,” hath a general signification; it signifies any minister or servant: and it hath a special signification, when it denotes that *peculiar officer* which was instituted in the church to take care of the poor. And so the name of a *pastor* hath a more general and a more special signification. In general, it signifies any teacher or officer in the church, ordinary or extraordinary; in special, it signifies that peculiar officer in the church which, as such, is distinguished from a teacher, “He gave some to be pastors and teachers,” Eph. iv. 11; for there is a distinction between pastor and teacher, *not as to degree, but as to order*. I do not use the distinction in the sense of those who make bishops and presbyters differ in degree, but not in order; but it is a distinction as to that beautiful order which Christ hath instituted in his church. Christ hath instituted a beautiful order in his church, if it were discovered and improved. And I have wished sometimes I could live to see it; but I do not think I shall. Yet this I would recommend to my brethren as the way to discover the order of Christ in the church:— there is no way to discover it but by the harmony that there is between gifts, office, and edification. The original of all church order and rule is in gifts; the exercise of those gifts is by office; the end of all those gifts and offices is, edification.

Now, I believe I can demonstrate that all ordinary spiritual gifts that Christ hath given to his church, are reducible to four heads: and all of them are for the exercise of these gifts; for they must all be exercised distinctly. Herein you will find out the beautiful order of Christ in the church, and not else. I say, all gifts may be reduced to four heads. The one head of these gifts is to be exercised by the *pastor*; one head by the *teacher*; one by the *ruler*; and one by the *deacon*: and all these gifts, exercised by all these officers, answer all ends for the edification of the church. For it is a vain opinion, that the rule and conduct of Christ’s church is either in one or in all. There is nothing in what I have declared but what is the design of the apostle in Rom. xii. 6–8. Let us study that harmony more, and we shall find more of the beauty and glory of it.

I shall speak of those pastors mentioned here in the text; and I shall speak of them in general, as all teaching officers in the church, — which is the general signification of the word. And all that I shall speak of them is, to remind myself, and my brethren, and you, of somewhat of the duty of such a pastor; — what is incumbent on him, — what is expected

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397 This sermon was preached at an ordination, September 8, 1682.

from him. Now, I do not design to go through all the necessary duties of a pastor or teacher; I only design to give some instances.

First. The duty of such an officer of the church,<sup>398</sup> — a pastor, teacher, elder of the church, — is that mentioned in the text, — “to feed the church with knowledge and understanding.” This feeding is by preaching of the gospel. He is no pastor who doth not feed his flock. It belongs essentially to the office; and that not now and then (according to the figure and image that is set up of the ministry in the world, — a dead idol) as occasion serves. But the apostle saith, [Acts vi. 4](#), “We will give ourselves continually to the word.” It is to “labour in the word and doctrine,” [1 Tim. v. 17](#); — to make all things subservient to this work of preaching and instructing the church; to do it in that frame the apostle mentions in [Col. i. 28](#). He speaks of his preaching, and the design of his preaching: “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” How doth he do it? [Verse 29](#), “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.” There is not one word in our translation that answers the emphasis of the original words, — “Whereunto I labour,” — Εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ. Κοπιῶ is to labour with diligence and intention, with weariness and industry. “I labour ‘usque ad fatigationem’ — to the spending of myself. Striving (ἀγωνιζόμενος), — striving as a man that runs in a race, or striving as a man that wrestles for victory,” — as men did in their public contests. And how? Κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ, — “According to the effectual in-working, or inward operation, of him (ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ) who does effectually work in me.” We cannot reach the emphasis by any words in our language. And how is all this? Ἐν δυνάμει, — “With mighty power.” Here is the frame of the apostle’s spirit (it should give dread to us in the consideration of it): “I labour diligently, I strive as in a race, I wrestle for victory, — by the mighty in-working power of Christ working in me; and that with great and exceeding power.”

What I shall do is, to show you, in some instances, what is required unto this work of teaching or of feeding the congregation with knowledge and understanding, in this duty of preaching the word:—

1. There is *spiritual wisdom* in understanding the mysteries of the gospel, that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God, and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ, unto the souls of men. See [Acts xx. 27](#); [1 Cor. ii. 1–4](#); [Eph. iii. 7–9](#). Many in the church of God were, in those days of light, growing and thriving; they had a great insight into spiritual things, and into the mysteries of the gospel. The apostle prays that they might all have it, [Eph. i. 17, 18](#), “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your un-

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398 It is proper to inform the reader, that several things in this sermon are to be found in Dr Owen’s “*True Nature of a Gospel Church*,” chap. v.

derstanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

Really it is no easy thing for ministers to instruct to such kind of duties. If there be not some degree of eminency in themselves, how shall we lead on such persons as these to perfection? We must labour ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries, or we shall be useless to a great part of the church. There is spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries, of the gospel required hereunto.

2. *Authority* is required. What is authority in a preaching ministry? It is a consequent of unction, and not of office. The scribes had an outward call to teach in the church; but they had no unction, no anointing, that could evidence they had the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces. Christ had no outward call; but he had an unction, — he had a full unction of the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces, for the preaching of the gospel. Hereon there was a controversy about his authority. The scribes say unto him, [Mark xi. 28](#), “By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?” The Holy Ghost determines the matter, [Matt. vii. 29](#), “He preached as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” They had the authority of office, but not of unction; Christ only had that. And preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit, which men quarrel so much about, is nothing less than the evidence in preaching of unction, in the communication of gifts and grace unto them, for the discharge of their office: for it is a vain thing for men to assume and personate authority. So much evidence as they have of unction from God in gifts and grace, so much authority they have, and no more, in preaching: and let every one, then, keep within his bounds.

3. Another thing required hereunto is, *experience* of the power of the things we preach to others. I think, truly, *that no man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart*. He who doth not feed on, and digest, and thrive by, what he prepares for his people, he may give them poison, as far as he knows; for, unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence that it will have power in the hearts of others. *It is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach than our hearts to preach*. To bring our heads to preach, is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth, of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others: this is very easy. But to bring our hearts to preach, is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them, both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts, and in delivering of them, that we may have benefit; and to be acted with zeal for God and compassion to the souls of men. A man may preach every day in the week, and not have his heart engaged once. This hath lost us powerful preaching in the world, and set up, instead of it, quaint orations; for such men never seek after experience in their own hearts: and so it is come to pass, that some men’s preaching, and some men’s not preaching, have lost us the power of what we call the ministry; that though there be twenty or thirty



thousand in orders, yet the nation perishes for want of knowledge, and is overwhelmed in all manner of sins, and not delivered from them unto this day.

4. *Skill* to divide the word aright. This skill to divide the word aright, is *practical wisdom* in considering the word of God, — to take out not only that which is substantial food for the souls of men, but what is meet food for them to whom we preach. And that, —

5. Requires *the knowledge* and consideration of the state of our flocks. He who hath not the state of his flock continually in his eye, and in his mind, in his work of preaching, fights uncertainly, as a man beating the air. If he doth not consider what is the state of his flock, with reference to temptations, in reference to their light or to their darkness, to their growth or to their decays, to their flourishing or to their withering, to the measure of their knowledge and attainments; — he who doth not duly consider these things, never preaches aright unto them.

6. There is required, too, that we be acted by *zeal* for the glory of God, and compassion to the souls of men.

Having spoken these few plain words, I may say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” There is required that spiritual wisdom which is necessary to understand the mysteries of the gospel, able to instruct and lead on to perfection the most grown in our congregations; — that authority which proceeds from unction, and is an evidence of an anointing with the graces and gifts of the Spirit; which alone gives authority in preaching; — that experience which conforms our whole souls into every sermon we preach, so as to feel the truth in the power of it; — that skill whereby to divide the word aright, etc. Hence we see we have great need to pray for ourselves, and that you should pray for us. Pray for your ministers. This, then, is the first duty required of gospel ministers.

Secondly. Another duty required is, *continual prayer* for the churches over which Christ hath made them overseers. I have not time to confirm these things by particular testimonies: you know how often the apostle expresses it of himself, and enjoins it unto others, continually to pray for the flock.

I will name four reasons why we ought to do so, and four things we ought to pray for:—

1. My first reason is, — because I believe that no man can have *any evidence* in his own soul that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty towards his flock, who doth not *continually pray for them*. Let him preach as much as he will, visit as much as he will, speak as much as he will, unless God doth keep up in him *a spirit of prayer* in his closet and family for them, he can have no evidence that he doth perform any other ministerial duty in a due manner, or that what he doth is accepted with God. I speak to them who are wise, and understand these things.

2. This is the way whereby we may *ble*ss our congregations.



Authoritative blessing, as far as I know, is taken from us. There is only that which is euctical<sup>399</sup> and declarative left to us. Pronouncing the blessing is only euctical and declarative, and not authoritative. Now there is no way whereby we can bless our flock by institution, but by a *continual praying* for a blessing upon them.

3. If men are but as they used to be, I do not believe any minister, any pastor in the world, can keep up a due love to his church, who doth not pray for them. He will meet with so many provocations, imprudences, and miscarriages, that nothing can keep up his heart with inflamed love towards them, but by praying for them continually. That will conquer all prejudices, — if he continues so doing. And, —

4. My last reason is this, — in our prayers for our people, *God will teach us what we shall preach* unto them. We cannot pray for them, but we must think on what it is we pray for, and that is the consideration of their condition; and therein God teaches the ministers of the gospel. If it be so with them, this is that they should teach them. The more we pray for our people, the better shall we be instructed what to preach to them. The apostles, to take us off from all other occasions, “gave themselves to prayer and the word,” [Acts vi. 4](#). Prayer is in the first place. It is not personal, but ministerial prayer for the church, and the progress of the gospel.

What shall we pray for?

1. For *the success of the word* that we preach unto them. This falls in with the light of nature. We are to pray for the success of the word unto all the ends of it; and that is, for all the ends of living unto God, — for direction in duty, for instruction in the truth, for growth in grace, for all things whereby we may come to the enjoyment of God. We should pray that all these ends may be accomplished in our congregations, in the dispensation of the word, or else we sow seed at random, which will not succeed merely by our sowing; for let the husbandman break up the fallow ground, and harrow it, and cast in the seed, — unless showers come, he will have no crop; in like manner, after we have cast the seed of the gospel, though the hearts of men are prepared in some measure, unless there come the showers of the Spirit upon them, there will be no profiting. Therefore, let us pray that a blessing might be upon the word. The ministers of the word preach, and would be accepted with the people; take this “*arcanum*,” [the secret] of it, — pray over it; and it is the only way to have it accepted in the hearts of the people: follow it on with prayer.

2. We are to pray for *the presence of Christ* in all our assemblies; for this is that whereon depends all the efficacy of the ordinances of the gospel. Christ hath given us many promises of it, and we are to act in faith concerning it, and to pray in faith for it in our assemblies; which is a great ministerial duty: and if we do it not, we are ignorant of our duty, and are

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399 *Euctical* (εὐχομαι, to desire earnestly, or to pray), expressive of desire. — Ed.



willing to labour in the fire, where all must perish; we fight at hazard, for all the efficacy of the ordinances of preaching and praying doth not depend upon any thing in ourselves, — on our gifts, notions, parts, fervency, — but it depends only upon the presence of Christ. Make this your business, to pray mightily for it in the congregation, to make all these effectual.

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3. Our prayers should be with respect unto *the state and condition* of the church. It is supposed he that is a minister is satisfied he hath some measure of understanding and knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel; that he is able to conduct the best of the congregation unto salvation; that he knows their measure, their weakness, and their temptations; that he knows the times and seasons in which they are exercised and exposed, whether times of adversity or prosperity; and, as far as possible, knows how it is with their persons. And we ought to suit our prayers according to all we know concerning them, and be satisfied in it that Christ himself will come in to recover them who are fallen, to establish them who stand, to heal them who do backslide, to strengthen them who are tempted, to encourage them who are running and pressing forward to perfection, to relieve them who are disconsolate and in the dark: and we have of all these sorts in our churches. And our prayers should be for a communication of supplies unto them continually, in all these cases.

Thirdly. It is incumbent on men who are pastors and teachers of churches, *to preserve the truth* and doctrine of the gospel, that is committed to the church, — to keep it entire, and defend it against all opposition. See the weighty words wherewith the apostle gives this in charge unto Timothy, [1 Tim. vi. 20](#), “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust;” and [2 Tim. i. 14](#); “That good thing” (τὴν καλὴν παρακαταθήκην, — that good depositum, that good treasure) “that is committed to thee keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us.” This charge is given to all of us who are ministers, “*Keep the truth*, that good, that blessed thing.” “It is,” saith the apostle, “the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust,” [1 Tim. i. 11](#). And it is committed to *all* our trust; and we are to keep it against all opposition. The church is the ground and pillar of truth, to hold up and declare the truth, in and by its ministers. But is that all? No; the church “is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men,” [Cant. iv. 4](#). The ministers of the gospel are shields and bucklers to defend the truth against all adversaries and opposers. The church hath had thousands of bucklers and shields of mighty men, or else the truth had been lost. They are not only to *declare* it in the preaching of the gospel; but to *defend* and preserve it against all opposition, — to hold up the shield and buckler of faith against all opposers.

But what is *required hereunto*?

1. There is required a *clear apprehension* in ourselves of those doctrines and truths which we are so to defend. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness: if we have not a full apprehension of the truth, and that upon its own proper grounds and principles, we

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shall never be able to defend it. This is to be attained by all ways and means, — by the use, especially, of diligent prayer and study, — so that we may be able to stop the mouth of gainsayers.

2. There is required *love of the truth*. We shall never contend earnestly for the truth, we shall never “buy it and not sell it,” whatever we know of it, unless our love and value of it arise from a sense and experience of it in our own souls. I fear there is much loss of truth, not for want of light, knowledge, and ability, but *for want of love*.

I have the advantage of most here present in this, that I know the contest we had for the truths of the gospel before our troubles began, and was an early person engaged in them; and knew those godly ministers that did contend for them as for their lives and souls, and that all the opposition that was made against them was never able to discourage them. What were these doctrines? — the doctrines of eternal predestination, effectual conversion to God, and the obduration of wicked reprobates by the providence of God. These truths are not lost for want of skill, but for want of love. We scarce hear one word of them; we are almost ashamed to mention them in the church; and he that doth it will be sure to expose himself to public obloquy and scorn: but we must not be ashamed of truth. Formerly we could not meet with a godly minister, but the error of Arminianism was looked upon by him as the ruin and poison of the souls of men: such did tremble at it, — wrote and disputed against it. But now it is not so; the doctrine of the gospel is owned still, though little taken notice of by some among ourselves, the love of it being greatly decayed, — the sense and the power of it almost lost. But we have got no ground by it; we are not more holy, more fruitful, than we were in the preaching those doctrines, and attending diligently unto them.

3. Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to *novel opinions*, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith as those wherein they who are gone before us and are fallen asleep found life, comfort, and power. Who would have thought that we should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification; about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ; and about the perseverance of the saints; when these were the soul and life of them who are gone before us, who found the power and comfort of them? We shall not maintain these truths, unless we find the same comfort in them as they did. I have lived to see great alterations in the godly ministers of the nation, both as to zeal for and value of those important truths that were as the life of the Reformation; and the doctrine of free-will condemned in a prayer, bound up in the end of your Bibles. But now it is grown an indifferent thing; and the horrible corruptions we suffer to be introduced in the doctrine of justification have weakened all the vitals of religion. Let us, for the remainder of our days, “buy the truth, and sell it not;” and let us be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations.



Bring one man into the congregation who hath a by-opinion, and he shall make more stir about it than all the rest of the congregation in building up one another in their most holy faith. Take heed lest there be men arising from ourselves speaking perverse things; which is to make way for grievous wolves to break in and tear and rend the flock.

4. There is *skill and ability* required hereunto, to discover and be able to oppose and confound the cunning sophistry of the adversaries. Great prayer, watchfulness, and diligence are required, that we may be able to attend unto these things. And those who are less skilled may do well to advise with those who are more exercised in them, to give them help and assistance.

Lastly. I shall mention one duty more that is required of pastors and teachers in the church; and that is, — that, *we labour diligently for the conversion of souls*. This work is committed to them. I should not mention this, but to rectify a mistake in some. The end of all particular churches is, the calling and edification of the catholic church. Christ hath not appointed his ministers to look unto themselves only; they are to be the means of calling and gathering the elect in all ages: and this they principally are to do by their ministry. I confess there are other outward ways and means whereby men have been, and may be, converted. I find, by long observation, that common light, in conjunction with afflictions, do begin the conversion of many, without this or that special word: and persons may be converted to God by religious conference. There may be many *occasional* conversions wrought by the instrumentality of men who have real spiritual gifts for the dispensation of the word, and are occasionally called thereunto. But principally this work is committed unto the pastors of churches, for the conversion of souls. Take this observation, — *the first object of the word is the world*. Our *work* is the same with the apostles'; the *method* directly contrary. The apostles had a work committed to them, and this was their method:— *The first work* committed to the apostles was the convincing and converting sinners to Christ among Jews and Gentiles, — to preach the gospel, to convert infidels; — this they accounted their chief work. Paul made nothing of administering the ordinance of baptism, in comparison of it. "Christ sent me not," saith he, "to baptize, but to preach the gospel," [1 Cor. i. 17](#). In comparison, I say, preaching was their chief work. And then, *their second work* was to teach those [who were] disciples to do and observe whatever Christ commanded them, and to bring them into church order. This was their method. Now the same work is committed unto the pastors of churches; but in a contrary method. The first object of our ministry is the church, — to build up and edify the church. But what then? Is the other part of the work taken away, that they should not preach to convert souls. God forbid. There be several ways whereby they who are pastors of churches do preach to the conversion of souls:— 1. When other persons that are unconverted do come where they are preaching, to their own congregations (whereof we have experience every day), they are there converted to God by the pastoral discharge of their duty. "No," say some; "they preach to the church as *ministers*, — to



others only as *spiritually gifted*.” But no man can make this distinction in his own conscience. Suppose there be five hundred in this place, and a hundred of this church, can you make the distinction, that I am preaching in a *double* capacity, — to some as a minister, and to others not as a minister? Neither rule, nor reason, nor natural light, expresses any thing to that purpose. We preach *as ministers* to those to whom we preach, for the conversion of their souls<sup>2</sup>. Ministers may preach for the conversion of souls, when they preach elsewhere occasionally. They preach as ministers wherever they preach. I know *the indelible character*<sup>400</sup> is a figment; but the pastor’s office is not such a thing as men may leave at home when they go abroad. It is not in a minister’s own power, unless lawfully dismissed or deposed, to hinder him from preaching as a minister. And it is the duty of particular churches (one end of their institution being the calling and gathering the catholic church) to part with their officers for a season, when called to preach in other places for the converting souls to Christ. We had a glorious ministry in the last age, — wonderful instruments for the conversion of souls. Did they convert them *as gifted men*, and not *as ministers*? God forbid. I say, it may be done by them who have received gifts, and not [been] called to office; but I know no ground any man hath to give up himself to the constant exercise of ministerial gifts, and not say to the Lord in prayer, “Lord, here am I; send me.”

Had I time and strength, I should tell you of the duty of pastors and teachers in administering of the seals, and what is required thereunto; and their duty in directing and comforting the consciences of all sorts of believers; — what prudence, purity, condescension, and patience are required in it, as a great part of our ministerial duty.

I should show you, also, their duty in the rule of the church. Not that ever Christ intended to commit the rule of the church to them alone, — to take them off from that great and important duty of preaching the gospel; but as time and occasions will allow them, to attend to the rule of the church.

And lastly, in exemplary conversation, and in assembling with other churches of their order, for the managing church communion.

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400 The “indelible character” is the dogma of the church of Rome; — that a man ordained to be a priest within its pale never can lose his priestly character; and though he even cease to be a Christian, cannot cease to be a Christian bishop, priest, or deacon, if he has previously held any of these offices in the church. The dogma can be traced no farther back than the days of the schoolmen. The *Council of Nice* decreed that certain bishops and presbyters, who had been ordained by Miletius, a deposed bishop, should be re-ordained before they could exercise their office. Dr Campbell, in his “*Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*,” reviews at some length the discussions on the “indelible character.” Speaking of those who argued for the unreiterable sacraments, to which ordination, according to the church of Rome, belongs, he remarks (lecture xi.), “The whole of what they agreed in amounts to this, — something, they know not what, is imprinted, they know not how, on something in the soul of the recipient, they know not where, — which never can be deleted.” — Ed.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” Pray, pray for us; and God strengthen us, and our brother, who hath been called this day to the work! It may not be unuseful to him and me, to be mindful of these things, and to beg the assistance of our brethren.

## Sermon VI.<sup>401</sup>

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.

“My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer,” etc. — Ps. xlv. 1–3.

The whole Book of Psalms hath a peculiar respect unto Jesus Christ, either directly or in the person of David, who was his greatest personal type, next to Aaron and Melchizedeck; but there are some psalms that are altogether *directly* prophetical of him and of his offices, — namely, the 2nd psalm is prophetical of his kingdom; the 16th psalm, of the work of his mediation and obedience to God therein; the 22d, of his priestly office, his sufferings, death, his resurrection, and intercession; the 40th, of his oblation and suffering; the 72d, of his kingly and prophetical power and glorious regard unto his people; the 68th, of his glorious exaltation; and this 45th psalm is a prophecy and description of his person, and his kingly office, and of the espousals of him and his church.

The title of the psalm is, “To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.”

“To the chief musician;” so לְמִנְצֵחַ is generally rendered, — “To him that excels.” As מִנְצֵחַ signifies eternal, I have sometimes thought it might be as well rendered, “In perpetuum rei memoriam;” — “For an everlasting remembrance.” But we may take it in the common acceptation, — that it was recommended unto him that did preside over the rest of the Levites in the worship of God in the temple, by singing on instruments of music.

“Upon Shoshannim.” The word signifies lilies; whether it was a musical *instrument* or a certain *tune*, we know not, neither do the Jews.

“For the sons of Korah.” Who these were we may see, 1 Chron. ix. 19, “The Korahites were over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle,” etc. What were they else? Verse 33, “These are the singers, chief of the fathers of the Levites, who remaining in the chambers were free;” for they were employed in the work of singing the praises of God with instruments of music day and night.

David was the first who brought musical instruments into the solemn worship of God; not but that they did occasionally make use of timbrels and cymbals in the praises of God before, but he was the first that brought in a great number of musical instruments into the worship of God. And he speaks expressly, in 1 Chron. xxiii. 5, of praising God with instru-

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ments of music, “which,” says he, “I made.” He did it by the direction of the Spirit of God; otherwise he ought not to have done it: for so it is said, [1 Chron. xxviii. 12](#), when he had established all the ordinances of the temple, — *the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit*. And [verse 19](#), “All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.” It was all revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, without which he could have introduced nothing at all into the worship of God. The Lord prepared him for this service while he was a shepherd; at which time he had attained great skill in singing on musical instruments.

And I cannot but observe, by the way, that it is a great mercy when God will engage the natural faculties and abilities of men, especially wherein they are excellent, in any way of his service. David had got an excellency in this faculty, and God engages it in his service. And those that had skill therein, and were not so engaged, are condemned in the prophet Amos, [chap. vi. 5](#). What were they condemned for? Why, that they would invent *instruments of music like David*. David did it to serve the Lord; and they did it to serve their lusts. Where men have any peculiar faculty or ability, it is an unspeakable mercy to have it engaged for God; for otherwise it will certainly be engaged for the devil: and, to render the mercy more singular, I think it is evident the devil hath got the use and advantage of natural faculties and abilities above what is given up to God.

Again: this was David’s special inclination; whence he is called “The sweet psalmist of Israel.” The edge of his spirit lay to it. And we may observe, that it is an excellent mercy when the edge of our spirits, in special inclination, is engaged for the service of God. [Prov. xxvii. 17](#), as “iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Every man hath an edge; and there are several ways whereby it is sharpened. There is no man but *cuts* one way or other; and company and society is the great means whereby the edge is sharpened. One cuts to the world, another to pleasures, to lusts; and such company makes him more sharp. It is well when the edge of a man’s spirit is set for the things of God, and he has some to sharpen that edge; for that way that a man’s edge is set, *that way is he*. He may do something in the worship of God; but if his edge be to the world, that way is he; and if his edge be to lust and pleasure, that way is he. Now, here was David; the special inclination and edge of his spirit was set towards God, and so was employed of God.

There is a general title given to this psalm, “Maschil;” that is, song to make wise, or to give instruction. They are the things of Christ that, in an especial manner, are suited to give instruction to the church of God.

The special matter of the psalm is, “A Song of loves.” And why is it called “loves”? It may be upon three accounts:— 1. Because the psalm mentions a *mutual* and *interchangeable* love. It is not only of the love of Christ to his church, nor only of the love of the church unto Christ, — but it is mutual, of the love of Christ to the church, and of the church to Christ; so that it is a song of loves. 2. It may be put in the plural number by way of *eminency*,

which is frequent in the Hebrew; “of loves,” — that is, of *the most excellent love*, such as none other is to be compared unto it. 3. It may be called so, cause of the *manifold fruits* of that one single love that is between Christ and his church. Though it be but a single love on each hand, yet various are the fruits of it; which will be described in the next verse.

I principally look upon it to be called so in the second sense, cause it is more eminent than any other love in the world; the mystical, spiritual love that is between Christ and the church, is the most excellent love.

It is “A Song of loves” I shall not speak unto you of the nature of *songs*. “Let him that is merry,” saith James, [chap. v. 13](#) (or in a rejoicing, cheerful frame of heart and spirit), “sing psalms:” so that singing was a means appointed of God whereby men should express their joy in a way of thankfulness.

Thus this title of the psalm will yield us these two observations:— I. That the espousals of Christ and his church, or the *mutual love* that is between Christ and his church, is *a subject-matter for a song of great joy*. II. It is not a song of love, but it is a song of *loves*. I observe from thence, that there is no love like the love of Christ to his church in the day of espousals, and to every believing soul; it hath an eminency in it above all other love whatever.

I. This love of Christ and the church in their espousals is matter of great joy and rejoicing:—

1. It is so *to God himself*. He expresses the frame of his heart therein, [Zeph. iii. 17](#), “He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” The union of Christ and a believer (for it is spoken of there), is a matter of unspeakable joy to God himself. Not that God is subject to the like affections with us; but he expresses it to the height in [Jer. xxxii. 41](#), that we may know how the heart of God approves it, “I will rejoice over them to do them good, with my whole heart and with my whole soul:” so that it is a song of loves to God himself. Also in [Isa. lxii. 4, 5](#), “The Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” Many other places might be given to this purpose.

2. It is matter of joy *to Jesus Christ*. [Cant. iii. 11](#), “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” This Solomon was a type of Christ; and the mother of Christ, that brought forth Christ as to his human nature, was the church: and in the espousals of the church to Christ set a crown upon his head; see [Ps. xvi. 6](#), “The lines,” saith Christ, in reference to his church, “are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage;” — it is the approbation that Christ gives of his church when he is espoused unto it, in the day of the gladness of his heart.

3. It is matter of joy to *believers themselves*, [1 Pet. i. 8](#), “In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” It is, I say, matter of joy and praise unto them.

Why are the loves of Christ and his church, or the espousals of Christ and a believing soul, matter of such joy as to be the subject of a song of loves to God himself, to Jesus Christ, and to believers?



(1.) Because, on the part of God, it is that wherein the glorious design and *purpose* of his grace is *accomplished*, and his goodness satisfied. God doth all things for “the praise of the glory of his grace,” [Eph. i. 6](#). Wherefore, when this grace of God is accomplished, and his goodness satisfied, it is matter of rejoicing unto God. When he had laid the foundation of *the old creation*, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, God himself looked upon all, and, “behold, it was very good;” he approved his whole work: and when he carried on the work of the *new creation*, whereof this I am speaking of is the greatest instance, even the espousal loves between Christ and a believing soul, having accomplished such a work of grace, and power, and goodness as this is, God himself doth approve of it; it is matter of joy unto him.

(2.) It is matter of joy to Jesus Christ, because “he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.” This is that he laboured for, [Isa. liii. 11](#), etc. It was matter of joy to Jacob, when he had obtained Rachel to be his wife, that he had got that he laboured for: “He served for a wife,” saith the Holy Ghost, [Hos. xii. 12](#). Why, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he hath united his church to himself (and in proportion, any believing soul), he hath that which he hath laboured for, — he sees of the travail of his soul. It cost him prayers and tears, blood and death; but now he sees what it is come unto: it hath produced this bride for him, or believing souls to be united to him; and he is satisfied. He fulfilled a hard service; but it was for his bride, in whom his soul delighted, — as he does in every believing soul, when he hath made them comely through his comeliness, or in and through the righteousness he puts upon them.

(3.) It is certainly matter of joy to all believers themselves, because *it instates them in those new relations*, and in that condition, which they, for their part, never ought to have expected or looked for, as to any thing that was in themselves. And therefore the prophet Isaiah, [Isa. liv. 5](#), calls upon the church to rejoice exceedingly, because “thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.” All grace and privilege, all mercy, pardon, every thing else we enjoy in this world, and hope for in another, depends upon this, of relation unto Jesus Christ; therefore, certainly it is matter of joy and rejoicing to believers.

That which we may learn from hence, by way of *use*, is, —

1. The *infinite wisdom*, goodness, and condescension of God, in *disposing the way* of saving poor sinners so as that it shall be matter of joy and rejoicing to him, to Jesus Christ, and to believers themselves. It was infinite wisdom and grace, that God would dispose any way for the salvation of his creatures. He gave out a way to Adam, whereby (by perfect obedience) he might have attained life, immortality, and glory. That was not a way that did issue in such great joy to God, to Christ, or to ourselves, as this doth, where God is glorified, Christ satisfied, and believers themselves are surprised. We were poor, desolate, forlorn, lost creatures; and that God should bring us into a way of saving us, so as that the heart of God and Christ, and our own hearts, should rejoice in it; — this calls for our admiration. I know it is hard for us to believe it; yet I know it is true, that God himself is rejoiced, and Christ rejoices in the taking of any one soul into espousals with himself. And, which may add more, all the angels in heaven rejoice too, [Luke xv. 10](#), “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;” because God is so glorified, and Christ so exalted. God hath put this way of converting and saving sinners into such a channel as will tend to his glory, and the glory of Christ, and so be matter of joy unto them.



2. Let us inquire whether we have found, or do find, this joy *in our own hearts*. Is the remembrance of the closing of our hearts with Christ a song of loves unto us? Truly, if our loves be earnest and intent upon *other* things, we find joy and refreshment *in them*; but are we not dead and cold to the thoughts of this great and excellent advantage, of being *espoused to Christ*, as all believers are? If so, it is but a sad evidence we are truly so espoused. Alas! if a poor beggar, a deformed creature, should be taken into the espousals of a great prince, would she not be sensible of it? We are poor, deformed, woeful, sinful, polluted creatures; and for us to be taken into this relation with Jesus Christ! — *where are our hearts*? Why do not we rejoice in the Lord with joy unspeakable, and full of glory? Is it not because Christ hath not our whole hearts? because we are not so entirely with him and for him in our affections as becomes this relation? because the world hath too much hold upon us? Shall God rejoice, and Christ rejoice, — shall it be a song of loves to God and Christ that we are brought into this relation, and these dull hearts of ours be no farther affected with it? We ought to be ashamed to think how little we are concerned in this so great a privilege, — how little lifted up above the world, and alienated from the world; if, indeed, we are partakers of this mercy.

II. The second observation from its being a song of loves, is this, — that there is *no love like* to the love between Christ and the souls of believers. There are flaming loves in some to their lusts, — in others to the world, that even devour them; but yet I will say again, upon ten thousand accounts, there is no love like to the love between Christ and the souls of believers.

Should we go to speak now of the love of Christ, on the one side, it is an ocean, — we cannot fathom it. The best act of our souls towards Christ’s love is *admiration*, astonishing





admiration, till the heart is quite overwhelmed with it, — till our thoughts and understandings are, as it were, lost; the soul is taken out of itself, and laid in the dust as nothing, to be swallowed up in a holy contemplation of the unspeakable, inconceivable love of Jesus Christ.

I will name three heads of it, that may help us, in this admiration, to see that it is a love that is *inimitable*: the fiery loves of men, after this world and their lusts, are not to be named the same day with it:—

1. Consider it in its *condescension*. Now, I think we shall all confess that this love is inimitable, because nothing but infinite, divine power and wisdom could work such an effect as was the condescension of the Son of God, — out of his love to take our nature upon him, to become flesh as we are; and God never wrought it, nor will, *but in that instance*, to all eternity: and therefore, this love hath the pre-eminence above all other loves whatsoever. In [Phil. ii. 6–8](#), it is there set forth, where he unites those things that are set at an infinite distance of being. He stoops so low, that he saith, [Ps. xxii. 6](#), “I am a worm, and no man;” he comes to the lowest condition mankind can be reduced unto in this condescension: and surely this hath a pre-eminence above all other loves whatsoever.

2. The love of Christ was manifested *in his suffering* in that condition. You know what he suffered, and what he suffered for. He suffered to bear *the guilt* of our sins, so to take away the wrath of God; he suffered to wash away the filth of our sins, so to take away shame and confusion from our souls; he suffered to redeem us from the world, poor captive creatures as we were, that we might be his own: and therefore, God gives us the type of it in the prophet Hosea, [Hos. iii.](#), by a harlot; and Christ bought us when we were harlots with the world (our hearts going after sin and Satan), that we might be his property. He suffered for us, so as to bear the guilt of our iniquities, that there may be no wrath from God upon us. “I will pay,” saith Christ, “what I never took away.” “For a good man,” it is possible, “some would even dare to die,” [Rom. v. 7](#); but saith he, “Here is love, Christ died for us when we were sinners, when we were enemies.” “He loved us, and washed us in his own blood,” that we may be purified from the filth of our sins; he loved us, and redeemed us out of every kindred and nation in the world. Here lay all misery; — the guilt of sin, that rendered us obnoxious to the curse of God; and the filth of sin, that made us odious to God, and kept us under the power of the world. This love hath suffered on purpose to redeem us from all this.

3. The care and *tenderness which the Lord Jesus Christ continues* to manifest towards us, now he is in heaven, while we are upon the earth, is *another fruit of this love*. [Heb. v. 2](#), this high priest knows how to “have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.” [Chap. iv. 15](#), He hath been “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and “in all points tempted like as we;” and “he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” In these things he expresses his love to, and care for, his people.



On the other side, I say, the love of believers to Christ is inexpressible, or beyond all other love whatsoever.

1. In a way of *value*. [Matt. xiii. 45](#), when the merchant-man had found the precious pearl, he sells all he hath to buy it. Believers will part with all they have to obtain Christ; for they prefer him above all. What will they not part with, and what *do they not* part with and deny, for Christ? Whereby you may see it is a love that is transcendent to all other loves.

(1.) They part with their sin, lust, and corruption. There is not a believer in the world but hath naturally as great a love of, and adherence to, sin, lust, and corruption, as the highest debauched person upon the face of the earth; but a believer will part with them all, subdue them all, so that he might win Christ: which manifests it to be a transcendent love. And they that will not do this are not believers. If our hearts are not engaged to the mortifying of all sin, lust, and corruption, as he enables us, we are not married to Christ; for “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts,” [Gal. v. 24](#).

(2.) They will part with their *righteousness* for Christ. This was that the Jews would not give up, that they might obtain justification. They had a righteousness which was according to the law; and, saith the apostle, [Rom. x. 3](#), “They will not submit to the righteousness of God, but go about to establish their own righteousness.” All the righteousness which is in the world, that the men of the world value before Christ, while they are engaged in their lusts and pleasures, they will not part with it for Christ; — yea, even when they are wrought off their lusts and pleasures by conviction to some duties, yet they will not part with their own righteousness for Christ. But believers will part with theirs, and count it all as loss and dung.

If corruption be subdued, and righteousness be given up, what remains? Truly, —

(3.) *Self* remains. If a man denies not himself in lawful things, in any thing that will hinder his walking with God and living unto God, which will make him unfaithful in his place or unfruitful, to please God, he is not worthy of him. If he cannot deny his ease, liberty, peace, profit, or pleasure, he is not, worthy of Jesus Christ. Now, that love which will carry a man out to deny all ungodliness and lust, to renounce all his own righteousness, to lose all he hath wrought in his own strength, to deny himself upon every instance wherein Christ requires him; — this is a transcendent love, above all other love whatsoever.

2. The love of believers manifests itself also *in suffering for Christ*; and O who can tell what the martyrs endured from love to the Lord Jesus!

So that this psalm, which treats of the espousals of Christ and believers, may well have this title, — “A Song of loves;” it being the most excellent love.

Two things, from hence, are incumbent upon us:—

First. To labour to *get a sense of this love of Christ* upon our hearts. If we are believers, all this love of Christ, who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” is fixed upon every one of our souls; and it is our great duty to labour to let in a sense of this love of Christ into them.



Out of his abundant love and grace, and for no other reason in the world, he loved us when we were strangers, — he reconciled us to himself when we were enemies, and engaged in enmity against him; give him, then, the glory of his sovereign grace with respect to your own souls. And, —

Secondly. Let us *examine ourselves* whether we have this transcendent love to Jesus Christ in our hearts. If we have, it will continually keep us up to the mortification of lust and corruption, to the renouncing of all self-righteousness, to the denying ourselves; and it will make us continually ready for all the service and suffering Christ shall call us unto.

## Sermon VII.<sup>402</sup>

“My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.” — Ps. xlv. 1–3.

This psalm hath three parts. The title of it is, “A Song of loves,” which I have already spoken unto; the preface of it, in [the 1st verse](#); and the song itself, from [the 2d verse to the end](#).

[The 1st verse](#) contains a preface to this song of loves:— “My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

I shall offer a few things from these words:—

Observe, in general, that he that lays a good foundation makes a good beginning of what he hath to say. It is from his heart. “My heart,” saith he, “is inditing.” If things do not begin at the heart, whatsoever we do about spiritual things, they are of no value, of no use. We may perform duties, — we may pray, and preach, and hear; but if these things do not spring from the heart (that is, from faith, and love, and delight working in the heart), all is lost. A sacrifice without a heart, a silly dove that has no heart, are things God abhors, [Hos. vii. 11](#).

The heart of the psalmist was in this matter; and if our heart be in it, it will be a duty, in our measure and proportion, good and acceptable with God, as it was with him.

There are in the verse two things:— I. The subject-matter treated of in this song of loves. II. The manner of expressing it.

I. The subject treated of:— 1. In general, that it is *a good matter*. It is not a song about vain, empty things; much less about wicked and sinful things, as the songs of the world are; neither is it only about things that are true, but have no goodness in them: but, saith he, “My heart is inditing a good matter.”

2. What this good matter is, is declared: “I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.” “The subject,” saith he, “of this song of mine is the King; it is no ordinary person.” It was the name whereby they called the Messiah, “Christ the Lord,” under the Old Testament, who is, indeed, “The Lord of lords, and King of kings.” “I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion,” [Ps. ii. 6](#). He was principally prophesied of as “a prince, a ruler, a captain; being to deliver the people of God.” He is the subject of the song. And it is limited to things touching or concerning him; as if he had said, “It is not for me, it is not for any mortal man,

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402 This sermon was preached at Stadham, June 7, 1674.

to conceive or express all the glories and excellencies of the great King, Jesus Christ; but,” saith he, “*something touching*, something concerning him.”

The best we can reach or attain unto in this world, is only something touching Christ. “We cannot yet behold the King in his glory; we cannot see his *uncreated excellencies* or beauties, nor those unspeakable glories of his person, natures, and works, as we shall one day contemplate and behold.”

“I speak,” saith he, “of the things I have made;” that is, “which I have prepared; I will mention only the things which I have composed concerning Christ.”

So that the subject of this song is, in general, “a good matter;” in particular, things touching Christ, and such things as the psalmist, through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, had composed.

II. There is the *manner* of their delivery, both as to their conception and as to outward expression. Their conception, it was in his heart; as to the outward delivery, it was by his tongue. And there is a peculiarity in both. It is not an ordinary conception of the heart, — it is not a common expression of the tongue. If you will look into the margin of your Bibles, you will find that what we have rendered here, “inditing,” in the original signifies “boiling” or “bubbling up.” The word refers to the bubbling up of water in a fountain or spring. The heart of the psalmist was so full of these things of Christ, things touching the King, that they did naturally overflow, as water rising out of a spring naturally flows into the stream, without any labour or difficulty. It was no hard thing to him to speak of the things of Christ; his heart was full of them. O that it was thus with us! It is promised it shall be so. In [John iv. 14](#), Christ hath promised to give his people his Spirit, that “shall be in them as a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

“My tongue,” saith he, “shall not only express it, but in a peculiar manner; ‘my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.’”

“A ready writer,” — one speedy, steady, able to set down any thought or conception whatsoever. When we deal about the things of Christ, there is a peculiar manner required both in the conception of the heart and in the expression of the tongue.

Thus I have given you the sense of the words; and I shall now name some observations from them:—

First. That the things which concern Jesus Christ are a *good matter to believers*. They are not only true, — so as the mind may assent unto them and never be deceived, — but they have that in them which is the object of the soul’s delight and valuation, and which the soul of a believer cleaves unto. The truth of it is, here lies the great difference between sincere believers and mere hypocrites:— hypocrites assent unto the doctrine of the gospel, things touching the King, *as true*, but they never embrace them *as good*; their hearts and affections do not *cleave* unto them, as finding a real sweetness, excellency, and suitableness unto their wants in them: for no man esteems that to be good which is not *suitable* unto him.

Jesus Christ, and the things of Christ, are a good matter unto believers; for, —

1. They are very *excellent in themselves*. Col. i. 18, “He hath in all things the pre-eminence.” Whatsoever is good in any kind, it centres in Christ. And what is in him is better than that which was in the state of nature; better than what was in the law; better than what is in self-righteousness; better than life itself: so that, from their own nature, they are good things. Give me leave to say they are good things, because they are God’s best things. As to temporal good things, take a king or a potentate; — his best things are peculiar treasures, gold and silver, and precious stones; but the things which concern Christ are the best things of the kingdom of heaven.

The things which concern God’s only begotten Son, and which concern all the wisdom, grace, love, and power the holy God will exercise in the greatest work he ever set his hand to; surely they are good things. When the psalmist saith it is “a good matter,” his meaning is, it is *the best matter* in the world.

2. They are a good matter to believers, because they have received the Spirit, whereby *they are able to discern the excellency of them*.

As to others, it is said, “He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him,” Isa. liii. 2. Can we see no goodness, no excellency in Christ, in the grace of Christ, in his ways, in his people, why he should be desired? Believers can, 1 Cor. ii. 7–10. The Spirit of God discovers to them the excellent things of Christ, whereby they find them to be good; whereas to strangers from Christ they seem absurd and foolish things, and no way to be desired. Men of carnal wisdom, that have attained to the highest pitch of reason and ability in the world, they can see neither form nor comeliness in Christ, or the things of Christ; but when God opens the things of Christ by the Spirit, then they see that there is a goodness and an excellency in them.

By way of use. — Seeing the things of Christ are good things in themselves, and believers discern their goodness and their excellency; we may do well, then, to inquire whether the things of Christ are good things to us. Then they are good things to us, when we desire them above all other things whatsoever. Phil. iii. 8, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” He could make use of those things he had; but in comparison, his heart did really esteem them all as loss and dung, — when they stood in competition with Christ. And pray let us consider how the psalmist hath here stated it. Saith he, “My heart indites, and my tongue professes.” It is easy to profess that the things of Christ are good things, and that we esteem all other things as loss and dung; but do our hearts so esteem them? otherwise we come short of what is here intended by the psalmist. Do our hearts really value the good things of Christ, — things concerning the glory of his person, his love to his church, the excellency of his kingdom and his rule? The things here treated of; the glory of his person, “Fairer than the children of men;” — the glory of his kingdom,



“In thy majesty ride prosperously;” “thy throne O God, is for ever and ever;” — and his love to his church, “Hearken, O daughter, and consider and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people and thy father’s house, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: “— do we value these things, I say, in our very hearts, so as to esteem all other things as loss and dung, — that we could freely forego them? Do we find satisfaction in the things of Christ, with and without all other things? *With* other things? It is the will of God, while he intrusts us with other things, that we should use them to his glory; but is our satisfaction in the good things of Christ so high that we can be satisfied *without* other things? Truly, I hope the Lord will help us, that if we come to lose all things for the good things of Christ (and how soon we may come to such a time we know not), we may do it cheerfully and willingly. This I can say, that the nearer some have been to the losing of all things, even life itself, the better Christ hath been unto them. And I would pray for you, that if God should reserve us for such a time as to deprive us of all other things, this may grow upon our hearts, that the things of Christ are better than ever you apprehended. This will carry us through all our darkness and trouble, — to be satisfied with them in the want of other things. And take it for your comfort, though you may tremble now at the parting with a hair of your head, as if it was the garment from your back, yet, if you are sincere believers, when you come to part with all, you will do it cheerfully. Christ will come in and enable you so to do. Examine, therefore, yourselves, whether you do not only give a naked assent to the gospel and the things of Christ, or whether you find a goodness in them, a suitableness and satisfaction in them, — that it is “a good matter” unto you.

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Secondly. Observe from the words, that it is the duty of believers to be making things concerning Jesus Christ: “Things that I have made touching the King.” Now, to be making things concerning Jesus Christ, is *to meditate upon him*, — to have firm and fixed meditations upon Christ, and upon the glory of his excellencies: this is it that here is called, “The things I have made,” composed, framed in my mind.” He did not make pictures of Christ, or frame such and such images of him; but he meditated upon, Christ. It is called, “Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, in [2 Cor. iii. 18](#). What is the glory of the Lord? Why, it is the glory of his person, the glory of his kingdom, the glory of his love. Where are these to be seen? They are all represented in the glass. What glass? The glass of the gospel. The gospel hath a reflection upon it of all these glories of Christ, and makes a representation of them unto us. What is our work and business? Why, it is to behold this glory; that is, to contemplate upon it by faith, to meditate upon it, — which is here called making “things touching the King.” This is also called “Christ’s dwelling in us,” [Eph. iii. 17](#); and, “The word of Christ dwelling richly in us,” [Col. iii. 16](#); — which is, when the soul abounds in thoughts of Christ. I have had more advantage by private thoughts of Christ than by any thing in this world; and I think when a soul hath satisfying and exalting thoughts of Christ himself, his person and his glory, it is the way whereby Christ dwells in such a soul. If I have observed any thing

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by experience, it is this, — a man may take the measure of his growth and decay in grace according to his thoughts and meditations upon the person of Christ, and the glory of Christ's kingdom, and of his love. A heart that is inclined to converse with Christ as he is represented in the gospel, is a thriving heart; and if estranged from it and backward to it, it is under deadness and decays.

“Touching the King;” — the psalmist hath respect unto Christ as a king. Hence, —

Thirdly. Observe that there is a peculiar glory in the kingly office of Jesus Christ, that we should daily exercise our thoughts about. The comfort, joy, and refreshment of believers, in this world, lie in the kingly power of Christ. What a view is there taken of him in [Isa. lxiii. 1](#), “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save;” and which refers us to but one part of his kingly office, — namely, to the power he will put forth in destroying his enemies. It is generally thought that Edom under the Old Testament shadows forth Rome under the New. This is a glorious description of Christ going forth in the greatness of his power, when the year of his redeemed is come, and the day of vengeance is in his heart. How dreadful will it be to the world! how glorious in the eyes of believers! when we shall see him glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength, till he hath destroyed all his stubborn adversaries.

There is a peculiar glory in the kingdom of Christ, that we ought much, for our relief, to meditate upon. If we could behold the internal and external workings of Christ; what he hath done, what he will do, — how that certainly he will save every believer, how that certainly he will destroy every enemy, — how infallible in his grace, and never-failing in his vengeance; we should then see a peculiar glory in his kingdom.

Fourthly. Observe, that when a heart is full of love to Christ, it *will run over*; then men will be speaking of Christ, and of his glory. “We believe,” saith the apostle, “and therefore speak,” [2 Cor. iv. 13](#). If we do believe, we shall speak. And saith the apostle, [Acts iv. 20](#), when they said, “Speak no more in this name,” saith he, “‘We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard;’ we *cannot but* speak them.” On the contrary, there is sad evidence how little there is of love in the hearts of men towards Christ. Alas! look about to the multitudes of them that are called Christians; when do you hear a word of him? when do you meet with a heart overflowing with love to Christ? Some speak of him to blaspheme him, some to the reproach of him; but for a natural readiness to speak for him, where do we find it? Yet if the heart be filled, it will boil over. There are some that pass for professors; you shall very seldom hear a word of Christ from them. If a man would make himself a reproach in the world, he cannot better do it than by owning Christ and his Spirit before men.

Fifthly, and lastly. That profession alone is acceptable to God, and useful in the church, *which proceeds from the fulness of the heart*. It is to no purpose to have our tongue “as the



pen of a ready writer,” if our hearts be not full. It must come from the boiling or meditation of our hearts, if our profession be good and acceptable.

This is the preface of the song. \_\_\_\_\_

## Sermon VIII.<sup>403</sup>

“Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.” — Ps. xlv. 2.

I have given you an account of the general design and scope of this psalm already, and spoken something from the title of it, “To the chief Musician,” etc.; and opened the 1st verse, and spoken something to that also, — which is the preface to the whole psalm.

I shall now speak something to you from the 2d verse: “Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.” You know who it is that is intended in these words, — namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, the King, the Messiah; and this is a description of him, which the psalmist gives in prophecy.

There are three parts of the verse:— I. A description of *Christ’s person*, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” II. An account of his endowments that were bestowed upon him to enable him to his work, “Grace is poured into thy lips.” III. God’s acceptance and approbation of him in his work, “Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.”

I. Here is a description of Christ’s person, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.”

You may consider it, — 1. Absolutely, that Christ is *fair*. 2. Comparatively, that he is *fairer* than the children of men.

1. Absolutely: Christ is *fair*. He ascribes beauty to him. There is mention of the beauty of God in Ps. xxvii. 4, “To behold the beauty of the Lord;” — that may concern his worship. But it is directly spoken of God himself, in Zech. ix. 17, “How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!” As beauty among men consists in the symmetry of parts, so in God it is the harmony of all the divine perfections. The infinite harmony, agreeableness, suitability of all divine perfections, I say, is this beauty. Christ is called fair, to denote his glorious perfections.

2. Comparatively: “Thou art *fairer* than the children of men;” that is, — (1.) Than all worldly men. There is more excellency, more desirableness in Jesus Christ than in all the men of the world. (2.) More than in all those who were employed in the church, which is peculiarly here intended; more excellent than Moses and Aaron, — than any of the kings and prophets of old, who yet were so desirable. Aaron had his garments made for beauty and for glory. But saith he, “Christ is more beautiful, more fair, than any of the children of men.”

I told you the design of the psalm was, to speak of the kingdom of Christ, and to set forth the mutual love that is between Christ and his church; but yet, in the first place, he lays down this description of his person as the foundation, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.”

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403 This sermon was preached at Stadham, June 14, 1674.

I say, — 1. Absolutely, Christ is fair; and we may observe from hence, that, in the consideration of Jesus Christ, if we intend any interest in him, and any benefit by him, the first thing we ought to know and consider, is *his person*. So the psalmist here, when he had designed the description of his kingdom and benefits, begins with his person. And if we know not the person of Christ we have no interest in him. The apostle, in [Phil. iii. 10](#), shows what our design should be, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,” etc. First “know him,” says he, before he speaks of the benefits of his mediation; which is consequential to the knowledge of himself. So he tells you, of the subject of his preaching, [1 Cor. ii. 2](#), “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;” — first Christ, and then him crucified; first his person, and then his mediation.

The reasons are, —

(1.) Because Jesus Christ will be loved and preferred above all *for his own sake*. He tells his disciples, [Matt. x. 37](#), “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.” If we intend to have any benefit by him, he must be valued above all for his own sake, or for the sake of what he is in himself. He puts it as a mark upon them that followed him, “Because of the loaves,” [John vi. 26](#). And if, without the knowledge of Christ, without a due consideration of his person, we think to follow him only for his benefits, for the advantage which we hope to have by him (which is to follow him for the loaves), we shall be found strangers to him, when we think we are in a better state and condition.

(2.) Without this, no man can secure his love and faith *from being selfish*, or from beginning and ending in self. For if we regard only those things whereof we have advantage, so that we may have our sin pardoned, our iniquities done away, and our souls saved, we would not care whether there were a Christ to trust in or no. But as this tends not to the glory of God, so neither will it tend to the advantage of our own souls. So that if we intend any interest in Christ, we must begin with his person, and the knowledge of it: “Thou art fairer than the children of men.”

The use of this point is, —

First, To show *how few real Christians* there be in the world, — seeing there are so few that have an acquaintance with, and a love unto, the person of Christ. Some deny him. We have a generation among ourselves that pretend to be Christians (I mean the Quakers), who deny the person of Christ, — leave him neither the perfection of the Deity, nor humanity, nor the union of his natures; and have framed to themselves a religion without Christ, — a carcass without a soul or life to quicken it, or enable it to be of any use. And there are others that evidence how little it is they value Christ. [1 Cor. ii. 8](#), “Had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Do ye think, if men knew Christ, whatsoever they pretend, they would so despise his ways, his ordinances, his worship? — prefer their own inventions and imaginations before them, and prosecute and persecute all that truly fear

him, according to the power of their hand? Had they known him, they would not have done so. And the greatest part are perfectly sottish, — brutishly ignorant concerning the person of Christ: yea, many to whom he hath been preached, it is to them like the wind, — they hear a sound, but know not whence it comes, or what it means; perhaps they never had one serious thought in all their lives what Christ is, or who he is? — wherein his excellencies do consist, or what they expect from him. O how few labour to have a familiar intercourse with this Saviour! How few say to wisdom, “Thou art my sister, and call understanding their kinswoman,” as in [Prov. vii. 4](#), speaking of Christ, who is the wisdom of God. They that know Christ, will make him as near and familiar to their souls as they can.

Secondly. This shows what great cause *they* have to rejoice, unto whom God hath revealed Christ. [Matt. xvi. 13](#), etc., “Whom do men say I am?” saith Christ to his disciples. “And they said, Some say thou art John the baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” The world has very dark notions concerning Christ, — like the blind man, that saw men like trees walking: but as for those who have the knowledge of Christ, they are blessed; “for flesh and blood hath not revealed it.” It is the greatest spiritual revelation, and the greatest evidence that we have received any spiritual revelation from God, when we know the person of Christ. Let us be thankful for any revelation God hath made of Christ unto our souls; that we behold his person, and know him; that he is not a stranger unto us, but that our souls have some holy acquaintance with him.

And if God hath thus revealed Christ unto us, let us be manifesting to all the world that we are Christ’s, when others are ashamed of him. How? By our prizing, valuing, preferring him above all other things; above the world, and all the satisfactions and enjoyments of the world; above its ways, pleasures, converse: we have better satisfaction, better acquaintance to converse with and retire unto.

2. Observe from the words, that, in the knowledge of Christ, what we should chiefly consider are the things wherein he is fairer than the children of men, wherein he is more excellent, and to be preferred above all other persons and things whatsoever.

Now, wherein is Christ fairer than the children of men?

I answer, In three things:—(1.) In the dignity of his person; (2.) In the excellency of his work; and, (3.) In the power and heavenliness of his doctrine. Many other instances may be given, but things may be gathered to these three heads; whereby we may make answer unto the question, that is tacitly asked of us by nominal professors in the world, which was asked of the spouse by the daughters of Jerusalem, [Cant. v. 9](#), “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” — “What is there in Christ more than in other persons and things, that there is such a stir made about him?” I say, “He is fairer than the children of men.”

(1.) In *the dignity of his person*. He is a more excellent person. Wherein consists the excellency of Christ's person? Truly, not at all in the outward appearance of his human nature, especially while here in the world. It is the foundation of all devotion among some, the making of glorious pictures of Christ; by which means to represent him fine and glorious. But what doth he speak of himself in [Ps. xxii. 6](#)? "I am a worm, and no man." He was brought to that low condition that he was of no esteem, of no reputation. But if we could have had a sight of him, how comely would he have been! Why, "he had neither form nor comeliness," in his outward appearance, "that when we should see him we should desire him," [Isa. liii. 2](#); — wherein, then, consists the dignity of his person? In two things:—

[1.] In the glory of his divine nature. [2.] In the immeasurable fulness of his human nature with grace:— [1.] In his *divine glory*. [Phil. ii. 6](#), "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Here is his glory. Also in [John i. 14](#), "We beheld his glory." Wherein consists that glory? "The glory of the only begotten of the Father."

If you ask us, "What is our beloved more than another beloved?" — "What is there in Christ, that our souls are sick of love for him, breathe and pant after the enjoyment of him, and that continually?" It is because we have seen his glory who is God blessed for ever.

[2.] It consists in the immeasurable, unspeakable *fulness of grace* that was given to his human nature. It is what I have as much thought of as any one thing, concerning the immeasurable fulness of grace which is in the human nature of Christ. So saith the apostle, [John iii. 34](#), "God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him." How by measure? "To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ," [Eph. iv. 7](#). We have every one of us *a measure*; but it is given to him without a measure. There is an immeasurable fulness of grace in the human nature of Christ, which we are partakers of; "for of his fulness we all receive, and grace for grace." It is an infinity in the divine nature, transferred into the human nature of Christ, and through him communicated unto our souls. From the eternal fountain of the divine nature, through the human nature of Christ, which hath an immeasurable fulness, as the head of the church, it is, I say, transfused to all his members. In this he is "fairer than the children of men."

(2.) He is so in *the excellency of his work*. The work that Christ did was such as none ever did or could do, but only he himself. It is true, "The law was given by Moses," but "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," [John i. 17](#). Could not the law give grace, and do this business, so as to bring in an everlasting righteousness, pardon sin, save the soul, make us accepted with God? No; [Rom. viii. 3](#), "What the law could not do, that God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, did." But there were sacrifices of the law; when men had sinned, they could make atonement. No; "Sacrifice and burnt-offerings thou wouldest not. Then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will," [Ps. xl. 7](#). But would there not be righteousness, if men observe



the law, and follow after it? Alas! they could not obtain it; [Rom. x. 3, 4](#), “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” So that neither the deeds of the law, nor the sacrifices of the law, nor the righteousness of the law, will do. “The redemption of our souls is precious,” and would have ceased for ever, if Christ had not been found to undertake this work. When there was but a book to be opened of revelations for the church, none was found worthy to open it, until Christ prevailed, [Rev. v. 2](#), etc. If there could be no new revelations made but only by Christ, much less could any in heaven or earth redeem the souls of men from death and hell, bring them into favour with God, and work out eternal redemption for them.

(3.) He is more excellent than all the sons of men, *in the revelation he has made of the will of God*. Christ has made such a revelation of the will, love, and grace of God, as none of the children of men ever saw before.

These are the things we ought to consider in Christ, as he is fairer than the children of men, in the dignity of his person, in the excellency of his work, and in the glory of his revelation.

You will say, “*Why* should we consider Christ in these his incomparable excellencies?” I answer, —

[1.] *That our hearts be not taken away* nor engrossed by the children of men, and what belongs unto them, — their glory, their honours, their lusts, their pleasures, their righteousness. If we would not have our hearts allured and drawn off with them, the way is, to exercise our faith upon the incomparable excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can the world be to us an all-sufficient God, and a great reward? Can the world pardon our sins, save our souls, deliver us from wrath to come, reveal to us the mystery of truth from the bosom of the Father? Can it make known the mind of God? communicate grace and love to us? If it cannot, then let us dwell in our thoughts on *him* who is fairer than the children of men.

[2.] *The consideration* of these excellencies in Christ is exceedingly *suited to increase faith and love in us*. They are the proper objects in Christ of these graces. What is it we believe and love? Do not we believe in Christ as the Son of God, as God-man in one person? do not we love him as he is so? do not we believe he hath made atonement for us? and do not we believe and love the excellency of his work? Then the exercise of our thoughts upon these things is the way to increase faith and love in us. And the great reason why we are so weak in our faith, and so cold in our love, is, because we exercise our souls no more to immediate, direct thoughts upon Christ and his excellencies. We live by *reflex* considerations upon the benefits of Christ; but if we could exercise our souls more *directly* in daily thoughts of Christ in faith and love, we should increase more in these graces, and be more transformed into his likeness. “Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image,” etc., [2 Cor. iii. 18](#). It is not such a cheap thing to be a Christian as most imagine.

What wandering thoughts have the generality of Christians about Christ, and never once examine into their thoughts whether they have any spiritual acquaintance with him or no!

II. The second thing to consider in the words is, — *the endowment of Christ, in his human nature*, for the discharge of this great office and work, which is here ascribed unto him in this psalm, set forth by grace being poured into his lips.

And there are three things that may be observed:— 1. The nature of this endowment; and that is, *grace*. 2. The manner of its communication, and that is, *poured*; it is not dropped, but poured. 3. The seat of it, being communicated; grace is poured into *his lips*.

1. The nature of this endowment; it is *grace*.

Grace in Scripture is taken two ways:— (1.) For *inherent* grace and holiness, or the graces of the Spirit. Things that are bestowed upon men, and wrought in them, they are called grace, the same as the principle of spiritual life. (2.) Grace is taken *externally* for favour and love. “Ye are saved by grace;” that is, by the free favour of God.

It is here taken in the first sense, for the internal principle of grace and holiness. This was poured into the lips of Christ. Grace in the second sense is also mentioned in the last clause of the verse, “Therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.”

And we may observe, in reference to the seat of it, that it hath particular respect unto the prophetic office of Christ, whereby he discharged his duty in the revelation of the will of God. Christ did manifest and evidence grace in all he did and said in this world, as the lips are the way of manifesting the mind.

It is the first of these things I shall chiefly discourse on, — namely, the endowment that renders the human nature of Christ so exceedingly desirable and glorious, is *grace*.

That which rendered Christ so beautiful, so desirable, and glorious, was not secular wisdom, though there was in him the greatest fulness of all wisdom; it was not the pomp, the greatness, the glory of the world, outward ornaments, or any thing that men esteem: no, it was that which men hate and persecute that rendered Christ so beautiful and glorious. God did not endow Christ with riches; no, he was poor, so poor that he had not where to lay his head: nor with bodily appearance; for he was a worm, and no man. But saith God, “I will render him glorious.” How? He shall be full of grace. “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” “We saw it,” say they: “the world saw nothing but a poor man, whom they despised; but *we* saw his glory.” And what was that glory? “He was full of grace,” [John i. 14](#). Even the glory of Jesus Christ consists in grace.

And why doth this glory of Christ consist in grace? For these three ends:—

(1.) Because in this internal grace consists *the reparation of the image of God*. All the glory that God thought meet to communicate to his creature man (and it was unspeakable, and all he designed him for), was to make him in his own image and likeness. This was the glory God intended; every thing else doth but follow it. Now, we left this image, and became as like the devil as if we had been begotten by him. [John viii. 44](#), We are the children of the

devil, he is our father; we are a “generation of vipers,” — the seed of the serpent by nature. But it is grace that doth repair and renew this image of God. It is grace that makes a representation of God unto us; and therefore doth Christ’s glory consist in grace. The apostle tells us so, [2 Cor. iv. 6](#), “We behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” How is that? Why, in that abounding grace that was in Christ there is made such a representation of God, that there we may see his likeness. It is the human nature of Christ that makes the great representation of God, because he hath all that which is the image and likeness of God — namely, grace in the fulness of it — in him.

(2.) This grace is the glory of Christ, because it is that *which inclines the heart of Jesus Christ* unto all that goodness and kindness that he hath showed unto us. Whence was it that Jesus Christ loved us so as to lay down his life for us? whence does he continue to have compassion on us, even when we were ignorant, and wandered out of the way? It is from that abounding, unspeakable, heavenly love that was in his heart and soul, that inclined him to it. The more grace we have, the more we have of love, compassion, and delight in doing the will of God. But there was that *abundance in Christ* that inclined him to do all this good for us, — to live, to die, to intercede for us. This makes Christ very beautiful and glorious to the eye of faith.

(3.) It is the glory of Christ, as he is the great *example* and pattern, whereunto we ought to labour after a conformity. When we had lost all, and wandered up and down, it was not enough that we should have a rule set us, but we must, moreover, have a pattern to follow; we must be like unto Christ. And there is an unconquerable desire implanted in the heart of every believer in the world to be like unto Jesus Christ; because God hath, in the way of an ordinance, appointed him to be our pattern. And we are but trifling Christians, and a dishonour to our profession, if we make not this the design of our souls continually, — that we may be in the world as Christ was, — that the same mind may be in us that was in him, [Phil. ii. 5](#); the same meekness, humility, self-denial, faith, love, patience, that was in him.

To close in a way of use; — if this internal grace and holiness was that wherein Christ was fairer than the children of men, because grace was poured into his lips; then, —

1. Let us learn to *esteem* it above all other things. That which rendered Christ beautiful, will render us so: not in the eyes of the world; — no, it did not render Christ so to the world; the more he abounded in grace, the more they despised him; — but it renders us beautiful *in the sight of God* and all the holy angels, and in the judgment of all believers upon earth. If we be but like unto Christ in any measure, it will render us fair, beautiful, desirable in the eyes of all that have eyes to see and hearts to discern it.

2. Let us not value so much the lustre, the splendour, and glory that earthly men have in earthly things, — in their riches, power, honour, and the like. How apt are we to fret ourselves sometimes at the thoughts of these things; and think they have a peculiar happiness, — that they are so great and glorious as they appear and make a show of! But God knows





there is nothing in them but what is the object of his contempt, and of all the saints and angels, and will be so to all eternity.

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## Sermon IX.<sup>404</sup>

“Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.” — Ps. xlv. 3.

In the 2d verse we have a description of the person of Christ, and of the ground of God’s blessing and accepting of him in his work, the psalm having a double design; — first, To show the glory of Christ in his kingly office; secondly, To show the mutual love that is between Christ and his church.

This 3d verse sets forth his entering upon the first part of his work, and is spoken by the way of encouragement unto Christ, in the name of God the Father, to undertake his office, and to go through with it. “Gird thy sword,” saith he, “upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.”

There are three things in the words:— I. The *work* that is proposed unto Jesus Christ, or rather his *preparation* for his work: “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.” II. The *manner how* he should go through this work: “With thy glory and thy majesty.” And (that which I shall particularly enlarge on) III. The *appellation* that is here given to Christ; which is, “Most Mighty.” He is most mighty in the execution of his office which he is exalted unto:—

I. We have Christ’s preparation for his work: “Gird thy sword on thy thigh.” Consider two things:— 1. What is the *sword* of Christ. 2. What is meant by *girding* this sword upon his thigh.

1. The sword of Christ is the word of God; so it is called, “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” Eph. vi. 17. The Spirit being the great immediate agent whereby Christ administers his kingdom, that which is the sword of the Spirit is the sword of Christ: and therefore, where Christ is described in his kingdom, it is said that “he hath a sword proceeding out of his mouth,” Rev. i. 16; which, in another place, is called “The rod of his mouth,” Isa. xi. 4. It is the word of God, the great instrument of Christ in managing of his kingdom, that is called here his sword.

2. Concerning this it is said, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.” The girding of the sword upon the thigh, is the putting of it into readiness for use. When David was going up against Nabal, he said unto his men, 1 Sam. xxv. 13, “Gird ye on every man his sword.” Wherefore Christ’s girding his sword upon his thigh, is the disposing of the word into the ordinances of the gospel, where it may be ready for use. It hath respect unto the time when he ascended on high, and sent forth his word for the setting up of his kingdom. Then he put his word in readiness to effect the great designs of his love and grace, when “he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,” Eph. iv. 11. He furnished men with gifts and abilities to dispense this word unto the ends of his kingdom.

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II. The *manner* of going through his work is, “With thy glory and thy majesty.” The glory and majesty of Christ are his power and authority. And so it is prophesied of, as an encouragement unto the Lord Christ, that he should clothe his word with power and authority for the ends of setting up his kingdom, — the edification of his church and the preservation of it in the world.

These things I speak in a general way; I shall now more particularly address myself, —

III. To the appellation that is here given unto Christ, — “O most Mighty, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, from אֱלֹהֵינוּ, one that prevails in every thing he takes in hand.

Observe from hence, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as king of the church, is endowed with a mighty power for the accomplishing of all the designs and ends of this rule and kingdom. It is said of him, [Ps. lxxxix. 19](#), God hath “laid help upon one that is mighty.” It is spoken there primarily of David, “I have found David my servant.” But what could poor David do? one taken from the sheepfold. It was not a laying help, therefore, upon David that was mighty, absolutely speaking; but a putting strength into him. But David was a type of Christ; and to him must the passage be referred; — he is the mighty One. Also Isaiah, [Isa. lxiii. 1](#), describing of Christ in his kingdom, saith, “It is ‘I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’” And again, in [Ps. xxiv. 7](#), etc., there is a description of his ascension into heaven; the gates and everlasting doors being lifted up, that he, the King of glory, may enter in. The question being asked, “Who is this King of glory?” saith he, “The Lord, strong and mighty.” It is a property everywhere ascribed unto Jesus Christ, that he is mighty.

Here we may inquire, — 1. *Whence* Christ is thus mighty for the execution of his kingly office? and, 2. *To what ends* he doth put forth this might and power?

1. *Whence* is Christ thus mighty? Christ is mighty upon two accounts:—

(1.) From the *omnipotent power* of his divine nature; which is the principle of his mighty operations in the union of his person. So the prophet declares, [Isa. ix. 6](#), “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” And how shall he be called? “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God;” — “This child that is born unto us, this son that is given unto us, his name shall be (that is, he really is), — The mighty God.” Why so? Because of the union of the divine nature with the human in the same person; whereby the same person becomes a child born, and also the mighty God.

(2.) He is mighty, from the *authority* and power that was *communicated* and given unto him *by the Father*, as mediator, for the accomplishing of his whole work. Two things concur to make one legally mighty to proper ends; — first, strength and power; secondly, authority. Where there is strength and power and no authority, it is force; and where there is authority, but no strength or power, that authority will be void. Christ had strength and power as the mighty God; and he hath authority too, as all power is communicated to him by God the Father; as may be seen in [Matt. xxviii. 18](#); [Eph. i. 20–22](#), and many other places.



But it will be objected, “If Christ be the mighty God *by nature*, how comes it to pass that he should have power and authority *given unto him*? God hath given unto him might and dominion, far above all principalities,” etc.

I answer, — Christ, as his power is given to him, is considered not absolutely as God, nor absolutely as man; but as *God-man*, Mediator, — one that mediates between God and man: and so his power to erect his kingdom is given him of his Father.

2. The second inquiry is, — *Unto what ends* doth the Lord Jesus put forth this mighty power wherewith he is endowed? I answer, — To these five ends:— (1.) Unto the erecting of his kingdom or church in the world; (2.) To the preservation of it; (3.) To the subduing of his enemies; (4.) To the raising of the dead; (5.) In the judging of all flesh, and distributing of eternal rewards and punishments: all which are acts of mighty power.

(1.) Jesus Christ puts forth this mighty power in *erecting and building of his church*. In [Matt. xvi. 18](#), our Lord saith, “I will build my church;” and the apostle, in [Heb. iii. 3, 4](#), shows that it was *an act of divine power* to build this church of God: “He that built all things is God.” No one could build a church in all ages, but God himself. And if we were able to take a view how Jesus Christ first built his church in the world, we should learn not to distrust his power in any thing he had afterward to do. There was a combination of hell and of all the power of the world, against the interest of Christ and the gospel. The concurring suffrage of mankind, wise and unwise, learned and unlearned, Jew and Greek, influenced by their interest, by all that was dear unto them, set themselves in a combination against Christ’s building of his kingdom. He employed against all this force a *few poor men*, unlearned, unskillful; and gives into their hands only the sword of the Spirit, — the word of God; furnishes them only with gifts and abilities for the dispensing of the word: which was “his girding of his sword upon his thigh.” He set these poor men to work; and clothing them with his glory and majesty, they make havoc in the devil’s kingdom, and destroy it by degrees, until they root it out of the earth. It was, then, an act of mighty power in Christ, to build his kingdom and church.

(2.) Christ puts forth this mighty power *in the preserving of his church*, being so founded and built on him. It is that which he expresses, [Isa. xxvii. 3](#), “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.”

The church being built, is not able to stand of itself; for unto the end of time the gates of hell and the power of the world shall be engaged against it. But saith he, “I will keep it, ‘and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’” There is a carnal church in the world, or a worldly church; and how is *that* kept? By force, — laws and power of men who have wrapt up their secular interest in the preserving of it; and they will fight for their kingdom. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ hath a *spiritual church*, of them that believe in him. They also are preserved; and by what means? By *a secret emanation* of mighty power from Jesus



Christ. There hath not been any age in the world since the ascension of Christ, but there hath been an emanation, or putting forth of this mighty power of Christ in preserving of this church. He preserved a people under the whole apostasy of Antichrist. Had there been none left on the earth to fear him, and believe in him, all the promises of God to him had come to an end. But he did secretly, by his mighty power, preserve a people to himself in the midst of all the defection of Antichrist. And he doth so at this day, in the midst of the new defection made to Antichrist: for, in former days, the world fell off to Antichrist by superstition and idolatry; they are now falling off to him by profaneness and atheism: yet Jesus Christ, by his mighty power under both, or by a secret exertion of his power, preserves his church through all, and carries them as safe through the *new* opposition as he did through the *old*.

(3.) He puts forth his power for the *subduing* and conquering of his and his church's *enemies*.

What enemies has Christ? what enemies has the church? As many as there are devils in hell, and men and women in the world that are of the seed of the serpent. But I may reduce all the enmity to the interest of Christ upon earth to these four heads:— [1.] Satan; [2.] The world; [3.] Sin; [4.] Death. Christ is most mighty in conquering all these enemies:—

[1.] He puts forth his mighty power in conquering of *Satan*. This was the first word that was spoken of him in the world, in [Gen. iii. 15](#), “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” The first discovery God made to his creatures concerning the incarnation of his Son was in this, — that he would destroy Satan; and so the Holy Ghost tells us he hath done, [Col. ii. 15](#), “He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross.” These words, “He spoiled principalities and powers,” are an exposition of the former promise in Genesis, that “the seed of the woman” (Jesus Christ) “should bruise the serpent’s head.” How should he do it? Why, in spoiling principalities and powers, and triumphing over them openly in his cross. So he saith, in [Heb. ii. 14](#), “That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” He did not destroy him as to his *being*, but as to his *power* and authority. Hence, first, The devil hath a limited power only remaining, such as shall never prejudice the eternal interest of the church; and, secondly, He is reserved unto eternal destruction by this mighty power of Christ.

[2.] The second enemy of Christ is the *world*; and that may be considered either in the men of it or in the power of it:—

In *the men* of it. The Lord Christ puts forth his mighty power to deal with and subdue all the men of the world that rise up in opposition against him. Whatever success they may seem to have, they are all made his footstool: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel,” [Ps. ii. 9](#). And you have him twice or

thrice described in the Revelation as going forth in his mighty power for the subduing of all his adversaries. See [Rev. xix. 11–21](#).

And this *must* be; for he shall subdue all the *authority* in the world, — not only the *persons* of men, but all the *power* and all the authority which is set up against him, or exercised against his interest. [1 Cor. xv. 24, 25](#), “When he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” There is a suspension of the issue of all things until Christ hath thus put down all that opposeth him and his interest. But there is an expectation in heaven, and in earth, in the whole creation: all are waiting, as if one single person, for the putting forth this mighty power of Christ for the subduing of all unto him; for the end will not be till then. Whatever we endure, we must be contented with it; whatsoever we suffer, the end must not be till all his enemies be made his footstool, and there be nothing to stand up against him who is most mighty.

[3.] *Sin* in his people is another *enemy of Christ*. Sin, as it is in men by nature, is that which gives life and efficacy to all the enmity that is acted against him; and, as it remains even in believers themselves, it doth act a great enmity against Christ. How come we, then, to be freed from it? how comes it to be subdued? The apostle, in [Rom. vii.](#), gives an account of the great contest and conflict that believers have with the remainder of sin in them, that makes them cry out for deliverance from it, [verses 24, 25](#). It is a sudden breaking forth of the apostle there, when he was describing the law of sin; for he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” etc. But he as suddenly takes up, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;” — “Through the power of Christ this enemy, sin, shall be subdued.” Therefore, [chap. vi. 14](#), it is said, “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace;” — “If you come under grace, or under the rule of Christ, sin shall not have dominion over you.” What is the reason of it? where is the consequence of the argument? Because sin is one great enemy of Christ, and he will certainly conquer it.

[4.] *Death* is another enemy. It is the last enemy, [1 Cor. xv. 25, 26](#), “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” And, in [verse 54](#), he tell us that “death is swallowed up in victory;” a conquest is obtained over it. It is the last enemy, because, until the consummation of all things, we shall be subject to its power; but *that* shall also come under the feet of Christ, when we shall die no more.

This is the third end wherefore Christ puts forth this mighty or exceeding greatness of his power, — namely, for the subduing of his enemies.

(4.) The fourth end for which Christ puts forth the greatness of his power is, for the *raising up all his church from the dead*, [Phil. iii. 20, 21](#), “Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” The mighty power of Christ reaches thus far, that the dead shall be raised thereby. Yes, our vile body shall, — the body of our humili-

ation; that is, the body as it is fallen into corruption, into a vile estate, though it come to worms and dust, yet he shall revive it by the exceeding greatness of his power. He shall raise the bodies of his people. The privilege of believers in that day will be, that they shall be first raised, and they shall be peculiarly raised by the power of Christ as mediator. Their bodies shall be raised in conformity to his glorious body, when others shall be raised after them by the mere divine power of Christ, and raised with all their own vileness upon them.

(5.) And lastly, to mention no more; — the mighty power of Christ is put forth in *judging of all the world*, and distributing to them rewards of bliss or woe that shall abide to all eternity, [Matt. xxv. 31–46](#).

Thus you see why the Holy Ghost, by the psalmist, calls Christ here the Mighty One, — one that will mightily prevail in every thing. It is because of his divine power, — he is the mighty God. Because of his mediatorial authority there is committed unto him all power in heaven and in earth. He doth put forth this power for the erecting of his church, for its preservation, for the subduing of his enemies, in the raising of the dead, and distributing rewards and punishments.

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## **Sermon X.<sup>405</sup> The use and advantage of faith in a time of public calamity.**

“The just shall live by his faith.” — [Hab. ii. 4.](#)

This is the first time these words are mentioned in the Scripture, but they are three times quoted by the apostle Paul: he preached, as it were, thrice upon them, [Rom. i. 17](#); [Gal. iii. 11](#); [Heb. x. 38](#); for it is full of heavenly matter, and is made use of by the apostle to several purposes. I know no one text that hath been more preached upon, or more written upon by them who have treated of the life of faith; — how the just live the life of justification, and how they live the life of sanctification, the life of consolation, the life of peace, the life of joy, the life of obedience, etc. My design is quite of another nature, and is that which falls in with the design of the prophet in the first use of the words; as we shall presently see.

You know that, for many years, upon all these occasions, without failing, I have been warning of you continually of an approaching calamitous time, and considering the sins that have been the causes of it. The day is with the Lord, — the year and month I know not: but I have told you that “judgment will begin at the house of God;” that in the latter days of the church, “perilous times will come;” that God seems to have “hardened our hearts from his fear, and caused us to err from his ways;” and that none knows what “the power of his wrath” will be. In all these things I have foretold you of perilous, distressing, calamitous times; and in all men’s apprehensions they now lie at the door, and are entering in upon us. Now I must change my design; and my present work will be, both upon this and, if I live, upon some other occasions, to show how we ought to deport ourselves in and under the approaches of distressing calamities that are coming upon us, and may reach, it may be, up to the very neck.

What this text teaches us is, that in the approaches of overwhelming calamities, and in the view of them, *we ought, in a peculiar manner, to live by faith.* That is the meaning of the place.

And that this is our duty appears from this passage and the context. For the prophet had received a vision, a dreadful vision, from God, of the coming in of the Chaldeans, and of the destruction they would bring upon the church and upon all the land, in [the foregoing chapter](#). Having received this vision, he considers what is his own duty, and what is the duty of the church, in the approaches of this distressing, calamitous season. Why, saith he, [verse 1](#), “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov’d.” — “God will reprove me; there will be great arguings between God and my soul: I know my own guilt and sin, and I would be in a readiness to have something to answer God when I am reprov’d, — something

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to betake myself unto. The answer," saith he, "I will betake myself unto is this, 'The just shall live by his faith.'" Two things are here included:—

First. Saith he, "I will betake myself" (as the apostle makes use of it) "unto *Jesus Christ for righteousness*. I have nothing else to answer God when I am reproved."

Secondly. "I will pass through all these terrible and dreadful dispensations of providence that are coming upon me, by living the life of faith:" a *peculiar way of living*, as we shall presently see. When the flood was coming upon the world, Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," [2 Pet. ii. 5](#). What righteousness did Noah preach? Why, that righteousness whereof he himself was partaker; for he "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith," [Heb. xi. 7](#). When the flood was coming, Noah preached the righteousness of faith to the world, that they might escape, if they would attend unto it; but it was rejected by them. Wherefore, I say, in the approach of a calamitous season, there is, in an especial way and manner, a living by faith required of us. But you will say, "What is a calamitous season?" or, "When do you esteem a season calamitous?"

I will give you two things for the description of such a season as I judge to be manifestly calamitous:—

1. When it *exceeds the bounds of affliction*, or when the dispensations of God's anger in it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction. [Ezek. xxi. 9, 10, 13](#), "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod?" The *rod* comprises all affliction; but God will bring a *sword*, — a judgment that shall not be reducible to the head of affliction; it shall contemn it. Now, I say, let it be what it will, when a calamity doth befall a people, or the church of God, that cannot be reduced to the head of affliction, but that every one shall find there is *anger, judgment, wrath* in it; then it is a distressing time.

2. When judgments fall *promiscuously* upon all sorts of persons, and make no distinction, then I take it to be a distressing time; for they strip men of the comforts they cherish in their own minds. [Job ix. 22, 23](#)," This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked." "What! doth God always do so? doth he never make a distinction about judgments?" Yes, sometimes; but "if the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." When God brings a scourge, or a sword that shall slay promiscuously, that shall seize upon, destroy, and devour the innocent, so that they shall not escape, he will be as one that standeth by *rejoicing* to see how they carry themselves under their trial.

Now, this is enough to give satisfaction as to what I intend by a distressing, calamitous time:— it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; and it slayeth suddenly and promiscu-



ously the perfect and the wicked; and, it may be, “the good figs shall go first into captivity.” I am not much otherwise minded; and God may have mercy for them in that dispensation. I shall now show you these two things:— I. How we shall live by faith, — how we should deport ourselves; what faith will do in such a season, — what our duty is under the approach of these calamitous, distressing times that are coming upon us. II. I shall show you how faith doth and will carry it under other perplexities that we have upon us, that we either feel or fear:—

I. Faith will guide and act the soul, under the approach of these distressing calamities, in these following things:—

1. It will give the soul a *reverential fear of God* in his judgments. So it did unto the saints of old, [Heb. xi. 7](#), “By faith Noah, being warned of God;” ἐύλαβηθεῖς, — “moved with a reverential fear.” There is no man that is not stout-hearted and far from righteousness, but is, upon God’s warning, moved with a reverential fear of God in his judgments. It was so with David, [Ps. cxix. 120](#), “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.” He was not afraid as to outward judgments, but under them his flesh trembled with a reverential fear of God. And so was it with the prophet Habakkuk, upon the vision he had of the approach of the Chaldeans, [Hab. iii. 16](#), “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.” He had a reverential fear of God in his judgments working upon him. According to my best observation of things in this state wherein we are, the generality of people may be distributed under these three heads:—

(1.) There are some that are, indeed, *really afraid* of approaching judgments; they do not know how soon they will reach unto themselves, their persons, their families, their relations, their estates, — all that they have laboured for, and exerted their utmost care and industry about in the world; the flood flies at the door, ready to carry all before it; they fear every day. Some men die, also, for fear of dying; they are poor for fear of poverty; — they will part with nothing, because they fear they must part with all. A strange contradiction of spirit! Now this is not the work of faith. So far as it prevails upon any of our spirits, God will rebuke us for it, [Isa. li. 12, 13](#), “Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor?” ([chap. viii. 13](#).) “and hast not sanctified the Lord in thy heart, nor made him thy fear?” Who art thou? God hates this sinful fear; it is an abomination unto him. This is nothing but the fear of self; we will keep all warm about us, while we are in this world, and are afraid of the besom of destruction.

(2.) There are others who *utterly despise* these things, — take no notice of them; who do not think any such distressing calamity shall come upon them: if it does, they shall deal

well enough with it. [Isa. xxviii. 14, 15](#), “They have made a covenant with death, and with hell are they at agreement;” and say, “When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us.” They have a thousand ways to disinterest themselves from any thing of the most distressing calamity that is coming over the world. This swallows up the generality of mankind, and is that which the prophet doth so reflect upon, [Isa. xxvi. 11](#), “When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.”

(3.) The other sort is mentioned in [Judges v. 6](#), and may be called *wayside men*, idle, discursive men, that have nothing else to do but to walk up and down and talk, and are not concerned with a reverence of God and his judgments; they talk of them as if there were no God in heaven to regard them, or as if they had no concernment with him. If we have the least true saving faith in exercise, it will cast this cursed frame out of our hearts, it will be daily working it out of our souls, and will bring us to that which I told you is its proper work “God,” saith the psalmist, [Ps. ix. 16](#), “is known by the judgment which he executeth.” And what of God is principally known in the judgments which he executes in the world, is but little considered. That which God makes known of himself in a peculiar manner in these dreadful dispensations is, his majesty, his holiness, and his power.

God will appear to be awfully *majestic* and wonderfully *glorious* in such dispensations. He speaks of himself upon that occasion, [Isa. ii. 20, 21](#), “In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.” If we have the light of faith to let it in, we shall see a majesty and glory in God’s actings, even in his public and distressing judgments, — such a greatness and a glory that the soul will be constrained to bow down before him.

God doth in his judgments also manifest his *holiness*; of which we shall speak afterward. So [Rev. xv. 4](#), “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy.” How doth this appear? “For thy judgments are made manifest.” When God makes his judgments manifest, his holiness will appear. And so, when Habakkuk came to plead with God about that great judgment of the Chaldeans which gave occasion to my text, he cries out, “O Lord my God, my Holy One, thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.”

God in them also glorifies himself in his *power*. He sets up one, and pulleth down another, and doth whatsoever he pleases. Herein he manifestly shows his sovereign power.

Now, to live by faith, is to cast out all those cursed frames before mentioned, and to bring this frame into your hearts, as the foundation of all that follows, — namely, that you have a reverential fear of the majesty, the holiness, and the power of God, in all his judgments: and without this, we shall not please God in any thing we do. These are the true sayings of God. If there be another frame in us, this dispensation will pierce to the very soul before it be over: that is the first thing.

2. Where faith hath filled the soul with a reverential fear of God, its first work will be, to put the soul upon *preparing* and providing an ark for itself: so it was in the great example of our faith before mentioned. Noah, being moved by fear, “prepared an ark,” wherein he saved himself and his family. Let men pretend what they will, unless they are under a strange, careless stupidity and security (which, I fear, is upon the generality of professors), they cannot, in such a season as this, but be preparing some reserve for themselves. “What shall we do when this comes upon us?” They have some predominant reserve. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city,” [Prov. xviii. 11](#); — he may lose a great deal, but he will save enough for himself: so the strong man trusts to his strength, the wise man to his wisdom: one thing or other men prepare for themselves, to be an ark against the storm comes; and those who do not so, they fluctuate up and down at uncertainties, hoping that by one way and means or another, that they know not of, they shall be carried above all, have a good issue, — that it shall not be as this or that prophet or minister foretells, but that some way they shall escape. This is not to prepare an ark; which is the work of faith to do. And here I shall inquire into two things:— (1.) What is this ark that is to be prepared; (2.) How we ought to enter into it, or how we are to make especial entrance into it, in reference to an approaching calamitous season. I say, —

(1.) *This ark is Jesus Christ.* Faith in him is necessary. In this chapter of my text, where inquiry is made what shall be answered unto God, and what course shall be taken upon the coming in of the overflowing flood of the Chaldeans; this is the course to be taken, “The just shall live by his faith.” What is that? It is to seek for righteousness by Christ; to seek afresh for justification and life by Christ. There is no other way, no other ark; and he is described as this ark in that well known place, [Isa. xxxii. 2](#), “And a man” (that is, Jesus Christ) “shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:” that is the ark. I know not how to describe [better] what I intend by securing ourselves in the ark, like the description the prophet here gives, though in terms metaphorical. Likewise in [Mic. v. 5](#), having given a promise of Christ, he adds, “And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.” To betake ourselves to the ark, is to betake ourselves to the fountain of our peace. And so [Ps. ii. 12](#), “If God’s wrath be kindled but a little” — How then? “Blessed are all they that” betake themselves unto him — “trust in him.” In whom? In the Son; — “Kiss the Son.” And surely, my brethren, the wrath of God is now kindled, not a little, but a great deal, in all sorts and ways. The indications of the wrath of God are upon the spirits of men of all sorts, — of professors, of the world, in their own persons, in all societies and relations. Where are we, then, to betake ourselves, but unto Christ? “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

(2.) But now, it would not have advantaged either Noah or his sons to have an ark prepared for them, unless they had a door to the ark. “Make a door,” saith God to them, “that

ye may have entrance.” To obtain an interest in Christ is the general work of faith all our days. But how shall we be able now to make *an especial entrance* into this ark, suitable unto the state and condition wherein we are, and to approach a calamitous season that is hastening upon us? I know but of one way for our making an especial entrance into this ark, Jesus Christ, in reference to such a season; which is, *the solemn renovation of our covenant with God*. This is the way that hath been used by the church from the foundation of the world, without any instance of the contrary; — that, when a storm was coming, if ever they were delivered from it, they entered into the ark, by the renovation of their covenant with God. And seeing the end is certain, we are *thus afresh* to enter into this ark, Jesus Christ. It is no wisdom in civil things to remove a means, unless we have a better to substitute in the room of it; and it is so in spirituals. I desire all that fear God would stir up their hearts and thoughts, and offer to us (if they can) a better way for this church, or any church, to enter into the ark in the approach of a storm than this, and it shall be embraced. This church hath done so; though I begin to fear some look upon it as a very dead, sluggish commodity, they know not how to trade with. But do not mistake, you have no such thing lies by you in the sight of God this day. Do not despond, the day is approaching “when others shall come” (as in [Zech. viii. 23](#)) “and lay hold upon your skirts, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.” Some, — blessed be God, and let his holy name be exalted! — have far outgone us already, both in zeal and warmth and courage, under a sense of engagements that are upon them. I look for no safety, no deliverance, in the trials and afflictions that are coming upon the earth, but what is had in the way of believing. I value not those that are otherwise minded. Bless God, who hath provided for you this door of entrance before the flood comes and the rain falls; bless God, I say, for it, and make use of it, and be able to plead it with God: and let the Lord know that you have made your choice to be his, and are under his care, and not under the protection of the world. I will not say you shall be saved *temporally*, but you shall be saved *eternally*; I cannot say you shall have peace with *men*, but you shall have peace with *God*; I cannot say you shall not lose your *lives*, but I will say you shall not lose your *souls*: and these are our principal concernments. Make good your entrance. A door made into the ark will do you no good, unless you enter in and make good your entrance at the door. How shall we make good our entrance into the ark, that we may have safety therein? If we are not at this work, we have no faith, Why, stand to your engagements, — stand to the performance of those duties God requires at your hands; not only as there is no one thing required but what is a special duty of the new covenant, but stand to them now as those that have been your entrance into the ark, where God will give you all that rest that in this world you can be partakers of. This is another work of faith in the approach of a calamitous time.

3. If we live by faith in the approach of a calamitous season, this will *put us upon the seareh* and examination of our own hearts, what accession we have made to the sins that



have procured these judgments. This is that which faith (where it is in any measure sincere) will assuredly put us upon; and it is that God doth now in an especial manner call for. Now, the sins which do and have procured these judgments are of two sorts:— (1.) The open and flagitious sins of the world. (2.) The sins of churches and professors.

(1.) The open and *flagitious sins of the world*. The apostle reckons them up together, [1 Cor. vi. 9, 10](#), “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” He doth it again in [Eph. v. 5, 6](#), “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” He reckons them up also in [Gal. v. 19](#), etc., “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like.” There is a marvellous large copy written out of these texts in the nation at this day: every man may read an exposition of these things in the practice of multitudes. Some will say, they bless God they are free from these things; and so they hope they have had no hand in procuring the judgments of God that are coming upon the nation; let them fall upon them and their interest who are guilty of these provoking abominations, such as for which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against their ungodliness. Why, it is well if they are not guilty of any of these sins; but the seed and foundation, even of all these sins, lie in *our nature*, if not in *our persons*, and what eruptions they have made towards the provoking the eyes of God’s glory I know not. But suppose you have escaped these pollutions that are in the world through lust, —

(2.) There are other sins — *sins of churches, and of professors* — that, in reference to Christ’s *mediatory* kingdom, have as great influence for the procuring of judgments as the worst sins of the world have for the procuring of judgments in his *providential* kingdom. I know a time when there was a storm, wherein a whole vessel, and all that were in it, were like to have been cast away; but one Jonah, that was in the ship, was the cause of the storm.

I shall just mention the judgment procuring sins of churches and professors, which are reduced in Scripture to these four heads:—

[1.] *Lukewarmness*; which was the judgment-procuring sin of Laodicea.

[2.] *Contenting ourselves in outward order and freedom from scandal*; which was the judgment-procuring sin of Sardis, and will prove ruinous to the best churches in the world.

[3.] *Want of love* among ourselves, and division in churches.

[4.] *Earthly-mindedness*, and love of the world, and conformity to it, that is found among the generality of professors.

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## Sermon XI.<sup>406</sup> The use of faith under reproaches and persecutions.

“The just shall live by his faith.” — Hab. ii. 4.

You may remember, I spake occasionally from that of the psalmist, Ps. xcvi. 2, “Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;” and from thence took occasion to consider what is our especial duty when clouds and darkness are round about us, as they are at this day. And some of you know I have had a great persuasion that the clouds that are gathering will, at least in their first storm, fall upon the people of God. I must repeat it again and again; I have been warning you for some years, and telling you it would be so. The present frame wherewith I have to conflict in my own spirit, and that frame of spirit which I have observed in others, the state and condition of all churches and professors, so far as I know, is, — they are gone into a dreadful security. I speak my heart, and what I know with reference unto our present state and the cause of God; we are gone, I say, into a dismal security: which still confirms me that the storm will come upon us, and that it will not be long ere we feel it. My design is, therefore, to show you how we ought to behave ourselves under the perplexities and difficulties we are to conflict withal in this world. And I have not sat studying for things to speak, but only tell you the experience of my own heart, and what I am labouring after. I have already showed you what our duty is under the approach of these distressing, calamitous times that are coming upon us, and what faith will do in such a season.

II. I am now, in the second place, to show you how faith will carry it under other perplexities, that either are present or are coming upon us. And here I shall show you, — 1. How we may live by faith, under all the reproaches and persecutions that do or may befall us, upon the account of that order and fellowship of the gospel, of that way of God’s worship, which we do profess. 2. How we may live by faith, with reference unto the returning upon us of antichristian darkness and cruelty, if God shall suffer it so to be. 3. How we may live by faith under an apprehension of great and woeful decays in churches, in church members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual withdrawings of the glory of God from us upon that account.

1. How may we live by faith, *with reference unto those reproaches*, that scorn and contempt, which are cast upon the ways of God which we profess, that worship of God wherein we are engaged, and that order of the gospel that we do observe, with the persecutions that will attend us upon the account thereof? Truly, I may say of it as the Jews said to Paul about Christianity, Acts xxviii. 22, “As for this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” The whole world seems to be combined, that the name of Israel, in this way, may no more be had in remembrance. There are few that are concerned about these things while it is well

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406 This sermon was preached April 30, 1680.



with them, their families, their relations, estates, inheritances. Let the ways of God be reproached, what is that to them? they are not concerned in it. They cannot say, as the psalmist doth, when he speaks in the person of Christ, [Ps. lxix. 9](#), “The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” Perhaps some of us are more sensible than others (or, at least, have reason so to be) of those reproaches that are continually cast upon the ways of God, seeing they are more particularly upon us; but to those that are not concerned in this scorn and contempt, I would say three things:—

First. *What evidence have you that you have a concern in God’s glory?* For these things are those whereby God is glorified in this world; and if you are not concerned when there are so many reflections thrown upon it, pray consider what evidence you have in yourselves of any concernment in the glory of God.

Secondly. *What evidence have you that you have a love to these things*, that can hear them reproached, scorned, contemned, and never be moved at it? An honest, good man, would find himself concerned if his wife or children were reproached with lies and shameful things, because of his interest in them; but for them that can hear the ways of God reproached every day, and, so long as it is well with them and theirs, are not concerned thereat, — they can have no evidence that they have a love unto them. Nehemiah cries out upon such an occasion, [Neh. iv. 4](#), “Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity.” God hath made special promises to such as are thus concerned: [Zeph. iii. 18](#), “I will gather them,” saith he. Whom will he gather? “Them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.” The solemn assemblies were reproached and mocked; and there were some of them (not all) to whom this reproach was a burden. “These,” saith God, “I will gather;” — “gather them under my gracious protection.”

Thirdly. To add one word more: If you are not concerned in the reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, *persecution shall awaken you*, and either make you concerned or put an end unto all your profession.

Now, the inquiry is, how, under these difficulties that we have to conflict withal, we shall glorify God, and pass through them without loss, — unto our spiritual advantage?

The apostle, in [the 10th chapter to the Hebrews](#), where he describes this very condition I have been speaking of, doth fully direct us. “Ye endured,” saith he, “a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods,” etc., [verses 32–34](#). But how shall we carry ourselves under this condition here described? “Now,” saith he, [verse 38](#), “the just shall live by faith.”

What is the work of faith in this condition, that we may glorify God, and carry it through to a good and comfortable issue to ourselves? Call your own hearts to an account, and see



how faith will work to give you support and supply. I will tell you what I am labouring after in my own heart; and the Lord direct you to find out what will be more useful! What will faith do in such a case? I answer, —

(1.) *Faith will give us such an experience of the power, efficacy, sweetness, and benefit of gospel ordinances and gospel worship, as shall cause us to despise all that the world can do in opposition unto us.* Here I would cast my anchor, and exhort you not to be confident of yourselves; for nothing else will keep and preserve you. An opinion, a well-grounded opinion and judgment, will not preserve you; love to this or that man's ministry, will not preserve you; that you are able to dispute for your ways, will not preserve you (I can give you instances wherein they have all failed); — resolutions that, if all men should leave them, you would not, are insufficient. Nothing can preserve you but a sense and experience of the usefulness and sweetness of gospel administrations, according unto the mind of Jesus Christ. This faith alone can give you. "Desire," saith the apostle Peter, "the sincere milk of the word," [1 Epist. ii. 2](#); — "Desire, and labour to continue in, the ordinances of the gospel, and the worship of God under the administration of the word." How? "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," [verse 3](#); otherwise you will never desire it. I should hope that, through the grace of God (and otherwise I do not hope it), I might yet continue (if, indeed, I could keep alive) an experience that, in the dispensation of the word, I find a constant exercise of faith in God, delight in him, love to him; — if I find that I come to the word as expecting to receive from God a sense of his love and supply of his grace; I should then, I say, have good hope, through grace, that ten thousand difficulties should never shake me in my continuance in this way. But if it be otherwise, there will be no continuance nor abiding. I mention these things, because, to the best observation such a poor worm as I am can make, there is a mighty coldness and indifferency grown upon the spirits of men in attending to the worship of God. There is not that life, spirit, courage, and delight in it as hath been in times past; and if so, where it may end God only knows. This, I say, is the first thing that faith will do in this state, if we set it on work. If we would but labour to stir up faith to find those supplies of spiritual life and strength in the ways of his worship and ordinances, — if we would labour to overcome prejudices, and set ourselves against sloth and negligence, — we should find ourselves as other men, and greatly set at liberty as to what the world can do unto us. This is that which faith can do for us in such a state of things; and this is that I would be labouring to bring my own heart unto.

(2.) *Faith, in such a season, will bring the soul into such an experimental sense of the authority of Jesus Christ, as to make it despise all other things.* I profess, if it were not for the authority of Christ, I would renounce all your meetings; they would have neither form nor comeliness in them why they should be desired. But a deep respect unto the authority of Christ (unless our evil hearts are betrayed by unbelief and weakness) is that which will carry

us through all that may befall us. Faith will work this double respect unto the authority of Christ:—

[1.] *As he is the great head and lawgiver of the church*, who alone hath received all power from the Father to institute all worship; and whoever imposes herein usurps his crown and dignity. All power to institute spiritual worship is given unto Christ in heaven and in earth. What then? “Go, therefore,” saith he, “and teach men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” [Matt. xxviii. 18–20](#). Bring your souls to this exercise of faith, that those things we do are commanded us by Christ, who is the sovereign Lord of our consciences, who hath sovereign authority over our souls. We must all appear before his judgment-seat, who will require of us whether we have done and observed what he hath commanded us or no. Do not only say these things, but labour greatly by faith to *affect* your consciences with *this authority of Christ*, and you will find that all other *authorities will come to nothing*, however you may suffer for it.

[2.] Faith respects the authority of Christ, *as he is “Lord of lords, and King of kings;”* as he sits at the right hand of God, expecting all his enemies to become his footstool; as he hath not only a golden sceptre in his hand, “a sceptre of righteousness,” wherewith he rules his church, but also an iron rod, to break all his enemies in pieces like a potter’s vessel. If faith exercises itself upon this power and authority of Christ over his enemies, it will pour contempt upon all that the world can do. You cannot be carried before any magistrate, but Christ is there present, greater than them all, — who hath their breath in his hands, their lives and their ways at his disposal, and can do what he pleases with them. Faith will bring in the presence of Christ in such a season; when otherwise your hearts would fail for fear, and you would be left unto your own wisdom, which is folly, and your own strength, which is but weakness. But if you have but faith working in the sense of this authority, it will make you like those well-composed persons in [the 3d of Daniel](#). Do not wonder at the greatness of their answer and the composure of their spirits when they looked on the fiery furnace on the one hand, and the fiery countenance of terrible majesty on the other. “Know, that God,” say they, “whom we serve, is able to deliver us out of thy hand; but if not, — if God will not give us this present deliverance, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image,” [verses 17, 18](#). Faith will give us the same composure of spirit, and the same resolution; and with these things should we relieve ourselves under the worst that can befall us.

(3.) *Faith*, in such a case and condition, *will bring to mind*, and make effectual upon our souls, *the examples of them that have gone before us* in giving the same testimony that we do, and in the sufferings that they underwent upon that account. When the apostle had told the believing Hebrews, that through all their trials, tribulations, and sufferings, they must live by faith, [Heb. x.](#), “What encouragement,” might they say, “shall we receive by faith?” Why, saith he, “Faith will bring to mind all the examples of them that have gone before you,

that have suffered, and been afflicted, and distressed as you now are;” — which account takes up the [whole 11th chapter](#), and [a good part of the beginning of the 12th](#). It is a great thing when faith revives an example. Let us, then, by faith, carry in our minds the examples that are recorded in the Scripture. There is the example of Moses, the apostle gives it us; and it is an eminent instance: “He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” He, by the dark promise he had to live upon, endured the reproach of Christ. My brethren, take the prophets for an example of them that have suffered; and consider how the apostles have gone before us: but do not stop at them; for there is a greater than Moses, and the prophets, and apostles, — greater than even a cloud of witnesses; and that is no less a person than the Lord Jesus Christ. [Heb. xii. 2](#), “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” He underwent the contradiction of sinners against himself, “and is now set down at the right hand of God.” Faith, calling to mind these great examples, would give us great support under all the trials we may be brought unto, and conflict with. Whither are we going? what do we hope for? We would be where Moses is, and where the prophets are; but how got they thither? They did not get thither through the increase of riches, and multiplying to themselves lordships in the world; but by sufferings and the cross. Through many tribulations they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

(4.) *Faith will receive in the supplies that Christ hath laid up for his people, in such a season.* Christ hath made peculiar provision for suffering saints. And it consists in two things:— First, In his special presence with them. He will be with them in the fire, and in the water. Secondly, In the communication of the sense of God’s love unto them. Their “tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and then the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us,” [Rom. v. 3–5](#). Faith will bring all these things into the soul. But your minds must be spiritual, or you cannot put forth one act of faith for the bringing in this special provision that is laid up for suffering saints; — and very few attain this spiritual frame, where faith fetches in these spiritual consolations Christ hath prepared for such souls. This is one way whereby we may live by faith in such a season. Search, therefore, and make inquiry in your entrance into troubles, what sense faith gives you of the love of God, to carry you through these difficulties.

(5.) *It is faith alone that can relieve us with respect unto the recompense of reward.* Moses “suffered affliction with the people of God; for he had respect to the recompense of reward,” [Heb. xi. 25, 26](#). The light and momentary affliction which we undergo in this world, “worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” [2 Cor. iv. 17](#). Who knows, but in a few days some of us may be taken into that incomprehensible glory, where we shall eternally admire that ever we did put any manner of weight on things here below? Faith will fix your eye on the eternal recompense of reward. We have, indeed, a faith now at work,

that fixes the minds of men upon this and that way of deliverance, and this and that strange accident; but we shall find that true faith will burn up all this as stubble.

(6.) And lastly, *faith will work by patience*. The apostle tells us “we have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we might receive the promise;” and we are to be “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” [Heb. x. 36, vi. 12](#).

This is something of what I had to offer unto you, and, I hope, both seasonable and useful. However, it is what I can attain unto in these times of reproach, scorn, and contempt, that are cast upon us, and persecutions approaching. I say, faith will discover to us that efficacy, sweetness, power, and advantage in spiritual ordinances, as to make us willing to undergo any thing for them. Faith will bring our souls into such subjection unto the authority of Christ, as Head of the church, and Lord over the whole creation, that we shall not be terrified with what man can do unto us. Faith will furnish us with examples of the saints of God, whom he hath helped and assisted to go through sufferings, and who are now crowned and at rest in heaven. Faith will help us to keep our eye fixed, not upon the things of this world, but upon the eternal recompense of another world, and glory therein. And faith will also work by patience, when difficulties shall be multiplied upon us.



## Sermon XII.<sup>407</sup> The use of faith, if popery should return upon us.

“The just shall live by his faith.” — Hab. ii. 4.

Our inquiry is, how we may live by faith, with reference unto those difficulties we have, or may have, to conflict with in the days wherein we live. The last head we spake to was, how we may live by faith in reference to all the reproaches and scornful contempt that are cast upon that way of worship, that order and fellowship of the gospel, which we cleave unto, and the persecutions which we may undergo upon that account. I now proceed:—

2. The second difficulty that we have, or may have, to conflict with, is, *the return of Popery into this land*. Half the talk of the world is upon this subject. I have nothing to say to some among ourselves; but I verily believe, that those who have the conduct of the papal, antichristian affairs throughout the world are endeavouring to bring it in upon us. I remember what holy Latimer said when he came to die, “Once I believed Popery would never return into England; but,” said he, “I find it was not faith, but fancy.” I wish it prove not so with many of us. Now, that which I am to speak unto is this, — how we should live by faith, both in the prospect of the danger of it, and if it should come upon us. I shall name unto you a few things which I exercise myself with. If you have more supporting thoughts, and a better guidance of light, I pray God confirm it unto you.

(1.) The first thing I would exercise my thoughts upon, and that my faith rests in, in this case, is this, — *that there is a fixed, determinate time* in the counsel of God, when Antichrist and Babylon, and idolatry and superstition, together with that profaneness of life which they have brought in, *shall be destroyed*. It is so fixed, that it shall not be altered: all the wisdom of men, all the sins of men, and all our unbelief, shall not hinder it a day; it shall assuredly come to pass in its appointed season. This time is reckoned up in Scripture by days, by months, by years; — not that we should know the *time* of it, but that we should know the *certainty* of it; for if it hath but so many days, but so many months and years, then it must have a certain period.

Under the Old Testament we see this all along. Saith God to Abraham, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation will I judge,” Gen. xv. 13, 14. They knew not the beginning nor the ending of this four hundred years; but they knew that at the end of them it should be as God had said: and “the self-same day it came to pass,” Exod. xii. 41. Likewise God threatens the Jews with a seventy-years captivity in Babylon: “And it shall come to pass,” saith God, “when the seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation for their iniquity,” Jer. xxv. 11, 12. The church knew not when



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407 This sermon was preached May 7, 1680.

they began, or when they would end; but this they knew, that the same day they were accomplished it should be as God had said. And so it was.

The fixing and computing of the time of the Man of Sin, of Antichrist, by days, and months, and years, is to secure our faith in the punctual determination of the season, but not to satisfy our curiosity when the season should be. But the consideration of this, that there is such a time, or a determinate season, is a great foundation of faith and patience. [Isa. lx. 22](#), “A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time.” But if there be a fixed time for the accomplishment of this promise, you may ask, “How can it then be hastened?” Why, if you live in the exercise of faith and patience, it shall surprise you; it shall come when you do not think it will, nor expect it: “I will hasten it in his time;” — “I will not bring it before its time, be ye never so patient or impatient; but exercise faith and patience, and I will so order it, that it shall be a sweet surprisal unto you.” And it is a means of patience, [Hab. ii. 3](#), “If the vision” seem to “tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come.” When we know it will come, when we know there is such a determinate time, and that it will surely come, it is a great ground of patience to wait for it. This is a great consideration with me, and I leave it with you. Here I can exercise faith, without fancy or conjecture, that there is a certain determinate time in the counsel of God wherein he will pour out all his judgments and plagues upon the antichristian world, until Antichristianism be destroyed and rooted out.

(2.) Another thing that comforts my heart is this, — it is *no less glorious* to suffer under the *beast* and the false prophet than it was to suffer under the *dragon*. The book of the Revelation is chiefly made up of these two things, — of the persecutions of the church; one by the dragon, and *he* is conquered; the other by the *beast and false prophet*, and *they* shall be conquered. The dragon was the heathen power of the Roman empire; and it was a glorious thing to suffer under that power. They that did so are described, [Rev. vii. 14, 15](#), “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” And of those that suffered under the beast and the false prophet it is said, [Rev. xii. 11](#), “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” We account them great and glorious persons who won the liberty of the gospel and the Christian religion by suffering against the pagan power, and who destroyed all idolatry by their blood, starving and “famishing all the gods of the earth,” [Zeph. ii. 11](#). Never were men more glorious than they. These made up the “Turba palmifera;” that is, the company who, with palms in their hands, and a new song in their mouths, give glory unto God, [Rev. vii. 9–12](#). I say, it is not less glorious to suffer under the beast and false prophet, the second persecuting power, — that is, the papal, antichristian power, — than it was before under the pagan. This the church hath for many ages conflicted withal, and must continue to do so, until the time is come when they

shall have a perfect and complete conquest over this also. It is a glorious thing, and I would have you reckon upon it as such. If a time of going into Smithfield should again come, — if God shall call us to that fiery trial or any other, whatever it may be, — remember that to suffer against Antichrist is as great and glorious as to suffer against Paganism.

(3.) Though our *persons* fall, our *cause* shall be as truly, certainly, and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand of God. Among the heathens, men of courage did not value their own lives, so their cause was carried on. Now, however your persons or my person may fall in this trial, yet the cause in which we are engaged shall as surely conquer as Christ is alive and shall prevail at last. Upon the first rise of the beast, it is said, [Rev. xiii. 7](#), “He made war with the saints, and overcame them.” The poor Waldenses looked upon themselves to be the people there prophesied of; and said, when they were under the butcheries of the papal power, “We are the conquered people of God; but there shall come forth conquerors.” When going to die, they knew and believed their cause would conquer. And so, after Antichrist hath conquered and prevailed over persons for a season, at length it will come to a final issue. “They shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful,” [Rev. xvii. 14](#). The gospel shall be victorious. This is the third thing that greatly comforts and refreshes me, — that if God should give me the honour, the strength, and grace to die in this cause, my cause shall be victorious, as sure as if I had the crown in my hand.

(4.) *The judgments of God shall come upon the antichristian world when they look not for them*; when the kings of the earth do not look for them; yea, when believers themselves do not look for them; — they shall come so suddenly. The Holy Ghost saith so expressly, [Rev. xviii. 8](#), “Her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire.” How is it possible that one that is in the state and condition wherein she is, should have her plagues come upon her in *one day*? The reason is added, “For strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.” Almighty strength shall be put forth for the accomplishing of it. And if this be not enough, [the 17th verse](#) tells you that it shall come in “one hour.” And I do verily believe that the destruction of this cursed antichristian state (of the head of it) will be brought about by none of those means we see or know of; but that the strong Lord God shall break in upon her and destroy her by ways unknown to us. It may be to-morrow; it may be not these hundred years. She herself, when it is done, shall look for no such thing. [Verses 7, 8](#), “She hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day.” When she is boasting herself, destruction shall come; — when the kings of the earth shall have no expectation of it; for they shall cry, [verse 16](#), “Alas, alas! that great city, Babylon, that mighty city; for in one hour so great riches is come to nought.” And believers themselves will be such as the children of Israel in Egypt. When Moses came

they could not believe, because of the cruel bondage they were under: it is like the day wherein God's judgments will come upon Antichrist, the old enemies of Jesus Christ.

(5.) I would consider very much with myself the greatness of *the indignation of God against those that shall in the least comply with Antichristianism* when it doth come upon us. In [Rev. xiii. 11](#), there is mention of "a beast that had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (which, I think, is the pope), "and he exerciseth all the power of the first beast;" that is, he exercises a power answerable to the pagan power. And what then? [Verse 16](#), "He caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark." No matter what the mark is; but to receive any thing of him, is to receive his mark; either in our foreheads, where we shall show it unto all the world; or in our right hands, more privately, where it may be shown when opportunity serves. What then? Why, in [chap. xiv. 6, 7](#), "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." When Antichrist would bring his mark on the foreheads of the people and into their hands, God, by his gospel, calls men from their false worship and idolatry. But what if they do not obey? The [9th and 10th verses](#) tell us a "third angel followed, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb," etc. Some will be apt to say, "Let us make a fair composition, and use some compliance, to put an end to these disputes." No; do it at your peril. God saith you shall drink of the wine of his wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and that for ever and ever. And I believe with all my heart and soul that this will be the portion of all the men and women in this nation that shall comply with any return of antichristian idolatry among us; — God shall pour out his indignation upon them.

(6.) Remember that *if the trial comes, it is a day of battle*; and it is not for you, when you should just engage in a battle, to be considering of this or that way or contrivance to escape. No; it is courage, and constancy, and faith alone, must be set on work, or you will not be preserved. All your wisdom and contrivances will not preserve you; but it being come to the issue between Christ and Antichrist, "it is the girding up the loins of your mind," and a "resisting unto blood against sin," and abiding in it, that is your duty, and must preserve you. Nothing will save you but faith, courage, and constancy.

(7.) There are in the Scripture *intimations*, that those who, in an especial manner, cleave unto God and his worship, with faith, love, and delight, shall be preserved and saved. I do



not propose this unto you as an object of your faith; all the rest I do: but I say, there are intimations that give me some satisfaction; that they who with quick and lively spirits do act faith, and love, and delight in God and his worship, or that are worshippers in the inner court of the temple, shall be peculiarly secured at such a time. But I am afraid few of us shall have it; because I see so much coldness and deadness grown generally upon us and the churches of Christ. It makes me think exercises will come upon us all; for we have need of them.



To conclude, —

First. Let not your talk about *strange things* keep the thoughts of these things you have been hearing out of your hearts; for you will be tried with Antichristianism before you die. We talk of news, and great things we look for in the world, and that Antichrist shall be destroyed: and so he will; but I do believe he will try us sorely in the meantime.

Secondly. Take heed of *computations*. How woefully and wretchedly have we been mistaken by this! We know the time is determined, — its beginning and ending is known to God; and we must live by faith till the accomplishment.

Thirdly. So many of us as have afresh engaged ourselves in covenant unto God, let us remember that we have taken the “mark of God upon our foreheads;” and it will ill become us to set the mark of Antichrist by it.

This is all I have to offer unto you as to living by faith under the apprehensions of those difficulties we have to conflict withal, in reference to the coming in of profaneness and idolatry, wherewith we are threatened by hell and the world, which are at this day combining together to bring them again upon this nation.

## Sermon XIII.<sup>408</sup> The use of faith, in a time of general declension in religion.

“The just shall live by his faith.” — Hab. ii. 4.

I am now come to the last thing that was proposed to be spoken to, and with which I shall shut up the subject, namely, —

3. How we may live by faith, under an apprehension of great and woeful decays in churches, in church-members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual withdrawing of the glory of God from us all on that account.

I would speak unto three things:— (1.) That this is such a time of decay among us, among churches, among church-members, and professors of all sorts and ways throughout this nation; yea, and other nations too, where there are any that fear God. (2.) That this is, and ought to be, a cause of great trouble and trial unto all that are true believers. And then, — (3.) I shall show you how we may live by faith in such a season, — what it is faith will do to support the soul at such a time.

(1.) That it is *now such a time of decay*, there are too many evidences of it. I will name a few things:—

[1.] A sense of it is impressed upon the minds of all the most judicious and diligent Christians, that do abound most in self-examination, or do take most notice of the ways of God. Multitudes have I heard testifying of it; complaints are received from many in this nation, and the neighbouring nations, that there is a great decay, as to the power of grace and life of faith, among all sorts of professors. And some of them will go farther in their evidence, and tell us that they find the effects of it in themselves; that they find it a matter of great difficulty, requiring great watchfulness and great diligence, in any measure to keep up themselves unto their former frames; and when they have done all, they do not attain their desire. And, to increase this evidence, we are all convinced of it, or else we are notorious hypocrites; for I know not how often I have heard it prayed over in this very place. So that there is sent forth from God a conviction upon the hearts and minds of spiritual, self-examining believers, that churches, church-members, professors, and themselves, are under spiritual decays. This is the first evidence; and therefore, in such a season, it was the best part of the church that made that sad complaint, Isa. lxiii. 17, “O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?” They were sensible that there was a judgment of the hand of God upon them.

[2.] The open *want of love* that is among churches, among church-members, among professors, is another evidence of decay. I will not speak of the want of love among churches one to another; but as to love among church-members, we have scarce the shadow of it re-

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408 This sermon was preached May 21, 1680.

maintaining among us. Where men have relations, where they have acquaintance, where they have been old friends, where they agree in humour and converse, — there is an appearance of love; and where they agree in a party and faction, there is an appearance of love: but upon the *pure spiritual account* of Christianity and church-membership, we have, I say, scarce the shadow of it left among us. I remember how it was with us, when it was a joy of heart to behold the face of one another; — wherein there was love without dissimulation, in sincerity; love attended with pity, compassion, condescension; yea, love attended with delight. But it is dead in churches, dead among professors.

[3.] Another evidence of this decay is, *want of delight and diligence in the ordinances of gospel worship*. These ordinances were wont to be a joy of heart unto all that feared God; but now there is so much deadness, coldness, and indifferency, — so much undervaluing of the word, self-fullness, pride, and so much an apprehension that we know every thing, — so little endeavour to tremble at every truth, by what means soever it be brought unto us, — as gives a manifest evidence of woeful decays that are fallen upon us. Dead preachers! dead hearers! — all things now go down among the churches of God and professors in these nations. And this is attended with two desperate evils; one of which I heard of but lately (but upon inquiry, I find it to be a far greater evil than I took it to be), namely, men — under an apprehension that they do not see others enlivened nor quickened as they were wont to be by the ordinances of divine worship, and finding no such thing in their own hearts neither (in all probability finding themselves to grow dead and useless) — are fallen into an opinion that there is an end of them, and that they ought to attend unto them no more. And this doth befall some that have long walked soberly and with great diligence in the use of ordinances: some in this city, and in other places, are led by foolish delusions to it, because they do not find the spirit, and life, and power of the word and ordinances in themselves and, as they think, in others. A godly and learned minister, that showed me a discourse written upon this subject, in defence of ordinances, did acquaint me with so great a number falling into this abomination, that I did not think it had been possible. This is one of the evils.

The other evil that attends it is this, — that this deadness and indifferency unto ordinances, and want of bringing our necks to the yoke of Christ therein, against all disputings and arguings of flesh and blood, hath taken such place among us, and proceeded so far, that all ways of reformation are useless. Men may make divisions, and do I know not what; but this I know, there is no way of obtaining any reformation) but for men to engage their hearts to return unto God in more delight in his service than there hath been. Some utterly forsake the assemblies; some come with great indifferency, — using their liberty, off and on, at their pleasure. Are not these things evidences of great decays among us? To me they are. I speak not as to this congregation in particular, but as to the state of all churches that I know or can hear of in these nations.

[4.] The last evidence I shall mention of these decays among us, is *our worldly-mindedness*, — conformity to the world, and security. These things have been so often spoken to you, and no reformation hath ensued, that now they are looked upon as words of course; and I am discouraged from speaking of them any more. But assure yourselves, this conformity to the world, and this security that is yet found among us, is a great evidence that the glory of God is departing from us. Ministers preach against worldly-mindedness, security, etc., but it makes no impression upon the minds of men; for we can scarce give an instance of any, the least reformation. These things plainly demonstrate that we are all under great decays.

(2.) A sense of this general decay among churches, church-members, and professors, ought to be an exercise and concern unto our minds. If we think all is well with us, and are satisfied, while we are free from outward troubles, and [do] not concern ourselves about our decays, I will not say we are hypocrites, but, truly, we are poor, low, dead, carnal, unspiritual Christians. I thought to have spoken to these three heads, to show you, —

[1.] How God is dishonoured by this general decay;

[2.] How the world is offended and scandalized at it;

[3.] How the ruin of churches is hastened by it; — which will befall them assuredly, unless God recover us out of this bad state: but I shall waive these things, and proceed:—

(3.) Suppose it be thus (and we do complain of it to one another, not knowing what the issue will be, nor what it may come unto), — *how shall we live by faith under this consideration?* what is the work of faith in this state? If things are so (and I wish any one could evidence they are not; but suppose, for once, that they are so), and our souls are burdened with an apprehension that they are so, — then what will faith do to enable us to pass through this exercise, and to live to God?

I will tell you something of what *I find*. And if God help you not to better things, make use of these, and improve them, that you may give glory to God by believing under this condition also:—

[1.] Faith will mind the soul that notwithstanding this also, *yet Christ hath built his church upon that rock*, that it shall not be utterly prevailed against. “The promise,” saith faith, “extends itself as well to the inbred adversaries of our own souls, unbelief, deadness, and all these things, as to our outward enemies.” [Matt. xvi. 18](#), “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Though we were all dead, helpless, lifeless, poor creatures, — though we had retained almost nothing but outward order, and had lost the very vigour and essence of faith and obedience, — yet Christ’s church shall abide and stand, and those that belong to him shall be preserved. “Such and such are turned apostates,” saith the apostle, [2 Tim. ii. 19](#), “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” Here is my ground of hope, notwithstanding all this, though one falls after another, though one decays after another, — “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure;” and it hath a seal upon it,

“The Lord knoweth them that are his.” Every one whom he hath effectually called, and built upon the rock, Jesus Christ, shall be preserved, whatever befalls the residue of the world. To see such a confluence of all manner of dangerous evils from without as are coming this day upon the church of God; and to see, in the meantime, so many evidences of a decaying spiritual state in believers themselves; it will put faith to exercise itself upon this promise of Christ, — “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” If you find your spirits at any time pressed with these things, if nothing better occurs at hand, exercise faith upon this promise of Christ, and upon the firm standing of the foundation of God, that he knoweth who are his, and will carry them through all these difficulties, and land them safe in eternity.

[2.] Faith will also mind the soul that God hath yet *the fulness and residue of the Spirit*, and can pour it out when he pleases, to recover us from this woeful state and condition, and to renew us to holy obedience unto himself. There are more promises of God’s giving supplies of his Spirit to deliver us from inward decays, than there are for the putting forth the acts of his power to deliver us from our outward enemies. And God is as able to do the inward work, — to revive and renew a spirit of faith, love, and holiness, of meekness, humility, self-denial, and readiness for the cross: he is able, with one word and act of his grace, to renew it; as he is able, by one act of his power, to destroy all his enemies, and make them the footstool of Christ, when he pleases. Live in the faith of this.

The psalmist saith, in [Ps. cxlvii. 16, 17](#), “He scattereth the hoarfrost;” and the issue is, the earth is frozen, — he brings a death upon it. But saith he, in [Ps. civ. 30](#), “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit; and thou renewest the face of the earth.” In like manner there is deadness upon all churches and professors, in some measure, at this time; — but God, who hath the fulness of the Spirit, can send him forth and renew the face of the soul, — can give professors and profession another face; not to trim and trick, as now so often is done; not so high and haughty, not so earthly and worldly, as is now so much seen; but humble, meek, holy, broken-hearted, and self-denying. God can send forth his Spirit when he pleases, and give all our churches and professors a new face, in the verdure and flourishing of his grace in them. When God will do this I know not: but I believe God can do this; he is able to do it, — able to renew all his churches, by sending out supplies of the Spirit, whose fulness is with him, to recover them in the due and appointed time. And more; I believe truly, that when God hath accomplished some ends upon us, and hath stained the glory of all flesh, he will renew the power and glory of religion among us again, even in this nation. I believe it truly, but not as I believe the other things I have mentioned unto you: for those I believe absolutely, — namely, that Christ hath built his church upon a rock, and that nothing shall ever finally prevail against it; and that God hath the fulness and the residue of the Spirit to renew us again to all the glory of profession and holy obedience. These I propose as truths that are infallible, that will not fail you, and upon which you may venture your souls to eternity.

And if your faith in these things will not give you support and comfort, I know not what else will.

[3.] When your souls are perplexed within you about these things, your faith will say unto you, “O my soul, why art thou cast down? Are not all these things foretold thee, — 1 Tim. iv. 1, ‘That in the latter times some shall depart from the faith;’ 2 Tim. iii. 1–5, ‘That in the last days perilous times shall come;’ because men should have ‘a form of godliness, but deny the power?’ Hath it not been foretold that churches shall decay, and lose their first faith and love, in examples that have been set before you?” “Why are you surprised?” saith our Saviour, John xvi. 4, “These things have I told you, that, when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.” I was never nearer a surprisal than by this one thing, how it could possibly be, that after so many instructions, — after so many mercies, trials, fears, — after so many years carrying our lives in our hands, and so many glorious deliverances, there should yet be decays found amongst us, and such going backward. It is a great surprisal to one that considers it aright. But seeing it is foretold that so it shall be, “let us live by faith:” God hath some great end to accomplish out of it; and then all will be well. “When I have performed my whole work upon mount Zion,’ saith God, “then,” etc., Isa. x. 12.

[4.] And lastly, *faith*, if it be in exercise, will put every soul in whom it is upon an especial attendance unto those duties God calls him unto in such a season. This accomplishes and completes our living by faith under such a trial as this is. If faith be in us, and in exercise, it will put us upon all these duties that God requires of us in such a season:—

1st. It will put us upon *self-examination*, how far we ourselves are engaged in these decays, and have contracted the guilt of them.

2dly. It will put us upon great *mourning*, by reason of God’s withdrawing himself from us.

3dly. It will put us upon *watchfulness* over ourselves, and over one another, that we be not overtaken by the means and causes of these decays.

4thly. It will put us upon *zeal* for God and the honour of the gospel, that it may not suffer by reason of our miscarriages.

In one word, faith will do *something*; but for our parts, we do *little* or *nothing*. Faith will do something, I say, wherever it is, when it is stirred up to exercise; but as to these special duties, in reference to these decays that all professors are fallen under, — O how little is it we do in any kind whatever! Would we might advise with one another what to do under these decays, — to further one another in recovering ourselves from them! This, then, is what we are called to, and is required of us, — namely, faith in the faithfulness of Christ, who hath built his church upon the rock, [so] that, be things never so bad, it shall not be prevailed against; — faith in the fulness of the Spirit, and his promise to send him to renew the face of the church; faith in apprehending the truth of God, who hath foretold these

things; and faith putting us upon those especial duties that God requires at our hands in such a season.

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Posthumous sermons:  
series published for the first time  
in MDCCCLIV  
Also  
three discourses,  
published in 1798.





### **Prefatory note.**

The following Sermons have never hitherto been published. It was observed that the other posthumous discourses of our author had been drawn mostly from manuscripts in the possession of Mrs Cooke of Stoke Newington, the grand-daughter of Sir John Hartopp, the friend of Owen, and member of the small church in which, during the closing years of his life, he officiated as pastor. On application to the present representative of Sir John Hartopp's family. Sir W. E. C. Hartopp, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, it was ascertained that an additional volume of the same unpublished manuscripts was in his possession; and with a generosity which merits the warm gratitude of all the admirers of Owen, he placed it immediately at the disposal of the publishers of the present edition of Owen's works. On the fly-leaf of the volume, which is beautifully written and carefully preserved, there appear the following name and statement: "Eliz. Cooke; These manuscript sermons were taken in shorthand by her grandfather, Sir John Hartopp, from Dr Owen's own mouth, and transcribed by him into longhand; — bound up by her, in order to preserve such valuable discourses. Newington, 1755." In farther confirmation of their genuineness, it may be added, that the first sermon in the series is evidently identical with Owen's posthumous treatise "On the Mortification of Sin." A proof of scrupulous adherence to Owen's statements, and of a desire on the part of the writer to give as exactly as possible what came from his lips, is found in the beginning of one of the sermons, where he mentions, that having come late into the meeting-house, after the service had begun, he had not been able to give the introductory part of the discourse. With all the disadvantages under which they are now given to the world, they have still sufficient merit to justify the character ascribed to them by Mrs Cooke, to whose care we are indebted for their preservation, when she pronounces them "valuable discourses." — Ed.



Posthumous Sermons.

## Sermon I. The furnace of divine wrath.

“And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the Lord have poured out my fury upon you.” — [Ezek. xxii. 17–22.](#)



I shall not insist upon the particular opening of these words, but only take some observations from them:—

First, This is a very instructive similitude this of silver and dross; therefore it is often made use of by the Holy Ghost: [Isa. i. 21, 22](#), “How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross.” “Thy silver is become dross;” — this is God’s expression of the condition of an apostate people. “Thy silver is become dross.” He uses it again, [Jer. vi. 29, 30](#), “The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver,” refuse silver, drossy silver, “shall men call them.” And so here, in this place of the prophet, “Thy silver is become dross.”

Secondly, There are two sorts of things that are called the dross of silver. The first is the scoria, that which remains after the furnace, and which manifests, the whole not being departed, the whole to be dross; that is, to be refuse and reprobate silver, — that is, the dross after a trial. There is, secondly, a dross that is called so, which is nothing but the ore the silver is mixed withal before a trial. That is the dross here mentioned, — brass, tin, iron, lead; such things as are mixed with the silver before the trial. When God promises a purification, “I will take away all thy tin,” saith he. Now, whenever a nation is thus dross, there is yet some good silver in it. When there is nothing but refuse silver *after* a trial, then is all thrown away; but when there is a multitude of dross *before* a trial, there is always some good silver, or else no trial would be made. God is not an unskilful founder, to make a trial when there is no silver in the material. So here, in the text, “As silver is melted in the furnace;” — “as *silver.*”



Thirdly, When the dross is greatly increased, and the silver will not be otherwise separated from it, both dross and silver must into the same furnace. That is the case here; and you will excuse me if I judge it to be the case with ourselves. Both dross and silver must go

into the same furnace; for we must observe, — 1. That the furnace belongs to God’s covenant. There is nothing in the furnace but that the best silver may be brought into it; and it needs to be brought into it, if it be but a furnace. In the day that God made a covenant with Abraham, [Gen. xv. 17](#), “it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between the pieces of his sacrifice.” There the furnace is dedicated, God’s furnace, in those words, for the use of the church. If it be but a furnace, it is in the covenant for the use of the church: for, — 2. God hath an oven as well as a furnace; but the oven belongs not to the church at all: [Mal. iv. 1](#), “Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” When was this? Why, first, Christ came as “a refiner and purifier of silver,” [chap. iii. 3](#); and they are not purified by Christ. And “the day cometh that shall burn as an oven;” that was the day when Jerusalem was burned, and all that wicked, apostate church was consumed. God left them neither root nor branch, when eleven hundred thousand of them were destroyed in that city. That was God’s oven, which burned up that wicked, apostate church. Truly, brethren, if we had complied with Christ as a refiner, in the day of his refining, we might have prevented the day of the coming of his oven. However, that is not the thing here threatened; but it is a furnace in common for the silver and for the dross, — the same furnace.

Why then, observe, that when God brings both silver and dross, both good and bad, into the same furnace, it is the highest token of God’s displeasure. So it is here in the text, ‘Ye shall know that I do it in my fury, and in mine anger, and in my displeasure.’ There is nothing more to be trembled at than when all must go into the same furnace. ‘I will gather the silver, and the brass, and the iron, and the lead, and the tin together, and they shall go into the same furnace.’ God sometimes makes a distinction; as [Isa. xxxi. 9](#), “Saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.” The “fire” there is the fire of a fining-pot; the “furnace” is a burning furnace. There is such a time, there may be, there hath been such a time, when God wilt bring his own Zion only to the fining-pot, and they shall not be in the furnace with wicked ones. I am afraid the cleansing of the churches is beyond the fining-pot; however, here in my text they are put into the same furnace.

When is a people so overgrown with dross as that it is necessary the good and the bad should go into the same furnace?

I shall name but two plain things:—

1. When the generality of a people are openly wicked and profane. You will see in the following verses of this chapter the reason given why God will put them all into the furnace. And why is it? Because the prophets were wicked, and the priests were wicked, and the princes were wicked, and the people were Wicked. He distributes them all into several parts, — prophets, priests, princes, people; and they are all wicked, and therefore they must into

the furnace, saith he. Isaiah also speaks of setting up a furnace, [chap. i](#). Why will God set up such a dreadful furnace? Why, saith he, [verses 5, 6](#), it is because “the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” When there is an universal corruption of the ways and walkings of all sorts of men, and of the whole body of the people, then God sets up his furnace.

2. You may add hereunto, that the dross doth so cleave unto the silver that there is no other way of separating them, a, but they must all into the same furnace. When all endeavours fail, warnings fail, chastisements fail, preaching of the word fails, an the silver is not separated from the dross; when men can scarce, professors can scarce, bear to be warned; when they can think of others’ sins, but will not think of their own; when they will do nothing towards reformation, but say they shall have peace, — let what will come, one way or other they shall have peace; — there is no way but we must all into the same furnace; nothing else will do.

This is all that I shall observe from the words; only I would make a little use of them in one or two words. And I will say concerning them, as the apostle Paul doth in another case, “This speak I, not the Lord;” that is, not that he spake any thing against the mind of the Lord, but it was that which he had not an immediate revelation about. ‘Though,’ saith he, ‘I judge I have the Spirit of God to guide me according to rule in this matter, yet I have not an especial revelation about it; “This speak I, not the Lord.” But when he comes in with that for which he hath a special revelation, then, “This the Lord commandeth, not I.” So, truly, I will say two things, whereof one is, ‘I say, and not the Lord;’ and it is only this, that it is my judgment we are all going into the same furnace. Let men please and flatter themselves as they will, crying, ‘The church, the church; The temple of the Lord; Peace, peace;’ my judgment is, we are all going into the same furnace with all the brass, and tin, and lead, and iron, in the nation, — going into the same furnace. And do I say so *now*? do I think so *now*? Nay, I have been speaking of it to this congregation for some years, that we are all going into the same furnace. But this I can say, ‘I speak from the Lord, the Lord speaketh, and not I,’ that things are so stated in the rule, so stated in providence, that it is your duty and mine to prepare for the furnace, a fiery furnace, a smoking furnace, that I am afraid God will cast this whole nation into; for, —

First, Neither you nor I can tell what to say as to the sins of the nation, of all sorts of persons, — our priests, prophets, princes, people. Nor you nor I can tell what to say unto the deadness and slowness of all sorts of professors, — of me, and you, and of all sorts of professors, — to come to such a reformation as may be preventive of a furnace; nay, to come to such a reformation as may give us faith to plead for an interest in the fining-pot and not in the furnace. I know what the general hopes of men plead and speak. Well, bring forth



your reasons, plead them before God this day, if you can, if you have any thing to plead but sovereign grace and mercy.

And [as for] the utter impossibility that appears by any other way to separate the silver from the dross, to separate us from the world, the plague, the fire, have not done it; signs in the heavens above and in the earth beneath have not done it; the sincere preaching of the gospel, though in weakness, hath not done it; entreaties, beggings, exhortations, have not done it; our prayers have not done it: we cleave unto the world still.

I will not insist upon particulars now; I have showed you enough formerly. So that I know nothing that can be a plea why we should not all into the same furnace. And, —

Secondly, God hath called out his workmen to set up a furnace. The workmen that God calls out in the world are not to make the fining-pot, but men that work in mortar and brick, fit to build a great furnace. And there are all sorts of them; — the Lord help us! God employs his workmen to build the furnace; — some by violence, some by treachery, some by folly; but all prepare a furnace. We may see them at work and hear them working every day, to prepare for this nation a furnace of God's wrath and displeasure.

Now, brethren, this I say, this saith the Lord, when God's workmen are setting up a furnace it is certainly our duty to be building an ark. The persons that were employed about Noah's ark (it is but another kind of allusion) were God's workmen to bring on a destruction that destroyed the old world, the world that repented not at the preaching of Noah. God called out his workmen; but Noah, moved with fear, built an ark. I have observed that the spirits of men do work towards and hearken after every thing that may keep them from fear: generally they do so; and oftentimes most weak and trivial things will put off our fear. But, saith He, "Noah, moved with fear," upon the warning of God that there would come a deluge that would destroy like this furnace, "built an ark." He was moved with fear, and he built an ark. I have often wondered at that word, [Ezek. xxi. 9–13](#). God threatens "a sword, a sword sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? He hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer. Smite therefore upon thy thigh." Why? "Because it is a trial," saith he, "and what if the sword contemn even the rod?" — all other meaner afflictions? After having spoken such a great and dreadful word of the sword being furbished and given into the hand of the slayer, "It is a trial," saith he. The meaning is this: Here the people themselves had thoughts of a thousand ways of escaping the sword; and that it should not be a trouble, a trial, unto them, they would bear it this way and that way. Truly, I am ashamed of myself and most of the people of God with whom I converse, to see that we have such thoughts; — that when God's sword is furbished, there is not a trial in it, — that we shall be dealt well enough withal. But prepare yourselves; a trial it will be, a trial that will try all your carnal confidences, and consume them. It will try your profession of what sort it is; and if it be found false, will



consume it also. It is to try all your graces to the utmost, — all your faith, all your trust, all your self-resignation, all your readiness to leave the things of the world and to part with them. It will be a trial, friends. Think what you will, it will be a trial. “Because it is a trial,” saith He. It is strange there should be such stupidity upon us, that when the sword is furbished and made bright for the slaughter, and given into the hands of the slayer, we should not so much as think that it will be a trial, but make mirth. The reason is this, plainly, Because we have escaped former trials in the plague, and fire, and in the wrath of man. But saith the prophet, “This shall condemn every rod,” — go beyond all those rods we have undergone, and despise them. You think it is a rod; but do not mistake; it shall condemn every rod, despise them, and will be a trial. You have had no trial; neither your confidence nor your grace has been tried: but this will be a trial. I do not believe these things are a vain divination.

Then what is our duty, if this be the posture of things with us? Why, that which we are come together for this day; which is to cry to God for mercy, in this day of darkness, of gloominess, this day of anguish, —

1. For the whole nation. Let us pray to God that, if it be his holy will, however he shall deal with the nation, he would call in the workmen that seem to be employed about building the furnace; for their faces are filled with dread and terror, and it argues dreadful work when God employs such workmen: beg of God to divert them, otherwise to employ them; beg of God to take them off, — that fierce, cruel men may not have the execution of God’s judgments upon this poor land, — that God would take us yet into his own hands, — that men whose hearts are like the nethermost millstone, that grind with blood and revenge, may not have the trial of the land.

2. We may hope yet that the decree is not gone forth, and we may beg that God would not use these workmen. Now, if we should beg of God that he would yet cause the furnace to pass away, if we find it coming, and if we find our hearts enlarged to pray, and God bowing down his ear to hear, let us continue to ask further, not only that such and such may not be employed to fire the poor nation, but that God would even cause the furnace to pass away. Abraham began to pray to God: ‘O Lord,’ saith he, ‘if there be fifty righteous in Sodom, wilt thou spare?’ ‘I will,’ saith God, ‘if there be fifty.’ ‘Lord,’ saith he, ‘if there be forty-five, wilt thou spare?’ ‘I will for forty-five,’ saith God. ‘Yet let me add, suppose there be forty?’ ‘I will spare for forty’s sake.’ Abraham found the infinite condescension of God to his prayer, and he asks no more by fives, but by tens: ‘Wilt thou if there be thirty, twenty, ten, there?’ Faith grew upon the Lord. If we find God answers our supplications for the removal of the workmen that are employed, that God would employ them elsewhere, and we have asked salvation in that, and a disappointment of others in their counsels, and find the Lord coming down, let faith come to ask by tens and tens, to bring it to the lowest degree. The utmost condescension of grace and mercy that will bear a consistency with the essential holiness

and righteousness of God may be drawn out by faith and prayer. Then cry mightily unto the Lord, that, if it be his will, the furnace may depart from the nation.

3. If it be so determined that the furnace must be set up, and that we must all into the furnace, beg of God that we may have the lamp that belongs unto the covenant as well as the furnace. The furnace was all horror and smoke; but the lamp had a light in it. I take it from that of Abraham. When the furnace was a dark and smoking furnace, yet there was a lamp, a burning, shining light, that passed between the pieces of the sacrifice. That the dark, smoking furnace may not deprive us of the light of God's countenance in Christ, to support us in it and under it, beg of God that though we go into the furnace, yet we may have the lamp to direct us, to give us light in that horror of darkness, and in the smoking furnace.

Lastly, Who knows but that God may yet, by prayer, by the preaching of the word, by continual warnings, before the day comes, before the decree brings forth, before it be too late, make such a separation (for this is as far as ever I can go), that his people shall be put into the fining-pot, and not into the same furnace? Cry for that! It is your mercy to be in Zion's fining-pot rather than in the consuming furnace.

And, then, tremble to think that there seems to me no dispensation remaining but the oven, but that which shall consume, and leave neither root nor branch.

The substance of all is, brethren, that there is a woful and a wicked corruption and profaneness of life grown upon the generality of the nation, — that there is such an adherence to the world and the ways of the world among professors, that former means have not separated them from the world (for this separation from the world in outward worship, if it be all, signifies nothing), — that we seem all to be ready, unless God relieve in infinite mercy, to be brought into the same furnace; which is under a testimony of God's displeasure: 'Ye shall know that I have done it in anger, when I have brought you into the same furnace.' It is a great pledge of God's displeasure with us. Yet there is left room for faith and prayer to plead with God in all the particulars mentioned; — to deliver us from the hands of blood-thirsty men; to divert the judgment ('I repented me of the evil,' saith God); yea, to remove the furnace; yea, to make us meet for the fining-pot, or, however, to enjoy the lamp when we are in the furnace, — to enjoy light, direction, guidance, when we are in all confusion of darkness and in the smoking of the furnace.





## Sermon II. The wisdom of making the Lord our refuge.

Preached February 27, 1669.

“Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.” —  
Ps. xiv. 6.

There is a peculiar mark put upon this psalm, in that it is twice in the Book of Psalms. The 14th psalm and the 53d psalm are the same, with the alteration of one or two expressions at most. And there is another mark put upon it, in that the apostle transcribes a great part of it, Rom. iii. 10–12.

It contains a description of a most deplorable state of things in the world, — ay, in Israel; a most deplorable state, by reason of the general corruption that was befallen all sorts of men, in their principles, and in their practices, and in their opinions.

First, It was a time when there was a mighty prevalent *principle* of atheism got into the world, got among the great men of the world. Saith he, ‘That is their principle, they say in their hearts, “There is no God.”’ It is true, they did not absolutely profess it; but it was the principle whereby all their acting were regulated, and which they were conformed unto. “The fool,” saith he, “hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Not this or that particular man, but the fool, — that is, those foolish men; for in the next words he tells you, “They are corrupt.” Saith he, “The fool ... they are corrupt;” and verse 3, “They are all gone aside.” “The fool” is taken indefinitely for the great company and society of foolish men, to intimate that whatsoever they were divided about else, they were all agreed in this. ‘They are all a company of atheists,’ saith he, ‘practical atheists.’ “The fool hath said in his heart;” — that was their principle.

Secondly, Their *affections* were suitable to this principle, as all men’s affections and actions are suitable to their principles. What are you to expect from men whose principle is, that there is no God? Why, saith he, for their affections, “they are corrupt;” which he expresseth again verse 3, “They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy.” “All gone aside.” The word in the original is, “They are all grown sour; “as drink, that hath been formerly of some use, but when grown vapid, — lost all its spirits and life, — it is an insipid thing, good for nothing. And, saith he, “They are all together become filthy,” — “become stinking,” as the margin hath it. They have corrupt affections, that have left them no life, no savour; but stinking, corrupt lusts prevail in them universally. They say “There is no God; “and they are filled with stinking, corrupt lusts.

Thirdly, If this be their principle and these their affections, us look after their *actions*, in the third place, to see if they be any better there, if they are any better in their actions. But consider their actions. They be of two sorts, — 1. How they act in the world; 2. How they act towards the people of God.

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1. How do they act in the world? Why, consider that, as to their duties which they omit, and as to the wickednesses which they perform. What good do they do? Nay, saith he, “None of them doeth good.” Yea, some of them. “No, not one.” Saith he, [verses 1, 3](#), “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.” If there was any one among them that did attend to what was really good and useful in the world, there was some hope. ‘No,’ saith he; ‘their principle is atheism, their affections are corrupt; and for good, there is not one of them doeth any good, — they omit all duties.’

What do they do for evil? Why, saith he, “They have done abominable works; — ‘works, saith he, ‘not to be named, not to be spoken of, — works which God abhors, which all good men abhor.’ “Abominable works,” saith he, ‘such as the very light of nature would abhor;’ and give me leave to use the expression of the psalmist, — “Stinking, filthy works.” So he doth describe the state and condition of things under the reign of Saul, when he wrote this psalm.

2. ‘If thus it be with them, and if thus it be with their own ways, yet they let the people of God alone; they will not add that to the rest of their sins.’ Nay, it is quite otherwise; saith he, “They eat up my people as they eat bread.” “Those workers of iniquity have no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.” What is the reason why he brings it in that manner? Why could he not say, ‘They have no knowledge that do such abominable things;’ but brings it in thus, “They have no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread”? — ‘It is strange, that after all my dealings with them and declaration of my will, · they should be so brutish as not to know this would be their ruin. Don’t they know this will devour them, destroy them, and be called over again in a particular manner.’ In the midst of all the sins, and greatest and highest provocations that are in the world, God lays a special weight upon the eating of his people. They may feed upon their own lusts what they will; but, ‘Have they no knowledge, that they eat up my people as they eat bread?’

There are very many things that might be observed from all this; but I aim to give but a few hints from the psalm.

Well, what is the state of things now? You see what it was with them. How was it with the providence of God in reference unto them? Which is strange, and a man would scarce believe it in such a course as this is, he tells you, [verse 5](#), notwithstanding all this, they were in great fear. “There were they in great fear,” saith he. May be so, for they saw some evil coming upon them. No, there was nothing but the hand of God in it; for in [Ps. liii. 5](#), where these words are repeated, it is, “There were they in great fear, where no fear was;” — no visible cause of fear; yet they were in great fear.

God by his providence seldom gives an absolute, universal security unto men in their height of sin, and oppression, and sensuality, and lusts; but he will secretly put them in fear where no fear is: and though there be nothing seen that should cause them to have any fear, they shall act like men at their wits’ end with fear.

But whence should this fear arise? Saith he it ariseth from hence, “For God is in the generation of the righteous.” Plainly they see their work doth not go on; their meat doth not digest with them; their bread doth not go well down. ‘They were eating and devouring my people, and when they came to devour them, they found God was among them (they could not digest their bread); and this put them in fear, quite surprised them.’ They came, and thought to have found them a sweet morsel: when engaged, God was there filling their mouth and teeth with gravel; and he began to break out the jaw-bone of the terrible ones when they came to feed upon them. Saith he, ‘God was there,’ [verse 5](#).

The Holy Ghost gives an account of the state of things that was between those two sorts of people he had described, — between the fool and the people of God, them that were devouring, and them that had been utterly devoured had not God been among them. Both were in fear, — they that were to be devoured, and those that did devour. And they took several ways for their relief; and he showeth what those ways were, and what judgment they made upon the ways of one another. Saith he, “Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.”

There are the persons spoken of, — they are “the poor;” and that is those who are described in the verses foregoing, the people that were ready to be eaten up and devoured.

And there is the hope and refuge that these poor had in such a time as this, when all things were in fear; and that was “the Lord.” The poor maketh the Lord his refuge.

And you may observe here, that as he did describe all the wicked as one man, “the fool,” so he describes all his own people as one man, “the poor,” — that is, the poor man: “Because the Lord is his refuge.” He keeps it in the singular number. Whatsoever the people of God may differ in, they are all as one man in this business.

And there is the way whereby these poor make God their refuge. They do it by “counsel,” saith he. It is not a thing they do by chance, but they look upon it as their wisdom. They do it upon consideration, upon advice. It is a thing of great wisdom.

Well, what thoughts have the others concerning this acting of theirs? The poor, they make God their refuge; and they do it by counsel. What judgment, now, doth the world make of this counsel of theirs? Why, they “shame it;” that is, they cast shame upon it, contemn it as a very foolish thing, to make the Lord their refuge. “Truly, if they could make this or that great man their refuge, it were something; but to make the Lord their refuge, this is the foolishest thing in the world,” say they. To shame men’s counsel, to despise their counsel as foolish, is as great contempt as they can lay upon them.

Here you see the state of things as they are represented in this psalm, and spread before the Lord; which being laid down, the psalmist showeth what our duty is upon such a state of things, — what is the duty of the people of God, things being thus stated. Saith he, ‘Their way is to go to prayer:’ [Verse 7](#), “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be

glad." If things are thus stated, then cry, then pray, "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion," etc. There shall a revenue of praise come to God out of Zion, to the rejoicing of his people.

That which I would principally think of use for myself and you in this psalm is this, —

That it is a wise thing, a thing of great counsel and advice, to make God our refuge in the time of greatest distress, terror, disorder, and wickedness, that can be in the world. This was the counsel of the poor of old in such a time as is here described (and there is not a sadder time in the whole book of God), that at such a time, and at all times, it is a wise thing, a thing of counsel and advice, to make God our refuge. I do remember, in [Deut. xxxii. 21](#), God reproaches his people that they provoked him with that which was not God; and in [Gal. iv. 8](#) it is a reproach unto them, "Ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." The meaning of it is this, that it is the foolishness in the world to put our trust and confidence in any thing that hath not the nature of God. There is nothing but the immense nature of God that is able to yield a refuge unto a poor soul in all the distresses whereinto it may fall; and therefore it is certainly our wisdom to make him our refuge. It is true, men do not take their immediate refreshment out of the ocean; but it is from the ocean that all our streams are derived that give refreshment unto all creatures. We do not immediately take our spiritual relief in trouble from the immensity of God's nature, from his being God; but it is from thence that all our streams whereby we are relieved do proceed. And let us, any of us, set ourselves to the most glorious stream that appears for our refreshment, if we do not by faith trace it unto the immensity of God's nature, we shall deal with it as behemoth thinks to do with Jordan, drink all up, swallow up the glorious stream of refreshment that lies before it, if we do not see it by faith stream from the immensity of God's nature. "Trust in the Lord for ever," saith he, [Isa. xxvi. 4](#). Why? what is the reason? "For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. The eternity of God and the omnipotency of God, the everlasting strength and name of God, that he is Jehovah, are reasons for us to place our trust and confidence in him. "Trust in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Ye know that God doth often invite us to trust in his name; and they that know his name will put their trust in him: [Ps. ix. 9, 10](#), "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe," [Prov. xviii. 10](#). Is there any one that "walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord," [Isa. i. 10](#).

Ay, but you will say, 'Is it wisdom so to do? is it matter of counsel? the best course?' We have briefly seen it is great folly to trust in any thing that is not God by nature. Now we come to the positive part, that we are to make him our refuge. Is it good counsel so to do? Yea, "Trust in my name," saith God.



1. I would observe two things concerning this *name* of God, that he doth propose to us for the object of our trust; to make our refuge of:—

(1.) In general, what is there in this name of God? Why, the whole Scripture is but a declaration of the name of God. All the preaching of Jesus Christ is nothing but to declare the name of God. He saith so himself, [John xvii. 6](#), where he gives an account of his ministry: “I have manifested thy name,” saith he, “unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world.” And ye have a summary description of it, [Exod. xxxiv. 5–7](#), “I will proclaim my name.” What name? Why, saith he, “The Lord, strong and mighty;” or, as we read it, “The Lord God,<sup>409</sup> merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” Certainly, if this be the name of God, it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. It is wiser, it is better, of better counsel; for this *is* his name. The name of a prince may be Nabal; but God proposeth his name to us, so as to suit every state and condition we may possibly be in, under any distress: “The Lord God, merciful and gracious.”

(2.) It is wisdom, because God hath, in the revelation of his name, from the foundation of the world, accommodated himself unto the state and condition of his people, that they might thereby be wrought; upon to trust in him. When he revealed himself to Abraham, who was to wander up and down the earth in the midst of strange and wicked nations, without a dwelling-place, and was, I am persuaded, in that state oftentimes which he expresses once, “The fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me” (he had occasion oftentimes to think thus, “They will slay me for my goods and possessions;” he was a very great eyesore to all the wicked inhabitants of the land, as Isaac was afterwards, “Thou art much mightier than we”), why saith God, “Fear not, I am God Almighty.” He accommodates his name to his condition. And you know when the children of Israel quite despaired, and thought they should die under their bondage, and be worn away, God comes to them, and reveals himself unto them by his name Jehovah; — ‘I will fulfil all my promises now.’ When the children of Judah came out of captivity from Babylon, and the world was full of noise, confusion, and tumult, and armies were round about them, as you may see in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, what was the name God revealed himself by? “Thus saith the Lord of hosts.” He revealed that he had the power of all the armies in the world. What name hath God revealed himself now by, that may be relief unto us, and make it advice and counsel now? Why, he is revealed now as “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is his name, and that is his memorial throughout all generations, which takes in all our spiritual and temporal concerns, — one who is afflicted with us in all our afflictions, tempted in all our temptations, suffers with us under all our sufferings. He is the God and Father of



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our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the captain of our salvation, and able to say unto the uttermost. He hath called us to trust in this name, and hath given us this reason for it.

2. God, to show it to be our duty and wisdom, doth immediately propose *the very properties of his nature* for our relief: [Isa. xl. 27](#), “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?” — words whose sense are often ready to possess our hearts: I am sure they often lie at the door of mine; I know not how it is with you. What doth God propose to relieve them in that condition? Why, he doth tell them, [verse 28](#), “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” Why, he proposeth three or four of the essential properties of his nature to our consideration to make our refuge:— His eternity; he is “the everlasting God;” — his power; he is “the Creator of the ends of the earth;” — his unchangeableness; he “fainteth not, neither is weary;” — and his infinite wisdom; “there is no searching of his understanding.” He proposeth immediately unto our consideration these glorious properties of his nature for our relief and refuge in such a time, when we are so far beyond all relief and all hope in the world. We are so quite sunk under the weight, so laid out of the way, so thrown away, that we are ready to think that we can see no relief from God himself. “My way is hid from the Lord;” — I have had my last trial and hearing; my judgment is cast out in the court of God, passed over; God will not determine in my cause.’ It is the complaint of the church under the great oppression of the Babylonians, ‘God hath passed it over, put off the day of hearing.’ What doth God give in this great distress to their relief? Why, he minds them of his glorious properties, of his unchangeableness, eternity, infinite wisdom, and infinite power. God carries it on in that place, but I will go no farther, though in the next words God manifests that he will exert all these holy properties of his nature in a way of covenant mercy to those that believe in him and put their trust in him.

3. It is our wisdom; because no distress is unspeakably and uncontrollably great that is capable of any relief or appearance of relief from any thing but the infinite nature of God. We are exposed, or may be, unto such distresses as nothing can give us the least relief in but the consideration of God’s nature. Suppose a man were by the hands of violence cast into prison or a dungeon, where none was able to relieve him. Ay, but he will say, ‘I have relief here; many good people know I am in a dungeon, and they will pray for me, pity me, have compassion upon me.’ But a man may be cast into that condition where no man sees him, no man knows of him, where there is none to pity him, — a storm at sea, a dungeon out of knowledge. What shall relieve this man but the sole consideration of his interest in the infinite properties of God? I have known many in distresses of conscience that have been able to blow off every thing, until God comes to swallow them up with the infiniteness of God. Doubts and fears of their hearts have despised every answer, every word of comfort, that could be given unto them; but if you could once come to swallow them up in the infiniteness



of God, that hath given them some quiet. And the reason of all this is, because our fears are able to pursue our apprehensions [of relief]. Whatever you can apprehend, your fears will go as far as your apprehensions, and weaken it unto you. Swallow up your apprehensions in what is infinite, and fear is swallowed up thereby. Every particular that your apprehension or reason can go through, your fears will go through, and will imbitter it to you. But if you can swallow all up into infinite wisdom, unchangeableness, mercy, fears and every thing else are swallowed up; and then the soul is at rest. Bring it to a particular promise. While fear and unbelief are at work, they will go as far as you, and give trouble; but if you come to make the Lord himself, in his infinite nature, to be your refuge, there is rest and peace in the soul.

It is matter of counsel and wisdom to make God our refuge, because it is a foolish thing to trust in that which is not God; and because God hath so proposed his nature and properties to us, as is suited to give us relief in every strait and distress whatsoever that may befall us.

“Ye have shamed,” saith he, “the counsel of the poor.” There is nothing that wicked men do so despise as the making God a refuge, — nothing which they scorn in their hearts like it. “They shame it,” saith he. ‘It is a thing to be cast out of all consideration. The wise man trusts in his wisdom, the strong man in his strength, the rich man in his riches; but this trusting in God is the foolishest thing in the world.’

The reasons of it are, —

1. They know not God; and it is a foolish thing to trust one knows not whom.
2. They are enemies to God, and God is their enemy; and they account it a foolish thing to trust their enemy.
3. They know not the way of God’s assistance and help. And, —
4. They seek for such help, such assistance, such supplies, as God will not give; — to be delivered, to serve their lusts; to be preserved, to execute their rage, filthiness, and folly. They have no other design or end of these things; and God will give none of them. And it is a foolish thing in any man to trust God to be preserved in sin. It is true, their folly is their wisdom, considering their state and condition. It is a folly to trust in God to live in sin, and despise the counsel of the poor.

Here we see what our duty is; and I thought I should have been able to have added a word or two of direction how to put this counsel into execution, to make the Lord our refuge, but my strength is gone.

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## **Sermon III. Faith's answer to divine reproofs.**

Preached January 5, 1672.



“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved. And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” — [Hab. ii. 1-4.](#)

I must look a little back into [the first chapter](#). The title is, “The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.” The burden is a burdensome prophecy, that should lade and burden them that were concerned in it. It is the burden which Habakkuk did see. Habakkuk, I do judge, is a proper name, though there is some question, because of the composition; and it signifies the “wrestler” or “striver.” It is apparent he was a very great wrestler with God, a great pleader with God; as any man may discern, if he will but read [the first and third chapters](#), where there is as great a spiritual conflict and wrestling in them both as is in the whole book of God. He may be so called because he was an eminent wrestler with God in those days, as Jacob was. And it is such to whom God gives visions. God gives visions of judgment and of peace (for they are both here in a principal manner) to those that are great wrestlers with him. I will not insist upon this, though I could prove it, because I am not so absolutely certain that the word here is not merely a proper name.

The burden and vision he had was a grievous burden, a grievous vision, concerning the wasting of Jerusalem and of all the nations about by the Chaldeans. God doth frequently involve his church in common calamities; but he hath always a special design towards them in those common calamities. Alas! Nebuchadnezzar commanded the Chaldeans and the nations about; they saw no more in the wasting and destroying of Jerusalem than in the wasting of Egypt and the countries about. God involves his church in general calamities with particular designs: for we know what particular design God had upon his people at that time; which, indeed, was the wheel within the wheel that caused the destruction of all the nations round about. Jerusalem was not destroyed because the nations were to be destroyed; but they were to be destroyed because Jerusalem was to be destroyed. And this was a great and dreadful period of time. God had set up his church, and had continued it now



for four or five hundred years; but it had so many breaches, flaws, decays, that he saw there was no dealing with it, but to take the fabric down to the ground. It had been often repaired; in Josiah's and Hezekiah's times many reparations had been made of the fabric of the church. God saw it was grown so ruinous that it must be taken down to the ground; therefore he brought that universal devastation upon them by the Chaldeans, when their whole nation and church-state was ruined, and the people carried into captivity, and the temple burned with fire. I often compare it to God's dealing with the Christian church. When it had stood four or five hundred years after its erection, God saw it necessary to take it quite down; and turned in the Goths and Vandals, those barbarous nations, that ruined the church all the world over, the apostate church. And God let the church of Judah lie but seventy years before he repaired it; but he let the Christian church lie in rubbish seven times seventy years, before there was any vigorous attempt for its reformation. I only observe, it was a great period of time when this prophet had his vision; which gives great weight unto it. And he describes the matter of his vision in [verses 6-11](#): "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every stronghold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god." Truly, a man would take it to be a description of another nation at this very day. And if I would insist thereon, I could show you how applicable the particulars are, in the hastiness, fury, pride, of that nation; in the multitude of their horsemen, and spoils, and captivities, and taking of forts; in their superstition and idolatry, imputing it to their gods, and standing upon their strength: but I will not do it.

Upon the consideration hereof, that so great and mighty a nation should come and swallow up the people, and there would be no standing before them, upon the strangeness of it, the prophet falls under a double, deep temptation: and, let us do what we will or can, we shall find something of those temptations exercise our minds in a like dispensation. The first was, That notwithstanding all their profession, yet God has no regard unto his church and those that make profession of his name and truth; that he respects other men in the world more than them. "Wherefore," saith he, [verse 13](#), "lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" — 'It is true, this poor people is a sinful people; but they are more righteous than the Chaldeans. Whence is this? I cannot understand it.' And so in [verse 4](#),

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“The wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.” This was his first temptation. Secondly, He hath another temptation upon it that goes farther. Saith he, ‘It may be God regards none of these things; that even throughout the world the strongest carries it:’ [Verse 14](#), “Thou makest men as the fishes of the sea;” the rule whereof is, that the greater devour the less. ‘Thou makest all the inhabitants of the earth as the fishes of the sea, I can see nothing else [than] that those that have strength, power, and greatness, they devour the less.’ And this twofold temptation is exceeding apt to insinuate itself into the minds of men in the time of such terrible dispensations. And thence there ariseth a twofold conclusion which the prophet maketh in [verse 4](#), under his paroxysm; a dreadful conclusion:— 1. That “the law is slacked.” The word, the law, is ceased; there is an end of the law; it seems as though the law were come to an end; that is, the whole covenant of God, and the ordinances and presence of God with them, are come to an end, for the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he, and, when it is done, imputes it to his god. There is an end of the law, the covenant, and institutions. 2. Saith he, ‘There is no providence, then, in governing of the world, and judgment doth never go forth.’ Dreadful conclusions the prophet was tempted unto, or tempted with, upon the consideration of this wonderful vision of the Chaldeans, that hasty and fierce nation, destroying the church of God, with the nations round about them, because terrible, strong, and many.

To stay himself, in [this first chapter](#) he fixes upon two general conclusions, with which, in the midst of these great concussions and impressions that were upon him, he should stay himself:— 1. That notwithstanding all this, God is holy and faithful, and always the same: [Verse 12](#), “Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One?” — ‘He is the Lord our God, and our Holy One, notwithstanding all these dispensations.’ 2. The second conclusion he fixes upon is this, That correction is needful for the church of God, but it shall not be to their destruction: “We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.”

These two general conclusions he lays down; and I would only observe, that it is good for us to retain some general principles, that we may be unshaken in whatever private, particular concussions our faith may have under God’s dispensations; such as these: That God is from everlasting the same, the Holy One, and changeth not; secondly, That though the church of God need judgment and correction, yet they shall not die, God will not utterly destroy them.

Having fixed these principles, the prophet knew it was not enough; but he goes to bring things to a particular issue, in [the beginning of this second chapter](#), in the words I have read unto you.

And there are four things in the words:— 1. What he would do now, after all these shakings: “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower.” 2. To what end he would do so. It is to “see what God will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.”

3. There is the event of it; God shows him a new vision: “The Lord answered and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables.” And, 4. There is the conclusion which he works all unto, and his own will unto, the issue of these things, in [verse 4](#). This, then, must all come to, to put an end to all disputes, fears, temptations, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

For the opening of these words (which is the most I aim at, and some short observations from them), take notice that the prophet may be looked on under a double consideration, — 1. As a public minister of the church, as a prophet; 2. As a particular believer, that had to deal with God about these things.

First, He may be looked upon as a *public minister of the church*, and so having received a vision from God, it was his duty to observe what would be the issue of it, what would become of it.

It is the duty of all public ministers of God, whether ordinary or extraordinary, to look after the event, and success, and issue of the visions which they receive from God, which they give out from him. So doth the prophet here: ‘Well, I see not through to the end of this business; I will set me upon the tower, where God places the watchmen;’ that is, he doth enjoin himself to have continual consideration of God’s dealings and of God’s works.

In this posture he hath a vision; and you may consider, — 1. The vision itself, and, 2. The nature of it.

The vision itself is explained, [Isa. xxi. 6–10](#). That and this put together explain well what this vision was “Thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman,” set this Habakkuk, “and let him declare what he seeth. And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed: and he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: and, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen.” This the watchman tells God. “And God answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. O my threshing, and the corn of my floor.” God sets him upon the watch-tower in a vision, and he seeth all sorts of creatures come with tidings that Babylon is fallen, that God hath executed judgment upon these Chaldeans. All bring tidings that Babylon is fallen, the Chaldeans are destroyed. So here in this, when he comes to declare this vision. It is expressed in [verses 5–8](#), “Because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people: shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall

spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein." This is the vision God gave him concerning the Chaldeans. Let them spoil the people for a season, the watchman upon the tower sees, and tidings come unto him that Babylon is fallen, is fallen, the Chaldeans are destroyed by the nations whom they had destroyed and pillaged; because they enlarged their desire like hell and the grave, and nothing could satisfy them until they should gather all nations unto them. This is the vision. In the midst of the greatest distresses, there is a vision of the destruction of all Christ's enemies and the enemies of the church sufficiently recorded; and after a while he will declare the accomplishment of this vision, when we shall see chariots coming, one providence after another, declaring God is executing vengeance against Babylon, [and] the Chaldeans.

Then we have the adjuncts of this vision, which I will but name:— 1. It is *certain*: "Write it." It is a certain vision. 2. It is *evident*: "Make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." 3. It is *determined*: "The vision is yet for an appointed time; "you must not cause it to make haste. 4. That there will be a *great many interposition*, that will cause men to fear this vision will never be accomplished: "Though it tarry, wait for it; at the end it shall speak, and not lie." Men will think it is but a false vision, that it will lie; but wait, for it will not tarry beyond its appointed time.

I could take observations from these adjuncts concerning the destruction of the adversaries of the church, but I shall say nothing to them, because there is something else I would speak unto.

Secondly, Habakkuk may be considered not only as a public minister of the church, but as a *private believer*; and thence we may learn three or four things from his deportment in this case, as he was a private believer.

1. In all that we have to do with God, we may justly fear and justly expect that we shall be reprov'd by him. Habakkuk had had dealings with God, and saith he, "Now I will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd." Pray remember it, I say, in all wherein we have to do with God we may justly fear that we shall be reprov'd, that he will reprove us.

Consider ourselves as men, poor creatures, consider ourselves as sinful men, we have reason to expect reproof from God.

Consider ourselves as men: [Job iv. 17-19](#), "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?" If God chargeth his very angels with folly, that is, an unanswerableness unto his infinite holiness and wisdom, — what can poor mortal men expect, that dwell in houses of clay, that are crushed before the moth? Therefore, upon that very consideration, when Abraham spake unto God, [Gen. xviii. 27](#), "Behold," saith he, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and



ashes;” — ‘Let not God be angry that I, who am but dust and ashes, speak unto thee.’ We may upon this consideration, but much more upon the consideration that we are sinful men, expect God will reprove us.

We may refer the grounds whence we should be in a continual expectation of reproof from God unto these three heads:—

(1.) The consideration of God’s own holiness. This ground the prophet lays down, [Hab. i. 13](#), ‘“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity;” and therefore I must consider what I shall say when I am reproved.’ Such is the infinite purity and holiness of God, that we cannot expect but that we shall fall under reproof when he comes to deal with us. The reason why men think they shall not be reproved by God is, because they think God is such an one as themselves, having no regard to the holiness of God. But saith God, ‘I will reprove thee, and manifest myself to be a holy God.’

(2.) We may justly expect to be reproved, because of the defilement that is in the best of our duties, Poor Habakkuk here was a great wrestler with God, yet he had such defilements cleaving to the best of his duties that he might justly expect to be reproved by God upon that account. [Isa. lxiv. 6](#), “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;” and if, in any thing we have to do with God, the best righteousness we have is but as filthy rags, may we not expect to be reproved?

(3.) We have reason to fear upon the account of sin: [Ps. cxxx. 3](#), “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities,” what is done amiss, we have done so many things amiss, “who shall stand?” So [Ps. cxliii. 2](#), “Enter not into judgment with thy servant;” he deprecates God’s reproofing of him: “for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

I say, it is good to apprehend upon all these accounts, of God’s holiness, the imperfection of our best duties, the multiplication of our sins, that God will reprove us. Fear always. Blessed is the man that doth so.

2. Observe from hence, also, that it is good to be well prepared with an answer to give unto God when we are reproved. Saith he, “I will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.” It is good to be prepared with an answer to give unto God. Job thought so: [Chap. xxiii. 3, 4](#), “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.” You know who was reproved, and had nothing to answer; — the poor creature that came in to the wedding, as we all do. Our profession is our coming in to the wedding. Christ comes and reproves him: “Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?” The poor creature had nothing to answer, — he was speechless. What then? “Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.” If we have nothing to answer when God reproves us, that will be the issue with every one of us.

And there is a fourfold evil answer that men betake themselves unto under God’s reproof:—



(1.) There is Adam's answer. "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Men think to answer God by palliating excuses. God will reprove them, and they will make palliating excuses in their own hearts. 'It is not so and so; there was this and that occasion of it.' This answer will not stand.

(2.) There is Jonah's answer when he was reprov'd. "Doest thou well to be angry?" saith God to Jonah. He tenderly reproveth him. "Yea, I do well to be angry, even unto death." Men [there are] that, under God's reproofs, will justify themselves in all their sins; like the man in [Deut. xxix. 19](#), who when he heareth the words of the curse yet saith, "I shall have peace, though I add drunkenness to thirst;" — 'Notwithstanding all these reproofs of God, I do well to go on in the way wherein I am.' This answer also will not stand.

(3.) There is Israel's answer: [Ps. lxxviii. 34–36](#), "When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer." But what then? "Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues." False professors, upon God's reproofs, they humble themselves temporarily, and engage in false promises of reformation. This is the common answer mankind give to God's reproofs; but this answer will not pass when comes to reprove.

(4.) There is men's answer at the last day: [Matt. vii. 22](#), "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" God comes and reproveth them, and they plead their duties, their works. It will not do. "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity," [verse 23](#).

These are the common answers men, in their souls, and consciences, and spirits, give to God, when he reproveth them. Either they excuse themselves, with Adam; or justify themselves, with Jonah; or promise better things, with false, flattering Israel; or plead what good things they have done. All these things will fail us; which leads me to the last observation.

3. There is but one answer that will hold, but one good answer that is to be made unto God when we are reprov'd by him; and that is this, — free justification in the blood of Jesus Christ. What shall I answer when I am reprov'd? Truly this, "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by fairly." And the apostle, in three or four several places, doth prove that this resolution of the prophet intends faith, that is the means of our free justification, in the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the great and only answer poor sinful souls can make unto God when reprov'd.

I will a little open it unto you, by showing you how God reproveth us, and whence it is that this is our only answer.

God reproveth us four ways:— (1.) In general, by *the curse of law*: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This



is God's great reproof of all sinners. Under this reproof we all lie. Truly, he that cannot answer this reproof of God will be cast out as a speechless, self-condemned person. (2.) God reproofs us *by particular applications of the word of the law*, finding out our special sins; as when the prophet came to David, and told him, "Thou art the man." When in the preaching of the word there is application made unto the souls of men, that they are the persons that are guilty, that is a peculiar reproof of God. The general reproof is by the curse of the law, the sanction of the law; the particular reproof is by the application of the word to the conscience. (3.) God reproofs us *in general judgments*: "O Lord, when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." All the dispensations of God that are dreadful and terrible in the world, we ought every one to take them as reproofs for sin, and not put the evil day far from us, nor think there are not any calls of God in them towards us. (4.) God reproofs us *by particular afflictions and trials*, — chastisements in our persons, in our relations, in things that befall us in this world. The end of them is to reprove us. The first language wherewith affliction upon a person or in a family opens its mouth in conscience is, 'Thou art a sinner;' as the woman, when her child died, said unto the prophet, "O thou man of God, art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" [1 Kings xvii. 18](#). The brethren of Joseph, as soon as they fell into trouble, said, 'God hath called our sin to remembrance.' One great end of affliction is to reprove for sin.



Now, I say there is no other answer, when God thus reproofs in conscience, to be given, but only the plea of pardon of sin and free justification of our souls by the blood of Jesus Christ. The apostle tells us so, [Rom. iii. 19](#), "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." God gives reproofs by the law; what is the issue? Every mouth is stopped; all the world becomes guilty before God. Must they lie always so? is there no answer to be given to God? no relief? 'No,' saith he; 'but we are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," ' [verse 24](#). Here the mouth of the sinner is opened again, here is something for him to plead. But take him by himself under God's reproofs by the law, and every mouth is stopped, and that to eternity, and that with a sense of guilt; all the world becomes guilty before God.

The reasons hereof are these: There is no other answer, 1. Because in every other answer we should attempt the soul is lifted up. The prophet doth distribute all things that can be said to God when we are reproofed under these two heads; — one of them, "whose soul is lifted up, and that is not upright in him;" and the other pleads that "the just shall live by faith." There is an elation of mind, a lifting up of soul, which God abhors, in any other answer we can give him when we are reproofed, whatever it be. This is the only answer, 2. Because, in truth, the Lord Jesus Christ hath really made this answer for us. The whole charge from God consists in the curse of the law, and in the application of it unto our souls in particular. If Jesus Christ hath answered to both these, where shall we have another answer? He hath

answered the curse of the law, taken away the curse by “being made a curse for us,” [Gal. iii. 13](#); hath answered whatever the law required. “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” God reproofs not but by the law. He speaks in the command and curse of the law, and reproofs in both. Christ hath answered in both. He was made a curse, and answered that reproof. He fulfilled the righteousness of it, and answered that reproof, paying that which he took not. God reproofs us in the particular application of the law to our souls for our sins Why, God hath made all our sins to meet upon him, [Isa. liii. 6](#): which is the second reason why this is the only answer, — because, indeed, Christ hath made this answer for us. 3. Because in all cases wherein we are reproofed by God, Christ hath undertaken to be our advocate: [1 John ii. 1](#), “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” It is upon the account of sin that we are reproofed. God comes to reprove us, and we have set ourselves upon the watch-tower to see what we can answer him; for God must be answered when he reproofs. Why, we have an Advocate. An advocate appears for a man, and pleads his cause. Shall we take the plea of Christ out of his mouth, and say, ‘We can answer better for ourselves?’ I think it is our wisdom to trust to our advocate. And he pleads his own righteousness; for he is a propitiation for us. He pleads the atonement unto all God’s reproofs. When a man pleads nothing but pardon of sin through free justification by the blood of Christ, he saith nothing to God but what Jesus Christ pleads for him. The last reason is, 4. Because indeed we have nothing else to plead, no other answer to give. Our mouths are stopped, we are become guilty, and have not [any thing wherewith] to answer any reproof of God. We are apt to betake ourselves for relief unto excuses and promises, of what we are, and have done, or will do; but these answers will not do. I might easily go over the consideration of all we are apt to consider, our works before justification and after justification, to see if any of them will answer God when he comes to require a perfect righteousness of us, and to reprove us for every sin. What else will answer, what can we return else, but this righteousness of Christ? “The just shall live by faith.”

[As] for the use of it, it should keep our souls in an abhorrency of all those doctrines which pretend other pleas before God for our justification, that would make our own faith, our own obedience, our own works, to be the condition of our justification; that is, to make them to be our plea when we come to answer God when we are reproofed of him. Do we think we can do such things when God charges upon us the curse of the law? Will our faith, our obedience, our works, be an answer to God? ‘Nay, Lord, we have done thus and thus; we have obeyed in sincerity; we have performed these and those duties.’ Shall we trust to it? Will the men of these doctrines trust to it themselves, when God comes indeed to deal with them? Can their hands be strong or their hearts endure upon these principles, when indeed God shall deal with them? when God speaks in the application of the law to their souls?





Besides the great contempt cast therein upon Christ, we will not allow him to be our advocate. They will soon find their hearts cannot endure when they come to die, or when conscience is brought under a sense of his displeasure for sin.

A second use of it is for instruction unto ourselves, that we should always have this answer in readiness. We know not how soon God may come with special reproofs unto us. Truly, besides those general ways, in the law and in the preaching of it, God hath particular applicatory ways, and works in the world in judgments and afflictions; and how soon he may enter into our consciences we know not. It is good to have an answer ready. And truly we see what the answer is, 'Lord, we are poor, lost, undone creatures. If thou wilt deal with us, we cannot answer thee for one of a thousand; if thou markest what is done amiss, none can stand.' 'What, then, have you to plead, or are you speechless?' 'No, Lord; yet there is a plea left, this great plea, "The just shall live by faith." Thou hast appointed a new way of interesting us in justification, by the way of believing in Christ; and that plea our souls advance.' Have this plea in readiness when sin is charged upon your souls and consciences, in all your troubles and fears. Nothing else will answer God when he reproves.

I thought to have showed you what is required of us that we may be able to manage this plea aright, that it be not presumption in us; as, a stable self-condemnation without reservation, a prospect and view of the atonement made by Christ, and casting ourselves upon him to undertake for us.

## **Sermon IV. Spiritual strength; — its reality, decay, and renovation.**

Preached January 9, 1672.

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” — [Isa. xl. 31.](#)

The occasion of the words arises from the complaint of Jacob and Israel, [verse 27](#), “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.” It was with respect unto the dark dispensations of God’s providence towards the whole church, the church in general that this complaint was made.

I shall not stay to open the particulars; but as it is the complaint of the church in general, upon the account of God’s dispensation in general, so it is the condition of particular believers, of many believers, internal and external, spiritual and temporal, that they may be brought to that state wherein, through their weakness and unbelief, they may make this complaint.

God gives an answer hereunto, [verse 28](#), “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” He proposeth his own infinite and glorious properties and excellencies for the relief of his people. When all other considerations fail them (as there is a time and season when nothing will relieve us but that which is every way infinite), it overbears and overwhelms them.

But in the following verses, and in that which I have read, he gives them to understand where the great mistake lay. They thought it was trouble that arose for want of kindness and evidence of kindness from God, when indeed their trouble arose all for want of spiritual strength in themselves; and therefore God speaks not unto them of further manifestations of his love and grace to deliver them out of those straits, but he speaks to them of giving them more strength, more grace, whereby they may be able to manage themselves better under it. All our troubles and all our despondencies, they are not from want of sufficiency in God to relieve us, they are not from the greatness of our troubles and temptations; but they are all of them from the weakness of our faith and our grace. We think otherwise, but it is well if we could learn that that is the true state of things with us. When Peter was coming upon the water to Christ, the winds began to rise, and the waves to run high; and Peter cried out, “Lord, save me.” And now, if you should have asked Peter why he doubted, he would have answered, ‘Because of the greatness of the danger,’ — because the winds and waves of the sea were against him. Christ lets him know it was otherwise: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” It was not because of the greatness of his danger, but because of the littleness and weakness of his faith, that he was put into that condition of doubting. “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God.” ‘Why,’ saith



the Lord, 'you must have more strength. Therefore that is it which God promises in these words, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." And I think these things lie plain in it, which I shall but little more than name:— First, That all believers have a spiritual strength. Secondly, That this spiritual strength of believers is subject to decays, to weaknesses. And, Thirdly, That the way to renew this spiritual strength and to increase it is by waiting upon God. And then we may, in a word or two, show you what it is to wait upon God, and how we do renew and increase our spiritual strength thereby.

First, It is plain in the text that all believers have a spiritual strength: "They shall renew their strength." I acknowledge the word "their" is not in the original, but the very phrase carries it, "They shall renew strength;" that is, their own spiritual strength. Who hath a spiritual strength by nature? We have no strength, we have no power, no ability to live the life of God, nor to do any thing that tends thereunto: [Rom. v. 6](#), "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly;" and till we are made partakers of the benefits and effects of the death of Christ, we are ungodly and without strength; we have no strength at all No unbeliever hath any strength.

But now all that do believe, they have spiritual strength: [2 Pet. i. 3](#), "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue;" that is, whatsoever is required to lead a godly life is given unto believers by the divine power of God, a power that hath given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, — strength to enable us to live, and godliness for a holy and godly life and conversation. There are expressions to that purpose in other places: [Eph. iii. 16](#), "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Through the Spirit, the Spirit of God, that is, the author of all grace, he strengtheneth us with might, gives might and power. And the apostle affirms the same again, [Col. i. 11](#), "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering." And though there is a principle, a seed of grace, a habit of holiness, inlaid in the heart and mind of all believers, enabling them to live unto God, a sufficiency of grace for that end and purpose, yet so as [that] what they do by virtue thereof is not done by themselves but by the grace of God. As our apostle said, "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me;" giving him strength, power, and ability to go through with all those dangerous and laborious duties wherein he was engaged in the work of the gospel. We have no strength by nature, we are dead in trespasses and sins; but when quickened by the Spirit of God, he gives us this spiritual strength and power whereby we are enabled to live to God.

Secondly, This strength of believers, which is the actings of the principle of grace and holiness in them, is subject unto decays. "Be watchful," saith Christ in the counsel he gives



unto the church of Sardis, [Rev. iii. 2](#), “and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.” There was a decay in grace, a decay in spiritual strength, wherein their faith and love, in all the fruits of them, and works, were ready to die.



It would be worth the while, had I time, to consider the many ways whereby our spiritual strength and principle of grace, wherewith our natures are inlaid in our conversion unto God, are weakened. It is principally by our own negligence, by powerful corruptions and temptations, by cares of the world and the business of it, by want of attending unto the frame of our hearts, and not keeping our own vineyard. There is spiritual strength. This spiritual strength is subject to decay.

Thirdly, How shall we renew this spiritual strength? how shall we increase it? It is greatly incumbent upon us to be daily increasing our spiritual strength, to be renewing it, to be strengthening the things that are ready to die. All the losses we are at and troubles we meet with, they are all for want of well discharging this duty, because we do not take care to renew our spiritual strength. The way whereby it is to be done is by waiting upon God. Would you be strong, lively, vigorous, active Christians? would you have power to perform holy duties, to resist temptations, be fruitful in the world, be cheerful in yourselves? would you have corruptions die, and wither, and be prevailed against? You will say, ‘We would have all these things.’ Why, the way is plain; — it is to wait upon God.

What is it to wait upon God? How is it that we may increase our spiritual strength by waiting upon God?

There are three or four things in waiting upon God that make up waiting; for it is a peculiar kind and work of faith that is called *waiting*: and if you will read the Scriptures, you will find that there is not a duty or exercise of faith which hath greater or more precious promises annexed to it than this of waiting.

1. The first thing in waiting is *looking unto God*, eyeing of God. So David expresses it in the Psalms: “As the eyes, of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God.” God expresses it by “looking:” Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth.” “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee,” saith David, “and will look up.”

Now, this looking unto God, which is the foundation of waiting, is the fixing of the soul towards God; as when we look upon a thing, we make it the object of our consideration, and bend our thoughts towards it. If we would wait upon God, we must be, in the actings of our faith, looking towards him; that is, we must consider his goodness, the excellency of Christ, his promises, and his truth and faithfulness in them, and his power. We must be in the contemplation of these things if we intend to wait upon God.

2. The second thing is *patience in looking*. Sometimes it is called “patient waiting,” waiting patiently for the Lord, not to faint, not to be weary. Many a one will cast a look to-



wards God, but as quickly weary; this is not waiting. But he that will wait on God is to do it in patience, against all discouragements and oppositions that may arise from our own hearts and temptations. When God comes not in as we desire, nor such a progress is made as we would have, yet if we look unto God, that is patient waiting.

3. There is *expectation* too, and this is the life and soul of waiting. Waiting is often expressed in the Scriptures by “silence:” “My soul is silent to God;” “which silence is a quiet waiting to hear what God will answer. It is a wondrous sorry waiting on God when we do not expect something from him. To come together in the performance of this or the like duties without expectation of receiving something from God, it is the way to go as we came, without strength renewed or increased. We come to a duty and go from it at the same rate, when we have no expectation of receiving from God. Where there is no expectation, there is no waiting. Look to God with expectation to receive things suitable to what we expect, and then we shall see his infinite bounty and goodness. This is waiting on God.

The way wherein we exercise this grace is by *prayer*. I do not put it wholly upon it; for acting of faith, quiet submission of soul, constant looking up and expectation in a course of walking before God, make up a great part of this duty; but the solemn discharge of this duty is by prayer, wherein we act all these things. We ought to pray always, and to continue in prayer; and we are the strangest kind of creatures upon the earth if we abide in this duty without expectation from God. A man that looks for nothing from God had best never pray more. In prayer we are to exercise this grace of waiting upon God. They that thus wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

Whence is it that the renewing and increase of spiritual strength depend upon our waiting on God? There is not any thing in this world wherein we are more concerned, next to the securing our interest in Jesus Christ, than this one thing of renewing our strength, our spiritual strength. Especially it is of great concern unto us now when it is a time, as hath been confessed unto God, wherein there are great decays, visible decays, in most professors, and inward decays I fear in all. Therefore it is our duty to consider how we may improve this great duty, for this end, to renew strength, to strengthen the things that are ready to die, that you and I that are weak may be strong, that are dead may be quickened and live, that our graces may be lively and flourishing. Saith the Lord, ‘They that wait upon me shall renew their strength.’ They shall do so upon a double assurance:—

First, Upon a moral assurance, by reason of the faithfulness of God in his covenant. God hath promised it, and we may really believe it because of God’s promise: ‘They that wait upon me shall renew their strength.’ If we wait upon God in that way he accepts and approves, he is faithful to do it. And upon this account we may truly say, and do believe it, that no person under heaven waits on God as he ought, but God doth renew spiritual strength unto him, doth revive his graces, strengthen his faith and love, and enable him to obedience, as he hath promised.



Secondly, It is the way that God hath appointed for us to draw supplies of spiritual grace and strength from him. Our judgment and our dignity are not like those of the Chaldeans, that proceeded of themselves, [Hab. i. 7](#); but our judgment and dignity are of another, — God in Christ. All is from Christ; — our strength and honour are all from another. There must be a way, therefore, whereby we may derive strength from another, since it is not from ourselves. Now, this is the way that God hath appointed for us to derive supplies of spiritual strength from Jesus Christ, in whom are all the springs and stores of it; it is by waiting upon God in the ways before mentioned, — in the way of looking, of patience, of expectation on God in Christ, that he will perform his promise. God hath made this the way of communicating strength unto us, and deriving strength from Jesus Christ. ‘Abide in me,’ saith Christ: ‘if ye abide not in me, ye can do nothing; but if ye abide in me, ye shall be branches that shall be purged and bring forth fruit.’ Our abiding in Christ is by this exercising of faith upon God in Christ, whereby spiritual strength is renewed unto us.

I might speak of those things that are subordinate hereunto, because by this way of waiting upon God we mix his promises with faith, which God hath appointed; but I should then transgress my purpose and take up your time.

I have spoken these words to direct you and myself to the true use of this duty, that we have so frequent opportunities for, that none of us may rest in the work done, or satisfy ourselves that we have been at such a duty so often, so long, but improve it to its proper end, which is waiting on God in times of backsliding, that we may renew our strength; the consequence whereof is in the next words, ‘We shall then mount up with wings as eagles; we shall run, and not be weary; and we shall walk, and not faint.’

## **Sermon V. Holiness urged from the liability of all things to dissolution.**

Preached July 11, 1673.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” — [2 Pet. iii. 11](#).

My design is only to go over a few texts of Scripture that may give us light into that instruction which is wrapped up in these words, and a little, if it may be, whet it upon us.

It is not certain what is meant by “All these things,” whether all the things of the world, the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them; or whether it be the “all things,” the heavens and the earth, of an apostatized church, such as was the church of the Jews, at that time drawing nigh to a fiery destruction. I shall not detain you in discussing the difficulties of it. But that which I would leave with you from the words, and which without all doubt is in them, is this, that all things in and of the world are liable and obnoxious to a destructive dissolution. Our things, and other men’s things, the things of the nation, and the things of families, so far as they are in and of this world, are liable to a destructive dissolution.

And then there is this again, I am sure, in the words, that upon the near approach of great, destructive dissolutions, it is highly incumbent upon all professors of the gospel to be signal in holiness and godliness, or assuredly they will not escape the pressure and evil of that destructive dissolution.

I pray let us believe that there is nothing in this world, but only the gospel of Christ, and the interest of Christ, and the grace and mercy of God in the covenant, but it is liable to a destructive dissolution. It is the law that hath passed upon all things since the entrance of sin. All alterations tend to dissolution, and all things in this world are put into a course of change. Things alter every day, and the end of all that alteration is dissolution. Our relations, they must all be dissolved. There is a dissolution lies at the door between you and your estates, between you and your wives, between you and your children. And it is not a perfective dissolution, it is a destructive dissolution; for this dissolution ends it: and it lies at the door of us all, and every day leads us towards it. But there is a gathering up of the spirit of all things into a consistency in Christ Jesus, [Eph. i. 10](#). God hath reconciled all, and gathered all as the first-fruit and spirit of the whole into one head; that is, into Christ. What is gathered up into him never changes, it is obnoxious to no dissolution. Whatever is gathered up into Christ, be it never so little, if all the world should set themselves to dissolve it, they can never do it, — no, nor the gates of hell to boot; and whatever is not gathered up into Christ, if all the world should combine to preserve it, it shall never do it, — it will come to its dissolution. [Ps. lxxv. 3](#) are the words of Christ: “The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved: I bear up the pillars of it. Selah.” ‘Let there be a mark,’ saith he, ‘set upon that,



their being dissolved.’ “Are,” that is only, being obnoxious to dissolution. They have nothing in themselves to give them a consistency or a stability. Christ is pleased for a season to put some pillars in it.

The conclusion made from thence is, that there is a great deal of madness and folly in all men, to pride themselves in any thing here below; as in the next words, “I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck.” All pride and elation of mind from the things here below is mere folly and madness, and from want of considering that in their principle they are all dissolvable, and nothing stands but what Christ gives a pillar to. You may see the law of this, [Rom. viii. 20](#), “The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.” [Verse 22](#), “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” The “creature” in one place is the “whole creation” in the other; and by the entrance of sin it is brought into this state and condition, is “subject unto vanity.” “Vanity,” that is, to changes and alterations, which will issue in a destructive dissolution. It groans for deliverance. Every thing you see in the world of order, of power, they are all but endeavours in the creation to free itself from this state of vanity, to preserve itself as long as it can from dissolution; and they are but vain endeavours, for there is a dissolution waiteth for it. ‘Some things will be excepted, surely, from this dissolution. It may reach our small concernments, but the heavens and the earth, they will stand firm; there is no danger of those more noble and glorious parts of the creation.’ Why, truly, if there were not, yet as long as our interest in them is subject to it, we are not much concerned; but there is [an end] to them also: [Ps. cii. 25, 26](#), “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands.” What will he conclude from thence? ‘Therefore they shall endure? It is quite otherwise; “They shall perish, but thou shalt endure,” are the next words: “yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.” A man would have thought from that great preface, “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands,” the conclusion would certainly have been, ‘Then they should endure.’ No, saith the psalmist; “They shall perish.” God only shall endure, and an especial interest in God only shall endure; as I shall show you afterward from those words.

Go from the heavens and the earth to the inhabitants of them; the inhabitants of the earth, see what is their state and condition: [Isa. xl. 6–8](#), “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?” Something God would have taken notice of. ‘Cry out. What shall I cry?’ “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.” All is grass, and all is but grass. It is twice affirmed that all is grass, and it is twice affirmed that all withereth. It may be green and flourishing for a little season; but the wind shall come over it, and shall cause it all to wither.





“All flesh,” all men living; all their powers, all their honours, all their riches, all their beauty, all their glory, all their wisdom, all their gifts and parts, it is all “flesh” and all “grass,” and all liable to a destructive dissolution, that lies at the door.

‘Ay, but things in the world may come into such a combination as that they may be preserved from any danger of such a dissolution.’ No; [Ezek. xxi. 26, 27](#), “Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is.” One dissolution shall come upon the neck of another, until it all issue in Jesus Christ. ‘I will overturn it,’ saith God. ‘But men will set it up again.’ ‘I will overturn it again,’ saith God, ‘perfectly overturn it. All men’s endeavours shall but turn things from one destructive issue to another, till all issue in one whose right it is.’ The Jews have a way of remembering things, by a word that one way or other shall direct unto them. Truly, God hath strangely, wrapped up all this mystery in one word: [Heb. xii. 27](#), “This word, saith he, “Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. It is wrapped up in this one word. Carry this about with you as a note of remembrance, that God in dealing about those things hath put a “once more upon them; which is a sign they must come to a dissolution. It signifies that they are shaking, movable things, and must be gone. Remember God hath said concerning every thing, except only the unshaken things of the kingdom of Christ, God hath said of them’ “Once more,” and they shall have an end.’ That mark is set upon every thing but the things of Christ.

‘If we would look about us we might consider what would preserve any thing in this world from a destructive dissolution. A great consent and agreement would do it. Nations come to be broken and dissolved by differences one with another, and among themselves. If there were but a good consent and agreement, things would stand long enough, at least to the day of judgment.’ — I know not but that men were wonderfully well agreed before the flood, they all went the same way; yet that did not preserve the world; God marred the world he had made. They agreed so well, they would not destroy the world with their own hands; but God had a way to bring the world to a destructive dissolution.

‘But where an empire is mighty and strong, where there is force and power, we need fear no dissolution there.’ — Pray what is become of that part of Nebuchadnezzar’s image that was like iron, and broke every thing in pieces? what is become of the Roman empire, that dashed the world in pieces at its pleasure? It is brought to a destructive dissolution; it is brought to the dust, and that dust scattered away before the wind.

‘A long-continued title, a long prescription of time in the same state of things, certainly *that* will secure us from the fear of a dissolution.’ — There is not an empire at this day in the world that hath had a life so long as man had before the flood; and if a prescription of eight or nine hundred years could not preserve men from the grave, will it preserve empires,



kingdoms, and nations, when the time of their dissolution is come? God's own institutions, that were not immediately managed in the hands of Christ, were all liable to a dissolution, and had it, that we may be sure to know that there was nothing but should be dissolved, except only what is managed immediately in the hands of Christ. The Lord dissolved all his own institutions, all that glorious worship that he had instituted and appointed under the law.

Let us see *our* concernment herein, and what use we may make of it. Truly this, that if all our own things, and all things wherein we are concerned in this world, — our lives, our relations, our enjoyments, our interest in public things, — if they are all obnoxious to such a destructive dissolution, that waits for them every moment, certainly it is our wisdom to look after an interest in Him that is unchangeable, and in immutable, unchangeable things. Two of the places I mentioned before give us this direction. [Ps. cii.](#), the psalmist speaks first of his own condition: [Verses 23, 24](#), “He weakened my strength in the way; he shortened my days. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.” He had apprehensions of his own frailty and mortality, and that in the appearing midst of his days. He was ready to sink and to fail away. He looked to the creation: [Verse 26](#), “They shall perish,” saith he, “all of them shall wax old like a garment.” Whereunto doth he betake himself then? [Verses 27, 28](#), “Thou art the same,” saith he, “and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.” In an apprehension of the mutable condition of himself and all things wherein he was concerned, he betakes himself unto an interest in the immutability of God. There is nothing firm, stable, unchangeable, but God himself: “But thou art the same.” There is nothing else the same; we are not the same the following moment as the moment before; nothing is the same, but only God: “Thou art the same.” What advantage will ensue hereon? ‘In the midst of all these changes, “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.”’ Where there is an interest in the immutable God, in the midst of all changes whereunto we are obnoxious there is stability and eternal continuance for us and for our seed. The other place also gives the same direction: [Isa. xl. 7, 8](#), “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.” What shall we do, then? “But the word of our God shall stand for ever,” saith he; that is, as the apostle Peter explains it, [1 Pet. i. 25](#), “The word of the gospel which is preached unto you.” In this fading condition of all things, if you would come to any thing of stability, it must be in the stability of the word of God, that abides for ever. That contains the whole of what I have been speaking unto you, that there is a destructive dissolution waits for every thing, but only the kingdom and gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Lord keep us from needing that reproof which the psalmist uses to some hereon: “I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly.” But can there be any thing more foolish for us than to fix and set our hearts and minds upon that which God hath told us is grass? Your



estates, your parts, your wisdom, your wives and children, are grass; they all wither away, decay, and die. Yourselves are grass: “Surely,” saith he, “the people is grass.” Let us not be so foolish as to set our hearts upon those things that are withering and decaying; let us not please ourselves. We have security in nothing, when we return to our habitations, but this one thing, “The word of our God shall stand for ever.” Wives, children, husbands, may be dead, our houses may be fired and all consumed. There is only this, the word of God, that abides for ever; the promises of God fail not; everything else is obnoxious to dissolution, please yourselves with them as much as you will. Men are apt to have strange contrivances to satisfy themselves in other things, [Ps. xlix](#). The men the psalmist there speaks of, he gives this account of them: “They see wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.” They have convictions upon them, that as to their own persons, all their interest in present things is but perishing: for they see wise men and fools all die; there is no man but dies, be he of what condition he will. But they have contrivances to secure themselves another way; and this overpowers them, that they dare not speak one word that there is a happiness to be had in those outward, earthly things. But “their inward thought is” (they have a reserve yet), “their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names,” [verse 11](#). Though they cannot continue those things to themselves, yet they will continue them in their posterity: ‘Posterity from generation to generation, they shall enjoy all my wealth, and all I have laboured for, hoarded up, and preserved. What if I do die, seeing all must die, the wise man and the fool alike, yet posterity of generations to come shall enjoy it.’ That is their “inward thought;” that is it wherewith they relieve themselves against the open convictions they have that all things here, are uncertain and not worth the setting the mind upon. What judgment doth the Holy Ghost make of it, [verse 17](#)? Alas, poor man! he is little concerned in all that comes after him, for “When he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him.” The meaning is this, he hath no manner of concernment in all that is above ground. If he could carry his riches and his glory with him, it were something; but as for all that he leaves behind, he is no more concerned in it than any common man that lives upon the face of the earth: “He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.”

This should teach us, — and it were a good lesson if we could learn it this day, — to secure an interest in unchangeable things; about which you need not be careful or solicitous, as you are about all things you enjoy. I know you are so; — don’t deny it. There are none of you so negligent: careless, and stupid, but you may take a prospect of such near-approaching dissolutions as must make you solicitous about all your enjoyments. It were better, then, we should lay out the whole of our concernment in those things that cannot be shaken or moved, — that never are obnoxious to a destructive dissolution. “The word of our God shall stand for ever;” the things of the kingdom of Christ are unshaken things. Mercy coming



from an everlasting covenant to his children and their seed shall be blessed salvation. Though “all these things shall be dissolved,” God is “the same.” That is for the first observation.

The next observation is this, That upon the approach of a destructive dissolution, it is required of all professors to be signal in holiness: “Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”

I take here an approaching, destructive dissolution not to be that which attends all our designs upon the common account, but upon the account of the judgments of God that are in the world, the judgments of God that come upon people and nations. And I would speak to two things:— 1. What are the evidences of the approach of a destructive dissolution; 2. What are the reasons from thence unto signal holiness and godliness.

First, What are the signs and tokens of an approaching dissolution?

First, There is one in general that never misses; I mean this, that we have no instance in Scripture that ever God brought a destruction upon any place or people where that did not go before it, — and if we can free ourselves from that, we may free ourselves from the fear of an approaching dissolution, — and that is, *security*. The rule of all great, destructive judgments is laid down in [1 Thess. v. 3](#), “When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” You never read of any people or place destroyed with overturning judgments, but it is remarked before their approach that they were secure; though we do not rightly understand this security. There is no security but such as a woman may have that is with child, that yet may be surprised with the hour of travail. It is not every thought and apprehension of danger, every conjecture, every talk of it, that will free men from being in such a security as opens the door to great judgments and destructions. Things are so evident sometimes that men cannot but think, that unless a miracle interpose judgments must come; but yet they come “as travail upon a woman with child.” Therefore there are three or four things wherein this security doth consist:—

1. It consists in a general, earnest intension upon the occasions of life and the temptations of life. When a nation is divided into these two sorts, that some are extraordinarily intent upon the occasions of life, and some are extraordinarily compliant with the temptations of life, that nation is under universal security. It was so before the flood. Our Saviour tells us of some of them, [Matt. xxiv. 38](#), that “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage;” they were earnestly intent upon the occasions of life. And some of them were given up to a compliance with the temptations of life. Surfeiting, drunkenness, violence, the earth was filled withal. Let us now think what we will, talk what we will, if a nation may be distributed into these two parts, — one part over-intent upon the occasions of this life, and the other over-compliant with the temptations of life, sin and wickedness, — that nation, that people, is secure.

2. When, upon a prospect of the danger of approaching destructive dissolutions, men betake themselves to any other preparations or provisions than unto the proper remedy and help, there is security. In *Isa. xxii.* there is a great and terrible vision concerning a destructive dissolution coming upon Jerusalem: *Verse 2*, “Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle;” — that is, not yet. The day cometh: *Verse 5*, “It is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains.” And in *verses 8–11*, he tells you what provision was made to avoid this destruction and desolation that was coming upon them: “He discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool.” Those were not a secure people, surely, who took all this pains, were at all this charge, made all this provision, to prevent destruction from coming upon them. There are a people in the world who can see destruction lie at the door, and make no manner of preparation to keep it off from them. But these people were secure; and the reason is given: *Verse 11*, “But ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.” They had respect to other things to give relief, and not unto God, who alone ought to have been looked unto. We are not rulers or governors of nations, but poor and private persons. Let us examine our hearts what provision we are most apt to make against a destructive dissolution. Have we not hopes and reserves that we may escape? — this way and that way we may do it; it may come here, and not there? This is a sign of security.



3. A people are then secure when God’s warnings among them are despised. I am persuaded that, such is the goodness and tenderness of God to mankind, so little is he delighted in bringing sore judgments upon them, to their ruin and destruction, he scarce ever destroyed the most wicked and idolatrous nation, — those that knew nothing of him now of Christ, — but he gave them some providential warnings of it, that might make them look about them and consider where they were. It is apparent in story. He dealt so with all the heathen of old. There came no great destruction upon any nation but there were providential warnings went before. When these warnings are despised, that people are secure; as *Isa. xxvi. 11*, “Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see.” The lifting up of the hand is a giving notice that there is a stroke ready to come. And many lesser judgments are but God’s lifting up of his hand. Though they are strokes in themselves, yet, comparatively with what follows, they are but the lifting up of his hand, — they are but warnings. “Lord,” saith he, “when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see.” “They will not see: but they shall see;” — how is that? “They will not see while thy hand is only lifted up; but they



shall see when thy hand is come down.’ While under warnings, they will not see; but when warnings are executed, they shall see. May be we will not see in the plague, fire, sword; but when something else comes, many shall see then. When shall they see? ‘They shall see when “the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.” “Fire of thine enemies;” that is, it may be, the fire wherewith God will destroy his enemies. May be it is, when the fiery rage of a people that are enemies to God, shall, by the just judgment of God, be let out upon them. Oftentimes, if God have a nation in the world that is more an enemy to him than any other nation of the world, he will make use of that nation for the execution of corrective or destructive judgments upon others. No nation under heaven were at such enmity unto God as the Babylonians were. How they first began an open apostasy from God, and maintained an idolatrous opposition to him all their days, is known. Yet God would use the Babylonians. And sometimes a nation, by atheism, idolatry, and cursed persecution, may make themselves meet to be God’s instrument for the punishing of others before themselves be utterly destroyed. God’s hand hath been lifted up in these nations. I need not make application. It is well if the best of us all have been shaken from our security by God’s warnings. In truth, brethren, it doth not appear so to be, but that there is security enough yet left to let in a destroying dissolution upon us.

4. The highest thing wherein this security acts itself is by scoffing at warnings given from the word of God: [2 Pet. iii. 3](#), “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.” The last days of churches, when they are drawing towards their period, are always filled with this sort of persons. And it must be so. In the last days of any church-state that has had, it may be, some good reputation of life, and has been of use, there shall abound among them a sort of men that shall be scoffers, ‘Ye may know them,’ saith the apostle, ‘by this, they walk after their hearts’ lusts.’ They have no rule but their lusts; they give up themselves wholly to their lusts. ‘Well, but what do they scoff at?’ He tells you in [verse 4](#), “Where is the promise of his coming?” say they. ‘What promise of his coming?’ Why, truly, the poor persecuted Christians had been letting them know that Christ would come and take vengeance on them for all their bloody cruelty and persecution; and the time is delayed, and they prosper, walking after their lusts, and at length they fall a scoffing, “Where is the promise of his coming?” — for it was such a coming as God came in when he destroyed the old world with a flood. ‘But scoff you while you will,’ say they, ‘a fiery destruction will come upon you.’ When leading persons shall be scoffers at the promised coming of Christ to visit his people, and take vengeance on his adversaries, that is the height of security.

Where some are intent upon the occasions of life, and some are given up to the temptations of life; where, in an apprehension of approaching judgments, our relief is not from God, and in God alone; where God’s warnings in his providence are not improved,

and where God's warnings from his word are despised; — there a people are secure, if God hath instructed us aright out of his word.

Why are a people to be thus secure? for, as I told you before, God doth not bring destruction ordinarily upon any but upon a secure people. One reason is taken from God, and another reason is taken from the devil.

1. God gives men up to security in a way of judiciary hardening of them. God hath now determined their destruction; but he will take his own time, way, and season.

But may not this work be diverted? and will it be accomplished? Saith God, 'I will take care for that.' [Isa. vi. 9–11](#), "Go, make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long?" how long shall they! be in this state and condition? "And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate." God brings them now under security judicially. It is not preaching, — it is not men's thundering from heaven; it is not sudden judgments, poverty, misery, distresses, fears; — nothing shall now awaken such a people. 'Make their heart fat, and their ears heavy.' 'How long?' 'Until the land be utterly desolate. But the time is not yet come, I must stay a little longer, to try and exercise my people's faith, patience, and obedience; and many other things I have to do: but this people shall not escape,' saith he. 'But if this judgment and the other judgment pass over, they will escape.' 'No,' saith God; 'I will make their heart fat, and their ears heavy, that they shall not hear, nor understand, until the land become desolate.'

A man that is not utterly stupid cannot sometimes but wonder and stand amazed whence it is that mankind should be so secure when judgments are compassing them round about. If the word of God be true, and any tokens of God's anger and displeasure are to be taken notice of, whence is it that men are so unconcerned that they will not lend an ear to them? The reason is given, [Isa. vi. 10–12](#).

2. Satan hath a great hand in it. He is a very crafty prognosticator, — hath great apprehensions that judgments are drawing near to a people; and he was a murderer from the beginning, and delights in nothing but blood and mischief. He is afraid of nothing so much as that judgments should be diverted from a people. When he sees deserved judgments approaching, he knows he hath but this one way to take off all interventions that may hinder them. What is that? He makes them secure. He will now labour more with his temptations with all sorts of people than at any other time or season in the world. This is his day, the hour and power of darkness, now to try his skill, and see what he can do. If he can but keep people secure, judgments will follow. He delights in blood, as being a murderer from the beginning; and he that sees him not at work in the world in a most eminent manner in these days to this very end and purpose, working in men, by their lusts, by occasions and



temptations of life, every day, to continue them in their security, I think takes little observation.

This is the first sign of an approaching dissolution, which I have spoken to at large because it is that which the Scripture speaks so much of, and guides us most to consider, — namely, a general security.

Secondly, Another sign is, *a universal corruption of life* in all sorts of persons. The Holy Ghost tells us, that before the coming of the flood, “all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth,” [Gen. vi. 12](#). The way of the flesh is not very good at any time; I mean the way of men: but when they come as it were by general consent, all of them, to corrupt their way, it is to make way for the bringing in of a flood. Such a state and condition as that is described by the prophet Isaiah, [chap. iii. 1–5](#), “The Lord of hosts doth take away the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.” There is a general confusion and corruption of life and manners. The prophet describes what their state and condition was before God, and which would bring those destructive judgments upon the whole nation; as afterwards He did.

Thirdly, When unto universal corruption of life there is added *persecution of the church*, that is another sign of an approaching destructive dissolution. Our Saviour tells us, [Matt. xxiv. 7–9](#), that “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places, All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you.” A man would think they had something else to do at such a day, when nation rises against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there are pestilences, and famines, and earthquakes. A man would think they should have other employment. No; “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you.” What is the reason of it? That there may be another symptom of approaching desolation, [Matt. xxiii. 34–36](#).

I could name many other signs; — as, visible apostasy, the love of many waxing cold; God in an eminent manner calling off to rest with himself many of his servants, taking them away from the evil to come: but I have said enough upon this head.

I shall now speak a few words, in the second place, unto the reasons why in such approaching dissolutions all professors ought to be signally holy, signally godly. I shall but name one or two things:—

First, Because in every such dissolution, especially where the gospel hath been professed, there is a peculiar coming of Jesus Christ. Christ is in it, whether we see him or see him not. “Be patient, brethren,” saith James, [chap. v. 7](#), “unto the coming of the Lord.” How could



that generation, to whom he wrote sixteen hundred years ago, “be patient unto the coming of the Lord,” who is not yet come? That is not the coming of the Lord James intended; but his coming for the destruction of the impenitent, persecuting, obdurate Jews, “Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” When will that be? Why, saith he, [verse 8](#), “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” It will be within a very few years: [Verse 9](#), “Behold, the Judge standeth before the door.” This was the coming of Christ in the great and terrible judgment wherein he executed vengeance upon his stubborn adversaries, according as he had said before, “Those mine enemies, which would not have me to reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” In every signal dissolution and judgment, there is a coming of Christ; and every coming of Christ will be a day of great trial, [Mal. iii. 1–3](#). Their state was then with them, as to the person of Christ, much as it is now with many as unto other appearances of Christ. “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come, the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in.” He shall come, yea, he shall come suddenly. ‘What could be more welcome? what more desirable? We desire nothing in this world but that he may come!’ “But who may abide the day of his coming?” saith he. That people did nothing but cry out, the Messiah would come; and when he came, it proved their utter ruin and destruction. It is a great thing to have Christ come. We know not what will come to pass when Christ comes. It is a great thing to stand before Christ when he comes. And pray, brethren, what do you think Christ expects of us when he doth come? It is a foolish thing, as the psalmist shows, when men are in expectation of a dissolution, to be engaged in business about earthly matters (I mean beyond what duty requires), so as not to be prepared for it; but it is a wicked thing, when in that dissolution Christ comes, and men are not prepared for his coming. There is Christ in it. There is no dissolution that attends us, in our persons, relations, in the world, but Christ is in it. Christ cometh in it; and how are we prepared to entertain this great guest that cometh? Truly, I am afraid that in regard to many who bear themselves wonderfully high upon the coming of the Lord, when he comes, it will be darkness to them, and not light. Christ comes not to gratify men’s lusts; he comes not to exalt them in the world, nor to satisfy them in their desires upon their adversaries Christ comes to make us more holy, more humble, more mortified and weaned from the world; and if we are not so prepared for it, we are no way prepared for the coming of Christ. Oh, what ought to be the frames of our hearts if we lived under this apprehension, that Christ, the glorious, holy one, were coming to us every day!

Secondly, What doth he come for? Why, every such time of dissolution is a lesser day of judgment. I thought to have showed you how Christ in such a season will execute judgment. There are two parts of the judgment that Christ will execute. One is in vengeance upon his adversaries; the other is in trial upon his people. The apostle puts both together, [Heb. x. 30](#), “Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.” The first place is taken out of [Deut. xxxii. 35](#), and the latter



place is taken out of [Ps. l. 4](#). In the first place, God doth eminently speak of his stubborn adversaries, of his enemies: “Vengeance belongeth unto me,” saith he, “I will recompense.” And in the latter place, he directly speaks of his saints, of his own people, “The Lord will judge his people;” as we may see [Ps. l. 4](#). Why doth our apostle put both these together, things of so wonderfully different natures, “Vengeance belongeth unto me,” and, “The Lord shall judge his people”? The reason is, because though these works are wonderfully distant and discrepant one from another, yet Christ doth them always at the same time. When he taketh vengeance upon his adversaries, he judgeth his people. He judgeth the profession of many, and will put an end to it, determine it. He judgeth the miscarriages of others, and reproveth them. He comes as a spirit of judgment in all such trials. Let none mistake themselves. Whenever Christ comes to take vengeance on his people’s enemies, he cometh also to judge his people. We are wonderfully apt to have pleasant thoughts, that when the Lord comes forth in judgment on the world professors shall be hid, and shall escape. No; saith he, “Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense;” and again, “The Lord shall judge his people.”

What manner of persons, then, ought we to be? If Christ be coming to judge us, to make a judgment upon our profession, he will come into a church, and discard one for a false professor, and another for a false professor. Have none of us seen such a day of judgment already, — how God, by his providence, hath discarded many already? And he will do so more and more. He will discover hypocritical professors, and bring forth their hidden works of darkness; he will reprove others for their worldliness and unprofitableness under the gospel. How? It may be by consuming them, all they have in this world, bringing them to great poverty and distress. He will judge them in these things. ‘You have loved the world, and you shall have nothing left you in the world.’ Don’t expect the day of the Lord will be all light; there is sharpness even to his own in the coming of Christ, when he shall come with a destructive dissolution. It is good, therefore, to be preparing beforehand for his entertainment, and considering what manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness, seeing Christ will thus come and call upon us.



## **Sermon VI. The obligation to increase in godliness.**

Preached May 29, 1674.

“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.” — [1 Thess. iv. 1.](#)

Our business that we design this day is, to consider how we may carry on our practice. This text of Scripture speaks out the whole of what I aim at; and I wish that I could speak it in the same spirit and with the same frame of heart wherewith it is done by the apostle.

It is a very unusual earnestness the apostle uses in this matter. “We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you,” saith he. And it is evident from thence that this matter, whatever it be, is of very great importance in itself; that it sat with very great weight upon the heart and mind of the apostle; and that it is a matter that brethren, members of churches, will oftentimes stand in need of being very earnestly pressed unto. I conceive all these three things to be evidently included in this earnestness of the apostle, and the reduplication of it. “Now we beseech you, brethren, and we exhort you,” saith he.

The first word, in my apprehension, doth express his love and condescension, “We beseech you;” and the latter doth express his ministerial authority, “We exhort you,” speaking of the application of the word in the ministry of the gospel, called “exhortation,” [Rom. xii. 8.](#) So here is a mixture of personal love and ministerial authority, which is the wisdom of a minister. The apostle lays his whole interest upon this matter.

And there is another word that signifies also what weight he lays on it, We have rendered it here, “Furthermore then.” It is τὸ λοιπὸν οὖν, — “for what remains” ‘You have been instructed in the mystery of the gospel; you have been made partakers of the privileges of the gospel: all that remains now, brethren, is that you so walk as to please God, and abound therein more and more.’ Having prepared the way thus, he gives another encouragement and enforcement unto what he hath to press upon them; and that is, that he had taught them their duty already, there was nothing now behind but their practice. “As ye have,” saith he, “received of us how ye ought to walk.” He had already taught them this great matter; which would be a facilitating of the duty, and a great aggravation of their guilt if they lived in the neglect of it.

What is this thing the apostle makes this entrance into? It is, “How ye ought to walk and to please God,” saith he.

And further to insinuate it upon their minds, and take off any objection, ‘What makes this earnestness? why do you press this? why are you so importunate with us? what can you blame in us?’ ‘No,’ saith the apostle, ‘as we have taught you “how to walk and to please God;” so,’ saith he, ‘I charge you with nothing, but desire you that ye would “abound more and



more.” ’ ‘Rest not in what ye have attained; there is yet a progress for us all,’ saith he, — ‘for you and for me.’ If we think we are risen as high as we need, we have attained as much as is necessary, ‘it is quite otherwise,’ saith the apostle, ‘your work is to “abound more and more.” ’

And, truly, the great thing that is upon my heart to exhort you unto, — and this text of Scripture doth but confirm it, — is, to abound more and more in such work wherein we may please God. I cannot speak with that love the apostle did, nor with that authority the apostle did; no, truly. We cannot say we have taught you in all things, yet, how to walk and to please God; though we hope you have been taught: but I can truly say the same thing is upon my heart, according to my measure, to beseech you and exhort you, to declare unto you how to walk in this church relation wherein you stand, so as that you may please God, and so as that you may abound in so walking more and more; and the Lord convince us all, every one, that it is our duty to be abounding in this matter! Some may think there is no more needful but so to walk as that they may be members in the church, and give no offence to the church; some, who have already attained a good reputation in their profession, may not think it incumbent on them to do any more but to keep up their place and station, not to decay. Our duty is quite otherwise; we are to “abound more and more.”

Now, because I do intend, if I live, and God will and permit, to go over all the especial duties of our relation, to show in them all how we may so walk as to please God, I shall lay a little general foundation at present out of these words, and that in this rule or proposition, — That there is a peculiar walking with God in fruitful holiness required of all who are admitted into the fellowship of the gospel, the communion of the saints, — and the order of the churches.

This is the first general rifle, and I would build all that ensues upon it. There is a peculiar walking with God, so as to please God, and a progress therein, abounding more and more in it, required of all who are admitted to the privileges of the gospel in church-order and society, and the communion of the saints.

A walking with God; — in the Scripture our obedience to God is not so frequently expressed, in general, by any one word as by this of walking: to walk with God; to walk in his law; to walk in his statutes; to walk in the fear of the Lord.

Now, this walk we speak of is the whole course of our conversation, and our exercise therein with respect unto God. That is a man’s walk. As is the course of a man’s conversation, and his exercise therein with respect unto God, so is his walk: which may be either straight or crooked; it may be either close or loose; it may be either with God or contrary to him. ‘If ye walk contrary to me,’ saith God, ‘I will walk contrary to you.’ And it is variously expressed in Scripture. Sometimes it is called walking with God: [Gen. v. 24](#), “Enoch walked with God;” — sometimes it is called walking before God: [Gen. xvii. 1](#), “Walk before me, and be thou perfect;” — sometimes it is called a walking after God: [2 Kings xxiii. 3](#), “The king made a



covenant to walk after the Lord;” — sometimes it is called a “walking worthy of the Lord,” [Col. i. 10](#); — and sometimes it is termed a “humbling ourselves to walk with God,” [Mic. vi. 8](#). We render it to “walk humbly with God;” but it is so in the original. And all this is to show that God ought to be all and in all in our walk; that we ought so to walk as those who have all from him, as those who do all for him, as those who design conformity to him, and as those that wait for the enjoyment of him. It is every way expressed, that we may know that God ought to be all in our whole walk, — that is, in all we do in this world.

Answerable hereunto, God’s gracious actings towards us are called his walking with us. [Lev. xxvi. 11, 12](#), “And I will walk among you,” saith God. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. When God and we walk together in peace, upon the agreement made between us by Christ, by the blood of the cross, then are we in our places, and then is God exalted.

Now, this walking with God, without which, as I shall manifest afterwards to you, all our privileges and all our enjoyments are useless, are dangerous, are present means and will be future aggravations of our eternal ruin (without it, I say, that which we lay such weight upon, that which we suffer for, that which we rejoice in, if there be not this walking with God, so as to please him, it is useless and dangerous, — it is a present means of destruction, and will be a future aggravation of it), I say this walking with God may be considered two ways: 1. With respect unto the covenant of grace in general; and, 2. With respect unto the particular church covenant, or holy agreement that is among us in the fellowship of the gospel, which the apostle hath here a particular respect unto: “How ye ought to walk;” — ‘Ye church of Thessalonica, which is in God the Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ; how ye ought to walk.’

First, It is our obedience in general according to the tenor of the covenant of grace; for so it is expressed. All covenant-obedience is expressed in that word, “Walk before me,” [Gen. xvii. 1](#). “I am the Almighty God,” saith he: “walk before me, and be thou upright.” And so, when God promises his Spirit to fulfil in all believers, in all the elect, the grace of the covenant, he saith, “I will write my law in their hearts, and cause them to walk in my statutes” Now, brethren, I would desire you to consider this, in the second place, that church-society is the peculiar way that God hath chosen and ordained whereby we may express covenant-obedience, unto the glory of God and the furtherance of our own salvation. I say, that church-society is a peculiar way God hath appointed whereby we may express our covenant-obedience, unto the glory of God and unto the furtherance of our own salvation. And if any man ask us a reason of this way, and a reason of the ordinances of this way; we can give him neither better nor other answer than this, It is the way God hath appointed whereby we may express our covenant-obedience unto his glory.

Hence these two things follow:—

First, That no man can walk as he ought, and please God in church-society, that doth not walk as he ought in the covenant of grace. The reason is plain, for this our church-society is nothing but the way God hath appointed to express that obedience; as all institutions from the beginning of the world were nothing but ways God had appointed to express covenant-obedience in.

There is no man, therefore, let him by any way or means come into a church, and be made partaker of the privileges of the church, can walk so as to please God (as the text saith) in that church, unless he walk antecedently and fundamentally in the covenant-obedience that God requireth of him.

Secondly, It follows from hence that no man can walk as he ought to the glory of God in covenant-obedience, that doth not join himself to some church-society wherein to walk; and the reason is, because it is the way God hath chosen and appointed whereby that obedience may be expressed, in one church-society or other that is sound in the faith, walking in the truth. A man cannot walk orderly else in covenant-obedience, because he knows not how to express it to the glory of God.

Now, the first of these, how we should walk in general with respect unto the covenant of grace, I shall not speak unto. It is a long work, a great work; it is not that which I design. In brief, the *principle* of it is the Spirit of God, whence we are said to “walk in the Spirit;” — the *rule* of it is the word of God, whence we are said to walk according to the rule, “As many as walk by this rule, peace be on them,” etc.; — the *life*, way, power of it, is Jesus Christ, in the third place, “I am the way, the truth, and the life;” — the *object and end* of it is God himself; we walk before God, and so come to the enjoyment of him; — the *bounds* of it are the covenant; nothing beyond what God requires in his covenant belongs to this walk, nothing that falls beneath the grace of the covenant doth belong unto it, nothing that is contrary to the precepts of the covenant. It is the covenant that gives bounds unto our walking. And the design of this walk is the resignation of ourselves to God, conformity to him, and enjoyment of him. But these are not the things I intend.

That which I intend to speak unto (not now, but hereafter), is our walk with God in that especial church-relation wherein we stand. And I shall endeavour, if God will, to show you how we ought to walk so as to please God, by plain, evident, familiar instructions from the Scripture, accommodated to our state and condition in all things: and, secondly, press it upon your consciences and my own, as the necessity, and condition, and temptations befalling churches, in the days wherein we live, do require; and especially with respect unto that woful conformity to the world which seems to have overtaken the generality of professors in these days.

What I spoke unto you the last day hath occasioned me to go thus back, to lay this foundation; for that will give but one particular of what will be found necessary to press upon you, that you may so walk as to please God, and abound in it more and more.



Yet that is such a weighty particular, — namely, how we may every one of us, in our places and conditions, and under our opportunities, promote holiness in one another, and be awakened to a diligent watchfulness unto that duty, that I would beg of you that that might not fall off from our consideration with the experience of other things. And that you might know how to put it in practice more among us was referred to your consideration as well as mine.



## **Sermon VII. Perilous times.**

Preached May 21, 1575.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” — [2 Tim. iii. 1–5](#).

The apostle, in [the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans](#), gives an account of the great and abominable sins that Rome pagan, heathen Rome, was given up unto, the catalogue of sins in that place no way exceeding that given us in this. It may be asked what pagans and heathens these were? The apostle here tells us what pagans and heathens they were. The truth is, they were Christians whom the apostle intends, as is plain from [verse 5](#), where he saith these persons had “a form of godliness.”

There is a time when persons who claim the holy name and title of Christians are as bad, if not worse, in their lives, than the worst of pagans, Saith the apostle, “This know also;” — ‘Many things I have told you of, acquainted you with; in particular, that there would be many miscarriages among church-members, among the real disciples of Christ, by envy and strife (which are spoken of in [the last chapter](#)): but know this also, — there is more than these.’ It was a great mercy unto them to be forewarned of what would ensue on the wickedness of men.

“In the last days,” saith he, “perilous times shall come.” I have upon other occasions showed you that those expressions of “latter days” and “last days” are nowhere taken in the New Testament for the last days absolutely, but for the last days of the church, the latter days of the church, when they come unto their declination, when they have continued long in a profession, and have grown worse and worse, and are coming towards the last days. “God hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;” that is, in the very last days of the Judaical church. Christ came last, he sent him last, in answer unto what Jacob prophesied, “I will tell you what shall come in the last days;” — that is, the days when the church was coming unto an issue; then Christ came. And so in all other places. The latter days of churches are always perilous days, days full of danger.

When I speak of churches, I intend not only those that are properly so called, but those that call themselves churches, national churches, that which would have itself called the Catholic Church. The longer they continue, the nearer they come unto their end; the farther they advance in their last days, the more perilous the times will be. And it is to no purpose





to expect but that as apostatizing churches grow by continuance, they will grow in wickedness; they will grow more and more wicked every day, and the times shall be more and more perilous every day. We shall be mistaken if we look for any thing else. Till God shall new-form this world, the perils of the days shall increase upon us continually. They will do so till God's time comes to bring in a reformation, or a powerful work upon the world, that may be some relief; but in the meantime, while they are in their last days, "perilous times shall come."

What is it that makes them "perilous?" Men wallowing in a litter of unclean lusts under a profession of Christianity make the times perilous. I am afraid we are apt to look upon the peril of the times merely from the outward dangers that in these times we ourselves are obnoxious to.

But where lies the peril of the times? Truly, I don't think that all the world together can give so great a character of the world, of that which they call the "Christian world," at this day, as is given here by the apostle; — that is, they live in the open practice of all horrible lusts, and yet continue a form of godliness; that is, continue a profession of the Christian religion. Such times are perilous, not only because divers of those lusts that are here mentioned will be exercised towards them that are good (for in the midst of all those sins they are despisers of them, they hate them, and they despise them), but those times are perilous,

—  
First, Because they provoke unto judgment against the nations and people that are overtaken with these sins A great part of the book of the Revelation is taken up with declaring the judgments of God against apostatizing churches, destroying such churches as are overgrown with lusts in their latter days; that is, all that combination of men who, under the Romish conduct, falling into the apostasy, make up several churches in the world. I say, the book of the Revelation is spent in declaring God's fearful and dreadful judgments upon the world for these sins; this makes the times very perilous. Though, when the church of the Jews was going into its latter days before the captivity, there were some among them who were very good, very good figs, yet the days were so perilous that they must also into captivity. The judgments of God were to come upon the land, and the very good figs must also into captivity. God may bring destruction upon whole nations, because of those abounding lusts in the last days of the church.

Secondly, It is greatly perilous in point of temptations. There are two or three things wherein the open wickedness of the world proves a great temptation to professors:—

1. All professors are apt to countenance themselves in their lesser miscarriages by the open sins of the world. That makes a day of great sinning very perilous. They see and know that they are very far from being such as they see the generality of Christians are, and countenance themselves in a low, dead, carnal, worldly profession in many other things. There is more peril in this, as it will secretly insinuate itself into the best of us, more than

in all the persecutions the men of the world can contrive, — lest we should secretly please ourselves in an unthrifty and unholy profession that is seen in the world, seeing all this litter of lusts that others clothe themselves with every day, and we see we are not as they are.

2. There is danger and peril lest they should lead us, by some other more pleasant lust, into a compliance with them; for when a church is fallen into its latter days, all sorts of lusts that may suit the corruption and vanity of men's minds do abound among them, and some of these may insinuate themselves into professors, and make the times very dangerous unto them. I am afraid of a thing I have often mentioned, and that is pride and vanity of apparel; it is one of the lusts and sins of the latter days. And, indeed, upon the account of these very lusts, the days are very perilous, very dangerous, lest our minds be infected with them, and lest we conform unto them more or less, — lest we do many things that else we would not do, because they are done by the world; which is a perfect compliance with the lusts of the latter days.

3. There is peril in that ordinary converse which men are necessitated to by their conversation in the world and in their occasions, and other business which they must have with men, especially those who are traders and dealers in the world. They can scarce touch upon a business with those in whom there are those predominant lusts of a decaying church, but they must be, compelled to hear swearing, cursing, filthy discourses, that are not convenient, and all manner of profaneness. There is peril in this. And there are some kinds of professors who are so regardless and careless, that they will put themselves into such company on choice, when they have no business or necessity for it.

Thirdly, The times are most perilous, in the last place, upon this account, lest God utterly remove his candlestick from such a people, and suffer his gospel to be no more despised and dishonoured among them.

Now, truly, if it be so, the use I aim at in calling over these words is this: It is plain we are fallen into those times and seasons; — I am persuaded none of you will deny it. And if the Holy Ghost tells us expressly that these days and times are perilous, full of dangers; we are in a path wherein be robbers on every hand; and we ourselves can see somewhat of peril in them, — we know there is something in them of peril: and if you will but search, you will find out more. Now, if this be our present state and condition, it is our duty to be earnest with God to be preserved in such a perilous state as this. Shall we think we have an amulet to carry us through all perils, spiritual and temporal, that no danger shall befall us? It is not so with us. Unless we are upon our watch and guard, and cry mightily unto God for help and assistance, we shall be all overtaken with perils and dangers in the days wherein we live.



## **Sermon VIII. The mutual care of believers over one another.**

Preached September 6, 1678.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” — [Eph. iv. 15, 16](#).

A gathered church comes from Christ, and all of the church are from Christ. From him they flow, and they grow up again in him from whom they flow. It is compacted together by officers and ordinances. On both of them the apostle had discoursed before: “Compacted by that which every joint supplieth.” Officers and ordinances are by virtue derived from Christ, and they tend unto Christ. They are compacted and fitly joined by officers and ordinances. How shall they proceed and go on? “According to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” The great business of the church is not our number by addition, but by grace, by growing up in Christ. And the way whereby it doth it, is the working of every part, according to every one’s measure, for the edification of itself in love. What is, then, the church watch? It is the work of every member, according to its measure, to the increase of grace in itself and others, according to the principle of love. This we all know; but we are slow in the improvement of it. This is the work of every member, according to the measure of the grace of Christ received, to the increase of grace in ourselves and others, through a principle of love. Every one is not required to be a preacher, but every one hath a measure; and where there is any measure, there is some work. If this be not found in us, our church-order, as the apostle calls it, will not avail us. And, truly, methinks churches in these days do not abide this test. They are not “fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,” which should grow and increase in love. That is lost. I desire to know of all the brethren and sisters what they have done to answer this rule and duty, — what they have done to increase the body in every part. Some I can tell what they have done to destroy and pull down, contrary to this principle of watch. None of us but have our measure. Wherever there are gifts and graces, they will work.

To come nearer, I will show you where the rule of this church watch is. It is the mutual work and care of all the members of the church for the temporal, and spiritual, and eternal good of the whole and every member, proceeding from union and love, — the mutual operative care of all the members of the church. This is that watch I would speak unto.

It proceeds originally from union; they are united in love. Of this the apostle discourses at large, [1 Cor. xii.](#), by comparing the members of the church with the members of a man,



whose mutual care and assistance are for the unity of the same body. There is none of us but knows the concern of all the members in every member, and the care of every member of all the members of the body. You believe yourselves to be the church of God? Yes. Then, saith the Scripture, we are members, and are to have the same spiritual care of every other member as the members of the natural body have. But is it so? How unacquainted is one hand with another, one member with another! I lay this principle, that ye are all members one of another throughout the congregation. None so great or so wise but is a member; none so poor and abject but is a member. And if we have not care of the whole body, according as we have opportunity and seasons, we are wonderfully to seek. Indeed, there is no watch without love. The apostle tells us that it is “the bond of perfection,” [Col. iii. 14](#). This is perfect church-order. Take a company of sticks, some long and some short, some great and some little, some straight and some crooked. As long as there is a good firm band about them, you may carry them where you please, and dispose of them as you will: break this band, and every thing will appear crooked that is so. If this band, — that is, our perfection, — be loosed, every one’s crookedness will appear, one to be too long, one to be too short; one too big, one too little; one crooked, and one straight; there is no keeping them together. All the order in the world will never keep a church together if the band of love be loosed.

There be two things I shall speak unto, — what I have found in my ministry by experience. I have found when church-order was the greatest ease, the greatest relief, that a man could certainly desire or attain. I have known it. And I have lived to see church-order burdensome, that many have complained of it as the most insupportable burden. Nothing else is the reason but the decay of love. So that any person that will discharge his duty hath an insupportable burden on him. I tell you freely, my fears are, that if we were to gather churches again, as we did thirty years ago, we should have but a small harvest. That which should bring us together and keep us up in love is all lost. Read [1 Cor. xiii](#). I beg of you believe that scripture to be the word of God. We can love them who, as far as we know, are lovely; but that love that “beareth all things and believeth all things,” I am afraid not six of us believe that it is a duty. If we hear any thing of a brother or a sister, it is forty to one but we aggravate it unto the next body we meet. Is this love?

This watch, what is it for? It is for the temporal, and spiritual, and eternal good of all believers.

Their temporal good is first to advise about the poor; which I think is well attended to, being put into the way of God.

Their spiritual good, whereby we may keep up this watch, is to be sought two ways; — by the prevention of evil, on the one hand; and by recovery from evil, promotion of grace, and confirming in it, on the other hand.

We are to prevent evil in others. There are two ways whereby we may do it, — by example, and by exhortation.



If a considerable number of the church would engage to endeavour after an exemplary holiness and usefulness in all things, it would prevent much evil in others. Some things are troublesome in the church; but still, exemplary holiness and usefulness in believers are great means to prevent evil in others.

Exhortation will be so too. Exhort one another to edification. We are pitiful creatures as to this duty.

We want three things: we want love; we want ability; we want holy consciousness to ourselves of unbelief. Nothing can conquer these things but the grace of God; and unless we have these things, we cannot do it. Our recovery from any of these evils is a great part of this watch.

I will tell you of two defects:—

1. If we do come unto it, to admonish others, we do not do it with that meekness, that evidence of love, that tenderness, that are required in us. I would have no man come to admonish another but that he should carry it as the offender, and the other as the offended person, — with that profession of love.

2. We want wisdom; for this is very certain, ill management hath spoiled many things in this congregation, — talking, reflecting, complaining, even among carnal people. It is the constant exercise of the mind renewed by the Holy Ghost, and furnished with the principles of spiritual light and life, in thoughts and meditations upon spiritual things, proceeding from the cleaving of the affections unto them, with a sense of a spiritual gust, relish, and savour in them, that must enable us to this duty.



## Sermon IX. National sins and national judgments.

Preached April 11, 1679.

“For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.” — [Isa. iii. 8, 9.](#)<sup>410</sup>

First, Here is a confluence of sins delighted in.

Secondly, Here is a concurrence of various judgments unregarded. In [the ninth chapter of this prophecy](#), the prophet enumerates, from [the 13th verse to the end of the chapter](#), all sorts of judgments and indications of the continuance of God’s displeasure, concluding every one of them with this: “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still;” and it will end in their utter destruction.

Thirdly, Here are the preparative causes of ruin, that which would dispose Jerusalem and Judah to ruin and destruction. There are five of them reckoned up in [this chapter](#):—

1. When God takes away the good, the sober, the understanding part of a nation, and leaves a nation very thin of such kind of persons: [Verses 1–3](#), “Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.” When God makes a nation thin of such persons, it is a preparation and disposition to their ruin.

2. Weakness in their government is another preparation and disposition: “And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them,” [verse 4](#).

3. Horrible disorder in the minds of men, and contempt of God’s order, that should be among them: “And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable,” [verse 5](#).

4. When there is great oppression and persecution: “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them,” [verse 12](#). And what did they do? “Ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of hosts,” [verses 14, 15](#).

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410 This sermon was began before the writer came in. What he wrote is as follows. [This note is by Sir John Hartopp. On the top of the first page the word “fast” is written; seemingly to intimate that the sermon had been preached on the occasion of a fast. — Ed.]

5. And, lastly, there is horrible pride, and especially the pride of vain and foolish women; which the prophet insists upon from [verse 16 to the very last words of the chapter](#), and concludes, “Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.”

This is the end of it all. So that you have an account of what are those causes whereon God in his word doth pronounce cities and nations to be ruined and destroyed, even then when they stand in their fullest security, in their own opinion.

Now, the inquiry is, how those things are with us. I told you I would do no more than speak a word or two for the present occasion: and I shall speak that which I do believe; and if you do so too, it may be it may be your mercy. But it is a hard thing to believe London is ruined and England fallen, when we have peace and enjoy all things; but if we speak it in pride, it will be harder how to avoid it.

First, Is there not a confluence of all sorts of sins among us whereof mankind can contract guilt, especially of those sins upon the commission of which God pronounces a nation ruined, — atheism and profaneness, blood and murder, adultery and uncleanness, and pride? When these sins are predominant in a nation that makes profession of the knowledge of God, God himself saith, and we may say, that nation is ruined. Those things have prevailed among us.

Then let us mourn over those sins as we ought to do. Have we done so in this congregation? Hath it been done in any congregation in England as it ought? Hath it been done in private, in our retirement, to mourn over that confluence of sins that hath prevailed and spread itself over the nation till it hath reached to the very neck? We have not done it to this very day. There is not the least attempt for any reformation. Do we think in such a day as this is a little prayer is enough to save a dying nation? There is nothing seriously done to work that reformation without which London will be undone and England will fall, and there will be no deliverance. It is all one whether you will believe it or no, but the word of God abides for ever.

Secondly, A concurrence of judgments was the second thing we showed you from the words, — a concurrence of judgments unregarded; — a confluence of sins delighted in, and a concurrence of various judgments unregarded.

Judgments are of two sorts, — temporal and spiritual.

1. Temporal judgments are of two sorts. They are either monitory tokens of God’s displeasure, or they are actual punishments. All these various judgments have been upon us.

(1.) We have had monitory tokens of God’s displeasure: [1.] Signs in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; — things that ought not to be despised. Our Saviour hath warned us to expect and look for them before the general dissolution. They have been monitory judgments. [2.] God is making the nation thin of persons ancient, honourable, counsellors, the wise. He threatens to do this. They are persons rarely to be found, who are the stay and

staff of a nation. It is a monitory judgment, and so laid down by the prophet. [3.] The strange and unaccountable differences and divisions that are in the minds and affections of men. Multitudes in these nations stand at this day with their swords in their hands, ready to sheathe them in the bowels of their neighbours; Ephraim against Manasseh, and Manasseh against Ephraim, — one part of the nation against another, and another against them, ready to destroy one another. [4.] And, lastly, the warnings God hath given us of making us base and dishonourable, which I will not insist upon. We have had these monitory judgments.

(2.) We have had judgments which consist in punishments, — the plague, the fire, the sword, great distresses and poverty, that are come upon the nation; enough to make the hearts of men to tremble, but that we are grown hard like the nethermost millstone, and are sensible of nothing at all. I say these judgments and warnings of God are generally disregarded.

I would but ask two things, to see if by them we can evidence the contrary, notwithstanding all the judgments that we talk of:—

[1.] Who is the man, where is the person, that hath made any abatement in any thing of the world, — in love to the world, in conformity to the world, in the pursuit of any lust? Show me the man who, upon the account of these judgments in the world, hath made any abatement.

[2.] Show me the person who can by experience show that he hath by fear been moved to provide an ark for himself and family, any other ark besides present circumstances, — so much wealth, enjoyment, peace and quiet? Who is the person that hath provided an ark for himself and his family? Let us talk what we will, unless we make a visible abatement in conformity to the world, and labour to provide an ark, we disregard the judgments of God.

2. There are spiritual judgments also; and they are found among us, — (1.) In God's taking from us so many faithful labourers in the dispensation of the gospel, in the midst of their days and strength, as he hath done of late years in this nation. (2.) And in driving the remnant of his faithful ministers, many of them, into corners, where they are not able to serve the interest of Christ and the nation by promoting and furthering its return unto God: and thereby that which would have been the greatest mercy that the nation can be partaker of, the greatest means of the preservation of it and deliverance from ruin, is made the greatest means of the restraining and shutting up their ministerial abilities and graces; which I shall not now enlarge upon. (3.) There is another part of these spiritual judgments, and that is the general security that is come upon all sorts of men, according to the variety of their degrees, in being overtaken with the present temptations of the day. These judgments are upon us unregarded.

Thirdly, Another thing in the text is the preparation and disposition that are in a nation to ruin. But I shall not speak unto them; they are visible and known unto all.





But you will say, 'When God doth thus in his word declare that a nation is fallen and ruined by such causes, is there no hope but that it must be ruined, that destruction must overtake it?'

I answer, — 1. There is no hope at all while that place, that nation, continues in those ways and sins whereby God declares that they are ruined. A nation cannot be saved abiding in those ways which are the causes of its ruin, which God declares to be the causes of it. And let men have what expectations they will, please themselves as they will, I neither can desire nor will look for deliverance for a nation while it continues in those sins against which God pronounces judgments.

2. I do acknowledge it is frequent with God to declare a nation ruined with respect of merit, and yet to prevent their ruin with respect to the event. They may be delivered from that state and condition, and so be saved. The case is stated, [Jer. xviii. 7, 8](#), "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to pluck up and pull down, and to destroy it: if that, nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil. I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" God declares what they do deserve, but yet they may never feel it as to the event. Wherefore it is not in vain that we have designed to seek the Lord this day. There is room yet left to deal with God about London, about the nation, though plainly in the word they are declared to be under ruin.

But it will have no success without these three things:—

1. That there be a visible reformation, — I will not say a conversion, but a visible reformation, — vigorously attempted in and upon the body of the people.

2. Unless those who truly fear the Lord do mourn over the sins of the people continually. And, —

3. Unless they are fervent in their prayers for their deliverance.

It doth not stand with the honour of God, the glory of his righteousness, holiness, word, and truth, to save this nation without these things; — without an attempt at visible reformation of the body of the people; without his own people mourn over the sins of the nation, and abide in fervent prayer for that end. Without these, as Jeremiah the prophet told the Jews, [chap. xxxvii. 10](#), "Though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire;" So I say of our Chaldeans at this day: If half of them were executed, and the other half wounded, they should rise up and smite this city, unless we turn thus unto God.

We are called to consider the sins of the nation, and to deplore its state and condition upon the account of those sins. That is our present work; and these plain things God hath directed me unto from the reading of these words.

I will add a little more, for the further opening of the words. There is in them a summary declaration of the causes of this state and condition: "Because," saith he, "their tongue and,



their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. You may range all sins under these two heads — men's tongues and their doings; for their tongues and their doings have been against the Lord.

There is a particularly ruining provocation, when men set their tongues against the Lord. It a great sign, of he approaching, ruin of a people and nation when men set their tongues against the Lord. He puts a special mark upon that. I shall only name the things whereby men set their tongues against the Lord, keeping themselves to that one thing, by such ways as will certainly prove ruining.

There are these ways whereby men set their tongues against the Lord:—

1. By blasphemy. And thereof there are two branches:— (1.) Cursed oaths; (2.) Atheistical discourses. Whether they are found among us or no let every one judge as he hath experience.

Men set their tongues against the Lord especially by blaspheming the Spirit of Christ and the gospel. I do acknowledge that this is a sin which our Lord Jesus Christ as it were separates from all other sins, reserving it unto spiritual and eternal judgment; but it hath influence also on temporal judgments.

2. By mocking at all those judgments: “Where is the promise of his coming?” where is this talk that hath been among the prophets, among professors, for so many years, of judgment coming? “for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were.” They scoff at the word of God with reproachful terms.

When these are the things whereby men's tongues are set against God (I do not speak of the sins of the tongue in general, but of those sins whereby the tongue is peculiarly set against God), we shall do well to inquire whether any such things are found among us or no.

This comprises the whole remainder of outward sins against the Lord. I shall not need to speak unto them; I shall only touch upon the aggravations:—

1. The first aggravation of these sins, that makes them ruinous, is when they rise to such a degree as that they are a “provocation unto the eyes of God's glory.”

The “eyes of God's glory” intend two things, — First and principally, His holiness: “He is of purer eyes than to behold evil,” [Hab. i. 13](#). The eyes of God's glory are the purity of his holiness. Secondly, God's omniscency and omnipresency. His eyes are not eyes of flesh. He sees and knows all things by the infinite immensity of his own presence. Sins committed in an especial manner against the eyes of God's glorious holiness and his omniscency will always have special influence into the ruin of Jerusalem and of Judah.

What are the sins that have a special opposition unto the eyes of God's glory as it denotes his holiness? I answer, —

All sorts of uncleanness, — adultery, fornication. Uncleanness is in a peculiar manner opposed unto the holiness of God. We are to inquire whether there have been any over-

spreading of such abominations in the nation wherein we live. If there have, there have been provocations unto the eyes of God's glory. Every impure lust in the heart is provoking to the eyes of God's glory; every uncleanness wherewith the land is defiled, upon this account, because of its contradiction unto the pure and holy nature of God, is provoking unto the eyes of God's glory.

2. When men are bold in sin, — which brings along with it contempt of God's omniscience and omnipresence, — it is a provocation unto the eyes of God's glory.

There are two ways whereby men do manifest themselves bold in their sins; and they are both mentioned in the text:— (1.) By appearing under all demonstrations of outward pride, while they are filled with inward filth and laden with guilt; a thing that God doth greatly abhor. "The show of their countenance doth witness against them." We live in days wherein the nation is overwhelmed with the guilt of sin, and full of all manner of iniquities and defilements. They do compose all their garbs and ways unto pride. And, (2.) They reject the ways of God. They contemn God and man when they have all that guilt upon them.

3. The last aggravation whereby men provoke the eyes of God's glory is when they declare their sin as Sodom."

How is it to "declare their sin as Sodom?" (1.) When men will confer and talk together about the vilest sins and wickednesses. So did they in Sodom; they got together to act wickedness. Time was when profaneness and atheism were not grown to that boldness as now they are. They covered their sin. But now men and women will consult together, talk and advise together, about their sins, how and what way they shall commit them. (2.) When they will come unto that impudence, not only to confer about their sins, but so as to make them a scoffing and a laughing matter.

Let us consider whether there be not those abominations among us against which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. These are the aggravations the prophet gives of the sins of Jerusalem and of Judah, upon the account whereof he pronounces the one to be "ruined," and the other to be "fallen" from her strength and beauty. The judgment he passes upon all is, "Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves."

I shall close all with a word or two of use:—

First, If this be the deplorable state and condition of the nation wherein we live, let us endeavour, by all ways and means that lie in us, to retrieve the nation out of this state and condition, every one acting unto the utmost of his power to turn men from their evil ways, that God may repent him of the evil that he hath purposed against this nation.

Secondly, If they will not be healed, let our souls mourn in secret for them, and let us do something to help the poor dying nation. There is not one of you but may do much towards the saving, of this nation, by mourning in secret because of the abominations that are committed in it, whereby we have provoked the eyes of God's glory.

Thirdly, Take heed that we do not partake in any of their sins, that we make no approach unto them, lest we partake of their plagues There is no greater duty incumbent at this day on persons that fear God than this one, to be cautious of making approaches towards any persons or people against whom God hath declared that he hath a controversy with them.

Fourthly, Prepare to meet the Lord in the way of his judgments. God is righteous in all his ways, when he shall bring the scourge upon the nation, and it “shall be spoiled as Shalman spoiled Betharbel in the day of battle,” [Hos. x. 14.](#)

Lastly, Give glory unto him for all the appearances of sovereign grace and mercy in preserving this nation from that late horrid design and plot, which might have swallowed us up unless God himself had immediately interposed.

There are three or four things I would mention, that I have upon my thoughts:—

1. The open discovery of the profaneness and villany of their hearts, in striving to hide from God and man the wickedness they had contrived, by adding a new wickedness unto it, which they had not thought of, — the murdering of that innocent person.<sup>411</sup> God left them to discover the wickedness and profaneness of their hearts, that they would cover one sin with another, and God should not look through it.

2. The wisdom and justice of God, in making that which they concluded the means of hiding their plot from the eyes of men prove upon the matter the means of discovering it unto all men. They behaved themselves subtly, but the hand of God was upon them; there was “*digitus Dei*” plainly in the case. Their great design was, by the murder of that gentleman to conceal all. Saith God, ‘I will discover all by the murder of that person.’

3. See the hand and glory of God in this also. You are directed unto it this day, that though their wickedness and malice continue, God hath taken away their hearts. If wisdom and courage had not been taken from them, they might have ruined this nation; but God hath taken away their hearts, and so long we shall be safe enough.

4. In this glorious act of God there is a spirit poured out upon the commonalty of this nation above their light and above their principles; which is the immediate hand of God: for every man’s spirit follows his light and principles, but here it is beyond their light and principles. Therefore glorify God in this, and let it encourage us to be instant in prayer day and night for this poor nation, the laud of our nativity.



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411 The author alludes to the affair of Titus Oates and the death of Sir E. Godfrey. See note, vol. ix., p. 13 — Ed.

## **Sermon X. The death of the righteous.**

Preached July 1, 1681.

“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” — [Isa. lvii. 1, 2.](#)

This is a text that the providence of God hath severely preached on to this congregation. I cannot look before me, I cannot look behind me, but I see the footsteps of death. It hath been here, it hath been there, upon the right hand and upon the left. Sometimes God expounds the works of his providence by his word; and sometimes he expounds his word by the works of his providence. To suit the word of God and the works of God, as the one interprets the other, is the sum and substance of all our wisdom here in this world.

God doth at this day expound his works by his word. The world is full of confusion, full of tokens of God’s displeasure, full of judgments, full of dread; yet the world understands nothing of all these. Bring these works of God to the word of God, and we shall understand them. We shall understand the world is full of sin and provocation, that God is displeased, that he is talking away rest from men, — shaking every thing within and without. Those who know not the word of God understand nothing of these works, but are filled with a multitude of vain thoughts. He expounds his works by his word.

And sometimes God expounds his word by his works, as he doth this day. He expounds this text; so that in the works of God we may see the mind and sense of the Holy Ghost plainly, as in a glass. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.”

The general truth in these words is this:— That when God is bringing evils, distressing evils, upon a church, upon a people, in the ordinary way of his providence, he doth take away beforehand many of those who are most eminent and most useful. When in a particular manner “the righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away,” it is a time when God is bringing evils certainly. So, when God was bringing evils upon Jerusalem and the land of Judah, [Jer. xxiv.](#), he gathered all the good figs, and laid them aside. Many of them died, some went into captivity; but all that were good and were to be restored, God gathered them out from among them; and then came the universal desolation. “The righteous perisheth.” Josiah is an instance of this, whom some think the prophet (though long before) had a particular respect unto in this text: ‘Josiah shall perish; he shall be taken away.’ To what end? ‘That I may bring evil,’ saith God. ‘Go thou thy way. Thou shalt perish, and be slain; yet thou shalt go unto thy grave in peace, that I may bring evil.’ I have often spoken it myself, and beard

others say, the taking away, the gathering in, as the word is, (“They shall be gathered”), of so many ministers, — many of them in the fulness of their strength, and fulness of their labours, and best of their designs for God, — has been a token that there was evil to come. And it is not only so as to ministers; but as to others in this congregation, in a most eminent manner, such as I have never had experience of in the whole course of my life; — so many persons of holiness, worth, and usefulness, to be taken away, and gathered in out of one poor society in so short a time! That is the general scope of the place.

I shall a little open the words in particular.

It is a double description of the persons spoken of:— 1. With reference to their state and condition before God; they are “righteous men:” 2. With respect unto their state and condition towards men; they are useful men, “merciful men,” who are spoken of.

First, With reference to their state before God: “The righteous perisheth.” I know the word is frequently used for a man who is morally righteous, a just man among men. But from what follows in [verse 2](#), as we shall see by-and-by, I rather take the righteous man here to be a justified man, — a man who is righteous and accepted with God; a just man, that is, a man justified by the blood of Christ. That is his first description, as to his estate in reference unto God, of whom he speaks: he is a justified person.

Secondly, With respect unto their state and condition towards men. He speaks of “merciful men,” — men of benignity, men of kindness, men of goodness, good men, useful men, men that exercise kindness in the earth, who are peculiarly the lovely and desirable men in the world. The apostle makes a distinction between a just man and a good man, [Rom. v. 7](#), ‘Scarcely for a righteous man will one die’ (for a justified man); “yet peradventure for a good man” (one who is benign, kind, useful, merciful), — “some would even, dare to die” for such a man. Such are the persons who are here mentioned, — a justified man, and a man of benignity and kindness.

Truly, I cannot avoid the application of it; for God by his providence at present speaking unto us, it is our duty to apply it unto our case, to the person whom God hath lately taken from this congregation, — a justified man; as I might do to many others who have gone before. I was with him the day before he died, and found him in the exercise of faith upon as noble a principle as ever I would desire to live and die in, — that view which God had given him of the glory of his wisdom, of his righteousness, of his grace, and love, and mercy, all manifested in Jesus Christ for the saving of his soul. I know no more glorious act of faith. And they are the substance of the words wherein he expressed himself; as, indeed, he had done oftentimes before, when I had conference with him about his spiritual estate: for he was a person neither afraid of his pastor, nor unfree to communicate his thoughts unto him. And I cannot but give him the other character, — a “merciful man.” I see the faces of sundry in this congregation who have spoken of him to me as one full of kindness, love, benignity, ready to serve every one in all their occasions, inquiring how he might serve the meanest,

and any other, with great condescension, meekness, and humility. I account this little that I have said due unto him; and I shall add no more but that it is an instance of God taking away a righteous man, and of God's gathering in a merciful man. And it is known unto us that the same character, both for faithfulness and usefulness, may be applied in a most eminent manner unto several persons of this congregation who have been taken from us. I pray God we may be "followers of them who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises;" that all of us, who profess that we are justified before God, may take care that we be merciful, — that is, kind, benign, and useful, not selfish, not living to ourselves, but ready to serve one another, ready to serve all the members of the congregation, and all others, as we have opportunity. If we are justified persons, let us take care to be good, to be merciful, kind and benign.

But to go on with the words. What is said of this righteous man? He "perisheth." Absolutely? No; no righteous man perishes eternally. The prophet in [the next verse](#) obviates any such objection; for there he gives a distribution of him into his two essential parts. What saith he of him? "He shall enter into peace." There is his soul. What shall become of his body? That shall go into the grave. If the righteous man perishes, it shall be only a dissolution; — as to their souls, they shall go to rest; as to their bodies, they shall go into the grave. I say he doth not perish absolutely, neither as to soul nor body; but the prophet uses these expressions that he may be said to leave out no justified man, by what way soever or by what means soever they may come to their death, though they may seem to perish, to be cut off. Some die in their youth, in the beginning of their usefulness; some die in their usefulness; — some die under strong pains; some may die by the sword: all which have an appearance of perishing. This expression comprises whatever way or time God is pleased to take a just man out of the world.

Again; a just man is said to perish and be gathered in, because of the help and assistance he should have been unto the church, and city, and place where he lived. He is perished and gone. The just man perishes, and the merciful man is taken away. They are gathered. There is an emphasis upon the season. There is a time when the just man so perishes and the merciful man is so taken away; and we can all give instances of it in near relations, in friends and acquaintances, that it hath been so.

To go a little further; What is the end hereof? what is the issue of this dispensation of God in the perishing of righteous and merciful men?

Why, saith he, — 1. "No man layeth it to heart." And, 2. "None considering that they are taken away from the evil to come." The meaning of it is this, that in those strange and wonderful dispensations of God, there are very few that either consider the cause or end of it: none lays it to heart in considering the cause; none considers it in respect of the end, — their being "taken away from the evil to come." And that is the doleful truth which these words teach us, namely, that when God takes away, gathers in, righteous and merciful men,



to make way for the bringing in of great evils, distresses, and destruction, few or none shall either lay it to heart or consider it. It is part of God's displeasure, part of his judgment, that we are not more awakened by it. God be merciful to this poor church, or we are lost! If we don't see the cause and end of God's dispensation towards us, — unless the Lord be pleased to give us a further sense than yet we have attained, — I shall be afraid of "the evil to come, that is approaching unto a more sad event than we are ready to think of. "No man layeth it to heart;" very few shall do so. Yea, surely, how many sad words have we heard from all sorts of persons concerning those who have been lately taken from us: "Ah, my brother! Ah, my sister! Ah, their usefulness while they were among us!" and we can hang down our heads for a day, for a night; — but this is not laying it to heart. I speak unto the remnant of this congregation what God doth certainly require of us, that this complaint may not be found true concerning us, that none considers the cause and end, what they are; which is the saddest prognostic of most distressing evils.

*Evil* is a comprehensive word for every thing that is so. It is required of us that we do really take notice of the displeasure of God in it, — that God is displeased, not with them whom he hath taken away. Was God displeased with some of the best sprouts among our brethren? was God displeased with them? No. But we are to take notice of God's displeasure towards us. When God's hand is lifted up, if men will not see, he saith, "they shall see." Truly, I am almost ashamed, and ready to blush to look men in the face, to consider what rebukes God hath given us. Our Father hath spit in our face; he hath showed his displeasure, not in this instance only, but in nine or ten I could name, eminent in grace, whom he hath taken from us; so that I know not how we should not be ashamed that our Father is displeased with us, The Lord help us to lay it to heart! If we laid it to heart, we should blush.

What are the *causes* of God's displeasure with us? If God be displeased with us, what are the causes of it? I do not know that he hath given me a greater rebuke, in the whole course of my ministry, than that I have been labouring in the fire to discover the causes of God's withdrawing from us without any success. I will say nothing of them now, though it is good for us to think of them. Our duty is to let go all our vain pretences and security, and consider what is the cause that God is displeased with us as a congregation, and take shame unto ourselves.

And then, let us be jointly humbled for those causes, and be turning with all our heart from every thing that hath been a provocation unto the eyes of his glory. Without this, my own love unto this congregation will make me to apply that word unto it: 'You have I known of all the congregations in London in a peculiar manner, and therefore will I punish you for all your sins.' We have been lifted up unto heaven by privileges, and how God will bring us down I know not. But it is time for us to consider the causes of this displeasure of God, testified so openly against us, to be humbled for them, and return unto the Lord. It is high time so to do. Oh, blessed is he that contributes any thing hereunto in this particular! The



Lord raise up some, and pour his spirit upon them, to be useful unto this end; that we may help to save ourselves, the pity, and the nation wherein we live, and the residue of the churches in this land! The Lord can pour out such a spirit on some, that may raise such a spirit of repentance for sin and humiliation before God as may be useful to this end and purpose. The first charge is, that “No man layeth it to heart.” And I do believe, and therefore I speak, that if these things be not laid to heart in the way that I have declared, or to that purpose, it is an evidence that evil will come and overtake us in the latter end; for so it is said, “The righteous perisheth, and merciful men are taken away from the evil to come.”

Why are they taken from the “evil to come”?

First, That God may bring the evil: ‘I will leave some when the evil comes to be exercised; may be an old man, may be a young man. It waits but till I have gathered some to myself. I cannot bring evil till those lights be gone out and the good figs be carried away. I cannot,’ saith God, ‘bring evil upon Jerusalem till then.’ And they are taken away that evil may come. And, —

Secondly, Which is the most general acceptation, they are taken away that they should not see the evil; as Josiah was taken away by the sword that he might not see the evil. Death by the sword hath no evil in it, in comparison of the evil God will bring upon a people or nation when he comes in a way of judgment. ‘Josiah shall not see the burning of the city and temple, shall not see women eating their own children,’ etc. What is perishing by the sword in comparison of all those temptations wherewith these evils are accompanied? The Lord will take them away, that they shall not see that which hath evil, wrath, distress, in it. They are “taken away from the evil to come.”



## Sermon XI. The humiliation and condescension of Christ.

Preached November 9, 1681.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” — [Phil. ii. 5–8](#).

The apostle tells us, [1 Tim. ii. 5](#), that “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men.” The difference, by reason of sin, between God and men was such as could not be made up without a mediator. God himself could not be this mediator; so the same apostle tells us, [Gal. iii. 20](#), “A mediator is not of one, but God is one.” A mediator must be a middle person, and God in his divine nature is one: “A mediator is not of one.” Suppose this mediator be taken from among men, for one man sinning against another, “the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord who shall entreat for him? [1 Sam. ii. 25](#). “There is no umpire betwixt us,” saith Job, [chap. ix. 33](#), “that might lay his hand upon us both.” Who, then, is this mediator? Why, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” How comes he so to be? This office was not imposed upon him against his mind and will; it did not befall him by chance; we did not choose him; it was not a matter of any advantage unto him; neither did it befall him by necessity of nature or condition. How, then, did he come unto this office? how came it that this mediator was “the man Christ Jesus”? Why, it was his mind; it was from his own mind. Not to insist upon the designation of the Father, the apostle places it there: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” What was the mind that was in Christ Jesus? This was the mind, that when he was “in the form of God,” and “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” he “made himself of no reputation:” which was the original of Christ’s mediation.

There are three things in the words:— First, The substance of them, — a description of the self-humiliation and condescension of Jesus Christ, in becoming the mediator between God and men by the taking up of this office. And there are two parts of it:— 1. Ἐκκένωσις, — his emptying of himself; 2. Ταπείνωσις, — the humbling of himself. He “being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant.” Ἐκκένωσε, saith the apostle. We say, “He made himself of no reputation;” he emptied himself. Having taken this form of a servant, what did he do? Why, “he humbled himself.” He emptied himself to take the form of a servant; and he humbled himself in that form, to engage in obedience, to undergo death. There is an infinite distance between the Ἐκκένωσις, the self-emptying of Christ, when, “being in



the form of God, he took upon himself the form of a servant,” and the ταπεινώσις, the taking on him the form of a servant to obey and die. The one infinitely excels the other.

Secondly, There is in the words the principle from whence these distinct acts arise, — self-emptying, by taking our nature; self-humiliation, engaging in our nature to do and suffer. Whence doth it proceed? It proceeds solely from his own mind: “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not: then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.”

Thirdly, There is the application and improvement of these things unto our practice: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus;” which is the thing I principally aim at, though I cannot reach unto it at this time.

The words, so far as we are concerned, will be opened in our passage. I shall take these two propositions from them:—

First, That it was an infinite, mysterious self-humiliation and condescension in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to take our nature upon him, with reference unto the office of a mediator. That is the truth which the apostle designs here to demonstrate.

Secondly, That there is a spiritual greatness of mind, like unto the mind that was in Christ, required of all believers, unto that self-denial and unto those sufferings which they may be called unto for the gospel, and are like to be: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

I shall now treat of the first, that it was an infinite, mysterious self-humiliation of the Son of God, in taking upon him our nature, for the discharge of the office of a mediator. I shall, — 1. Prove it in general; 2. Show wherein it consists; and, 3. Make some use of it, if I am able.

1. For the proof of it, I would lay down but that one consideration which you have, [Ps. cxiii. 5, 6](#), “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the thing that are in heaven, and in the earth!” Such is the infinite perfection of the divine nature, that it is an act of self-humiliation, it is a condescension from the prerogative of his excellency and glory, to take notice of the most glorious things in heaven, and of the greatest things upon the earth.

And it is so upon these two accounts:—

(1.) Upon the account of that infinite distance which is between his nature, being, and essence, and the nature, being, and essence of any creature of any kind. Hence, [Isa. xl. 15, 17](#), it is said, “The nations are before him as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: all nations are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.” He is the infinite Being; and in comparison of him all creatures are “nothing,” even “less than nothing.” Now, there is no measure, no proportion, between an infinite Being and nothing and that which is as nothing: so that there can be no reason why an infinite Being should have any regard unto that which is as nothing, but its own infinite condescension. They are vain thoughts and imaginations of men that would find out foreseen causes



in ourselves of God's eternal election, in the first choice he makes of us. There is no proportion between an infinite Being and nothing. [Isa. lvii. 15](#), He is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity;" and, "To this man will I look, even to him that is of an humble heart and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." He is "the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity," who exists in his own eternal being; and what is beyond that is a bowing down to look on "him who is of an humble heart and of a contrite spirit." The most glorious exaltation that a creature can have brings him not one step nearer the essence of God than a worm; for between that which is infinite and that which is not infinite there is no proportion. That is the first reason: God "humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth," because of the infinite distance that is between his nature and the nature of all things.

(2.) Because of his infinite self-sufficiency to all the ends of his own blessedness and eternal satisfaction. Whatever we desire, it that it may add unto our satisfaction. There is no creature in heaven or earth that is self-sufficient. The top of the creation, the flower, the glory of it, is the human nature of Christ; yet is it not self-sufficient. It eternally lives in dependence on God and by communications from the divine nature. No creature can be self-sufficient. No angel in heaven or man on earth who can have any desire, or act any thing, but it is to add to his satisfaction; and therefore he takes the reason of what he doth from without. But, saith the apostle, 'God stands in need of nothing, inasmuch as he gives life and breath to all things.' There is nothing can add unto God, unto his satisfaction. There is nothing wanting in himself unto his own eternal blessedness: [Job xxxv. 6](#), "If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him?" God loses nothing of his own eternal sufficiency: [Verse 7](#), "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?" There can be no addition made unto God. Therefore it must be an infinite condescension in him and a humbling of himself, to behold the things done in heaven and on earth.

I make my inference from hence: If such be the eternal, blessed nature of God, and his infinite distance from all creatures, if such be his infinite self-sufficiency and blessedness, that it is a humbling of himself so much as to behold the most glorious things in heaven or the greatest things on earth, what great humiliation is it in the Son of God, who did not only look upon and behold us, and act kindly towards us, but took our nature upon him to be his own This is the self-humiliation which the apostle proposes unto us, and which for ever we are to be found in.

2. I shall show you wherein this humiliation of the Son of God did consist; which will tend to the opening of the words. And because it is the centre, life, and soul, of religion, the main rock on which the church is built, and against which there hath been opposition in all ages, but never so fierce and subtle as in the days wherein we live, I shall show you first wherein it doth not consist, as far as may be apprehended, and then wherein it doth.



(1.) When Christ humbled himself, he did not leave, he did not relinquish, he did not forego, his divine nature. He did not cease to be God when he became man. The foundation of it lay here: He was “in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” [Phil. ii. 6](#). He was “in the form of God.” God hath no innate form hut his nature, his being, his essence; and therefore to be “in the form of God” is to be participant of the nature, essence, and being of God. What follows thereon? He “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” the Father, in dignity, power, and authority. Because he was “in the form of God,” partaking of the divine essence, therefore he was “equal with God,” in dignity, power, and authority: which nothing could give him but only his being in the form of God; for though there is an order in the persons of the Trinity, there is no distinction or inequality in the nature of God. Every one who is partaker of that nature is equal in that nature, in dignity, power, and authority. This was the state of Christ. He had the same nature with God the Father, he was “in the form of God;” and had the same dignity, authority, and power, — “equal with God.” Here is the “terminus a quo.” This the apostle states. He “took upon him the form of a servant.” Ἐκκένωσε, he did “empty himself, he did humble himself, and took upon him the form of a servant.” When? While he was God; when he abode “in the form of God;” and was “equal with God;” then he “took upon him the form of a servants” This is that glorious condescension of Christ, which is the greatest of all gospel mysteries, which is the life and soul of the church. He that is God can no more cease to be God, by any act of his own, or act upon him, than he that is not God can become God by any act of his own, or any act upon him. Christ could not cease to be God, — no more than a worm can make itself God. We say, Christ, being God, was made man for our sakes. The Socinians say, that, being a man, he was made a god for his own sake; he was made equal unto God, in the same authority, but never “in the form of God.” In brief, we say, “The Word was made flesh,” — that is, had glorious authority and power given him in this nature. But Jesus Christ did not forego his divine nature; that he could not do. The apostle speaks that with as much confidence as that God cannot cease to be God.

(2.) This condescension did not consist in any substantial conversion of the divine nature into the human, though some of the Arians thought so of old; and some (too many), following their dotage to this day, say, ‘ “The Word was made flesh.” But how? As the water was made wine by a miracle, by a substantial conversion; the substance of the water was turned into the substance of wine.’ As there the accident of water ceased, and the accident proper to wine did accompany it, they would have it so here, — that the divine nature of Christ was created by the will of God before the world was made, and after, by a substantial conversion, was turned into human nature. They assert that that which is called the divine nature was destroyed, as water was no more water when made wine. And so a human nature is produced that is of no affinity and cognation unto us; not derived of Adam as we, but



made of the substance of the divine Word. This is far from being a due representation of this condescension of Jesus Christ.

(3.) It was not hereby, that the divine and human natures were mixed and compounded into one nature, so that it was neither that divine nature that was originally and eternally, nor human nature, but another, a third nature, made in time. This frenzy troubled the church for above one hundred years. Though Christ was made to be what he was not, yet he never ceased to be distinctly what he was. The divine nature had neither change nor shadow of turning. Consider this condescension of Christ, and observe all its essential properties. It acts suitably unto itself; it acts nothing but what becomes it and is proper unto the divine nature. Jesus Christ did many things in the human nature wherein his divine nature had no concurrence but in the sustentation of the human nature in his one person. The divine nature did not act in hungering, and thirsting, and weariness, and bleeding, and dying; it cannot do so. All the acts of the divine nature on the human were acts of sustentation, whereby he acted these things.

But you will say, 'What did Christ do with reference to his divine nature, when he took our nature upon him?' That the apostle expresses in this mysterious word, ἐκκένωσε. He veiled himself, he shadowed himself, he hid his divine nature, he eclipsed the glory of it. Not absolutely; all things under heaven cannot veil, eclipse, or hide, the glory of the divine nature. But he eclipsed, shadowed, hid, and laid it aside, as to himself and his interest in it: for upon his taking our nature upon him, men were so far from looking on him as God, that they did not look on him as a good man; and the reason was, because they saw and knew him to be a man, and he professed himself to be a man, and was no less a man than any of themselves were. And yet he professes himself to be God. They were so far from believing him so to be, that they took him not to be so much as a good man. Therefore, upon the mentioning of his pre-existence to his incarnation, — "Before Abraham was, I am," [John viii. 58](#), — they fell into a great rage and madness, and took up stones to cast at him, as we read in [the next verse](#); and they give this reason, [John x. 33](#), "We stone thee because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." This they could not understand. 'This we will not believe,' say they. And this overthrew the persuasion of many, that if Christ will be man, he shall be only a man.

All this is part of the condescension of Christ, if we will believe what the apostle here saith, He was "in the form of God," and "equal with God," — partaking of his essence, and equal in dignity, authority, and power. What then? "He took upon him the form of a servant;" that is, our nature, that therein he might be "obedient unto death." How did he take it upon him so to be his own that he should be a man, and in that nature be "obedient unto death"?



Having showed you that it was not by the relinquishment of his divine nature, that, being God from eternity, he then ceased to be God when he was made man; that it was not by a conversion of the divine nature into the human, — the Word was not made flesh as the water was made wine; that it was not by a composition of two natures into one, for still they remained distinct in their essence; I shall now show you wherein it did consist:—

(1.) The condescension of Christ consisted in veiling the glory of the Deity, — not in taking a man to himself, but in taking the nature of man upon himself. Flesh and blood can reveal that unto no man.

I shall show you how it was; and then give you a word of use:—

What, then, did Christ do in his condescension? Pray remember it, for it is the principal object of your faith, and the life of your souls. This was that which he did: The person of the Son of God, or the divine nature in the second person, continuing God in his essence and God in his state and dignity, did take “upon” him (I use that word rather than take “unto” him) the nature of man, into an individual subsistence in his own person, whereby he became that man; and what was done and acted in it by that man was done and acted by the person of the Son of God. This is that Condescension of Christ that is here spoken of. Every man hath his own individual subsistence, whereby the human nature is divided in particular. We have all of us the same nature in general; — that is, the same specific human nature belongs unto us equally and unto all men in the world; yet every man and woman hath this nature entire and absolutely unto himself, as if there were no other man or woman in the world. And Adam was not more a single person when there was none in the world but himself, than every one of us is a single person now the world is full of men, as if there were but one man. And every one comes into the world in his own individual subsistence unto himself, whereby he becomes a man as much as any of us. Here is the great act of self-denial in Christ.

I should have insisted upon the consequences of it, — for neither of his natures is changed, — and how the divine nature was concealed and veiled hereby; but these must be waived at present.

3. I shall speak to the use of it, and so conclude:—

The use should be, to raise up our hearts into the admiration of the great condescension of Christ in thus humbling and emptying himself for our sakes. But I cannot enlarge upon this. The prophet tells us, [Isa. viii. 14](#) (which is a prophecy of Christ), “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel; for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Peter expounds this place, [1 Epist. ii. 6–8](#). He shall be “a sanctuary” unto them who believe, to them who are oppressed; but “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word.” Both these is our Lord Jesus Christ in a peculiar manner, by this self-emptying, by this self-humiliation; he is “a sanctuary,” and he is “a stone of stumbling.” Herein Christ is principally a

sanctuary unto them who do believe. What do men look for in a sanctuary? Freedom from danger, deliverance out of trouble, and a supply of all their wants. All these are proposed in this self-humiliation of Jesus Christ, if we could by faith make him our sanctuary, — if we could by faith, as we ought, go unto him for relief. If we go unto any one for relief, we question but two things, — his will and his power. If he be willing and if he be able, you have no ground to question but you shall have relief. I know how it is with us all. We have all wants, we have all temptations, we have all fears, we have all inward conflicts and perplexities, more or less; and we all secretly groan to be delivered from all these things. Groaning is the best of our spiritual life, — to live in continual groaning. Oh, that we may do so every morning and every evening! that there may be nothing but God and Christ in our souls, all clear and serene, and all our minds spiritual and heavenly! Where shall we betake ourselves, then, for relief in all cases? If any one have will and power to relieve us, oh, that he would come in to our relief and help; thither would we go! But here is the loss of our souls and peace, here is that which keeps us at such a poor, low rate, and makes us scramble for the world, — because we neglect going unto Christ for relief in all our wants. How few of us live in the exercise of faith for this purpose! ‘But will he relieve me?’ Why, he hath humbled, emptied himself, and laid aside his glory, for this very end, that he might relieve us. For my own part, I do verily believe that all coming short of all gospel joy, strength, and power, is for want of due application unto Jesus Christ for relief. The not believing of his willingness shall be the condemnation of the world for their ingratitude. “Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.” ‘Oh, who would have thought that he would have received us?’ Why, can I give you greater encouragement than I do? He still retains his omnipotent power; he is still “in the form of God.” The holy God help us to live more in the exercise of faith on him, that we may have more comfort in our lives!

But herein Christ is also “a stumbling-block and a rock of offence” unto the rest of the world. This they stumbled at of old, and this is that which the world continues yet to do. Some asserted Jesus Christ only to be a prophet come out from God. This the Mohammedans will all comply with; and the Jews were well enough content that John the Baptist should be a prophet, but Christ should be none, because he made himself equal unto God. There they stumbled and fell. And at this day great offence is taken in the world at this divine person of Christ and his self-humiliation. The truth is, “All flesh hath corrupted his way.” All the world begins to grow weary of the religion which they profess, and to question whether there be any thing of supernatural revelation. God gave us a natural religion at first; we lost it; and God raised it by supernatural revelation, which continued till the coming of Christ. Then he put an end unto all supernatural revelation. Then the devil was at a loss, and he raised a scandal upon supernatural revelation. The world is grown weary of it, and would return unto a natural religion, having lost the power of all supernatural revelation. It makes way for atheism. They believe nothing the Scripture expresses of gospel mysteries; and this



makes way for the disbelief of the Trinity and incarnation of the Son of God. They follow the conduct of men influencing them unto their own secular advantage. But let us hold this fast, because the world grows weary of it. Let this cornerstone be laid hold of by us for a foundation, and it will prove our life and safety.

## Sermon XII. Enoch's walk with God.

[The date of this sermon appears to be October 8, 1675.]

“And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” — [Gen. v. 24.](#)

This Enoch here spoken of hath the most considerable circumstances of any one of the patriarchs before the flood, nor was there any more but one afterwards, under the law, equal unto him; for he was a prophet, and foretold, as, no doubt, of other things needful unto the then present state of the church, so in particular of the future judgments of God, and the manner of them, on ungodly sinners, with the causes and reasons of those judgments. This part of his prophecy was revived by the Holy Ghost, and reported unto us by [Jude, verses 14, 15.](#) And although therein he seems principally intend the general judgment of the last day, yet he doth it so as include other lesser days of public judgment, when the patience of God being as it were wearied with the preventions of men, he hath testified his wrath from heaven against them in calamitous desolations. Such were the flood, the conflagration of Sodom, the destruction of Jerusalem; which, with other things of an alike nature, he foretold.

And herein he was also, as his great-grandchild Noah, a “preacher of righteousness” unto that generation; for the application of his prophecies was to deter men from profaneness, and to call them to repentance.

The state of things at this time in the world was very evil and corrupt, as being far engaged into that condition which, not long after, came unto a universal apostasy, [Gen. vi. 5, 11–13.](#) In the days of Enos there had been some reformation attempted, as the children of God by profession had separated themselves from the profane and wicked posterity of Cain, [Gen. iv. 26:](#) but at this time the degenerate offspring of Seth, the generality of visible professors, began to mix themselves in society, have communication and practice wickedness with the profane, scoffing, apostate world; an account whereof is given, [Gen. vi. 1–4.](#) And as those days were full of sin, so were they full of danger, persecution, and oppression, unto all that feared God. This Enoch in his prophecy expresseth a sense of the “hard speeches,” — that is, revilings and reproaches, — that were cast upon God; that is, on his servants and his ways: and we do know that such things in a multitude of ungodly men, accompanied with power, do not use to go alone. And, besides, the whole earth was then filled with violence and oppression; wherein those who feared God had no doubt the greatest share in suffering.

In this state and condition of things, both in the world and the church, we yet see in this instance of Enoch, — 1. That, under the most universal and deplorable apostasy of professors, God will maintain some to bear witness unto his truth, ways, and worship, against the profane wickedness of the children of men, until he comes unto the bounds and limits appointed in his wisdom unto his patience, whereon the universal destruction of apostates



shall ensue; and, 2. That no difficulties, discouragements, dangers, reproaches, persecutions, violences, oppositions, shall, can, or ought, to hinder any in, or terrify them from, the duty of bearing witness unto God and his cause in their generation, which they are called unto.

Again; we may observe of this Enoch, that his continuance in this world was but short in comparison of the rest of mankind, — scarce half the days of any one whose years are numbered before the flood, his father and his son being the longest livers that ever were in the world; for it is not long life, but public service for God, that we are to esteem a blessing in this world. A little time filled up with service and duty is inexpressibly to be preferred before a multitude of days spent in unprofitableness and vanity.

But yet while he was such an eminent prophet, a faithful preacher and witness for God, the Holy Ghost, intending to declare that rare privilege whereof he was made partaker above the residue of mankind, makes mention of none of those things whereunto it should have respect but only of his walking with God. And this is twice mentioned, as that which God had a peculiar regard unto, in the signal testimony of divine favour which he was made partaker of.

That, therefore, which is ascribed unto him here is, that “he walked with God;” the consequent whereof is, that “he was not;” and the reason of that consequent is, “because God took him.”

I shall not discourse any thing about the manner of this taking of Enoch, which our apostle calls “translation;” only we may observe that it is here doubly expressed:— 1. By his ceasing to be in the world: “He was not” 2. By God’s receiving of him into another state out of this world: “For God took him.” And the first is expressed with respect unto his state in the world. His life, no doubt, was like unto that of Elijah, his only associate in this favour from the foundation of the world, — full of labour, sorrow, persecution, danger, and trouble. His deliverance from this state and condition is that which is expressed in that word, “And he was not” He was no more exposed to the reproaches, and hard speeches, and violences of ungodly men. And although this was a peculiar way of deliverance, yet in general a deliverance it was, and that in and from as woful and calamitous a time as ever was since the foundation of the world. And that which I shall observe from hence is, — That walking with God is the only way to preserve and deliver any from the calamities of general apostasies, in wickedness, violence, and destruction. Many other ways men may contrive for this end, but this alone will be effectual. Some, scoff, [2 Pet. iii. 3, 4](#); some at such a season live in security, as did then the generality of the world until the flood came, [Matt. xxiv. 38, 39](#); some have hopes that either all things will grow better, or that they will not be so bad as some fear and imagine, [1 Thess. v. 8](#); some expect sudden changes of all things into a better condition, — whereunto, as unto desire, I could say with the prophet Jeremiah, Amen, but profess withal that I believe it not [possible] on such easy terms as are imagined, [Mal. ii. 2](#), [Amos v. 18](#); some have many contrivances for their own personal safety, let what will fall out: but



it will appear at last that it is this walking with God alone that will give us assured deliverance, so as that, when we are not, God will take us.

Enoch was a great prophet, and a great preacher, and a great patriarch; yet in his deliverance and translation there is no respect had unto these things, but only unto his walking with God. And this is that wherein you, who are neither prophets, nor preachers, nor of any great signification in the world, may be like unto him; and without which no other privileges whatever will avail us. Wherefore here is a common rule and duty expressed unto all, as the means and condition of a safe deliverance one way or other, which the meanest, the poorest, may have as good an interest in as the greatest and wisest in the world.

Two things, therefore, I design to do:— 1. To show you what it is to walk with God, or wherein this walking with God doth consist, or what is required thereunto. 2. How this walking with God will be the means of our deliverance from the calamities of a general apostasy drawing towards destruction.

It is the first of these which I shall principally insist upon; wherein I shall endeavour to declare the true nature of a Christian's daily walk with God, and what is required thereunto.

The great, comprehensive duty of walking with God, which expresseth the whole obedience of the new covenant, hath been treated of and spoken unto by many, whoso labours have been of great use in and profit unto the church of God; yet am I not discouraged from casting my mite also into the same treasury; and that partly because I have apparently observed some useful gleanings yet to be made after their vintage, and partly because I more particularly understand the state and condition of them unto whom I speak than any other can do, whence many directions may be taken for the directions which I shall give; for it is not so much walking with God absolutely and in general, as your walking with God in particular, which I design to guide and promote.

Two things herein I shall carefully avoid:— 1. Such a prolixity in handling of particulars, or the introduction of less necessary considerations or of such as may more properly be handled on other heads and occasions, as should weary or divert you, or turn you aside from being always in the consideration of what is offered, intent on this one thing of walking with God. Diversions and digressions may be useful and profitable on their proper occasions, where they be to the confirmation of doctrinal points, or the “confirmation of truth in controversy, or the full declaration of the nature of particular duties; but when a man's only business is to attend unto his way and walk therein, it is not expedient to attend unto them. It is no part of his duty who undertakes to show and guide another in his way, for to speed his course, to lead him out of it, that he may see this or that pleasant town or place, though desirable, and though he brings him into his way again; but it is so to attend continually unto the way wherein he is. I shall therefore only insist on such things as belong directly, immediately, and necessarily, unto our duty, as it is formally walking with God, and not on anything that may be reduced thereunto. 2. Such brevity must be avoided as would occasion



an omission of any important duty necessarily belonging hereunto, and that either absolutely or in the especial relation or circumstances wherein we may stand; yet I shall reduce all into as narrow a compass as I am able.

Now, unto the directions which I have to give unto this purpose some few things must be premised; as, —

1. They are professed believers alone whom we consider in this matter, — those, I mean, who pass for and are esteemed as true believers in the church of God, upon the profession they make of faith and obedience. It may be some, it may be many, such there are who are not truly and savingly interested in that condition. But these directions, though not intended for them, yet may be of use unto them; for when they shall see what is the indispensable duty of all believers herein, finding themselves to come every way short thereof, it may be a means of discovering unto them their own self-deceiving, and so of a delivery from their ruinous condition. But hence it is that I shall give no directions about our first general repentance, conversion to God, regeneration, and the like; all which are supposed here, as also I have handled them at large elsewhere.<sup>412</sup>

2. Whereas this walking with God respects the acting of our faith and obedience, we do suppose the nature of faith, obedience, and holiness in general, with their necessity and arguments for it, to be already received or admitted; and this part also of their great duty, wherein the foundations of it do lie, hath been elsewhere discoursed and declared. The principles whereby and the duties wherein we do or ought actually so to walk do alone now fall under consideration; and those we shall handle, both as unto the constant frame of our spirits and the daily acts of obedience that are required of us.

3. I shall not need to insist upon the explication of the metaphor of “walking with God,” or walking before him, which is commonly spoken unto and generally understood by all who concern themselves in these things. The Scripture doth variously express it unto us. It is “the life of God,” which wicked men are “alienated from,” [Eph. iv. 18](#); that life which is from God, and Whereby we live unto God: “Not living unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us,” [2 Cor. v. 15](#). To “walk with God,” is to live to him in an especial manner, in and through Jesus Christ, who died for us, that we might have grace, power, and wisdom, so to do. It is instantly to serve God day and night,” [Acts xxvi. 7](#); that is, to serve and obey him in the continual, intent performance of all the duties which he requireth of us. It is the “ordering of our conversation aright,” so as that we may “see the salvation of God,” [Ps. l. 23](#); wherein we have “our conversation in heaven,” [Phil. iii. 20](#); or it is so to walk as “to please God” in all things, [1 Thess. iv. 1](#).

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412 In the author's treatise on the Holy Spirit, vol. iii. of his works. — Ed.

Concerning this walking with God, I shall give these rules, which may both declare wherein it doth consist and also, give directions how we may be always found in the path thereof; as, —

First, Be sure that the general, prevailing design of our whole souls be to live unto God. It is not enough that we perform the duties which are required of us, but our whole course is to be managed with design and purpose of heart. Every agent that doth any thing according to reason hath some scope and design in what he doth, which both influences and guides him therein. To live unto the satisfaction of present desires, appetites, lusts, pleasures, and to subordinate various contrivances unto them, is the life of brutes, and brutish, unreasonable men only. And if no man can lead this natural, or a civil life as becometh a rational creature, but he must guide it by design, much less can any one otherwise live unto God in a due manner.

So Barnabas exhorted the first Christians, that “with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord,” [Acts xi. 23](#). To “cleave unto the Lord” is to “walk with him” or “before him” in faith and obedience. So Moses expresseth it, [Deut. iv. 4](#), “Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive;’ that is, who by faith in his promises yielded obedience unto his commands, and so “walked with God.” Now, this is to be done “with purpose of heart;” that is, with the full design and resolution of our souls. David carries it up unto the highest solemnity of expression, [Ps. cxix. 106](#), “I have sworn.” He respecteth his solemn covenant-engagement that he had made to God for universal obedience, with his resolution for its performance. This is that which I intend by this design, an express engagement of heart and soul constantly to pursue such an end. And this is that which God looketh on as such an eminent duty, [Jer. xxx. 21](#), “Who is this that hath engaged his heart to approach unto me?’ It is not merely approaching unto God, but the engagement of the heart to do so in all instances of duty, that is so acceptable unto God.

The Lord severely threatens those persons that “walk contrary unto him,” and that with a multiplication of plagues upon them, [Lev. xxvi. 21](#). The word is, and so is the meaning of the place, that “walk at all adventures with him.” They will walk with him in the performance of duties, it may be of all known duties, public and private; but they will do it “at all adventures,” — without design, or scope, or end, — without that reverent consideration that becometh those who walk with God; so that every occasion will either turn them out of the way or put a stop and end unto their walk. As two men may be walking together in the field, and they may both go the same way and at the same pace: but one of them hath a journey to go, a designed place that he would be at and must come to, or he utterly fails in his purpose; the other only walks for his health, or recreation, or diversion, or good company, without any certain design of an especial end, — that is, “at all adventures.” If a storm arise, if the rain fall, if weariness come on, the latter person either immediately turns out of the way for shelter, or returns quite back unto his own habitation; but the former, knowing that he hath

a journey to go, an end proposed, which he must pursue, or it may be he shall be undone, the difficulties and oppositions which he meets with do but occasion him to fortify his resolution, and to stir up all his strength for its accomplishment. So it is with him that “walketh with God at all adventures,” — difficulties, temptations, occasions of life, do easily turn him out of the way, or put a stop unto his progress; but he that hath a fixed design, that “cleaveth unto the Lord with purpose of heart,” is prepared to conflict with all difficulties, not to faint on any discouragements, but still to press forward towards his course and end, the mark of the high calling set before him.

Secondly, It ought to be inquired what it is to live unto God, which we are thus to design.

I answer briefly, three things are required thereunto:— 1. That we make him our end; 2. That we make his will our only rule; 3. That we expect our strength and reward from him alone.

1. If we live to God, we make him our *universal end*. This can be but one in any one man at the same time, or in the same state and condition. A man may have various general ends in various conditions; as the same person, whilst he is unconverted to God hath one general end, and when he is converted another: but in the same state he can have but one end. Every man may have, every man hath, many particular ends, and these are every way consistent with each other. Every particular action hath its particular end, and every especial course of life hath its especial end, if it be ordered aright; — in civil things, men pursue their trades, to increase their wealth thereby, like those in [James iv. 13](#), and to provide for their families, or the like; and every thing they do in that course hath its especial end also. And these may be multiplied, according unto men's occasions. So also in duties of religion, men may have particular ends. As he that giveth an alms to the poor, his next, particular end is to relieve their necessity. And although these particular ends are good, and the things done with respect unto them are honest and good in their own nature, yet do they not absolutely render them good unto them by whom they are performed, seeing there is an universal end over all these particular ends, whereon depends the formal nature of all that we do with respect unto God. These particular ends, therefore, may be many and various, coordinate or subordinate one to another, yea, sometimes contrary and stirring up a fierce conflict in the minds of men, — as it is with persons under the power of strong convictions, as also with them that serve divers lusts and pleasures.

But as for universal ends, they are but two, and those so absolutely inconsistent that no man can make them both to be his ends at the same time; and these are God and self. No man can make both these to be his general and principal end. He whose end is God may do too many things for self, and he whose end is self may do many things for God, — and our duty it is to inquire whether is predominant in us, — but both of these cannot be our chief and universal end at the same time. This our Saviour fully instructs us in, in one great instance wherein self prevails, [Matt. vi. 24](#). Our general end is our absolute master; we give up ourselves

unto it without limitation or condition. And although in such a sense we may sometimes do this or that work for another on particular occasions, yet we cannot entertain ourselves for an hour in the service of another. He that maketh self his end and master may do many things for God, but he can in nothing make God his chief end, but comparatively he will love self, and hold to self, and God shall be despised; and so also on the contrary. How we may know what is our principal end, or what end the prevailing design of our souls is for, shall immediately be inquired into.

How, then, is God thus the chief end of them who design to live unto him, or wherein do they make him so to be?

In answer, Our living unto God as our chief end consists in two things:— (1.) Our doing of all things unto his glory; and, (2.) Our aiming in and above all things at the enjoyment of him.

(1.) He is so when we do all things unto his glory; which the Scripture expressly requireth of us. In actions natural and civil, and in things sacred or religious, “whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,” [1 Cor. x. 31](#). This is in all things our principal end, if we live to God and not to self. That we may rightly understand it, we may observe, —

[1.] That, as we granted before, there are sundry particular ends that we may have in and unto all that we do. It is not so required of us to do all to the glory of God as not to have any lawful end of our own that may be subordinate thereunto. A sinful end, as the satisfaction of our lusts or self in any thing, we may not have; it is inconsistent with the general end proposed. So far as we attend unto it, we cross our principal end, if God be so. But such ends as are good in themselves are also allowed unto us. A man may eat and drink for the refreshment and sustentation of his nature, and may make that his end; so he may industriously labour in his particular calling, thereby to provide for himself and his family, and may make that his immediate end; yea, a man may use diversions and recreations for the relief and refreshment of his wearied nature, and make that his end. And so it may be in all instances, natural, civil, and religious; for all these ends may be as well subordinated unto the general end of living unto God as any of those actions may whose ends they are.

[2.] It is not, therefore, necessary that, in every particular action of our lives, of what sort soever it be, natural, civil, or religious, we should actually make the glory of God, or the glorifying of God, to be the immediate especial end of it. It may suffice, in many instances, that their particular ends be not inconsistent therewithal, but such as may be subordinated thereunto. Nevertheless, in greater duties, and such as the glory of God may have an immediate concernment in, such as are all acts of religious worship, there is an actual, especial intention of glorifying him, or of giving glory unto him; for that is the immediate end of all divine worship, which if it fail, the whole is lost. He, therefore, that lives to God, designs the immediate glorifying of him in all acts of his worship, and that by faith and the obedience



thereof. And the like may be said of sundry actions, ways, and courses, which are of importance in our conversation in this world. Wherefore, —

[3.] There are these five things required in all who design so to live to God as to make his glory, or the glorifying of him, their principal end:—

1st. They are bound to prefer, esteem, and value, the glory of God above all other things whatever. This Moses testifieth himself to have done on that great occasion wherein the lives of so many thousands and the being of a whole nation were concerned, [Num. xiv. 11–19](#). And so did Joshua on the like occasion, [chap. vii. 8, 9](#). The glory of God carries it, in the minds of those that walk with him, against all competition. Sometimes the contest may be seen; as when the glory of God is apparently engaged one way, and all our temporal interests another. And much work there will be to bring the soul into an acquiescency, by the preference of the glory of God unto all lawful self-interest and natural affection. David failed here in the case of Absalom; and a due discharge of this duty was that which the tribe of Levi was so renowned for, [Deut. xxxiii. 9](#). It hath respect unto their action in slaying their idolatrous relations, [Exod. xxxii. 25–29](#). They were scattered for their progenitor preferring self-revenge by the sword before the glory of God, [Gen. xlix. 7](#); and they are now consecrated to God by the sword, in preferring the glory of God above all natural affection and self-interest whatever. This is always to be done.

2dly. To order the general course of our lives in such a way as, considering our circumstances, may most conduce and tend unto the glory of God. I fear there is nothing among the most more neglected. Most men, indeed, are engaged into a course of life before they know how to choose for themselves with respect unto this great end; but supposing the way wherein they are so engaged to be in general according to the mind of God, as to that industrious use and improvement of our time which he requires of us, no small part of our wisdom and duty consists in ordering things so as that God may be glorified by us in the course of our conversation in our callings. This we ought to aim at, how we ought in them to walk so as to please God, and how to set forth his praise in all that we do. How this may be done will fall under many directions that shall be spoken unto afterwards.

3dly. To admit of nothing, to comply with nothing, that is contrary unto, or would in the least impeach, his glory. There is no man who makes God his end but he hath, in general, a careful circumspection in this matter. Possible it is that he may be surprised into particular actions that are derogatory unto the glory of God; but they are thereon his burden and his sorrow, as they were to David and to Peter, and will he so unto all true believers in instances of a much inferior nature, yea, in all that are any way contrary unto that regard which they owe to God's glory. And it must be said, that he who hath not a watchful care influencing him continually herein, that nothing he admitted or complied withal, in his person or any of his relations or circumstances, so far as in him lies, which doth any way in the least interfere



with God's glory, doth not so live to God as to make him his chief good. And into how many considerations this doth branch itself will afterwards appear.

*4thly.* Constant prayer for the exaltation of God's glory in the world, the church, and ourselves, answering a valuation of it in our hearts, is also required to this purpose. The Scripture is full of examples herein; and in that summary of prayer which is given us by our Saviour, the first and principal petition of it concerns singly this exaltation of the glory of God. Most men, indeed, do bring it into their prayers, — they are taught so to do; but if those prayers are not principled and animated by an inward, real, abiding esteem and love for the glory of God, they are of no value, nor any way accepted with God. But when we find our hearts so really affected with the concernments of God's glory in the world as that we cannot hut he pouring them out unto God about them, it is an evidence that we make him our principal end.

*5thly.* Readiness to do many things on the sole account of God's glory is also required hereunto. I have showed that there are particular and general ends of our moral actions, and how they differ. Now, our particular end cannot be made a general end, but our general end may be made a particular; that is, the immediate end of what we do, without the interposition of any other. So ought we to make the glory of God the particular end of much of what we do in the world, especially of what we suffer. Discarding all other considerations and motives, the concern of the glory of God is that which alone should influence us, and is itself the thing alone that we should aim at.

(2.) We live unto God as our Lord, when our principal aim is to enjoy him as our chief good. This is our utmost end and blessedness, the excellency and pre-eminence of our nature Consisting in its capacity for such a happiness. And there is a double enjoyment of God whereof we are capable; — the one present, in his love and favour; the other future, in the presence of his glory: and they are both intended in this rule.

[1.] Whoever lives to God as his chief end, prefers the present enjoyment of God, in his love and favour in Christ, before all other things in the world. So doth the psalmist, [Ps. iv. 6, 7](#), [Ps. lxxiii. 3](#). Indeed, he walks not with God, nor glorifies him as God whose principal aim and endeavour in this world is not to enjoy his favour in Christ, and to be made partaker of the pledges of his love and grace. And we may observe concerning it, — *1st.* That he who doth so will not have his endeavours after it, nor his care about it, nor his love to it, abated, in the greatest confluence of earthly mercies. Nor, *2dly.* will he despond of finding rest and satisfaction in God under the greatest pressures imaginable. *3dly.* It may be observed, also, that our aim and design at the present enjoyment of God in the tokens of his love is the true measure of what our real desires are to enjoy God in glory when we shall be here no more. For take that alone by itself, and it is a matter wherein men are very apt to deceive themselves. Every one would “die the death of the righteous,” and would, out of a natural desire of happiness, with traditional notions, wherein that must consist, come to the enjoyment of

God. But all these things may be false and deceiving. We have, indeed, no more desire to come to the future immediate enjoyment of God than we have desire to enjoy him here in his love and favour by Christ at present. [But,]

[2.] The future enjoyment of God in glory is the great design of all that walk with God, and belongs in an especial manner unto our living unto him as our chief and utmost end. This is spoken out plainly in the nature of the thing itself; for if God be our chief good, ultimate end, and eternal reward, it cannot be but that our principal design must be to attain the enjoyment of him. And that this may be regular, two things are required:—

1st. That we look for it by the way that he hath appointed. Now, this is only by faith in Christ Jesus; for none can come to God but by him. God despiseth all attempts for the enjoyment of him by any other way or by any other means, as knowing that those who use them seek not him, but themselves. And therefore those natural desires which all men have, to go to God when they die, are no evidence that they either live to God or walk with him. They only are accepted in this duty who make Jesus Christ, with faith and obedience in him, the way of attaining their end.

2dly. That we aim at the enjoyment of God as a spiritual good, and at a holy, spiritual satisfaction in him. God is herein to be eyed as infinite holiness, infinite goodness, infinite power, all in an infinite, eternal being. Wherefore our blessedness in the enjoyment of God consists in our eternal contemplation of these things, and assimilation unto them, according unto our capacity and measure. This is that which is to be the object of our desires. For men to have carnal notions of God and glory, or those which will give satisfaction unto their natural appetites and affections, is but to dream away their souls into disappointment and misery.

And this is the first thing in them who design to live unto God, — namely, that in all things they make him their chief end.

2. Where the prevailing design of our souls is to live unto God, his revealed will is *the rule and measure* of all we do, either in religion or in our course in this world. God doth as much require that his will be our rule as that his glory be our end; and it is equally necessary that it should be so, from his nature and ours. If we make our own reason or our own desires to be our rule, we cast off our dependence on the rule of God, and make ourselves to be in the stead of God unto ourselves. But it is a principal part of the design insisted on to do what God would have us to do, and to be what God would have us to be; without which we can never either please God or have peace in our own souls. Now, that we may thus make the will of God in all things to be our rule and measure, to give bounds unto our affections and desires, and order unto our actions, it is necessary, —

(1.) To know it, and that we make it no small part of our endeavours so to do. All light, wisdom, knowledge, and direction, are laid up in the word of God. See [Ps. xix. 7, 8, cxix. 98–100](#); [2 Tim. iii. 16, 17](#). But yet we must consider two things:— [1.] That many great and



principal parts of this wisdom and these directions are laid deep and hidden, as in a treasury or a mine: hence there must be great diligence used to search after them, and, as it Were, to dig them out, [Prov. ii. 3–5](#). God may teach men and instruct them, in his sovereign grace, as he pleaseth, but assuredly the common, way of cursorily reading the Scriptures, which most men satisfy themselves withal, is not ordinarily sufficient unto the investigation of the truth according unto what our own duty requires [2.] Where general rules are laid plain in the word, yet unless a man abound in the Scripture, he will be at a loss about their particular application. Were it not so, we should not so often miss it as we do in plain duties. Wherefore, unto the end that we may know the mind of God, as the universal rule of our obedience, all those instructions that are usually given about prayer, meditation, diligent use of all means, public and private, to the end we may come to a right understanding of the mind of God in the Scriptures, are necessarily to be attended unto. They are commonly spoken of. I will add one only, — which is indeed the principal in this case, and ought to influence all the rest, — and this is, That we should always read, and hear, and teach the word, and meditate upon it, with this end and design, that in our whole souls and lives, in all that we are and do, within and without, we may be conformable thereunto. Want of this design constantly kept up in our minds renders all other means fruitless. We take God's name in vain, and aggravate our own guilt, when we converse with the Scripture without this design. I need not produce particular instances; the whole word of God proclaims that, with respect unto ourselves, it is to be learned and studied with no other design.

(2.) That we use diligence to keep ourselves universally dose to the rule, so far as we have attained an acquaintance with it. Our walk in this world, if we intend to please God and discharge our duty, is to be according unto rule, and that attended unto with circumspection. Loose, way-side walkers are like way-side hearers; both will fail of what they seem to aim at. Every thing within us that is of ourselves, and every thing about us that is of the world and occasions of life, do either incline or solicit us unto a negligence of the rule; and if we walk not diligently, we shall frequently be turned aside. Hence is that loose, crooked, uneven walking that is among professors. He only is upon his guard in a due manner who always considers what his rule is, and what God in all things requireth of him. Let it not be said that this attendance unto the rule in all things is the way to make men scrupulous, fearful, and at length useless: for the word of God giveth light and liberty, and bringeth none into bondage who attends regularly unto it. Yet to prevent that careless boldness in walking and conversation which hath overrun the generality of professors, we must remember that “blessed is the man who feareth always;” and that it is our wisdom to “spend the time of our sojourning here in fear;” — which is the counsel given us by him who had learned this before from his own sad experience.

(3.) That we take heed of false rules and measures in our walking, both in things religious, moral, and of civil conversation. There are five false rules in religion, to some or all of which

the generality of mankind do give up the conduct of themselves:— [1.] Tradition; [2.] Multitude; [3.] Outward order and splendour; [4.] Human authority; [5.] Self-imagination It were easy to show how one or other, or all of these, are the rule and measure unto the generality of men in all their religious concerns. The whole church of Rome builds itself on the traditions received from the fathers; and what a long-derived tradition doth with them, the custom of a few ages doth among us. Men will do as those that went before them, and no otherwise; yea, some think there is no other fault in religion but the not doing of what others have done before, without more ado. And multitude prevails with many. It is thought safe doing what is done by the most; and, however, [at least,] few think it is particularly incumbent on them to examine whether almost all the world, especially the rulers, with the scribes and Pharisees, are out of the way or no. The other things mentioned are made rules to some, inasmuch as of late it is avowed, owned, pleaded for, that the civil laws of magistrates, or human authority, is the proper rule of all external religious worship. And many there are who leave the word and follow their own imaginations, Which they call their “light,” and take for their guide. But whoever attends unto any of these rules, he neither doth nor can walk with God, [Isa. viii. 19, 20](#).

There are also five false rules whereby men may deceive themselves in their moral and civil conversation:— [1.] The example of the best of men, taking in their infirmities. The examples of good men, being considered as they exemplify Scripture rules, are forcible encouragements unto duty. The example of Christ is an original rule; the example of others is to be looked on as such a transcript as wherein there may be mistakes. They are all, therefore, to be reduced unto the rule; and when they appear conformable unto it, they adorn it, illustrate it, and render it beautiful. Hence may we take encouragement unto imitation. But, for the most part, we are ready to consider good men, so as to countenance ourselves by their infirmities, ‘So and so do they; so do they talk, discourse, converse; unto such places and companies do they resort: and why may not we do so too?’ But I do believe that he who will be content with the worst of a good man hath no part of his best. [2.] The fashions of the world in things not directly sinful. [3.] Custom in trading, received by tradition. Men may, if they are not aware, learn in their apprenticeship to be dishonest all their lives; they have yet the trade of it. [4.] Satisfaction as to reputation in the world and the church. [5.] Quiet and satisfaction in our own minds.<sup>413</sup>

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413 The third division of this discourse has not been preserved. See p. 575. — Ed.



## **Sermon XIII. A fast sermon:— Christian duty under the hidings of God's face.**

Preached January 1, 1676.

The end of our meeting here this day is to bemoan, if God would help us, the withdrawing of God from among us, and to beg his returning unto us. It is not about any particular or any small occasion; but it is about the greatest concern of the glory of God and our own souls that we can ever be engaged or concerned in this world. Whether our spirits are suited and prepared to meet the Lord in such a work or no, we may do well to consider. Something I shall offer, if God bring it to mind, that may be of use unto us on the present occasion, from [Isa. viii. 17](#), —



“And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”

You may remember that my way is, upon these occasions, to speak some plain words unto you, that are not only of your special but of your present concern. I shall not, therefore, open the context here, but only tell you (which you will see by reading [the chapter](#) at any time) it was a time of great sin, of great darkness, of great danger; and yet there was a promise of Christ, that kept life in the church in the midst of all.

For the opening of the words, I would inquire into these four or five things:— 1. Whom it is that God hideth his face from; 2. What it is for God to hide his face; 3. How we may know when God hideth his face; 4. What are the reasons why God hideth his face; 5. How we may distinguish between God's hiding his face and God's departing; and, lastly, What is our duty in such a state and case, when God doth hide his face: “I will wait upon the Lord, who hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”

I shall speak very plainly, and I fear somewhat briefer than I intended, by reason of my infirmities, unto these things.

First, Whom is it that the Lord hideth his face from? It is from “the house of Jacob.” God never hideth his face from the world, because his face never shines upon them. The face of God's providence alters towards the world. It is sometimes filled with more frowns and anger than at other times, and he works great alterations accordingly; but the face of God's grace, that neither shines upon nor can be said to be hid from the world.

God hides his face from “the house of Jacob.” And two things are considerable herein:— 1. That it is the true church of God that is intended; 2. That it is the church of God in some special state and condition that is intended, that is “Jacob.”

1. It is the true church of God that is intended. Jacob is he that received the promises, with whom God made a covenant, to whom God engaged his truth: [Mic. vii. 20](#), “Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our

fathers from the days of old." Jacob being he that God had entered into covenant withal, took into covenant with himself, "the house of Jacob" are those, that are in covenant with God.

2. There is a twofold circumstance of the church comprised in this term, "Jacob:" — (1.) That it is in a low, poor, afflicted condition. So was Jacob all his days He was a man of sorrow, a man of affliction, a man of temptation. "Few and evil were the days of his pilgrimage." And the church is nowhere called "Jacob" but with reference unto its low estate: [Isa. xli. 14](#), "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel," saith he. When the church is as a contemptible worm, when there are but few that belong unto it, then it is called "Jacob." The church in a low, tempted, oppressed, sorrowful and mean condition, is "the house of Jacob." (2.) It is in a wrestling condition. This was the character of Jacob above all the patriarchs, — he was the great wrestler with God; and he got nothing but by wrestling through great difficulties. You all know so that know the story of Jacob from first to last. So that the church is called "the house of Jacob when it is in a wrestling condition, contending with God and man for the blessing. And many repulses he had, and came off lame at last, with the unjointing of his bones.

Brethren, you see who it is that in here intended, — the true church of God, in a low, weak, distressed condition; and there are some at least among them eminently wrestling with God and eminently wrestling with men for the great blessing of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Pray take notice that God can, and sometimes doth, hide himself from the church in this state and condition. Now, a man would think, now if ever is the time for God to shine upon the house of Jacob. But there may be such things found in the church, when it is in a low, wrestling condition, that God is compelled to hide his face from them.

Thus we have stated the subject. I desire to know whether it falls upon us or no? whether we are this "house of Jacob," whose condition is low, that, through infinite, free grace, God hath taken into covenant with himself? I do not speak absolutely in reference to ourselves, but to our brethren in the world, whose condition is low, distressed, tempted, oppressed. And yet there are remaining those that wrestle with God. If this be so, then the subject is rightly stated, and we are concerned in the text.

Secondly, Our second inquiry is, What it is for God to "hide his face"? To know that, we must inquire what it is for the face of God to shine upon any. You may observe that the shining of God's face upon any is, in Scripture, comprehensive of all mercies and of all blessings whatsoever. I will mention but one place, [Num. vi. 24–26](#), the blessing of God when he put his name upon the people: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Grace, preservation, and peace, they are the sum of all we receive from God in this world. And how doth this come? "The Lord cause his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon thee, and

give thee peace: the Lord cause his face to shine and bless thee." In a word, there the shining of God's face is, where the grace and favour of God in Christ Jesus evidences and communicates itself to the church and the souls of men. The grace and favour of God evidencing and communicating itself unto the souls of men is the shining of God's face and the lifting up of God's countenance.

And there are four things that do always accompany the shining of God's face upon any people or upon any person. The peculiar way of the communication and evidence of the grace and favour; which is the shining of his face, hath these four effects:—

1. It gives them light and guidance. "In thy light," saith the psalmist, [Ps. xxxvi. 9](#), "we shall see light," — in the light of God's countenance. When the face of God shines upon men, they are not at a loss to find their way. It is as the sun unto our natural occasions. Let a man be in his way, let him know it never so well, while the sun shines upon him, how pleasantly doth he travel! Though he be in the same way, if the sun go down and darkness come, what a loss is the man at! I know not what you have done, but I know what some others have done; — they have found sometimes pleasantness, plainness, satisfaction, in the same ways that afterwards they have been ready to stumble in, and could scarce find how to take one step before another. The sun was gone down! While God's face shines upon us, we shall not be at a loss nor in the dark about any of our ways.

2. Where God's face shines there is the communication of spiritual strength; for, as I told you, this face of God is his grace and favour, which is the fountain of all our spiritual life, of all spiritual strength, of all spiritual vigour. I need not stay to prove these things, which you know are acknowledged. All our spiritual life is from the fountain of God's grace and favour; and the shining of the face of God is the actual communication, of spiritual strength from that grace and favour. Whenever God's face shines, — and let us please ourselves with any other apprehension, — We shall have spiritual life, strength, vigour, quickening, as to all duties, as to all occasions, as to all trials and sufferings, whatsoever, we are called unto.

3. The shining of God's face is, in a peculiar manner, the cause of spiritual joy and refreshment; for by the shining of God's countenance he doth give in pledges unto our hearts that he is our reconciled God and Father. Spiritual joy is a most peculiar effect and an infallible evidence of the shining of God's face. Wherever it is, there God's face shines; and where it is not, there God hides his face.

4. And lastly, Deliverance from trouble is an effect of the shining of God's face: "Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." Such is the prayer of the psalmist.

These four effects do constantly accompany the lifting up of God's countenance, and the shining of his face upon us Wherefore the hiding of God's face must respect these effects, — light and guidance, spiritual strength, joy, and deliverance.



1. The hiding of God's face respects light and guidance: [Hos. v. 6](#), "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find him." Why? "He hath withdrawn himself from them." God hath hid himself. For God to hide himself, and for God to hide his face, are the same: [Isa. xlv. 15](#), "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." And when God withdraws and hides himself, men cannot find their way. They went with their flocks and with their herds to find the way to God, — with their church-assemblies, with all their concerns, — and could not find the way to God. When God hides his face, we shall be left under darkness as unto our churches, ways, and walking.

Pray, brethren, let us now inquire whether it is so with us or no. Consider these few things in the fear of the Lord:—

(1.) Do you see the beauty and the glory of the ways of God? Do you see the glorious goings of God in the sanctuary, as may be you have seen them? Do you see a desirableness and a beauty in the ways of God's worship in the church? Or, are these things grown unto you a very common thing? You are in a good way; hut is not the sun gone down? You are in the same path as formerly; but are your hearts so delighted, so refreshed? Do we really see a beauty and a glory in the ways and worship of the house of God? I am afraid we can scarce say so. And if it be so, it is through the want of the light of God's countenance. We are in the same way still, but darkness is round about us; we see not the beauty and glory of the ways and worship of God. Our very walking, our very actings, the very course we most of us take in the ways of the church, do manifest the hiding of God's face, — that God hath so far withdrawn the light of his countenance from us that we do not see a glory in the same way that once we saw before.

(2.) Are we not at a great loss as unto the ways themselves, and in the least difficulty we cannot find our way, but we are bewildered? Every trivial exception, that hath been answered a hundred times, will turn us out of the way, and keep us from the discharge of our duty, and from what God calls us unto. God hideth his face and leaves us much in the dark. When we would go about our duty, we do not find our way. All things have not been plain and clear.

(3.) Are we not in the dark as to the way of love, — the life, the soul, the cement of church-communion, — without which the best of us, as unto any church-order, are but as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal"? Whatever sweet or pleasant noise we make by our way or walk, without the exercise of love, we are as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." Is there not darkness come upon all professors herein? Is there that love among professors in general that either hath been or ought to be? Is there that love among churches, one church to another? They are scarce concerned in one another. I did little think ever to have lived to see the day wherein the churches of Christ should have so little concern in one another as they have. There is not that love among ourselves which there ought to be. Do not the paths of love mourn because none walk in them? Doth joy arise in our hearts and

pleasantness in our countenances when we behold the faces one of another? Why, then, do some complain that none visit, none confirm, none help, none relieve, none seek after their spiritual or outward condition? Who among us seeks to make himself an example of love? Is there a duty wherein men may exercise and show their gifts and parts? — there is a pretty readiness for it. Is there any thing wherein men may act severity of spirit? — they will be prepared for that. Who among us endeavours, in meekness, in condescension, in self-denial, in being little in his own eyes, to make himself an example of love? And all our church order and relation is a thing of no value without it. One person who is filled with love, which is a charitable grace, it will make him have low thoughts of himself, condescend greatly to others, forego temptation to provocations, and let go all these things. And who among us endeavours to make himself an example hereof? One such person would bring more honour and glory to Christ, and make a more glorious representation of him in the world, than a thousand of us do at this kind of rate of walking. The ways of God are the same, the worship of God the same, the saints of God the same also, — a company of poor tempted sinners: but we have not the same light, we have not the same guidance, we have not the same love; we live upon gifts, and not upon grace. God doth hide his face from us in this thing.

2. When God hides his face, there will be a decay as to spiritual strength, as to the flourishing and vigour of grace. I have spoken so much and so often to you upon this head, in this place, in our inquiry wherefore the Lord doth harden the hearts of his people from his fear, and in conference among ourselves, that I shall say no more to it, to manifest that we have this evidence of God's hiding his face, that there is a decay of spiritual strength as to the flourishing of grace among us. And truly, brethren, I am verily persuaded that if God do not give us an understanding of it by his *word*, he will give us an understanding of it by his *sword*, by his judgments, that will follow us till we are consumed.

3. When God hides his face, there will be a decay of spiritual joys. Spiritual joys are the immediate effect of the shining of God's countenance, the most proper pledge of it unto our hearts. And how is it with us, brethren? Pray remember my design, which is to speak familiarly unto you, and so bear with my manner of speaking at this time. How is it with us, brethren, as to this matter of spiritual joy? It is a thing that was purchased by the blood of Christ. It is more worth than all this world, and it is that without which we shall never greatly honour God, in this world or when we go out of it.

I cannot toll how to judge any of your hearts, nor what stock you have of this spiritual joy, but I will give you two or three outward signs, and one or two inward trials, whereby we may know whether there be not a decay among us in spiritual joy; and (which is the worst part of the story) we are content that so it should be.

(1.) This is certain, that carnal joys and spiritual joys are inconsistent; that where carnal joy is predominant, let men pretend what they will, and speak with the tongue of men and angels, there is no spiritual joy. By carnal joy I understand the prevalent satisfaction of the

minds of men in present enjoyments, whether in relations, or in outward state and condition, or in the succeeding of their affairs. Where there is a predominant satisfaction in these things, there is no spiritual joy. "Many say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." These things are absolutely opposed. The gladness of heart arising from the shining of God's countenance is absolutely opposed unto that good which men find in the increase of their corn, and wine, and oil. A predominancy of carnal joy in present satisfaction as to things here below is inconsistent with spiritual joy.

(2.) Earthly cares prevailing are inconsistent with heavenly joys. God hath brought many of us into that state and condition that it may be we will say we are free upon that account: 'We have nothing here to rejoice in; we are poor; we are low, disconsolate, afflicted.' Well, then, but have we not, on the other side, earthly cares and desires prevalent in us? We are not rich, but we would be rich; we are not healthy, but we would be healthy and strong; we have not provision for our lusts, but we would have it. Where there is this frame of spirit there is no spiritual joy.

I will give you these two inward trials whether you have spiritual joy or no:—

[1.] The first is, a frequency in surprisals with spiritual exultation. The spouse saith that her soul was surprised: "Ere I was aware, my heart made me as the chariots of Ammi-nadib," [Cant. vi. 12](#). Have not we found oftentimes that we have had surprisals, upon the approaches of God, upon the visits of Christ, with spiritual exultation, rejoicing in spirit, wherein the heart hath been lifted above itself, out of itself, hath been nigh unto God, and found that sweetness which no reasoning could ever bring it unto? A frequency in these spiritual exultations is that bubbling from the fountain of joy which will fix our hearts, in the night season, by the wayside, and upon other occasions. Oftentimes the heart is drawn up with these spiritual exultations. How is it with you, brethren? Are these things frequent with you? or can you scarcely recall the time when God hath given you such rejoicing of spirit? When the mother of Jesus came to visit the mother of John the Baptist, the babe sprang in her womb. When Christ comes to give the soul a visit, the heart will spring and rise up with joy. If these things are not frequent with us, if our hearts are not often surprised with these exultations, there is not a spring of spiritual joy in them.

[2.] What doth first present itself to you upon spiritual self-examination and inquiry as to your state and condition? I do not doubt that there is none of you but do often retreat to serious examination of your own state and condition. What doth first present itself to you? If you are compassed with darkness, that you are fain to work through by acts of faith, and to labour to Come to light as to your own state and condition, you are strangers to spiritual joy. Your condition may be good as to believing, but I speak as to spiritual joy. Where the heart is stored with that, the first reflection it makes from self-examination will be full of light, and will present a beauty and a glory. Though there be faith, if there be not spiritual



joy, the first consideration will be dark and confused, and our souls will be put hard to it to work out any evidence of their state and condition.

Have we not from hence another evidence that God doth hide his face from us, in the decay of spiritual joys. Either carnal joys and satisfaction do possess the room of them, or the cares of this world do stifle them, or we have not such surprisals with exultation of spirit as spiritual joy will give us upon all occasions. Sometimes when a man is taken with the greatest affliction, sorrow, distress, where there is the root of spiritual joy it will surprise him into exultation of spirit. "In that hour Jesus exulted in spirit," [Luke x. 21](#).

(3.) Lastly, If we are in the dark, and are fain to grope as in darkness after evidences of our state and condition, we are decayed in spiritual joy; God hideth his face as to these things.

4. God hideth his face when he doth not give deliverance. I shall not speak to this hiding, but leave it to the judgment of all whether there be not the hiding of the face of God in that particular, as to the deliverance of the church out of trouble.

Such is our second great inquiry, What it is for God to "hide his face"? When God hides his face there is a withdrawal as to light and guidance in the ways of his own worship, in the goings in and goings out of his house; as to spiritual strength in our own hearts, and the vigour of grace in our walking before him; as to spiritual joy (which, I am afraid, we are many of us strangers unto, and are pretty well content to be so); and as to deliverance; — all which things are effects of the hiding of God's face; and when God causes his face to shine upon our souls, all will return unto us.

Thirdly, The third inquiry is, How we may know when God hideth his face from us? for it may be all these things may happen and fall out, and yet there may not be a special hiding of God's face. These things may be in some measure and degree among us, and yet there may be no great nor special hiding of God's face. How shall we know, if it be thus with us, that it proceeds from this cause, that God doth hide his face?

I will name but one or two things:—

1. The first is this: When in such a state and condition God seems to shut out our prayers, and we have not returns of them, we may be sure it is a time wherein God hideth his face. The church complains of it, [Lam. iii. 8](#), "Also," saith she, "when I cry and shout, God shutteth out my prayer." How is it with us, brethren? We have had some days of prayer as to this mater; we have had frequent opportunities and seasons for prayer, and this thing hath been spread before the Lord; and it is the hope of my soul that you have in particular, every one of you, sought God in this matter. Where is the effect of our prayer? What ground have we got, what pledge have we of God's return? or what revival in ourselves as to any of these things? Is it not evident that in such matters, as yet, God shutteth out our prayers? Do not think it is an ordinary thing that is befallen us. It is from the hiding of God's face, or he

would not thus shut out our prayers, that so little ground should be got upon so many endeavours.

2. God hideth his face when our endeavours for relief are fruitless; — as in that place of Hosea, [chap. v. 6](#), “They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek me, but they shall not find me; I have withdrawn myself from them,” saith the Lord. It is time of hiding when endeavours are fruitless for recovery.

And they are fruitless upon these two grounds:— (1.) When we are in the dark, and cannot find the right way. There is something lies before us that we would fain be at, but we cannot find the way to it. The prophet tells you the reason why it is so, [Isa. lix. 10](#), “We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon-day as in the night.” Our way is plain, our rule is plain, and yet we cannot find the way. I am persuaded many that hear me this day would tell me, with all their souls, what it is they would be at. They would be at a spirit of faith and love; they would be at self-denial and resignation to the will of God in their own persons; they would be at special fruitfulness, at recovering a face of beauty and glory upon the church: but they cannot find the way; they grope as in the dark when they go about it; they miss the way, they cannot attain it. It is because God hath hid his face. (2.) When we grow weak and languid under our endeavours; for notwithstanding this, brethren, that God seems to shut out our prayers, that we cannot find our way, unless we abide continually in prayer and wrestling for the way, we shall never recover the face of God.

Now, it is a sign God hides his face, when we grow languid and cold in our endeavours, “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” We grow languid in our endeavours; warm one day and cold another, enlarged in prayer one day, and give over the next; we do not warm one another: and yet our lives, and souls, and the glory of God, lie all at stake in this matter. Our hearts are feeble; it is an evidence God hideth his face. We do not wait upon him as we ought; for they that wait shall not faint, whatever they do. It is wonderfully difficult, and we do not help one another as we ought. We do not go to one another; and advise with one another, to set one another in the way. And, lastly, we grow languid after we have been put into the way. The world cools our hearts, and we think enough is done upon such occasions. We shall not know the Lord in this matter, unless we follow on to know him.

Fourthly, Why doth the Lord thus hide his face from poor Jacob, from oppressed Jacob, from wrestling Jacob, — from his own people? why doth God thus hide his face from them as to all those things we have mentioned, — as to guidance, strength, joy, and deliverance?

The reasons are very plain why God doth it. It is, —

1. For their love of the world: [Isa. lvii. 17](#), “For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and I hid my face from him.” It is our love of the world and conformity to the world

that hath caused God thus to hide his face from us. I bless God that hath put it into the hearts of some among us to desire we may get together to consider what remedies we may have to cure us of that great conformity to the world that is grown amongst us; and I shall desire of the congregation that we may have a time to consider of it, because it is that which will greatly, with apparent offence, take us off from hearing our testimony against the world, which Christ hath committed to us. But it is for our love of the world, all and every one of us. None of us but have greatly refused God's teachings in that particular of love of the world that is among us. "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth." I would not judge any, nor reflect upon any; but I am afraid it is one great sin for which God is contending with our brethren at the ends of the earth, hiding his face from them, as at this day. Their hearts have too much gone out after the world, too much cleaved to it; and the word of God Cannot fail. If Jacob will love the world, if the iniquity of covetousness be found in him, God will assuredly hide his face; the word of God cannot be of none effect, It is in vain to imagine, that under a worldly, carnal frame of spirit, we should have the shining of God's face upon us.

2. A frowardness in our walking is another reason why God hides his face from his people. God complains of Israel, they are "froward children," and a "froward generation;" and so saith they shall not find him: [Mic. iii. 4](#), "He will even hide his face from them, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings," — "frowardly in their doings" When we behave ourselves frowardly in our ways, God hides his face from us. What is it to behave ourselves frowardly in the ways of God? It consists in two things, — (1.) Unreadiness to comply with God's providence; and, — (2.) Unevenness, crookedness, in our conversations in the world. The great thing God complains of under the name of frowardness is unreadiness to comply with his providence. We do not come to that which God calls us unto; we will not be at what God calls us unto. See a particular instance, [Isa. xxii. 12–14](#), "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die." Here is great frowardness. God calls to mourning, to humiliation; instead thereof there is slaying of oxen and killing of sheep, every one rejoicing in what he hath according to his power, every one eating and drinking as they can, adorning themselves as they please, — and that at a time when God called to mourning. 'But it is not such a time now.' Then it was never such a time in this world. All the tokens of God's displeasure are upon us; what we hear in the world is near approaching, particularly to ourselves. All the contests God hath had with this nation, by poverty, by that dreadful judgment of fire, and the like, threaten us every day. If these be not calls to mourning, we can have none from the word of God nor from conjunctions of providence. Yet at this time, who doth not eat and drink and clothe

himself as he can, refresh himself with what he is intrusted withal, from the highest to the lowest, especially those that are great and rich, even among professors? This is to walk frowardly with God, to walk uncomplyingly with providence. Neither our garb, nor countenance, nor food, nor raiment, nor any thing else, testifies we comply with the calls of God. And it is a dreadful word that follows: "It was revealed by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die." For, "If ye walk contrary unto me, I will walk contrary unto you, and will punish you seven times more." Instead of looking for the return of God and for the shining of his countenance, God speaks quite another language: "Ye walk contrary unto me, and I will punish you seven times more." It may be this comes home to our own state and condition, to God's dealing with his church and with particular persons. May be there is not that readiness in us to comply with the will of God in all things which he expecteth from us; and if we walk frowardly, God will never be prevailed upon by our frowardness.

3. Lukewarmness and formality in religious duties and worship are another reason why God hides his face from us. A multitude of duties men do perform. I never knew any professors in my life that were under the power of light and conviction, that did intend to countenance themselves in their lusts, but did multiply duties. But lukewarmness and formality in duty, and indulging to any lust, are as inconsistent with spirituality in duty (which is the acting of every grace in duty that is required thereunto) as light is inconsistent with darkness. And when it is so with us, God will hide his face from us.

4. And lastly, Another great reason why God hides himself from us is, because we do not fill up that testimony against the world which he hath committed to us. God hath committed to us a great testimony against the world for Christ, and for the glory and honour of his ways. And he looks on to see how we behave ourselves. And we have so shamefully betrayed the cause of God in the purity of his worship, wherein we are engaged, that saith he, "Let them alone; I will hide my face from them."

These are some of the causes of God's hiding his face from us:— Love of the world, frowardness, or a non-compliance with the calls of providence, formality in spiritual duties, and a not filling up our testimony against the world. And we have scarce time enough left in the world to sigh to the breaking of our hearts, that we do not more glorify God in this world. Therefore God hides his face from us.

I will but just name what I thought to have spoken on the two other heads:—

Fifthly, How shall we know that this is but a hiding, and not a departure? for saith God, "Woe to them when I depart from them!" If this should prove a departing, and the glory of God remove more and more from us, then woe unto us! How shall we know when it is a hiding, and not a departure?



1. If we mourn after the Lord, who hath hid himself from us; if we do indeed really, in our houses, closets, mourn and sigh, 'When will the Lord return again to his people?' — it is but a hiding.

2. It is but a hiding, when nothing will satisfy us unless God return. If God should give us peace and prosperity, give now England victory and success; if we can be satisfied with these things, God is departed. But if we can say, 'Nothing will satisfy us unless we have a sense of the return of God again unto us, of his shining upon us in the light of his countenance, quickening and reviving a spirit of grace in our hearts, filling our souls with joy; then we can be satisfied, but never without it;' — it is but a hiding.

3. When we can never rest in any of those things or ways which cause God to hide himself from us; when we can search our hearts and say, 'This is that I have put into the ephah, that hath contributed to the hiding of God's face from this congregation, from the church of God;' when we will give ourselves no rest in any thing that contributes to the hiding of God's face; — then it is but a hiding, and there is an appointed time wherein God will return.

Sixthly, and lastly, What is our duty in such a case as this? "I will wait upon the Lord," saith the text, "that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." Here is our duty.

What is "waiting?" Waiting is a permanent continuance in the performance of duties, against all difficulties and discouragements. It is a permanent abiding, a continuance in duty, whereby we seek for the return of God unto us, against all discouragements, difficulties, temptations whatsoever. They will arise from our own hearts on many various occasions; so that if we will wait upon God we must be permanent and abiding, — we must not make an end of what we have to do this day, but we must follow it on; and then the Lord will return unto the house of Jacob, from whom he hath hid his face.



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