

Monergism



# THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH

O P E N E D   A N D   A P P L I E D

EBENEZER ERSKINE

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OPENED AND APPLIED

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# **The Assurance of Faith**

## **Opened and Applied**

by Ebenezer Erskine

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**THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH, OPENED  
AND APPLIED**

Being the Substance of Several Sermons on Heb. 10:22.

Heb. 10:19–22.—"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith," &c.

## CHAPTER I

Containing an Introduction to the Main Purpose, with the Method of the following Discourse.

THESE verses contain the apostle's transition from the doctrinal to the practical part of the epistle. Having at great length discoursed upon the priestly office of Christ, in the foregoing part of the epistle, he sums up, in a few words, the scope and substance of all he had been saying, ver. 19–21, and then deduces a very natural inference from the whole, ver. 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Like a wise builder, he first digs till he come to the foundation, and then calls himself and others to build upon it with confidence.

That we may have the more distinct view of the words, it is expedient that we observe in general, the apostle here very elegantly expresses New Testament privileges, in an Old Testament style and dialect. The highest privilege of fallen man, is to have access into the presence of God, his offended Lord and Sovereign: the only way of access is Christ, of whom the temple of Solomon was an illustrious type. And with allusion unto that typical temple, Christ is presented to our faith under a threefold view, ver. 19–21.

1, As a gate or door, by which we may enter into the holiest, and that with boldness, by virtue of his atoning blood, ver. 19. Under the Mosaic dispensation, Aaron alone, and not the Israelites, could enter

into the holy of holies, and that but once a year, with the blood of beasts sacrificed for himself and them. But now, under the New Testament, through the death and satisfaction of the Son of God, the way of access to friendship and fellowship with a holy God, both here and hereafter, is made open and patent to every sinner, who by faith comes in under the covert of the blood of Jesus. No sooner had Adam sinned, but the door of access to the majesty of God was bolted against him, and all his posterity; the cherubim with the flaming sword stood in his way. But now the flaming sword of justice being quenched in the blood of the Surety, the door of access is again wide opened. I remember, the women of Tekoah, 2 Sam. 14:14, in her parabolical address unto David, on Absalom's behalf, makes use of this argument with David, to persuade him to bring home his exile son, "God (says she) doth devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him." This is remarkably true in the case in hand; God, in his infinite wisdom, has devised a way how his banished may be brought home again to his presence; and that is, through the blood and satisfaction of Christ, John 10:9; John 14:6.

2, To encourage us in our approaches to God through Christ, he is presented to us under the notion of a new and living way, consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh, ver. 20. The inner vail, that separated between the holy place, and the holiest of all, in the temple of Jerusalem, was a type of that body of flesh assumed by the Son of God, whereby his Deity was veiled; and through the breaking or rending of this by his death on the cross, the way to God and glory becomes open and patent. And this is called a new way, either in opposition to Adam's way by a covenant of works, which is shut up ever since the fall of man; or because it never waxes old, but is ever fresh, green, and fragrant, unto the believing soul. And it is called a living way, because, though Christ was once dead, yet now he is alive, and lives for evermore, to give life to every soul that comes to God through him. And then, he is a way consecrated for us, he is dedicated for the use of sinners in their dealings with God: "For their sakes (says he), do I sanctify myself." And O what can be more encouraging to a lost sinner, to make use of Christ by faith,

than to know that he is just devoted for this work of saving that which was lost!

3, Whereas the sinner might object, That though the door be opened, and the new and living way consecrated; yet he is either so ignorant, that he knows not this way; or so impotent, that he cannot walk in it; or so guilty, that he dares not venture to go into the holiest: therefore, to obviate all these, Christ is presented to us as "a great high priest over the house of God," ver. 21. O what noble encouragement is here for believing! Christ, as a High Priest, "is ordained for men in things pertaining to God," Heb. 5:1. And seeing he is ordained for men, may not men make use of his mediation with confidence and boldness? Heb. 4:14, 16. And then, by his office, he is obliged to execute the duties of his office toward every soul that employs him therein: he is obliged, as a High Priest, to instruct the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to confirm the feeble, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. And therefore let us take courage to employ and improve him, especially considering that he is both "a merciful and faithful High Priest," Heb. 2:17; and also a High Priest who is over the house of God; i.e. he has full power and authority from his eternal Father, to negotiate our affairs, and to render both our persons and performance acceptable unto him. In a word, the whole management of the offspring and issue, and of all the vessels of cups and flagons, is committed to him; yea, "all the glory of his Father's house hangs upon him, as upon a nail fastened in a sure place," Is. 22:24. And therefore, "seeing we have a High Priest (of such authority and interest), let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. 4:14–16. Whenever we have any business with God, whenever we would enter into the secret of his presence, or enjoy fellowship with him, let us go in at the back of our great High Priest, who has led the way before us, and is appearing in the presence of God for us.

Now I say, the apostle having thus presented Christ under the most encouraging views, as the object of our faith, trust, and confidence in

our dealings with the majesty of God, he proceeds to recommend and inculcate a correspondent duty in the words of my text, ver. 22, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled," &c.

Before we proceed to the more particular consideration of the words, it is very much worthy of our notice, to observe the apostle's order and method of doctrine, and how he knits the believer's privilege and duty together. He would have the privilege first believed, and then the duty performed: he would have us first believe, that the door of the holiest is opened by the blood of Jesus, that there is a new and living way consecrated for us, that we have a High Priest over the house of God, ready to introduce us into his presence; and, upon these grounds of faith, he presses and inculcates the duty, "Let us draw near," &c. It is pleasant hence to observe, how the method and order of the covenant of works is just inverted in the covenant of grace. In the covenant of works, duty was the foundation of our privilege; man was first to perform duty, and upon his doing of that, might expect the privilege in a way of pactional debt. But now, I say, the very reverse of this is God's order and method in the covenant of grace; for here we are first to believe the privilege, or to receive it as a grant of sovereign grace, and upon that ground we are to go on to duty. This is a thing that needs to be adverted to with the utmost attention, in regard the very bias of nature runs in the way of the covenant of works, namely, to expect the privilege on the score of duty, and to fancy that God is a debtor to us, when we have done this and the other duty required in the law: whereas the stream of nature runs quite cross to the order and method laid in the covenant of grace, namely, first to receive the privilege in a way of grace, like beggars receiving God's alms; and then to perform duty, as a testimony of gratitude for the privilege received, without expecting any thing from the Lord upon the account of duty done by us. This is what proud nature spurns against with the uttermost reluctancy. What? To take all freely, without money, and without price, and to reckon ourselves unprofitable servants when we have done all, is what depraved nature cannot yield to, till the heart be new moulded

by sovereign and efficacious grace. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" &c. Wherefore have we fasted, and prayed, and thou takest no knowledge? is expressive of our natural way of thinking. But though this way lie cross unto nature, yet this is the way in which God will have sinners saved, or else they shall never share of his salvation: he will have them to receive eternal life begun here, and consummate hereafter, as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord," without regard to any of our doings as a foundation of our claim or title thereunto. Boasting must be for ever excluded, that the glory of our salvation may redound allennarly unto grace, which "reigns through imputed righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." And therefore, I say, study to rivet upon your minds the order and method laid by God in the covenant of grace, where privilege received by faith is made the foundation of duty, and not duty the foundation of our claim to the privilege. This is the scheme or order laid in our Lesser Catechism, by the Westminster Assembly; where, in answer to the third question, we are told, that "the scriptures principally teach (first), what man is to believe concerning God," and then, "what duty God requires of man." And, according to this order, we have, first, the objects of faith, and privileges of believers explained; and then, the duties of the moral law inculcate upon that ground. And if this order of doctrine be inverted, we destroy the covenant of grace, and return to a covenant of works. So much for the connection.

I proceed to the words themselves. Where we may notice, 1, The grand duty the apostle urges upon the foregoing grounds, "Let us draw near." 2, He gives particular directions how we are to manage in our approaches unto God, through the new and living way, viz., "With a true heart, in full assurance of faith," &c.

As for the first, viz., the general duty that is pressed, "Let us draw near." The apostle does not tell us expressly whither or to whom we are to draw near; but it is plain, from the whole drift of the text and context, that he invites us to draw near "to God:" not to God



absolutely considered, for thus he is inaccessible by guilty sinners; but to "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." This is that "throne of grace" to which he had invited us to "come with boldness, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," chap. 4:16. The Greek word is the very same both there and here.

It is considerable, in the manner of the apostle's exhortation, that, when he is calling others to draw near, he comprehends himself; it is not, "Do ye draw near," but, "Let us draw near." Ministers of the gospel, when dispensing the truths of God, must preach home to their own souls as well as unto others. Sirs, we do not deliver truths or doctrines to you wherein we ourselves have no manner of concern; no, our own souls are at the stake, and shall either perish or be saved eternally, as we receive or reject these precious truths which we deliver unto you. And, truly, it can never be expected that we will apply the truths of God with any warmth or liveliness unto others, unless we first make a warm application thereof to our own souls; and if we do not feed upon these doctrines, and practise these duties, which we deliver to and inculcate upon you, though we preach unto others, we ourselves are but cast-aways.

The exhortation, "Draw near," supposes our natural distance and estrangement from God: "All we like sheep have gone astray," says the prophet Isaiah, chap. 53:6. When Christ would describe our apostate and lapsed state, he doth it under the notion of a "prodigal going into a far country," Luke 15. There are three things we all lost and forfeited in the first Adam, viz., the image of God, the favour of God, and fellowship with God: yea, so much have we lost them, that the apostle plainly tells us that we are alienated from the very life of God in our natural state. This God intimated unto Adam immediately after the fall, in that question he propounded to him when hiding himself from his presence among the thickets of Paradise, "Adam, where art thou?" Gen. 3:9. *Non es ubi prius eras*, as Austin, one of the ancient fathers, glosseth it; "Thou art not where thou wast before." What is become of the late friendship and fellowship that

was betwixt me and thee? Of a son of God thou art become a child of the devil; of an ally of heaven, turned a confederate of hell. Thus the breach and rupture is wide like the sea. Can ever parties betwixt whom there is such a natural and moral distance be brought together again? Yes; the apostle's exhortation to "draw near" plainly bears, that the offended and affronted Majesty of heaven is accessible "by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way." It was the great plot of heaven from eternity, to bring fallen man back again into fellowship with his Maker. Infinite wisdom, animated by infinite bowels of mercy, has found the way, and the way is CHRIST, John 14:6. The main intent of his incarnation, and of the whole of his mediatory work, was to "bring us to God," 1 Pet. 3:18. To bring strangers and enemies to amity and unity is a great and mighty work; yet this work he accomplishes and brings about by the ransom he has paid for us, and by the operation of his Spirit in us.

This "drawing near to God," it does not consist in any approach unto the essence of God: for, essentially considered, "he is not far from every one of us: in him we live, and move, and have our being." Neither does it lie in an external or bodily attendance upon him in the duties of his worship, "Bodily exercise profiteth little!" many draw near to God with their mouths and lips, while their hearts are far removed from him. Neither does it consist in a moral seriousness, though, alas! it is much to bring some people even that length. People may be morally serious about eternal concerns, in a legal way, like the Pharisee who came to Christ, saying, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Yea, heathens, and Mahometans, and Jews, may be morally serious in their own way, but they cannot be said to draw nigh to God. What is it then, say you, to "draw near to God?" I answer, It is an act of the heart or mind whereby the soul, under the influence of the Spirit, sweetly and irresistibly returns to a God in Christ as its only centre of rest. The poor soul having tried Adam's way of access, and finding that door bolted by the law, justice, and holiness of God, despairs of ever entering thereby. At length the man, when he has wearied himself in the greatness of his way, finding the door of the holiest opened by the blood of Jesus, the

new and living way being discovered to him in the light of the word and Spirit, he cries out at the sight of it, O, this is the gate of God, by this door will I enter into his presence; yea, "this is my rest, here will I dwell, for I desire and like it well." O what a sweet acquiescence of soul is there in God's device of salvation through Christ! The man cannot but applaud and approve of it, as a device every way worthy of infinite wisdom, crying out with the apostle, O! "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This ordinarily is the soul's exercise, both in its first and after approaches unto God in any duty of worship. There is a constant improvement of the merit and mediation of Christ in every address the man makes to the Majesty of heaven; he, as it were, fixes himself in the clefts of the Rock of ages; he gets into the secret places of that blessed stair by which we ascend unto heaven; and then he shews his countenance, and lifts up his voice, in drawing near to God by the new and living way. We, as it were, take up the propitiation which God has set forth in the hand of faith, hold it up to God, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant; behold, O God, our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed." We go quite out of ourselves when we draw near to the holiest by the blood of Jesus; we overlook our own duties, graces, frames, attainments, grounding our hope of access and success only upon the merits and moeyen of our great High Priest, God having "made us accepted in the Beloved." And, in this view of things, the soul will readily express itself, as David did in the like case, saying, "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." And if God hide his face, the soul will wait and bode good at his hand, saying, "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him! He will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me." And if the Lord smile, and grant an answer of peace, he will not ascribe his success to his own faith, frame, fervency, but unto Christ alone, saying "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory." Thus much for the main duty of "drawing near."

The apostle next proceeds to direct as to the manner of our approach. And,

First, He directs us to draw near with a true heart. This is a word fitly spoken. If he had required us to draw near with a heart perfectly clean and pure, he might as well have bidden us fly without wings; but he bids us draw near with a true heart, i.e., with a heart truly concerned about acceptance with God, a heart truly approving of, and acquiescing in the new and living way. In short, a true heart here is opposed to a double, doubting, distrusting, and hypocritical heart. All dissimulation is to be avoided in our dealings with him who "trieth the hearts and reins, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire, searching Jerusalem as with candles," Ps. 51:6. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts." Whereas the hypocrite, who draws near with his mouth, and honours God with his lips, while his heart is far removed from him, shall not stand in his presence. Take care then that your hearts be honestly minded toward God when you draw nigh to him. But I pass this also, and go on to that which I have principally in view, viz.—

The second direction or advice the apostle gives, in order to our successful approach unto God by the new and living way, and that is, to draw near IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH. The original word signifies to be fully persuaded or assured of a thing; and is opposed to wavering, doubting, and uncertainty. The apostle having laid a firm foundation of access in the preceding verses, he bids us trust to it, and rest upon it with an unshaken confidence, and certain persuasion of success. What further is necessary by the way of explication will occur in the prosecution of the following doctrine.

DOCT. "It is the will of God, that they who approach to him in Christ, should draw near in full assurance of faith, or with a certain persuasion, and confident expectation of success and acceptance."

The foundation of this doctrine is obvious. It is plain the apostle here is not speaking of that assurance of grace and salvation which follows upon believing, and is the result of the soul's reflection upon the operations of the Holy Spirit within; but of an assurance lying in the very direct act of faith: for the apostle's scope here is, not to give the

marks and evidences, but to present the object of faith, viz., Christ as the door and way to the holiest, and as a high priest ready to introduce us; and thereupon exhorts to a correspondent act of believing, in drawing near to God, namely, with full assurance of faith.

In discoursing this doctrine I shall, through divine assistance, endeavour to speak,

I. Of faith in general.

II. Of the assurance of faith.

III. Of the full assurance of faith.

IV. Of the grounds that faith builds its assurance upon, in drawing near to God.

V. Apply the whole.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Of Faith in General**

BEFORE I go on to discourse these heads, I shall only premise that the practical and experimental understanding of the subject, is a matter of the highest importance and concern, in regard, as the apostle tells us expressly, Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Without some degree of faith, we can never make a successful approach unto a throne of grace. What was said of the Israelites with relation to the earthly Canaan, that "they could not enter in because of unbelief," the same may be said of the greatest part of professors under the gospel, they cannot enter into the holiest

of fellowship with God here, or of immediate enjoyment hereafter, because of unbelief. And therefore, I say, the right understanding and uptaking of this subject must be of the greatest concern to them who have any concern anent their acceptance with God. This premised, I proceed to,

I, The first thing proposed in the method, which was, to discourse a little of faith in general. I shall not stand upon the different kinds of faith that are commonly mentioned, such as, a historical, miraculous, and temporary faith, which may be found in reprobates and temporary believers: our inquiry at present is particularly anent the faith of God's elect, which is well described in our Shorter Catechism, thus:

"Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone, for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel."

For clearing of which description, I offer the few following considerations.

1, That faith is a saving grace. And it is so designed, because it is "the free gift of God," Eph. 2:8. It is not the product of free-will; such a flower never sprung out of the soil of depraved nature; no, it is one of the prime operations of the Spirit, in effectual calling, upon the souls of God's elect. It is not bestowed upon any upon the account of good dispositions or qualifications antecedent to itself; faith is the first grace, or the first act of spiritual life, and, as it were, the parent of the other graces, because it roots and graffs the soul in Christ, of whom alone our fruit is found. Before the implantation of faith, nothing but atheism, enmity, ignorance, and unbelief, overspreads the face of the soul, "being alienated from the very life of God, through the ignorance that is in us." And therefore, faith must needs be a grace, or free gift of God, bestowed without any antecedent merit, good disposition, or qualification in us. Faith is a saving grace; because wherever true faith is, there salvation is already begun, and shall certainly be consummate in due time. There is an inseparable

connection stated, by the ordination of heaven, between faith and salvation: John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life." Mark 16:16, "He that believeth, shall be saved." When we preach the everlasting gospel, making offer of Christ and his salvation unto every creature, we are at the same time to declare, that whosoever he be that gives faith's entertainment unto this gospel of the grace of God, shall be saved. So that this promise, establishing the connection between faith and salvation, is as extensive as the offer of the gospel, and is not made to believers exclusively of others. It is certainly true of every son of Adam, lying within the joyful sound of a Saviour, that if he believe, he shall be saved. And this we are allowed to declare in the name of God, as an encouragement to every sinner to receive and entertain our message.

2, I remark, from this description of faith, that it hath Christ for its main and principal object; for it is a faith in Jesus Christ. There is such a sibness betwixt Christ and faith, that they cannot be separate. Take away Christ from faith, then faith is but a cypher, and stands for nothing; nothing can fill the eye or hand of faith, but Christ only. Christ is the bread of life, faith is the mouth of the soul that eats and feeds upon him. Christ is the mystical brazen serpent, faith the eye of the soul that looks to him for healing; Christ is the stronghold cast open to the prisoners of hope, faith the foot of the soul that runs in to him for shelter; Christ is our living altar, his satisfaction and intercession like the two horns of the altar, and faith flees in thither for safety from the law and justice of God, which pursue the sinner for his life: Christ is the bridegroom, and faith, like the bride, takes him by the hand, saying, Even so I take him. In a word, faith slights and overlooks every thing else to be at Christ, saying, with David, Ps. 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee;" and with Paul, "I desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

3, I remark, that faith is here described to be a receiving of Christ, according to what we have, John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." &c. For understanding this, you would know, that Christ, the ever-blessed object of faith, is presented to us in the gospel under a great many different views and aspects, in a correspondence unto which faith receives its denomination. For instance, Is Christ presented under the notion of meat to the hungry soul? then faith is expressed by eating. Is Christ held out under the notion of living waters? then faith is called a drinking. Is he held out as a refuge? then faith is called a fleeing to him, Heb. 6:18. Is he held out as a garment to the naked? then faith is a putting him on for clothing. Thus, I say, according to the aspect in which Christ is presented, faith receives its name; as the sea receives its name according to the different countries or shores it washes. Just so here, when Christ is presented under the notion of a gift, then faith is called a receiving him; for giving and receiving are correlates, as you see, John 3:27, "A man can receive (or as in the margin, take unto himself) nothing, except it be given him from heaven. \*Receiving, or taking of a thing, is but stealth or robbery, where it is it not warranted by an antecedent giving or granting: so our receiving Christ would be but presumption, and a vicious intromission, if he were not given of God to be received. And this giving of Christ in the revelation and offer of the gospel is common to all, and warrants all to receive him. John 6:32, says Christ unto a promiscuous multitude, the far greater part of whom were unbelievers, as is evident from Christ's character of them, "My Father (says he) giveth you the true bread from heaven," meaning himself. We read, Ps. 115:16, that "God hath given the earth to the sons of men," i.e. he made a grant of it unto them, to be used and possessed by them; and by virtue of this deed of gift or grant, before the earth came to be fully peopled, or stocked with inhabitants, it was lawful for a man to take possession of it, and use it as is own. Just so here, "God hath so loved the world" of lost mankind, "that he hath given his only begotten Son, that whosoever" of mankind lost "believeth in him, or receiveth him, should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16. This will not infer an universal redemption; for I do not



now speak of the purchase or application of redemption, which, without all doubt, is peculiar to the elect; but of that giving of Christ in the word, which warrants our receiving of him. And this, past all peradventure, is common to the whole visible church, yea, to all to whom the revelation of Christ comes; for if there were not such a giving of Christ as warrants all to receive him, the unbelieving world could not in justice be condemned for rejecting him. O then let mount Zion rejoice, and let the daughters of Judah (I mean the visible church) be glad, and receive it as a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, whose name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of peace;" for these are "good tidings of great joy to all people," Is. 9:6; Luke 2:10. Receive this Saviour who is given to you; and receive him with gratitude and praise, warbling out that doxology with heart and lip, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." And if you do not, remember I tell you, you will follow after lying vanities, and slight your own mercy.

4, Upon this description of faith, I remark, that faith is called not only a receiving, but a resting upon Christ: Ps. 37:7, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." We are not, in my opinion, to think, that receiving is one act of faith, and resting another act of it; they are only different expressions of the same applicatory, justifying faith, or (as some will have it) the rest of faith is a continuation of the reception. There are a great many denominations of faith, of the same divine authority with these two mentioned in the answer of the Catechism, such as, eating, drinking, fleeing, entering, coming, trusting, &c. But these are not different acts, but only different expressions of the saving act of faith, making use of, or applying Christ in a suitableness unto the view wherein he is presented in the word of God. Now, as to this expression of resting, it leads us to conceive of Christ as a rock or a strong foundation, upon which we may, and still ought to lay the weight of our everlasting concerns, with the greatest confidence. When we lay our weight upon a rock, we are not afraid that the rock sink or fail underneath us: so, in believing, the poor, weary, burdened soul, finding itself unable to

stand upon its own legs, leans and rests upon this Rock of ages, being confident that this Rock will not fail. Or the expression of resting may allude unto a man's resting upon a charter for an estate, a bond or bill for a sum of money; he rests upon it as good and sufficient security; so the soul, in believing, rests upon the fidelity and veracity of a God in Christ, pawned in the covenant of grace, and promise thereof. He looks upon the fulness of grace and truth, of merit and spirit treasured up in Christ, as they are laid out in the word of faith, saying, with David, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." On which account, faith, Heb. 11:1, is called "the substance of things hoped for;" because it rejoices in the promise, as though it had the thing promised. This resting is equivalent unto trusting, as is evident from all these scriptures cited in the Catechism upon this head. I shall notice, further, before I leave this point, that both these expressions of receiving and resting, whereby faith is here described, do, in the very nature of the thing intended, carry an application and appropriation in them: for when I receive a gift, I take it as my own property; and when I rest upon a charter or bond, I rest on it as my security: and if this be not allowed, the relieving and supporting nature of faith is in a great measure lost; without it we could never be "filled with joy and peace in believing." I shall only add, that both these expressions, pointing out the nature of faith, do so describe it, as to put it out of the rank or category of works; for when a poor man receives his alms, or when a weary man rests him, he cannot in any propriety of speech be said to work. God will have man saved, under the new covenant, by such a mean and instrument, that so works and boasting may be for ever excluded, and grace alone for ever exalted.

5, I remark, that faith receives Christ, and rests upon him alone. The poor soul, before the saving revelation of Christ, was grasping at empty shadows, trusting in lying refuges; and, like the men of the old world, when the waters of the deluge were upon the increase, was running to this and the other mountain, where he might be safe from the swelling deluge of God's wrath; but finding the waters to overflow his hiding-places, he quits them, and flees to the Rock of ages, saying, "In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the

multitude of mountains: in the Lord only is the salvation of his people. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby to be saved, but the name of Jesus." Every man by nature being married to the law in Adam, is attempting to climb up to heaven upon the broken ladder of the covenant of works, and to pass the deluge of God's wrath by the fallen bridge of the law. But as sure as the Lord lives, your attempts this way will fail you; for "by the works of the law, no flesh living shall be justified." God has established a bridge of communication between heaven and earth, by the obedience, death, and intercession of his eternal Son; and every other passage to heaven but this, is stopped by the justice and holiness of God. John 14:6, says Christ there, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

6, Faith receives Christ, and rests upon him alone for salvation. This points at the end the sinner has before him, in his first closing with Christ; he flees unto him for salvation: Acts 15:11, "We believe, that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved." By salvation here, we are not simply to understand an eternity of happiness in the enjoyment of God after time, but a salvation begun in this present life; salvation from the beginning of it in regeneration, till it be consummate in glory. The soul, in believing, rests upon Christ for pardon, which is salvation from the guilt of sin, and condemnatory sentence of the law: it rests on him for sanctification, which is a salvation from the filth and power of sin; for glorification, which is a salvation from the very inbeing of sin. Alas! the greatest part of the visible church have no other notion of Christ, but only as a Saviour to keep them out of hell, and to deliver them from vindictive wrath. It is true, indeed, our Jesus saveth from the wrath that is to come. But how does he that? He does it by saving from sin in the first place: "His name (saith the angel) shall be called Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." His first and great business was to condemn sin, that arch-traitor, and first-born of the devil, Rom. 8:3, "to finish transgression, and make an end of sin." And therefore it is a salvation from sin, in the guilt, and filth, and power of it, for which faith receives Christ, and rests upon him.

7, I remark, that faith receives and rests upon Christ, "as he is offered to us in the gospel." This offer of Christ, though it be last named in this description of faith, yet it is the first thing, in the order of nature, that faith believes: for unless one believe that Christ is offered to him in particular, as the gift of God, and as a foundation of hope and help, he will never receive him, or rest on him for salvation. This is a believing in order to believing; a believing that Christ, and salvation in him, is really offered, in order to his being accepted and received. And therefore be verily persuaded, that Christ is yours in the offer, and "that God hath given to you eternal life in his Son; for this is the record of God," 1 John 5:11. And unless you believe this, you "make God a liar, because you believe not the record that God hath given of his Son," ver. 10, O, Sirs, believe it, that "Unto you a child is born, unto you a son is given, whose name is called Wonderful," &c.; and that God hath given him to a lost world, in the gospel offer and revelation, that "whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16.

Next, you may observe, that it is in the gospel that this offer is made, and this gift of God is presented unto you. What is the gospel, but a word of grace, a word of promise, a word of faith, a word of life and salvation? and "to you is the word of this salvation sent." And in this word, Christ and his everlasting righteousness, and all-sufficient fulness, is brought near to you, in order to your receiving and applying him to your own souls by faith. You need not climb up to heaven, or dig into hell, in quest of a Saviour; for "the word is nigh the (and Christ in the word), even the word of faith which we preach," Rom. 10:6–9. As a sum of money is brought nigh to a man in a bond that is offered him, so is Christ brought nigh in the word of promise unto us, Acts 2:39, "The promise is unto you," &c. And without this word of grace and promise, believing were a thing impossible, in regard faith could never fasten on Christ, or on God in him, without this word of faith. If I should bid you believe that such a man will give you a sum of money, you would think me ridiculous, unless he had given his word that he would do it; your faith or trust could not fasten upon him without his word or writ as the immediate

ground thereof: so here, our faith, trust, or confidence, could never find a foundation without God's word of grace and promise; and in receiving his word, you receive himself, and all the treasures of his grace laid up in Christ, and laid out to your hand in the word.

Next, it is considerable in this branch of the description, that faith's reception and application of Christ must be regulated by, and bear a proportion unto the offer that is made of him in the gospel; for here we are told, that faith is a receiving and resting upon him as he is offered, &c. This qualifies our reception of Christ, and distinguishes the faith of true believers, from that of hypocrites and formalists. And therefore notice this as a thing of the last moment and consequence, whether your faith comes up to the offer, and corresponds thereunto. I shall illustrate this in the four following particulars:—

1st, Christ is freely offered in the gospel: Is. 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price," Rev. 22:17.—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." So faith receives and embraces him as the free gift of God. Beware of thinking to buy the pearl with the money and price of your works, duties, and good qualifications; as if by these you were fitted for receiving Christ, or as if God made you the more welcome; on the account of these, to receive his unspeakable gift; no, no, remember that, in the matter of believing, you are to shake your hands from holding of such bribes; for the pearl of great price cannot be bought in such a way. It is true, believing is called a buying, Is. 55:1; Rev. 3:18. But then let it be remembered what sort of a buying it is; it is a buying without money and without price. God's price in the market of the gospel is just nothing: and yet this is so great a matter with man, that the pride of his heart will not allow him to tell it down. We cannot think of coming up, I should rather say, cannot think of coming down to God's price; I mean, of taking Christ and salvation in him and through him for nothing. Many say to God, as Abraham said to the king of Sodom, Gen. 14:23, "I will not take any

thing that is thine, from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich." Just so does the proud self-righteous sinner upon the matter say unto God. God comes in a gospel-dispensation, saying, Come, sinners, I see you are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked:" you have nothing to give me as an equivalent for life, righteousness, and salvation; and therefore I seek no money or price from you, but make a free gift of my Son, and his whole fulness, for nothing; only take him as my free gift, and he and all that comes along with him is your own for ever. No, says the pride of the heart, "I am rich, and increased with goods, I stand in need of nothing" at God's hand: if God will give me life upon the terms of the first covenant, as it was granted to Adam; or if (because I am already a sinner, and incapable of yielding a perfect and sinless obedience) God will lower the terms of the covenant of works, and grant me an interest in Christ and salvation for my act of believing, or on the score of my honest aims and good meanings, or sincere endeavours, I am well content. But to take Christ and eternal life for nothing is what the proud legal heart cannot stoop to. O what a cursed aversion is there in the heart of man against his being a debtor unto grace, and grace only! To buy without money, and without price, is a mystery which the selfish heart of man cannot comprehend. But, Sirs, faith is a grace that comes to get, and not to give: or if it give any thing, it is the ills of the soul; but nothing of good does it pretend to give. The sinner, in believing, upon the matter says, Lord, I give thee my folly, and take thee for my only wisdom; I give thee my guilt, that thou mayest be the Lord my righteousness; I give thee my defilements, and take thee for sanctification; I give thee my chains and fetters, that I may be indebted to thee for redemption and liberty; I give thee my poverty, and take thee for my only riches; I give thee my wicked, wandering, hard, and deceitful heart, that thou mayest give me the new heart and spirit promised in the covenant, Thus, I say, Christ is freely offered, and must be freely received.

2dly, Christ is offered wholly, an undivided Christ is offered, and thus also he must be received. There are some who, in their

professed and pretended way of believing, do as it were halve and divide Christ. Some do so far receive him as a prophet, that they submit to the teaching of his word, and thereby come to acquire a great deal of speculative knowledge in the things of God; but, being unacquainted with the teaching of his Spirit, they never come to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. And hence it comes that they never flee to him as a probation, or submit unto his authority as a King and a Lawgiver: for the execution of the prophetic office, paves the way for his reception both as a Priest and King. Some again professedly receive Christ as a Priest to save them from hell and the curse; but, by continuing in their ignorance under a gospel-revelation, and walking according to the curse of this world, and not according to the laws of Christ, they do evidently reject him, both as a Prophet and King. Others again, and I fear too many in our day, so professedly receive Christ as a King and Lawgiver, to the prejudice of his priestly office, while they imagine, by their obedience to his law, particularly the new gospel-law of faith and repentance (as some call it), to purchase a title to salvation; by which means they either totally exclude the righteousness of Christ, or mingle in their own acts of faith and repentance with the righteousness of Christ, in the affair of acceptance and justification before God: in both which cases, "Christ can profit them nothing; they are fallen from grace," as the apostle expressly declares, Gal. 5:2, 4. Thus, I say, many pretended believers halve and divide the offices of Christ. But is Christ divided? No; a whole, an entire and undivided Christ must be received, or no Christ at all; there is nothing of Christ that a believing soul can want. It is true, indeed, the first flight of a poor awakened soul, fleeing from the face of the law and justice of God, is to Christ as a Priest; because here, and here only, it finds relief and shelter under covert of everlasting righteousness. But at the same moment in which it receives him as a priest for justification, it submits unto his kingly authority, saying, as the men of Israel did unto Gibeon, "Rule thou over us: for thou hast delivered us out of the hands of our enemies. O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we now make mention of thy name."

3dly, Christ is offered particularly unto every one of the hearers of the gospel; and accordingly faith receives him with particular application. The general call and offer reaches every individual person; and God speaks to every sinner as particularly as though he named him by his name and surname: Remission of sin is preached to you; we beseech you to be reconciled; the promise is unto you. And, for my part, I do not know what sort of a gospel men make, who do not admit this. Now, I say, faith, which is the echo of the gospel offer and call, must needs receive an offered Christ and salvation, with particular application to the soul itself. For a person to rest in a general persuasion that Christ is offered to the church, or offered to the elect, or a persuasion of God's ability and readiness to save all that come to Christ, is still but a general faith, and what devils, reprobates, and hypocrites may have. Man, woman, Christ stands at thy door; thou in particular, even thou art called and commanded to believe in the name of the Son of God. Here lies the great pinch and strait of believing; the convinced and awakened soul, through the policy of Satan, and the workings of a deceitful heart, thrusts away the word of grace and faith, as not pertaining unto it; till God, by the power of his Spirit, irradiate the word, and irradiate the mind of the sinner, letting the man see that to him the word of this salvation is sent: and then he believes with particular application, not only good-will to man upon earth, but good-will to me; Christ is offered to me, and therefore I take him for my own Saviour; the promise and covenant is directed unto me, and therefore I embrace it as my security. But, perhaps, more of this under the second general head.

4thy, God is hearty, and in good earnest, in his offers of Christ, and his salvation. O, Sirs! do not think that a God of truth dissembles with you, when he makes offer of his unspeakable gift, or that he offers a thing to you which he has no mind to give. He says, yea, he swears with the greatest solemnity, by his very life, that he is in good earnest, and has no pleasure in your death. And after this, to think that he is not in earnest, what else is it, but to charge a God of truth with lying and perjury? There cannot be a greater affront offered to a man of common veracity. How criminal then must it be to impute



such a thing to him, for whom it is impossible to lie, and who hates all fraud and dissimulation in others with a perfect hatred? Thus, I say, God is in good earnest in his offers of Christ; so faith is hearty, and in good earnest in receiving and applying him: "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." God's whole heart and his whole soul is in the offer and promise of the gospel, Jer. 32:41; and is it not reasonable that we should give him a meeting, by believing with the whole heart and soul? It is not one faculty, but all the powers of the soul do jointly concur in this business of believing; though, indeed, to speak accurately, with the learned and judicious Dr Owen, "Faith is in the understanding in respect of its being and subsistence, in the will and heart, in respect of its effectual operation." This much shall serve for the first thing proposed, namely, some account of the nature of faith in general.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Of the Assurance of Faith**

THE second thing in the method was to speak a little of the ASSURANCE of faith. And what I have to offer upon this head, I shall endeavour to reduce under these five propositions following.

Proposition I. Is this, that in this faith (which I have been describing) there is a twofold certainty or assurance, viz., of assent and application. The former necessarily supposes an assurance of understanding, or of knowledge, Col. 2:2. The apostle there speaks of the full assurance of understanding, which every Christian ought to breathe after, and which every believer hath in a greater or lesser measure; for it is only "they that know his name that will put their trust in him," Ps. 9:10. This assurance of understanding, as I take it, lies in an uptaking of the reality and excellency of things divine and supernatural: there is a beam of the glorious Sun of righteousness

darted in upon the man's soul, who before was sitting in darkness, and in the regions of the shadow of death; whereby he that was darkness in the abstract, becomes light in the Lord. He comes now to see things spiritual in another light than formerly; he enters, as it were, into a new world of wonders, upon which account we are said to be "called out of darkness unto God's marvellous light." Perhaps the man had, before this, some dreaming, floating, superficial notions of these things; he heard of them by the hearing of the ear: but now his eyes see them; and he sees as great a reality in things invisible and eternal, as though he saw them with his bodily eyes. This is called by the apostle, Heb. 11:1, "the evidence of things not seen." There is such a certainty here, as amounts to a demonstration; so that you may as soon persuade a man that it is midnight, when the mid-day sun is shining upon him in full splendour, as persuade a man in the lively exercise of faith, that there is not a reality and excellency in things supernaturally revealed. This is so essential to faith, that very commonly under the Old Testament, and frequently also under the New, faith receives its denomination therefrom, Is. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; John 17:3.

But, to come a little more close to the purpose in hand, 1st, There is, I say, in faith an assurance of assent, whereby the man assuredly believes whatever God has said in his word to be true; and that not upon the testimony of men, of ministers, or angels, but upon the testimony and authority of the God of truth, for whom it is impossible to lie, speaking in his own word, and saying, "Thus saith the Lord." But in a particular manner the soul gives its assent unto the truth of the gospel, and the revelation of the word, concerning the person, natures, offices, undertakings, and performances of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer, Surety, and Saviour of lost sinners. The man's understanding being enlightened with the knowledge of Christ, and having got a view of him by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, he finds it to be all true that God has said of Christ in the word, so that he cannot shun in this case to join issue with the apostle, "This is indeed a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. 1:15. He sees the truth

and veracity of God so much engaged in the covenant and promises thereof, that they are more firm than the everlasting mountains and perpetual hills, Is. 54:10. Now, this certainty of assent is, in scripture-dialect, called a "believing the report of the gospel," Is. 53:1; a "receiving the record of God," 1 John 5:10, 11; a "setting to the seal, that God is true," John 3:33.

2dly, There is in faith an assurance of application, or appropriation, expressed frequently in Scripture by a resting, a trusting or confiding in the Lord, and the veracity of his word of grace and promise. By this act of faith, the soul takes home the promise, and embraces it as a good and sufficient security to itself. It is said of the Old Testament worthies, Heb. 11:13, that they were "persuaded of the promises, and embraced them." Their faith in the promise was a persuasion, or assent with appropriation thereof to their own souls, insomuch that they looked upon the promise as their substance; and hence is that which we have in the first verse of that chapter, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." This applicatory act of faith, wherein the very life, soul, and sweetness of faith lies, is pleasantly expressed and illustrated in David. God had made a promise to him of the crown and kingdom of Israel, which bore up his spirits, when, through the rage and fury of Saul, he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains; and viewing the promise, and fidelity of the promiser, he cries out, Ps. 60:6, "God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice;" and because I have the security of his promise I dare say it with confidence and assurance, "Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine." In like manner, true faith, it appropriates the mercy of God in Christ to the soul itself in particular, upon the ground of the free and faithful promise of God. I might here demonstrate, that the stream of our best Protestant divines concur in their sentiments as to this matter: I shall only at present quote the definition of faith given by the great and judicious Dr Owen, in his Catechism, or Principles of the Doctrine of Christ; where, having moved the question, "What is justifying faith?" His answer is, "A gracious resting on the free promises of God in Christ Jesus for mercy, with a firm persuasion of heart, that God is a reconciled Father to us in the Son of his love."

For proof of which he cites, 1 Tim. 1:16; John 13:15; John 19:25; Rom. 4:5; Heb. 4:16; Rom. 8:38, 39; Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:20, 21. And on the margin he has these words,—“Of this faith the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause, the word the instrumental, the law indirectly, by discovering our misery, the gospel immediately, by holding forth a Saviour. Faith (adds he) is in the understanding in respect of its being and subsistence, in the will and heart in respect of its effectual working.” According to this account of faith, this assurance I speak of, viz. a persuasion of the promise with appropriation (as the judicious Calvin speaks), can no more be separate from faith, than light can be separate from the sun. It takes home the grace and mercy of God to the soul in particular, which before lay in common in the offer of the gospel. And without this particular application, the offer and promise of the gospel can stand us in no stead; but is like a price put in the hand of a fool, who has no heart to it. Our meat set before us will never feed us, unless it be applied by eating it; so “except we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man,” by an applying faith, “we have no life in us.” Whatever excellency there be in Gilead's balm, it will never recover the hurt of the daughter of Zion, unless it be used by faith. Faith answers and corresponds unto the word of faith, as the seal and the wax answer to one another, Zech. 13:9, “I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.” Faith will not quit its MY'S, though all the world should say against it. The marrow of the gospel (as Luther observes) is in these pronouns, “MEUM, NOSTRUM, my and our.” He bids us read these with great emphasis. “Tolle meum, et tolle Deum,” says another, “Take away property, and you take away God, take away Christ.” It is the common dialect of faith in scripture, to vent itself in words of appropriation; it has a peculiar pleasure and satisfaction in these words, my and our, and rolls them in its mouth like a sweet morsel. See how sweetly David harps upon this string, Ps. 18:1, 2, no less than eight times in a breath does he repeat his appropriating MY, “My strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my strength, my buckler, the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” Yea, so tenacious is faith in this matter, that it will maintain its MY'S in the face of a hiding and frowning God: Ps. 22:1, “My God, my God,

why hast thou forsaken me?" My is a word of faith, says Flavel on the text. So Is. 49:14, "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But I need not stand to offer more instances of this kind, seeing, as one observes, faith in scripture expresseth itself by these two words, my and our, no less than about three hundred times.

Thus you see what kind of assurance there is in faith, namely, an assurance or certainty of assent and application. The first may be found in a great measure, and in some sort, in devils and reprobates; the last is of a distinguishing nature, and peculiar only to the faith of God's elect, and of his operation; though indeed some shadow of it also may be found in the presumptuous faith of hypocrites; of which we may speak afterward. Knowledge and assent are preparatory toward that application, wherein the very soul of saving and justifying faith doth lie. And when we speak of them one after another, it is not as if they were really separate in the soul's exercise; for I take them up as one complex undivided act of the soul. In the very first view and relation of Christ by the word and Spirit, the soul cannot shun to cry out with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God." I do not mean that the soul always, in the first moment of believing, runs that length, as to express itself so with the mouth; but I mean, this is what faith would say, could it get up its head from under the load of unbelief indwelling corruption, wherewith it is overpowered.

Proposition 2. I offer, is this, that there is a great difference betwixt the assurance of faith (which I have now described), and the assurance of sense, which follows upon faith. The assurance of faith is a direct, but the assurance of sense is a reflex act of the soul. The assurance of faith hath its object and foundation from without, but that of sense has them within. The object of the assurance of faith is a "Christ revealed, promised, and offered in the word" the object of the assurance of sense is a "Christ formed within us by the Holy Spirit." The assurance of faith is the cause, that of sense is the effect; the first is the root, and the other is the fruit. The assurance of faith eyes the promise in its stability, flowing from the veracity of the promiser;

the assurance of sense, it eyes the promise in its actual accomplishment. By the assurance of faith, Abraham believed that he should have a son in his old age, because God who cannot lie had promised; but by the assurance of sense, he believed it when he got Isaac in his arms. By the first, Noah was sure that he and his family should not perish in the waters of the deluge; but by the last, he was assured of it, when the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat, and the waters were withdrawn again into their proper channels. By the former, the believing Israelites were assured, that Canaan should be their possession, because God had made a grant and a deed of gift of it to them in his promise; by the latter they were assured of it, when they passed Jordan, overthrew the old inhabitants, and divided the good land by lot, as the inheritance of the tribes of Israel. Time would fail me, to illustrate this matter by instances that stand upon record in the sacred oracles. Faith asserts its interest in a future good, because promised; sense asserts its interest in a present good, because possessed. Faith says, "My God will hear me;" sense says, "My God hath heard me." Faith says, "He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold righteousness;" sense says, "He hath brought me forth to the light, and I do behold his righteousness." Again, faith is conversant about things that are "not seen, and hoped for;" sense is conversant about things seen, and actually enjoyed. Faith says, "He is my God, because he has said in the covenant, I will be their God;" sense again says, "He is my God, because I know my soul has said unto the Lord, He is my Lord." Faith assures the soul of the remission of sins in the blood of the Lamb, because God has said, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" sense again assures the soul of remission, because of the intimations of pardon in some sensible smiles of the Lord's countenance, and some saving operations of his grace. By faith I believe my salvation, because it is purchased, promised, and possessed by my glorious head Christ Jesus: but by sense I believe my salvation, because I find this salvation already begun in a work of regeneration, and advancing in a work of sanctification, "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun the good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Proposition 3, The assurance of faith will stand its ground, when the assurance of sense is quite lost and gone. A clear instance of this we have in Christ, when there was a total eclipse of sensible manifestations, yea, nothing but a lowering cloud of vindictive wrath surrounding and breaking upon him as our Surety; yet, at that same time, the assurance of faith maintains the claim, and repeats it, saying, "My God, my God;" upon the ground not only of his eternal Sonship, but of the promise the Father had made to him, Ps. 89:26, "He shall cry unto me, thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation." And lest you should think this was a thing peculiar unto the head, see an instance of it also in the church, which is in his body, Is. 49:14, "Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Upon which the holy Rutherford sweetly glosses to this purpose: 'He may be a forgetting and withdrawing God to my feeling; and yet to my faith, MY GOD, and MY LORD: even as the wife may believe the angry and forsaking husband is still her husband.' Heman, Ps. 88 is so far deserted as to sensible presence, that he is as to his own feeling, "laid in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps," ver. 6. Yea, ver. 7, he adds, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves." And, ver. 15, 16, 17, "While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors hath cut me off. They came around about me daily like water, they compassed me about together." What lower could a child of God be brought, on this side of hell? and yet faith, amidst all these clouds, steps in with its appropriating my, v. 1, "O Lord God of my salvation." And truly, if there were not some exhilarating certainty in faith, acting upon the unalterable covenant, in such cloudy and dismal dispensations, I know not what could keep the believer from running into utter despair. But the grace of faith will venture the soul's safety upon the strong plank of the promise, even when sensible consolations are quite dashed to pieces, by the angry billows of outward and inward trouble, like two seas, meeting upon the believer. David had the experience of this, Ps. 27:13, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Hence also it is, that the Lord directs his people to the exercise of faith in such a case, Is. 50:10, "Who is among you that

feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."

Proposition 4, When we speak of the assurance of faith, it is not to be so understood, as if every one that has faith were perfectly free of doubting. This, I apprehend, is what scares many at this doctrine of the assurance of faith. They think, that if there be an assurance in the essence of faith, then it would follow, that every true believer behoved always to have such assurance as to be free from doubting; which lies cross to the experience of the generation of the righteous. But this objection goes upon a palpable mistake, as if faith and the believer were one and the same thing. We do indeed assert, that there is no doubting in faith; for faith and doubting are commonly in scripture directly opposed one to another: but though there be no doubting in faith, yet there is much doubting in the believer, by reason of prevailing unbelief and indwelling sin. If it were true that assurance is not of the nature of faith, because the believer is not always assured; by the same way of reasoning it would follow, that resting is not of the nature of faith, because the believer is not always actually staying and resting himself on the Lord; or that trusting is not of the nature of faith, because the believer is not always trusting. It may be as well argued, that seeing is not of the nature of the eye, because sometimes the eye-lids are closed; or that heat is not of the nature of fire, because its heat is not perceptible by reason of the ashes wherewith it is covered; or that light is not of the nature of the sun, because sometimes it is eclipsed by the interposing moon. Remove the ashes, and the heat of the fire will appear; remove interposing bodies, and the sun will have light; open the eye-lids and the eye will see: so do but remove ignorance, unbelief, and other incumbrances of corruption from faith, and see what the nature of it is then. For it is of the nature of faith in the abstract, that the present question is, and not what lodges in the believer who hath faith. In the believer there is, as it were, the company of two armies, grace and corruption, love and enmity, repentance and impenitence, faith and unbelief; but these are not to be confounded together, because they



are in the same subject. We must not exclude complacency and delight in the Lord out of the nature of love, because, through remaining enmity and corruption, his love is so overpowered, that he cannot perceive any such thing in him, but rather the reverse of love. The same may be said of other graces. So here we must not conclude, that there is nothing of this applicatory assurance in faith, because, of prevailing unbelief, and doubts flowing therefrom.

Proposition 5, is this, That as there is a great difference betwixt the my of faith, and the my of sense; so there is yet a far greater difference between the my of faith, (or of true sense flowing from it), and the my of presumption. Presumptuous confidence has its my's as well as faith and well-grounded experience; as we see plain in the case of Balaam, Numb. 22:18, "If Balak would give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God." Now, say you, since a presumptuous confidence may speak in the dialect of true faith and experience, wherein lies the difference? This is a very material and momentous question; and, with a dependence on the Father of lights, I shall attempt a resolution of it in the few following particulars.

1st, The assurance of faith receives and applies Christ to the soul in particular, as he lies in the revelation and grant that is made of him to sinners in the word, which is the immediate ground of faith; whereas presumptuous confidence, though it claims an interest in him, yet does it not upon this bottom, or in God's method and way of conveyance. The apostle tells us, Rom. 10:8, that Christ, and his righteousness and salvation, is brought nigh unto us in the word of faith. What is the design of a covenant of grace, and of these declarations, offers, and promises of grace, that are made to us in the glorious gospel, but just to bring Christ so near to us, as we by believing may come to apply him and his whole fulness to our own souls? John 20:31, "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." If we would find Christ, and eternal life in him, we need not "ascend into heaven or descend into hell," in

search for him, as the apostle speaks, Rom. 10:6, 7. But we are to search for him in the "scriptures, for they are they which testify of him." Christ is brought near to us in the testimony or record of God in the word, where "he gives us eternal life, in his Son Christ Jesus," 1 John 5:11. Now, faith, in its direct act, I say, takes Christ, and claims him upon this grant and gift that is made of him in the word of grace; and upon no other foundation will it adventure to assert its interest in him. Like an honest man, who will not intermeddle with goods, money, or the estate of another, unless he have a charter, bond, testament, promise, or some such security, upon which he may do it warrantably, without vicious intromission: whereas the thief and robber puts to his hand, without looking after any such warrant; if he gets what he has a mind for any how, he is easy\*. Here lies a fatal flaw in the faith of many hearers of the gospel; they grasp at Christ and his salvation, but they overleap the gift and grant of him in the word, as the immediate foundation of their faith. If we consult the experience of the saints in scripture, we shall find their faith terminating immediately upon the word: In his word do I hope, says David. "Remember upon the word which thou hast caused me to hope. I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." Their faith did come by hearing or reading the word. This is the chariot in which the Lord rides, when he presents himself to us as the object of our faith and trust: and therefore that faith which overlooks the promise and offer of the gospel, is but a presumptuous faith. "Gilead is mine and Manasseh is mine," says David, in that forecited sixtieth psalm, because "God hath spoken in his holiness." So says an applying faith, pardon is mine, peace is mine, grace is mine, glory is mine in Christ, yea, God himself is "my God;" because God hath made over himself, and all these things in Christ to me, in the covenant of promise, or testament of my elder Brother, sealed and confirmed by his blood. But, say you, may not a presumptuous hypocrite pretend to bottom his faith upon the promise, and claim an interest in him, even upon that ground? An answer to this, leads me to a

2d, Difference between the my of faith and the my of presumptuous confidence, namely this, That though the presumptuous person may run away with the promise, yet he does not embrace the promise "as it is in Jesus," or as Jesus is in it. This is a mystery which only can be explained to purpose by him who "openeth the book, and looses the seven seals thereof." The view I have of it, you may take up as follows. The covenant, and all the promises of it, are made to Christ as the first heir, both by birth and purchase: he is God's first-born, and therefore the heir of the inheritance of eternal life. But besides, as the second Adam, by his obedience and death, having fulfilled the law, and satisfied justice; the promise of life, which was forfeited by the sin and disobedience of the first Adam, comes to be settled upon him, and his seed in him. Now, matters standing thus, the soul, in applying of the promise, takes its title thereto, not upon the ground of any thing in itself, but comes in only upon Christ's right and title; his righteousness is the only proper, entitling, meritorious condition of the covenant, and of all the promises thereof. Here lies the failure in presumptuous confidence, that the man being never cleanly beat off from Adam's covenant, he is always seeking to found his title to the promise in himself, some good condition or qualification wrought in him, or done by him. Thus, many attempt to enter themselves heirs to the promises, and to eternal life, but shall never be able: Why? Because they do not by faith enter themselves heirs in Christ, or upon his right and title: and "another foundation can no man lay; for the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus, I say, presumptuous faith does not embrace the promise "as it is in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea, and in him amen." And then, I say, he does not embrace the promise "as Jesus is in it;" for as all the promises are in Christ, so Christ is "in all the promises." What is it that is bequeathed in his testament, but himself and all his fulness? He was the great mercy promised to the fathers. When the covenant was promulgate unto Adam, and afterward unto Abraham, what else was it, but just a promise of Christ? And when, in process of time, the covenant of grace came to be further opened, in a variety of promises, what were they all, but Christ, and the grace that is in him, parcelled out to us, that we by

faith might apply him, and the grace that is in him, according to our need? And hence it is that the believer, in applying the promise, finding Christ in it, he eats it, and it is to him the joy and rejoicing of his heart; he finds the Lord in his own word of grace, and this makes it relieving and comforting to his soul; he drinks in the sincere milk of the word, because therein he tastes that the Lord is gracious. But now presumptuous faith is more taken up with the naked promises, than with feeding the soul with Christ in and by the promise. A man that is possessed of Christ by faith, he has not Christ and his promise by him, as a man has money lying by him in his coffer; he has not the covenant and promises, as a man has his bonds and charters in his cabinet, which perhaps he will not look to once in a year: no, but he has Christ in the word of grace, as a man has his bread by him, which he is daily feeding and living upon: hence this applicatory faith is called an "eating the flesh, and drinking the blood of Christ;" which expression implies such an application of Christ to ourselves, as carries soul-nourishment along with it. True faith roots the soul in Christ, just as a tree is rooted in the ground; the prolific virtue of the earth enters into the tree, and the tree at the same time strikes and spreads its fibres into the earth, and draws sap and moisture therefrom, sending a digested nourishment through the whole, whereby it is made to grow and bring forth fruit. So here, in believing, the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus enters into the soul; and at the same time, there is, as it were, a sprig and fibre passing from every faculty of the soul, striking into Christ, and drawing a digested sap from him, whereby the soul is made to grow and flourish in grace and holiness. Hence we are said to be "his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works;" And, "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, do flourish in the courts of our God."

3dly, True faith receives and applies Christ according to the order that God has laid in his offices; but presumptuous faith inverts that order. The order that God has laid in the execution and application of the offices of Christ, is this—Christ comes by his word and Spirit, as a Prophet, enlightening the sinner's mind with the knowledge of his

lost estate by nature, and the way of his recovery through his atoning blood and satisfaction: upon which the soul, by faith, turns in to him as a Priest, taking sanctuary under the covert of his everlasting righteousness; and so submits unto him as a King, receiving the law from his mouth, and yielding itself unto his government, from a principle of gratitude to him who has bought it with a price. But now, the presumptuous faith of the legalist inverts and disturbs this comely order laid by Infinite Wisdom among the offices of Christ: for in his way of applying Christ, he begins with the kingly office, pretending to obey him as a Law-giver; and, upon this ground, expects that Christ will save him as a Priest by his righteousness; and thus makes his own obedience the ground of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. And what else is this, but to bring money and price, contrary to the express command of God, Is. 55:1.? Nothing can be of a more pernicious tendency toward the overthrow of the freedom of God's grace, in the great affair of justification and salvation. Hence it is the apostle so much inveighs against this method of seeking justification in the Galatians; insomuch that he tells them expressly, that by this way they made themselves "debtors to do the whole law; yea (says he), Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace," Gal. 5:2-4. This method of inverting the order of Christ's offices, and making the first act of faith to terminate upon him as a king, as it is a way of thinking most agreeable to nature, which runs with a mighty bias towards Adam's covenant; so, I judge, nature is much fortified in this way of taking up the method of salvation by Christ, by the strain of some men's doctrine in our day, who inculcate faith and repentance as new precepts given out by Christ in the gospel, which were never required in the moral law of the ten commandments. For if this be so, then inevitably we must first obey Christ as a king, by repenting and believing, in order to our being justified by him as a priest; besides many other dangerous consequences which are unavoidable upon this new law-scheme. All which are avoided, by teaching, with the strain of orthodox divines, that there are no precepts in the gospel strictly taken: and that Christ in the gospel giveth no new laws, but inforceth the old law, viz., the

moral, which, being adopted unto the gospel-dispensation, obligeth us to believe in Christ upon his being revealed to us in the gospel, and consequently to repent also in an evangelical manner. For that these duties of faith and repentance, as to their essence, are required in the very first commandment of the moral law, is indisputably evident; and I do think it strange, to find it controverted by any who embrace and own the doctrine of the church of Scotland, particularly the Larger Catechism, where that point is plainly determined, in the explication of the foresaid first commandment. But it is not proper to insist on this controversy in a discourse of this nature; if need be, it may be discoursed apart.

4thly, Another difference betwixt the my of faith, and the my of presumption, is this, That the assurance of faith will maintain its claim, and humble confidence, even under sad challenges, and a deep and abasing sense of much prevailing iniquity; whereas presumptuous confidence succumbs and fails upon the prevalency of sin. The reason of this is, because the ground of presumptuous confidence is within the man; some good disposition and qualification which he finds within him, as he apprehends, which, being dashed by the eruption of his reigning lusts, he has no more to look to, the foundation of his confidence is gone. But now, faith builds and buttens its confidence, not within, but on something without, namely, the everlasting righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and the mercy of God running in this channel, exhibit in the word of grace. Here it is that faith sets down its foot, and upon this foundation it stands, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. And thus, having the ground of its confidence from without, it is not shaken with every insurrection from within. An instance whereof we see in David, Ps. 65:3. The holy man in the first part of the verse, cries out, under a sense of the strength, power, and guilt of sin, "Iniquities prevail against me." Well, but what says faith in such a case? "As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away." Another instance of the like nature, we see in the same holy man, Ps. 130. We find him, ver. 3, under such a sense of sin and guilt, that, viewing himself as he stood in the eye of the law and justice, he

cannot shun to own, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities: O Lord, who shall stand?" Well, but where does David's faith find a standing in such a case? Only in the mercy and grace of a reconciled God in Christ; and therefore he adds, ver. 4, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared; and plenteous redemption, that thou mayest be sought unto." I do own, that a real believer may be sadly shaken, as to the confidence of his interest in Christ, under prevailing iniquity; but this certainly is his infirmity, and not his faith. Many real believers live more by sense than by faith; and hence it comes that they are soon shaken, whenever sensible experience is overclouded, under the sense of prevailing iniquity; though the pain of it is a just correction of their folly. Whenever faith recovers from under the fit of unbelief, and views what the soul is, and has, in Christ, and in the covenant, it recovers its stability and confidence, and withal, brings into the soul strength against corruption, so that it goes out against it like a giant refreshed with wine. But, say you, may not presumptuous faith recover its confidence also? I answer, No doubt it may: but then the difference lies here—True faith goes to work in a quite different way, in order to the soul's recovery, from that which the presumptuous legalist takes. When the terrors of the law, or challenges of conscience, have at any time battered down presumptuous confidence, the man goes to work, and fills up the hole that the law has made in his soul, with the new earth of his own obedience, reformation, duties, and the like, and with this untempered mortar he daubs and makes up the breach made in his conscience. But, on the other hand, though the believer be as diligent in the way of duty as the other, yet nothing in heaven or earth can satisfy him under challenges, or afford him ease or quiet, but Christ himself, and his righteousness apprehended and applied by faith; no balm but that of Gilead can cure his wound; he fetches his healing only from under the wings of the Sun of righteousness; all is but loss and dung in comparison of this, Phil. 3:8, 9.

There are several other differences might be given between the my of faith and the my of presumption, if I were not afraid of being tedious. Only, in short, the more of the assurance of faith, or yet of well-

grounded experience, the more lowliness, humility, and self-abasement. The higher that the soul is exalted in and by Christ, the lower does it sink in its own eyes, saying with David, when God promised to build him a sure house, and that the Messiah should spring of his loins, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" The poor believer, in this case, sees himself to be such a miracle of rich and sovereign grace, that he is even wrapped up in a silent wonder, and put to an everlasting stand, that he knows not what to say, "And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" And what can David say more? But now, the more of a presumptuous confidence, the more pride and self-conceit, like Laodicea, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" accompanied with an undervaluing of others in comparison of themselves, like the proud Pharisee, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men, or even as this publican."

Again, presumptuous assurance cherishes some secret and beloved idol: the man spares some right-hand or right-eye sin; and commonly his deceitful heart argues for its being spared, because grace doth abound. But now, true faith and experience purifies the heart, and engages the man to an impartial and universal opposition to all sin, as dishonourable to God, and grieving to his Spirit; and readily he bends his principal force against these sins, which receive the greatest advantages against him, by interest, custom, and constitution, or education; and the consideration of abounding grace is so far from encouraging him in sin, that it teaches him to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

Lastly, The my of faith, or solid experience, is always accompanied with much love to the person of Christ, and resignation of soul to him; for faith worketh by love. And therefore, at the same time, that the soul is enabled to say, My beloved is mine, it cannot shun to add, And I am his. One shall say, I am the Lord's. The man presents himself "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is his reasonable service." But now, as one well observes, presumption is



lame of one hand: it has a hand to take pardon, to take heaven and the benefits of Christ; but as it has no true love to his person, so it has not a hand to give or resign the whole man to the Lord, to be for him, and not for another: and the plain reason of this is, that the power of natural enmity was never broken, and the man is married to the law, and to his lusts also. But passing this, I proceed to

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Of the FULL Assurance of Faith**

THE third general head proposed in the method, was to speak a little of the full assurance of faith; for there is a plain gradation in the apostle's way of speaking; there is faith, then the assurance of faith, and then the full assurance of faith. Having spoken of the two first degrees, I proceed now to the last and highest degree of faith.

Before I go on directly to shew what this full assurance of faith is, I premise these two or three things, which I conceive to be imported in this expression of the Spirit of God. (1.) I premise, that the faith of every believer is not of the same size and strength. Some have a strong, and others have a weak faith: yea, the faith of the strongest believer, like the moon, has its waxings and wanings; or, like the sea, its ebbings and flowings. Although every believer be in Christ, yet every believer has not the same measure of faith; as every star is in the heavens, though every star be not of the same magnitude. The rounds of Jacob's ladder were not all at the top, though every round was a step towards heaven; so, though every faith be not triumphing in a full assurance, yet every true faith is bending towards it. You may see one believer under a full gale of the Spirit of faith, crying, with Job, chap. 19:25, "I know that my Redeemer liveth:" while another labours under such discouragements, that, like the publican, he stands afar off, with the tear in his eye, crying, "God be merciful to

me a sinner." You may see one saying with Paul, "He loved me, and gave himself for me:" another, through the prevalence of unbelief, saying, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Hath he forgotten to be gracious?" Perhaps you shall find one believer surmounting all fears, saying with the apostle, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" &c., while another is combating with many doubts, ready to raze foundations, saying, "I am cast out of thy sight;" and all men are liars that will say otherwise, the prophets of God not excepted. It is with believers, as it is with children in a family; one perhaps is lying in the cradle, another led by the mother or nurse, another can walk alone, a fourth come to such full strength that he is able for work and business. Thus in the household of God there are babes, young men, and fathers. (2.) I premise, that it is the duty of every believer, yea, of the weakest, to press after faith in the highest degree of it. Hence it is that Christ frequently checks his disciples for the weakness of their faith, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" True faith is a progressive thing, it goes on from one degree to another: hence is that expression of the apostles, Rom. 1:17, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Faith in its first and weaker, and faith in its repeated and stronger actings, feeds and centres upon the righteousness of God's operation and imputation, for acceptance, pardon, and salvation. It is of the nature of all true grace, particularly of the grace of faith, to breathe after its own increase and perfection; hence is that prayer of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith;" and that of the poor man in the gospel, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." We must forget things that are behind, and reach forth unto things that are before: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (3.) I premise, that the certainty or assurance of application, as explained above, ebbs or flows according to the strength or weakness of the assent of faith. That there are degrees of assurance will be controverted by none, who have any knowledge either of divinity or philosophy. The very words of the apostle in the text import, that we are not to rest in a lower, but ought to press after the highest degree of the assurance of faith: and

the apostle accounts it a great blessing to the Thessalonians, that they had much assurance, 1 Thess. 1:5; plainly intimating, that some true assurance might be in a less degree. Now, I say, this assurance of application bears a proportion unto faith's assent, and waxes or wanes as it is strong or feeble; so that a strong assent has a strong application, and a weak assent a weak application.

These things premised, I proceed to inquire what this full assurance of faith is, or wherein it consists. And, in one word, I conceive it lies in such "a firm and fixed persuasion, confidence, or trust in the faithfulness of a God in Christ, pledged in his covenant or promise, as overcomes and tramples upon all difficulties and improbabilities, all doubts and fears as to the actual performance of what is promised in God's time and way; and all this with particular application to the soul itself." This description I would illustrate and explain in its several branches, were it not done upon the matter on the former two heads, this being nothing but a higher degree of the self-same faith formerly described. Such an act of faith we find put forth by Abraham, Rom. 4:20, 21, where we are told that "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." This full assurance of faith, though mountains of impediments were in its way, yet it makes no more of them than if they were a plain; it overleaps and overlooks them all, fixing its eye only upon the power and faithfulness of the blessed Promiser; as we see clearly exemplified in the case of Abraham. His own body was dead, and incapable of procreation; Sarah's womb was barren, and incapable of conception: sense and reason in this case would have been ready to conclude, that it was impossible ever Abraham should have a son. But we are told, ver. 19, that he entirely abstracted from all considerations of that kind, "Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." He would not so much as listen unto the surmises of carnal reason; flesh and blood are put out of doors; and he rests with an assured confidence, without any doubting or hesitation, upon the fidelity of

the Promiser, being certain that God would do to him in particular as he had said, when the time of the vision should come. In like manner we find, that, after Abraham had gotten his beloved Isaac, the son of the promise, what a terrible shock may one think, would it be to his faith in the promise, when God commanded him to take Isaac, of whom the promised seed (Christ) was to come, and offer him up on one of the mountains of Moriah! Gen. 22. Reason here might be ready to object, and that not without great colour of religion, Can God, who has so severely forbidden murder, require me to imbrue my hands in the blood of my own son? Will not such a thing be an eternal reproach to Abraham and his religion? What will the Egyptians say, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, which dwell in the land? What will Sarah say, and how shall I ever look her in the face? But especially what shall become of the promise, and the veracity of him that made it, saying, In Isaac shall thy seed be called? Surely might unbelief and sense say, either this command is a delusion, or else the promise is a lie. But Abraham had a full assurance of faith as to the stability of the promise; and, therefore, he would upon all hazards obey the command of a promising God; he was fully persuaded, that though Isaac were sacrificed and burnt into ashes, yet out of the very ashes of his sacrificed son, God could, and actually would, raise up Isaac again, and so accomplish his own word of promise. Abraham, on the account of this his noble and gallant faith, is fitly called the father of the faithful, his faith being proposed as a pattern to all others for their imitation; and every true believer is on this score a child of Abraham. And let none imagine that they are not obliged to believe with such a faith as Abraham had; for the apostle expressly tells us, that the history of his faith stands upon record in scripture, "not for his sake alone, but for us also," that we, after his example, may be encouraged to "believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead," Rom. 4:23, 24.

Object. O, say you, if I had as good a ground for my faith as Abraham had; If I were as sure that the promise were to me, as Abraham was, I think I could believe with a full assurance of faith, as he did: but there lies the strait. I answer, You and I have as good a ground of

faith as ever Abraham had. Abraham had a promising God in Christ to trust, and so have we, you have the same God, the same Christ, the same covenant, the same promise as Abraham had. But, say you, God spake to Abraham, in particular, by name, when he gave him the promise, saying, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." I answer, although you be not designed by name and surname, as Abraham was, yet a promising God in Christ addresses himself as particularly to you in the word of grace, and dispensation of the covenant and promise, as though he called to you out of heaven by name and surname, saying, "To you (i.e. to you sinners of Adam's race) is the word of this salvation sent. The promise is unto you that are afar off," &c. And not only is the promise presented, but an express command of believing superadded, requiring and binding every particular person, to take hold of it, and embrace it: so that whatever shifts and evasions the unbelieving and deceitful heart may make, the promise of God comes as close and home to every individual hearer of the gospel, as that promise did to Abraham, when God bespoke him with an audible voice out of heaven; yea, "we have a more sure word of prophecy, unto which we would do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." Further, let it be considered that that promise was first presented unto Abraham as the object and foundation of his faith, before he could believe it; and by believing it, became his in possession; or in believing it, he was possessed of it as his own; for, upon a supposition that he had not believed, he had never been possessed of the promised blessing. In like manner, the promise is presented to you as the immediate ground of believing; and in believing, you come to be possessed of the great things contained in the promise; but if you do not believe, you shall not see the salvation of God. Thus you see that you have the same ground of faith, and the same warrant for believing, that Abraham had; and there is nothing to keep you from a full assurance of faith, or a believing without staggering at the promise, like Abraham, unless it be your own ignorance and unbelief.

I do own, as was hinted already, that every true believer does not come the length of Abraham, to believe without staggering; but that

is not the question. The present question is, if we have not now as good and firm a ground, and as good a right to believe the promise as Abraham had? If Christ, and his salvation and righteousness, be not brought as near to us in the word of faith, as it was unto him? This is what none, who understand the privilege of a New Testament dispensation, will adventure to deny; yea, I will adventure to say, that the ground of faith is laid before us under the New Testament with a far greater advantage than ever Abraham had; inasmuch as the gospel-revelation is much more clear, and brings Christ and his salvation much nearer to us, than ever he was under any period of the Old Testament dispensation. Abraham saw his day only afar off; whereas we live in that very day which he saw at such a prodigious distance: and, therefore, we have much more ground to believe without staggering than he had. And therefore, "seeing we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus;" and "seeing we have a new and living way consecrated for us, through the vail of his flesh; and seeing we have an High Priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, &c.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Of the Grounds of Faith's Assurance**

THE fourth thing proposed in the method, was to inquire into the grounds of this doctrine; or what it is that faith has to build its confidence upon, in drawing near to God with full assurance of acceptance. In answer to this question, I shall not at present enter upon the particular grounds specified by the apostle in the preceding verses, having discoursed on them apart in several sermons, where he shews that every bar and impediment on the part of law and justice are fully removed, through the complete satisfaction and prevalent mediation of the Son of God, as our great High Priest;

upon which a promise of welcome and hearty acceptance comes forth from a reconciled God, to every one who will come to him in this new and living way, for grace and mercy to help in a time of need. Thus you will see the apostle's argument runs, by comparing this and the preceding verses, with the verse immediately following, particularly the last clause of it, "For faithful is he that hath promised;" which clause, included in a parenthesis, I conceive stands connected, not only with the words immediately preceding in the same verse, but with the words of my text also; and the scope of the apostle is, as if he said, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," &c. Why? "For faithful is he that hath promised us welcome into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus;" faithful is he that hath promised acceptance in the new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us: faithful is he that hath promised to pity, pardon, hear, and help, through the mediation of the great High Priest over the house of God. And, therefore, seeing his faithfulness is pawned to receive us in this way of his own devising, let us answer his faithfulness, by drawing near in full assurance of faith, or with a full and certain persuasion, that, according to his promise, we shall be accepted in the beloved, who is the door to the holiest, the new and living way, and the High Priest over the house of God.

So that you see the next or immediate ground of faith, or full assurance thereof, in drawing near to God, is, God's own promise of acceptance through Jesus Christ: with which promises the word every where abounds, Is. 60:7; Is. 56:7; Mark 11:24; Matth. 7:7; John 14:13, 14. Now, faith, eyeing and pleading the promise of God in Christ, has many things to bear it up into a full assurance; I shall instance a few of many.

1, The grace, mercy and goodness of a promising God, revealed and proclaimed in the word, is a noble ground for sinners, and yet more for saints, to trust him, and draw near to him through Christ, with a full assurance of faith: Ps. 36:7, "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." It is cross to the very dictates of nature, for

a man to trust one whom he apprehends to be an enemy; yea, if we have but a jealousy that one bears us an ill-will, or designs our hurt, we will not trust or confide in him; but persuade a man once that such a one is his friend, that he hath an entire love and kindness for him, and wants only an opportunity to do him the greatest services he is capable; in that case, he will trust him without hesitation. Just so is it in the case in hand: so long as we conceive God to be an implacable enemy, our prejudice and enmity against him will remain; and while enmity against God stands in its full strength, it is absolutely impossible we can have any trust or confidence in him; instead of drawing near to him with full assurance of faith, we flee from him like our parents, under the awful apprehensions of his wrath and vengeance: but let us once be persuaded that he is a God of love, grace, pity, and good-will in Christ, then, and never till then, will we put our trust under the shadow of his wings. And therefore, to break the strength of our enmity and prejudice, and so to conciliate our trust in him, he is at the greatest pains imaginable to persuade us, that he bears a hearty liking and good-will towards us in Christ. And there are more especially these three ways God takes to convince us of his good-will toward men upon earth.

1st, By solemn proclamations and declarations of his mercy and grace: Ex. 34:6, 7, there the Lord passed by Moses, and proclaimed his name to him; and what is it? "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty;" or as some read it, in clearing he will clear, i.e. in clearing the sinner of guilt by pardoning grace, he will clear himself of injustice; he will make it appear that he is just, when he is the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Every where in scripture is the pardoning mercy of God proclaimed and presented as an encouragement to sinners to trust in him, Ps. 130:7, "Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption."



2dly, By solemn oath. Lest we should disbelieve his word, he superadds his oath, to convince us that he has no ill-will, but a hearty good-will toward our salvation and happiness, through the new and living way: Ez. 33:11, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" An oath among men is for confirmation of a controverted truth, and is to them an end of all strife, (says the apostle), Heb. 6:16. Well, Sirs, shall the oath of a man be so much regarded, as to determine controversies among men? How much more is the oath of the great God to be regarded, pawning his very life upon it, that he is not willing that any should perish, that he bears a hearty good-will toward our salvation through Christ? Shall this be any more a controversy with us? To entertain a doubt or jealousy of what he says, is to make him a liar; and to doubt and disbelieve what he swears, is to charge a God of truth with perjury. And beware of looking upon it as a matter of indifferency, whether you believe this declared good-will, mercy, and grace of God, or not; for it must needs be a matter of vast importance, wherein God interposes the solemnity of an oath; and to think otherwise, is to charge the eternal God with a profanation of his own name, which he will not suffer in others without the highest resentment.

3dly, As if his word and his oath were not enough to convince us of his mercy, love, and good-will toward us, he hath given the most convincing and practical demonstration of it that was possible for God to give, and that is, by giving himself, in the person of his eternal Son, to be incarnate, or manifested in our nature; yea, to be made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. O how great is this mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh! Without controversy, great and unsearchable is the mystery of love and good-will that shines with a meridian lustre in an incarnate Deity. If God had not loved us, and borne such a hearty desire after our happiness and salvation, would he even made such a near approach to us as to dwell in our nature, when he passed by the nature of angels? Yea, he was not content to become one with us in nature, but he goes further,

and becomes one in law with us; he puts his name into our debt-bond, and becomes "sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" he becomes "a curse for us, that we might inherit the blessing." It was a view of this design of love to man, shining in the incarnation of the Son of God, which made the angels at his birth to break forth with that celestial anthem, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men," Luke 2:14. Now, this love, and good-will of God toward man, in the incarnation of his eternal Son, is proposed in the gospel-revelation, as the greatest encouragement imaginable for guilty rebellious sinners to lay aside their enmity and prejudice against God, and so to put their trust and confidence in him; as is plain, like a sunbeam, from that great text, John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son:" Why, what was God's design in all this good-will? "That whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." Because of the excellency of this love, the sons of men do put their trust under the shadow of his wings. Now, I say, faith, in drawing near to God, it takes a view of this mercy and love of God in Christ, and upon this ground raises itself up sometimes so high, as to draw near in full assurance of acceptance: for still it would be remembered, that faith, under the conduct of the Spirit, takes up this revealed love and mercy of God to sinners, with particular application thereof to the soul itself, as was before hinted. And what can be more encouraging to a trust, without doubting of acceptance? O, then, "let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy." O do not entertain jealousies of a God of love, as though he were displeased or dissatisfied with you for your trusting in his mercy; for "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

2, Faith grounds its assurance upon the infinite power of a promising God. Being once persuaded of his love, mercy, and goodwill in Christ, it proceeds to fasten its foot upon everlasting strength, as fully able to fulfil what he has promised, saying, I know that thou can do every thing, and "there is nothing too hard for thee." Indeed, infinite power, armed with wrath and fury, is the terror of a guilty sinner; but

infinite power, animated with infinite love, proclaiming Fury is not in me, through the ransom that I have found, is a noble ground of trust, and may embolden a guilty sinner to "take hold of his strength, that he may make peace with him." Hence it is, that the power of God in Christ is frequently presented in Scripture as a ground of trust, Is. 26:4, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." The faith of Abraham founded itself upon this rock of the power of God, in that forecited instance, Rom. 4 when he believed without staggering at the promise. Being first persuaded of God's good-will toward him, in giving him a promise of the Messiah to spring of his loins, "in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed;" he next fixes the eye of his faith upon the power of this promising God, and was "fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." So, Matth. 9:27, we read of two blind men following Christ, sending their cries after him, "Thou son of David have mercy on us." They first believed that Christ was the promised Messiah, the son of David; and in this they saw mercy and good-will to man upon earth, he being the seed of the woman, that should bruise the head of the serpent. Well, Christ leads them on next to take a view of the power of God in him, as a further ground of trust and confidence, ver. 28, "Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They answer, "Yea, Lord:" and thereupon Christ says unto them, ver. 29, "According to your faith, be it unto you." Thus, I say, faith grounds its trust, confidence, or assurance, in drawing near to God through the new and living way, upon the power of a promising God.

O, Sirs, there is no such distance betwixt God's saying and his doing, as there is among men; for his saying is doing: Ps. 33:9, "He spake, and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast." There is an omnipotence or almightiness both in his word of command, and in his word of promise; therefore it is called "the word of his power," Heb. 1:3. And by this powerful word, he upholds the great fabric of heaven and earth, that they do not return unto their original nothing: and may not our faith venture to stand upon that bottom, on which heaven and earth stands? We are not afraid that this ponderous

globe of earth, which hangs in the liquid air, slide away from under our feet with its own weight: Why? Because we believe that the word of God's power has fixed it in its proper place, that it shall not be removed for ever. Why should we not rest with as much assured confidence, as to everlasting concerns, upon God's covenant and promise, seeing the same power of God is in the word of promise, as in that word which upholds the earth? Yea, "the fashion of this world passeth away, but the word of the Lord," his word of grace and promise, the foundation of faith and trust, "endureth for ever." This is a consideration which at once removes the principal discouragements that faith labours under. What is it that weakens our faith, and keeps it from arriving at a full assurance, as to the performance of the promise, but one of these two? Either we look upon the performance of the promise as difficult, or uncertain. Now, faith eyeing the power of a promising, reconciled God in Christ, can easily surmount both, and conclude, that the performance of the promise is both easy and certain. (1), It is certain, for it depends upon the will of an unchangeable God, the promise being a declaration of God's purpose or will of grace; he was willing to promise, for he has actually done it, "the word is gone out of his mouth;" and he is willing to perform, for he is a God of truth, always yea, and amen. (2), Faith viewing the power of God, sees the performance to be easy. What more easy than a word speaking? and yet one word from the mouth of God can give being and accomplishment to all the promises, without any pain, cost, trouble, or hazard. The covenant of grace may be resembled unto a tree, the promises to the branches of the tree, loaden with all manner of precious fruit. Now, the least word, the least breath from the mouth of God, shakes the tree, and makes all the fruit of it to drop down, as it were, into the believer's bosom. And, O, may the believer argue, will not he, who so loved a lost world, as to give his only begotten Son, and who loved me, and gave himself for me, will he not waver a word, or the breath of his mouth on me? Believe it, there is nothing but a word between you and all the sure mercies of David: yea, the word is already passed out of his mouth, I mean the word of grace and promise; and there remains nothing but for you to believe, trust,

and confide in it, and him that made it; and, in your so doing, all the sure mercies of the promise are your own in Christ. I suppose you do not doubt, but that God who cannot lie has promised. Now, there is as much reason to believe that he will perform, as to believe that he has passed his promise; for, as was hinted above, to promise and perform, to say and to do, are all one thing with him. Indeed, when men promise there is much ground to doubt the performance, because frequently things cast up afterward, which render it impracticable for them to do as they have said. But no such thing can happen unto Him, who perfectly foresees all future events, and who commands things that are not, as if they were. Now, I say, faith sees all this, and thereby raises itself up unto a full assurance, at least there is ground here for a full assurance of faith, and no ground at all for doubting and wavering. And were not our faith pinioned with ignorance and unbelief, it could not miss to believe without staggering upon this ground, as did the faith of Abraham.

3, The veracity and faithfulness of a God in Christ, pawned in the promise, is another ground upon which faith builds, when it draws near with a full assurance. Faithfulness in God, and faith in man, are correlates; and there is such a sibness and relation betwixt these two, that our faith cannot subsist without faithfulness in God. And, on the other hand, a revelation of God's faithfulness would have been needless, if there were not some to believe him. The light would be useless, if there were not an eye to see it; and the eye would be useless, if there were no light. To an unbelieving sinner, the revelation of the divine faithfulness is as unprofitable, as light is to a blind man; and our faith would be like an eye without light, if there were not faithfulness in God. Yea, faithfulness in God is the very parent of faith in man, Faith is at first begot and wrought in the soul by some discovery of the divine faithfulness in the word of grace; and it is maintained and increased in the same way and manner. Whence is it that some do believe, and others not, who equally enjoy the same revealed warrants and grounds of faith? The matter is this, the faithfulness of God in the covenant and promise is revealed by the Spirit to the one, and veiled and hid from the other, "the god of this

world blinding the minds of them which believe not." And whence is it, that at one time a believer is "strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and at another time, "staggers through unbelief?" The reason is this, the faithfulness of God at one time is so visible to him, that he sees it to be like a mountain of brass under him: at another time his light is so dark and dim, that he imagines the promise, and the faithfulness of the promiser, to be but like a broken reed, not able to bear his weight. But, O Sirs, what can be ground of assurance, yea of the highest and fullest assurance of faith, if not the veracity of that God, who hath "righteousness for the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness for the girdle of his reins?"

Let us but take a view of the high securities by which the divine faithfulness is engaged, as to the outmaking of his promise, and see if there be not ground for a full assurance of faith. The most jealous and suspicious heart in the world could not desire greater security from the most treacherous person on earth, than a God of truth has granted unto us, for our encouragement to believe.

1st, Then, Let it be considered, that the bare promise, though there were no more, is abundance of security, especially if we consider whose promise it is; it is "God that cannot lie, who promises." A graceless Balaam gives him this testimony, "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" We will adventure to trust the word of a man like ourselves, especially if he be a man of integrity and honesty, who, we think, will not falsify his word: and shall we have trust and credit to give to a man that may lie and repent, and yet no credit or trust to give to him for whom it is impossible to lie? God has so great a regard to his word of promise, that it is of more worth in his reckoning than heaven and earth, and all the visible creation; yea, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but one jot or one tittle of what he hath spoken shall never fall to the ground." Yea, I will adventure to say farther, that the divine faithfulness is so much engaged in the promise, that his very being is concerned therein. Man may break his

word, and continue to be man still; but God could not be God, if he were not faithful and true, because faithfulness is essential to his very nature and being. Now is not that word a sufficient ground of faith, and of full assurance, as to the performance of which the very being of a God of truth is so much concerned? But this is not all; for,

2dly, Not only is the word of promise passed out of his lips, but it is entered and registrated in the volume of his book. You know, the bare word of an honest man is good, but his written and registrate word or promise is better. When we put a man's bond in the register of human courts, it is in order to our better security, and getting the more speedy diligence thereupon. Now, God has consented to the registration of his word of promise, yea, it is actually enrolled and registrated in the scriptures of truth; and is not this a high engagement of the faithfulness of God? Perhaps you may think, if you had voices, visions, and revelations from heaven immediately, you could believe; but I can assure you, in the name of God, that the Bible, the book of God, which you have among your hands, is a far better, a much more solid ground of faith and trust, than any thing of that kind. The apostle Peter tells us, 2 Pet. 1:17, that he was taken up into mount Tabor, at Christ's transfiguration, and there he heard a voice coming forth from the excellent glory, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This was a rare privilege, and a notable encouragement to believe: but yet, says he, ver. 19, "We have a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed," &c. O, Sirs, think on this, and prize and improve your Bibles.

3dly, The faithfulness of God is so much engaged in the promise, that it is a sealed deed. The great and infinite JEHOVAH, in the person of his eternal Son, has sealed the promise, yea sealed it with his blood. Dan. 9:27, we are told concerning the Messiah, that he should "confirm the covenant with many." And how doth he confirm it, but by his death? Hence the blood of Christ is called "the blood of the covenant:" so, Heb. 9:16, 17, "Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force

after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all whilst the testator liveth." Thus, I say, the promise is sealed and confirmed by the blood of the Lamb, the most valuable seal that ever was appended to any deed in the world. And, in token and testimony of its being sealed by a Redeemer's blood, God has appended two other visible seals unto his covenant of promise, viz., baptism and the Lord's supper, which are "seals of the righteousness of faith;" that is, as I take it, seals of that covenant where God promises peace and pardon, grace and glory, on the score of the imputed righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith. And whenever these sacraments are dispensed to us, according to God's appointment, we have a sealed and confirmed promise and testament put into our hands, for our faith to feed and feast upon.

4thly, The faithfulness of God is so far engaged in the promise, that his oath is interposed: Heb. 6:13–18, there we read of "two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." His word is immutable, for it is always yea. But that we might have strong consolation, by having a strong ground of faith and confidence, he superadds his immutable oath; he not only speaks, but swears. Now, observe how the apostle speaks of the oath of God, ver. 13, "Because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself;" q. d. If God could have gone higher in his oath, he would have done it, The form of God's oath is peculiar to himself,— "As I live;" he swears by his life, he swears by his holiness, he swears by his being and Godhead. As true as I am God "I will bless thee," says the Lord to Abraham, ver. 14. But, may a poor soul say, what is that to me? what interest or concern have I in God's oath to Abraham? O yes, says the apostle, this concerns you and me, "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," ver. 18, q. d. This concerns every poor soul that has a mind for salvation in the "new and living way consecrated for us." He may say, and should say in himself, As sure as God said and sware to Abraham, so surely hath God said and sworn that I shall be saved in fleeing for refuge to Christ, who is our hope. As if the Lord should say, O sinner, I set my own. Son before thee in the gospel as thy only refuge and sanctuary; I set him forth as a



propitiation through faith in his blood; O flee, flee to him for thy life, "Turn ye to your stronghold, ye prisoners of hope;" for as sure as I am God, thou shalt be saved in him: "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." O what a great matter is this, the oath of God! What will we ever believe, or whom will we believe, if we do not believe a God of truth swearing by his life? Do not say you are not concerned with his oath; for as by believing you set to your seal that he is true in what he says and swears, so by your unbelief you call him a liar, and, upon the matter, charge him with perjury, as was already hinted. And for you who have actually fled by faith unto his Son, you shall be as sure of God's blessing through eternity as ever Abraham was when he heard God swearing to him, "Surely, blessing, I will bless thee, and multiplying, I will multiply thee."

5thly, The faithfulness of God is yet further engaged to believers in the promise, by giving a pledge or arls of the full performance; and the pledge he gives is of more worth than heaven and earth. O, say you, What is that? I answer, It is the "holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the inheritance," Eph. 1:13, 14. If ever thou felt the holy Spirit breathing on thee, by his saving influences and operations, thou hast the earnest of the inheritance, a pledge that all the promises shall be fully accomplished in God's time. You know, if a man give a pledge, it is a security for the full bargain; and if a man do not fulfil his bargain, he loses his pledge: so here, God will as soon forfeit his Spirit as break his word. And is not this notable security to the believer? Is not this a high engagement of the faithfulness of God?

6thly, The faithfulness of God is yet further engaged in the promise by the concurring declaration of the most famous witnesses that ever bore testimony in any cause, jointly attesting the truth of the promise and veracity of the Promiser, 1 John 5:7, "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." The Eternal Father attests the truth of the promise with a "Thus saith the Lord." The Son attests it, who is the essential and substantial Word; for he is "the truth, the Amen, the

faithful and true witness, who speaks in righteousness." The Holy Ghost attests it; for he is "the Spirit of truth, leading into all truth;" he is the holy Spirit of promise, not only because he himself is promised, but because he testifies of the truth of the promise, and faithfulness of the Promiser; and, by his power and efficacy, seals and stamps these upon the soul, whereby he works faith or believing. Now, all these three witnesses are one; not only one in essence, but one in their testimony. And what is the testimony and record of a Trinity? It is this, ver. 11, "That God hath given" (i.e., granted in his covenant of grace and promise) "to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son." And when this record or testimony of a Trinity is not believed, we make God a liar. From the whole, you see what high and deep engagements the divine faithfulness is come under for the outmaking and accomplishment of the promise. O, then, "let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith; for faithful is he that hath promised acceptance in the beloved."

But now, after all that has been said, some may be ready to object, It is true the good-will, power, and veracity of the Promiser are excellent encouragements to these who have a right to the promise to draw near to God in Christ with full assurance of faith; but that is my strait and difficulty, I doubt and fear, lest I have no claim or title to the promise of welcome into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way. An answer to this leads me to,

4. A fourth ground (taken in connection with the former) upon which faith may build its assurance, in drawing near to God by the new and living way, and that is, the indorsement or direction of the promise of welcome through Christ. To whom, say you, is the promise indorsed? I answer, It is directed to every man to whom the joyful sound of this everlasting gospel reacheth, John 3:16. There you see that the promise of acceptance, and of eternal life through Christ, reaches forth its arms to a lost world: "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." So here, Whosoever draweth near to the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way, through the mediation of the great high priest, shall obtain grace and

mercy to help them in time of need. The covenant of grace, and promises thereof, are so framed by Infinite Wisdom, in the external dispensation of the gospel, that they look to every man and woman, and, as it were, invite them to believe, and encourage them to enter into the holiest. He that sits on a throne of grace calls every one within his hearing to come for grace and mercy, assuring them that come to him who will, "he will in no wise cast out." And we that are the heralds and ministers of the great King, whose name is "the Lord, merciful and gracious," have warrant and commission to proclaim, that to you, men, and the sons of men, is the word of this salvation sent: The promise is directed unto you, as a ground of faith, even "to you, and to your seed, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." There is not the least peradventure, but the call or command of believing is to every one, otherwise unbelief could not be their sin. Now, the promise, in the indorsement and direction thereof, must be as extensive as the command: these two are inseparably linked together, both in the external dispensation, and in the inward application of the Spirit; insomuch that whosoever is commanded to believe, has right to the promise as the immediate ground of his faith; and whosoever actually believes, and builds upon this ground, has the promise in his possession. Take away the promise from the command of believing, you separate what God has joined together, and, in effect, command men to build without a foundation. It is true Christ is the object of faith; but it is as true that he can only be the object of faith to us, as he is brought near in the word of faith or promise, Rom. 10:8. And therefore, seeing the promise is to you and me, and every one who hears this gospel, I may warrantably say, with the apostle, Heb. 4:1, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." From which text it is plain that the promise of an everlasting rest, in and through Christ, is left even to these who, like the Israelites may come short of it through unbelief. And how is it left us, but to be applied by faith? Christ, our elder brother, has left his confirmed testament in our hands, to be improved and used in a way of believing, in order to our being actually entitled to, and, in due time, fully possessed of that rest

which is the purchase of his death and blood. O, then, let us fear, lest, when the promise is thus left us, we should seem to come short of the possession; for the promise can never be ours in possession, though left us, unless we believe; as is plain from the words immediately following, ver. 2, where it is added, concerning the unbelieving Jews, "The word preached" (viz., the promise of entering into his rest, as is plain from the connection) "did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." A king's proclamation and promise of pardon to a company of rebels cannot profit any of them but such as accept of it. A legacy left by latter-will of a rich and wealthy friend to a certain family, without specifying one individual person of the family, can only profit that person, or those branches of the family who claim right to the legacy upon their friend's testament; but to the rest it is unprofitable, because, through pride, or ignorance, or sloth, they forsake their own mercy. Or, suppose a letter should come indorsed to me, containing a bank-note of 50, 100, or 1000 pounds sterling, or more if you will; the indorsement of the letter to me gives me a right to carry the bill to the bank, and ask payment; but if, through pride and conceit that I am rich, and increased with goods, I will not receive the letter, nor ask payment of the sum, in that case I come short of my own privilege, and it becomes unprofitable to me. I own, that, in every one of these similitudes, there is a dissimilitude; the only use I make of them is, to shew how near Christ and his salvation is brought unto us in the word of faith or promise, that thereby we may be encouraged to draw near by the blood of Jesus, with full assurance of faith, seeing he is faithful that hath promised acceptance in this new and living way. To all that is said I shall only add,

5. Let it encourage us to draw near in full assurance of faith that there is no lawful impediment to hinder our access and success in entering with boldness into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. Every bar and hinderance that stood in our way is mercifully removed by our great high Priest, who is over the house of God. All the impediments that can be pleaded on God's part are, the law, justice, and holiness of God; and all the impediment that can be pleaded on

our part is sin. Now, none of these ought to hinder our drawing near in this new and living way, with full assurance of faith.

As for the law, that cannot be a just impediment to hinder our access; for that moment the soul enters by Christ, as the way to the Father, the law gets its end, Christ being "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Now, can the law be against its own end, or that which gives it its due? All that the law demands is a perfect and sinless righteousness; give it that, and it has no more to seek. Now, this the law gets that moment that a sinner believes, or draws near by the blood of Jesus. "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, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," Rom. 8:3, 4. From whence it is plain, that every soul that believes in Christ is that moment vested, by imputation, with the righteousness of the Son of God, whereby "the law is magnified, and made honourable." And therefore, in drawing near by the blood of Jesus, instead of having the law against us, we have the law for us, and on our side; we have a perfect law-righteousness to plead upon.

Again, as for the justice of God, this is ready to scare us, who are guilty sinners, from so much as looking toward the holiest, or the place where God's honour dwells. But this can be no impediment either to our drawing near by the blood of Jesus, with full assurance of faith: Why? That which justice demands, is a complete satisfaction for the injury done to the honour and authority of God, by the breach and violation of the holy and righteous law, which was a transcript of the purity and equity of his nature: now, when a sinner draws near, or enters into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, he gives justice that which it wants also, namely, a ransom of infinite value, even the ransom that God has found, the propitiation that God has set forth in the gospel, to be received by faith. The man, in believing, he, as it were, presents this ransom unto justice for the sin of his soul; and whenever justice sees this ransom of the blood of Jesus in the hand

of faith, it assoilzies and acquits the soul from all law-penalties, declaring that "now there is no condemnation to" that man, Rom. 8:1. Let none from henceforth "lay anything to his charge: for it is God that justifieth; who then is he that shall condemn? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession." Thus justice, instead of barring our way to the holiest, becomes our friend, and casts open the door of access to us: for God is just, when he is "the justifier of them that believe in Jesus."

As for the holiness of God, that seems to stand as an insuperable bar in our way of entering into the holiest, by reason of the blot, defilement, and pollution of sin, which renders us utterly loathsome in the sight of the Holy One of Israel. But, glory to God in the highest, this bar is also removed by the blood of Jesus; for, that moment a sinner comes under the covert of this blood, and draws near to God under this covering, he hath his heart thereby "sprinkled from an evil conscience, and this body washed with pure water." That same moment that the righteousness of the second Adam is extended to us for justification, his Spirit enters into us for sanctification, renewing us in the whole man, after the image of God. And the blood of Jesus not only cancels the guilt of sin, which made us obnoxious to the law and justice of God, but it hides and covers the filth of sin from the eyes of immaculate holiness. Yea, holiness is so much the sinner's friend, in drawing near through the blood of Jesus, that this attribute of the divine nature is pawned in the promise of acceptance made to Christ and his seed, Ps. 89:2, 35. On which account I may exhort all true believers, in the words of the psalmist (Ps. 30:4), "Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." Thus then, I say, all impediments and bars on God's part, that might hinder our access into the holiest, are removed by the blood of Jesus; and, therefore, "let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."

As for impediments on our part, they may be more particularly spoken to in the application. I shall only say at the time, that the sum

total of them all amounts to this, that we are sinners, and so wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, that we cannot think that ever God will receive or welcome us. But at once to roll away this impediment, let it be considered, that this new and living way of access into the holiest is only calculated for sinners; "Christ calls not the righteous (or innocent), but sinners," to enter by him, as the way to the Father. If you were not sinners, but righteous, as Adam was before the fall, you would not need to enter "by the blood of Jesus." But seeing the way and door to the holiest is just shaped and calculated for the sinner, let not the sinner scare to enter by it into the presence of God; especially when he calls us, who are sinners, to "draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Faithful is he that hath promised acceptance in the beloved.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Containing the APPLICATION of the preceding Doctrine**

I PROCEED now to wind up the whole of this discourse in some practical improvement thereof; which I shall endeavour to manage, as briefly as I can, in the few following inferences.

Inf. 1. From what has been said, we may see that there is a mystery in believing, which the world does not understand, yea, which none can know without "that Spirit which is of God, whereby we know the things that are freely given to us of God." The apostle, 1 Tim. 3:9, speaks of the "mystery of faith." And indeed every thing about it is a mystery. The way of its production, or how it is wrought in the soul, by the power of the eternal Spirit, is a mystery: "Who can tell how the bones are formed in the womb of her that is with child?" far less are we capable to account for the way and manner of the Spirit's

operation in forming and creating us in Christ Jesus by faith. Hence is that of Christ to Nicodemus, John 3:8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whether it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." How the Spirit of God drops into the heart the incorruptible seed of his own word, and impregnates it there, so as to turn it, though in itself but a dead letter, into a living principle, purifying the heart, debasing self, and carrying the soul directly into Christ for all, is a mystery which we cannot comprehend or account for. And then the object of faith is a great mystery. God, the ultimate object of it, is an awful mystery: "Who can by searching find him out," either in his essence, operations, or manner of his existence, one in three, and three in one? Christ, the more immediate object of faith, is a great mystery, an incarnate Deity; "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." The gospel-covenant, by which we believe in Christ, is a "mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to the saints." And, lastly, the actings of faith upon its objects is a great mystery; how the poor believer on earth can receive Christ in heaven, at the right hand of God: how he applies him as his own Saviour, his own Prophet, Priest, and King, upon the indefinite grant that is made of him in the new covenant, where the man is neither designed by name or surname: how faith makes use of Christ and his fulness with as great freedom as a man makes use of meat and drink that is set before him, on which account it is said to "eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man:" how it puts on the righteousness of Christ, and glories in the obedience of another, as though the man had fulfilled the law in his own person: how it draws forth the fulness of the Godhead, dwelling bodily in Christ, and thus fills the soul with the fulness of God: how it will take a bare word, dropping from God's mouth, and rejoice in it as one that findeth great spoils: how it will take this word, and draw near to him in the new and living way, with full assurance of acceptance. These things are mysteries which flesh and blood cannot reveal; and yet to every true believer it is given, in less or more, to know these mysteries of the kingdom.



Inf. 2. From this doctrine we may see the excellency of the grace of faith. When it takes a view of the "blood of Jesus," of the "new and living way," and of the "High Priest over the house of God," it can draw near to the holiest with full assurance of welcome. And it is not without warrant that faith promises itself welcome from the Lord in its approaches to him through Christ; God has made the same, yea, much greater grant to the grace of faith, as Ahasuerus made unto Esther (chap. 9:12), "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request? and it shall be done." Compare this with John 14:13, 14, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." So Mark 11:24, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." As Ahasuerus put a peculiar honour upon Esther, and preferred her above all the maids in his kingdom, so God, the King of kings, stamps a peculiar honour and excellency upon the grace of faith, preferring it above all the other graces: on which account it may say, with Mary (Luke 1:48), "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." Though God be high, yet hath he a respect unto the lowly: though he be the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, yet he dwells with the humble: he delights to choose and put honour upon the foolish, weak, base, and despised things of this world; yea, he chooses "things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." Faith is the meanest and lowest, the poorest and most beggarly of all the other graces; for all the other graces they give something unto God, whereas faith, like a mere beggar, comes not to give anything, but to get and receive all; and yet God takes this beggar, and sets it among princes, to allude unto that expression, Ps. 113:7, 8. Such honour and preferment does God put upon this grace, that though he has said, "He will not give his glory to another," yet so little jealousy has he of the grace of faith, that he, as it were, sets it upon the throne with himself, ascribing things to it which are proper and peculiar unto himself only: he sets the jewels of his crown upon the head of faith. The salvation of a lost sinner is God's prerogative; he alone is "the God of salvation, to whom belong the issues from death;" and yet we find this attributed unto the grace of faith, "Thy faith hath saved thee

(says Christ), go in peace." Justification is peculiar unto God only, "It is God that justifieth," says the apostle; and yet the same apostle ascribes the justification of a sinner unto faith. "A man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." God alone is the Lord of life, who kills, and makes alive; and yet life is ascribed unto faith, "The just shall live by his faith." Omnipotency is God's peculiar prerogative, he is the Almighty: and yet there is almightiness attributed unto faith, "All things are possible to him that believeth. If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed," we may "say unto this (and the other) mountain, Be thou removed, and it shall be done." If we read the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, we shall find things ascribed to faith which nothing but Omnipotency itself could effect, such as the "stopping the mouths of lions, quenching the violence of fire, raising the dead," and the like. Now, would you know why God doth thus attribute works and perfections to faith, which are proper to himself alone? The plain reason is, because faith is such a low, mean, self-denied grace, that it is just the genius and nature of it to exclude self, yea, to exclude itself, to glory in the Lord alone, and to give him the glory due unto his name, saying, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory." Does faith save us? Yes, it does: but then it turns the glory of salvation over upon the author thereof, saying, "Our God is the God of salvation." Does the just man live by faith? Yes: but then faith steps in with, "It is not I," Gal. 2:20. "I live; ye not I, but Christ liveth in me." Does faith justify? Yea, it doth but then its language is, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness in him will I be justified, and in him alone will I glory." Can faith do everything? Yea, but it is by leaning on the arm of omnipotency. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Thus, I say, faith arrogates and claims nothing to itself, but gives unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. And so zealous is faith to have God alone exalted, particularly the freedom of his grace in the justification and salvation of a sinner, that, though believing be the highest and greatest act of obedience that a person can yield unto the moral law, yet, that boasting may be for ever excluded, it excludes and shuts out itself from the rank and category of works, or acts of obedience, Rom. 4:5, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him

that justifieth the ungodly, his faith (objectively considered) is counted for righteousness." It is the peculiar excellency of faith, that it sinks its own act, that its blessed object, CHRIST, may be "all in all; it rejoices in Christ Jesus, and triumphs always in him." And though, as I was saying, it be the poorest, lowest, and most beggarly of all the other graces; yet it is a grace that prides itself in the Lord Jesus, and by his blood enters with boldness into the holiest.

Inf. 3, If it be the will of God that we should draw near with full assurance of faith; hence I infer, that unbelief, whether reigning in the wicked, or remaining in the saints, cannot shun to be most displeasing and offensive unto him.

1, I say, reigning unbelief in the wicked is a flat contradiction to the will of God. The man under the power of unbelief, instead of drawing near with the assurance of faith, departs from him, through a distrust and jealousy of his grace, power, and veracity. Solomon tells us, Prov. 6:34, "Jealousy is the rage of a man. If we shall entertain and express a jealousy or distrust of a man's veracity, it is enough to exasperate and engage him against us: why? when we express a jealousy of him, we in effect call him a liar. And if man who is vanity, and the son of man who is a lie, reckon it such an indignity to have their veracity or kindness called in question; how much more is it an indignity done to him, for whom it is impossible to lie? O Sirs! unbelief offers the most signal affront to a God of truth, that is possible for a creature to do. God, as you were hearing, to encourage our faith and confidence toward him, has given all the securities which he could possibly grant; yea, the most jealous heart in the world could not ask better security from the most treacherous person on earth, than God has granted in his word: for though his bare word of promise be enough to command faith from all mankind, yet, beside his word, he has given his writ; beside his writ, he has given his sacred oath; beside his oath, he has given a surety; beside a surety, he has appended solemn seals, and ratified all by the joint testimony of the three that bear record in heaven, Father, Word, and Spirit. Now, after all these securities, to entertain a jealousy of him, as if he were not faithful to

his promise of welcome and acceptance in the beloved, what else is this but to make him a liar? Faithfulness and truth are the girdle of his loins and reins; but unbelief does its utmost to strip him of his girdle, charging him with treachery and unfaithfulness. You would reckon it an imputation of a very high and horrid nature, for any man to charge you with blasphemy against God; and yet I will be bold to say, every unbeliever is a blasphemmer of God. Why, can there be greater blasphemy under heaven, than to make God a liar? It is indeed most certain, that God will be found true, and every man a liar: but yet the unbeliever does his uttermost to make him a liar, by refusing credit to his word. And, after all, is it any wonder though a holy and jealous God be so enraged against the sin of unbelief, as to declare, that "he who believeth not, is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him?" Believe it, Sirs, if you continue to blaspheme God by your unbelief here, you shall have time to blaspheme him in hell with devils and damned spirits, through the endless ages of eternity; John 8:24, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." John 15:22, "If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin."

2, This doctrine not only condemns the reigning unbelief of the greatest part of the hearers of the gospel, but also the remaining unbelief of believers themselves. God knows how many unbelieving believers there are among us. There are very few believers, but are guilty of ten, if not twenty acts of unbelief, for one act of faith. O that I could shame even believers out of their unbelief! I shall only say that your unbelief is much more unaccountable and inexcusable than the unbelief of other men; why? God has not only given you a ground of faith, as he has given others, but he has given you the grace of faith; and not to believe in that case, is a crime of a most black and aggravated nature. If a child who is sprung out of his parent's bowels, and who is the object of his most endeared affection, should call his father that begat him a liar, would not this give a more sensible wound to the parent's heart, than if he had been so treated by any other person? This is the very case with you, believers; God has taken

you into his family, given you the name of sons and daughters, and he says to you in effect, as, Jer. 3:4, "Wilt thou not from henceforth cry unto me, My Father?" Wilt thou not from henceforth draw near to me as a Father, and as your Father in Christ with full assurance of faith? And yet, after all, to call him a liar by your unbelief, and to say, that his promise fails for evermore, or that he has forgotten to be gracious; O what a deep wound may you think doth this give unto the heart of your heavenly Father! The provocations of sons and daughters, particularly this provocation of unbelief, touches him in the tenderest part.

You may readily ask, Wherein doth the unbelief of believers discover itself? I answer,

1st, It discovers itself in their frequent pleading the cause of unbelief, and that under the specious pretext of humility. O, will the man say, it would be too great a thing for the like of me to venture into the holiest; it would be presumption in me to draw near with full assurance of faith, asking peace and pardon, grace and glory; I dare not meddle with the gift of God, or take hold of his covenant; my fingers are too foul to touch such holy things. Here, indeed, is a fair mask and shew of humility. But, Sirs, It is nothing else than the devil of unbelief wrapped up in Samuel's mantle; it is a pleading the cause of unbelief, and a refusing to obey the express command of God, under a pretence that you are not fit enough for believing, that you want this and that and the other qualification: and what is this but a tang of the old Adam, a tincture of the covenant of works? Whatever carnal reason may imagine, true faith, though it be the boldest, yet it is the most humble and self-emptying thing in the world; and the more of the boldness and assurance of faith, always the more humility. And the reason of this is plain, because faith in its dealings with God, despises so much as to cast an eye upon any grace or qualification in the soul itself, excepting it be its emptiness, misery, poverty, &c. and builds its whole confidence upon a ground without itself, namely, the noble qualifications of the great High Priest over the house of God.

2dly, The unbelief of believers discovers itself in a faint, languid, and timorous way of believing, as if the ground they stand upon were not able to bear them. Much like a man walking upon weak ice, though he ventures his weight upon it, yet every moment he is afraid lest the ice break underneath him, and leave him in the deep. Just so is it with many believers, they venture upon Christ, upon his righteousness, and upon the faithfulness of God pawned in the promise, with a kind of erphing, as though they would fall underneath them, and leave them to perish for ever. And what else is this but unbelief, or a secret distrusting of the sufficiency of God's faithfulness, or of Christ's righteousness, to bear up the soul in its eternal concerns!

3dly, The unbelief of believers appears in their being too much addicted to a way of living by sense. Sense, unless it have the stock in its own hand, it does not reckon the promise of God worth a farthing; but faith, it rejoices in the promise as its subsistence even when sense is out of doors. The believer who lives by sense, he will not believe the promise, or credit the veracity of the Promiser, unless he be hired and bribed with sensible consolations and manifestations; much like Thomas, John 20:25, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." It is with many believers, as it is with some unskilful swimmers, they will venture into the deep waters if you will undertake to bear their heads above, but not otherwise: but this is not true swimming; true swimming is for a man to venture the weight of his body into the water, and by the strength of the water, and the waving of his hands and limbs, to bear himself up from sinking. So true believing is not for a man to trust God and his promise only when he is borne up with sensible consolations; but for a man to rest, stay, and bear up his soul upon the bare promise of God, even when these props are withdrawn: it is to "trust in the name of the Lord, and to stay ourselves upon him as our God, when we walk in darkness, and see no light."

Inf. 4. This doctrine serves to discover what is the strength or stature of our faith; for the expression of the apostle in the text, as was already hinted, plainly imports that there are believers of different sizes in God's family. Now, in enlarging this inference, there are two or three practical cases which I shall endeavour briefly to resolve.

1. What are the usual symptoms of a strong faith?
2. What are the usual attendants of a weak faith?
3. How may the reality of faith be known, though it were in the lowest or weakest degree?

Quest. 1. What are the signs or evidences of a strong faith?

Ans. 1. The more that the legality of the heart is overcome, the stronger is a man's faith. Every man is naturally married to the law as a covenant; and while there is any thing of nature in the believer, he will find a strong bias in his heart turning him into the works of the law, as a ground of acceptance before God. And, O, how easily and insensibly do our spirits glide into this old covenant-channel, imagining that God accepts of us the better on the score of our inherent holiness, or external acts of obedience! Now, I say, the more that this bias of the heart is conquered, the stronger is our faith. A vigorous and lively faith, it overlooks all graces, duties, attainments, and experiences, as grounds of acceptance; and finds its confidence altogether upon the blood of Jesus, the merit and mediation of the great High Priest over the house of God, by virtue of the covenant of grace, and free promise of acceptance in him. The strong believer casts out the bond-woman and her seed of legal works and doings, owning himself only a son of the free-woman, an heir of the promise of grace and glory, through Christ and his imputed righteousness. Upon this rock he drops his anchor, upon this foundation he builds his hope, disclaiming his goodness as a thing that extendeth not to the Lord, accounting his own righteousness, whether legal or evangelical, before or after conversion, as "loss and dung, that he

may be found in Christ, having the righteousness which is through the faith of Christ." He will not take so much as a stone or little pinning of the works of the law, to help up the new fabric of grace; no, it shall be all grace from top to bottom, and through every part of it, and grace reigning through imputed righteousness alone: Eph. 2:8, 9, "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."

2. Strong faith will build its confidence, as to great matters, upon a naked word coming from the mouth of Christ, even though sense and reason, yea, the ordinary course of providence, be against it. This we see exemplified in the case of Abraham, formerly mentioned, Rom. 4. Though every thing seemed to make against him, yet "he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Yea, strong faith will catch at the least hint of encouragement from the Lord, and build its assurance thereupon as to the desired event: Mat. 8:5 to 13, the centurion comes to Christ on behalf of his servant, who was stricken with a palsy, and grievously tormented, Christ answers, ver. 7, "I will come and heal him." Well, the man's faith fixes upon this simple word of promise, and is so much assured of the good-will, power, and faithfulness of the Promiser, that he makes no more doubt of his servant's recovery, than if it were already done, being persuaded that diseases and distempers were as much at Christ's back, and much more, than his soldiers or servants were at his; and that Christ's word of command could as effectually heal at a distance as though he were present: whereupon, ver. 10, we are told that Jesus marvelled, saying, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."

3. Strong faith is ordinarily attended with a firm and fixed resolution to hang on the Lord till it get the errand it comes for: and no supposable discouragements shall make it quit its gripe. Jacob was a strong believer, and, by the strength of his faith, "he had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed." We read, Gen. 32, after a long night's wrestling, the Lord says to him, "Let me go,



for the day breaketh:" Jacob answers, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This, one would think, looked like rudeness and ill manners in Jacob to speak so to God: no, it was not rudeness, but only the resolution of his faith. Lord, might Jacob say, if thou ask my leave to go, I can by no means yield to it; let the day break and pass on, let night come, and the next day break again, lame Jacob and the living God shall never part till I get the blessing: and his resolute faith like a prince prevailed. O let all the true seed of Jacob follow his example, and they shall be fed with the heritage of Jacob their father. The like instance we see in the Syrophenician woman, Matt. 15:22–28. Her faith breaks through all discouragements, yea, improves seeming discouragements as arguments to fortify her suit; whereupon Christ at length answers, "O woman, great is thy faith." Strong faith will rather die upon the spot than quit its gripe: "Though he slay me (says Job), yet will I trust in him."

4. Strong faith, though it may be troubled at the hiding of the Lord's countenance, yet it will not be cast down at every cloud, as though the Lord had forgotten to be gracious: no, it presently casts its eyes on the covenant, and reads love in God's words when it cannot see them in its looks; saying with the Church, in Mic. 7:8, 9, "Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." Why? He has said, and his word is sure, that "his goings forth are prepared (or secured) as the outgoings of the morning-light," Hos. 6:3; and therefore I no more doubt of the Lord's return than I doubt of the return of the sun in the morning when he sets out of sight in the evening. However dark the night may be, yet the day will break, and the shadows will fly away: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." And as strong faith keeps up the heart from sinking under the clouds of desertion, temptation, and inward trouble, so it keeps the spirit of a man in an equal poise under all the vicissitudes of time, so that "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord." "Although the fig-tree should not blossom," &c., "yet will he rejoice in the Lord, and be glad in the God of his salvation," Hab. 3:17, 18. Heroic faith hath the moon of

this world under its feet; it tramples upon all the changes of time, saying, with the apostle, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," &c. However matters may be situate in the conduct of providence, yet a lively faith can see that there are no changes in God's covenant, no change of his love or purpose of grace.

5. The more fruitful a person is in the exercise of other graces, the stronger is his faith. You know the plenty and bigness of the fruit of a tree flows from the abundance of sap and strength in the root: so here, faith is the radical grace, the root upon which the other graces grow; and, therefore, the more that a person abounds in love, hope, repentance, meekness, humility, and other graces, the more vigorous is his faith: for as the tree strikes its roots into the ground, and from thence draws and sends a digested nourishment through the several branches, whereby they are made to blossom and bring forth; so faith unites the soul to Christ through the word of grace, and fetches out sap and strength from that true olive, whereby the soul is made to "revive as the corn, to grow as the vine, and the scent and savour thereof to be as the wine of Lebanon."

The second question was, What are the usual attendants of a weak faith? An answer to this question may easily be deduced from what has been already suggested in answer to the former; a weak faith having the opposite symptoms of a strong. However, beside what may be gathered this way, I shall suggest the two particulars following.

1. Frequent doubting, staggering, and wavering of the heart, is a concomitant of weak faith. You know, there is a great deal of smoke goes up from the fire while it is weak, not thoroughly broken up; so the more of the smoke of unbelieving doubts, fears, and jealousies, there is the less faith. Hence doubting and believing are opposed,—"Wherefore didst thou doubt, O thou of little faith?" A staggering at the promise through unbelief is opposed to the strength of faith, Rom. 4:20. The word is borrowed from a man walking, whose feet through weakness hit one another, which makes him alter his pace,

one step is quick, and another slow: so here, the way of weak faith is not equal. Perhaps, under a sensible enjoyment, he is this hour triumphing in his high places; but anon the enjoyment is withdrawn, and he alters his pace, and staggers through unbelief, saying, "His promise fails for evermore; he hath forgotten to be gracious."

2, The more hasty and impatient the soul is under delays, the weaker is its faith. This I gather from Is. 28:16, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Weak faith is so hasty, that it will allow of no time to intervene betwixt the petition and its answer, betwixt the promise and its accomplishment: if the answer do not come presently, the man is ready to conclude, "The Lord doth not hear, neither doth the God of Jacob regard." But now, strong faith makes the soul to wait God's time and leisure, saying, "I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up. I will look unto the Lord: I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

The third question was this, How may the truth and reality of faith be known, though it be in the weakest and lowest degree? I answer,

1. True faith, even in the weakest measure, will look on sin as an enemy, though it perhaps dare not lay claim to Christ as a friend. True faith is said to "purify the heart," Acts 15:9. It is a living principle in the soul, which is always opposing the motions of indwelling corruption. Although indeed, sometimes, through the prevalency of sin, it cannot be discerned more than the living spring at the bottom of the well, when the waters are muddied; yet, like the living spring, it is always working out the mud and filth, till the waters be perfectly clear. Perhaps the soul is so far from perceiving any real grace, any actual interest in Christ, that it can see nothing but atheism, enmity, unbelief, ignorance, pride, and such vermin of hell, crawling in every corner; and yet at the same time the living principle of faith at the bottom of the heart will be working and wrestling against these, sometimes by groans, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" sometimes by complaints, "Iniquities prevail against me;" sometimes by looks to heaven for relief, "I know

not what to do, but mine eyes are upon thee;" sometimes by cries to heaven, "I am oppressed, undertake for me;" sometimes by breathing desires after more holiness, "Create in me a clean heart; Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" By such things as these, the truth and reality of faith may be discovered, even in its weakest measure and degree.

2. True faith, though never so weak, will have a high estimate and valuation of Christ, and the habitual bent and bias of the soul will be toward him, 1. Pet. 2:7, "Unto you which believe, he is precious." Is. 26:8, "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." Weak faith perhaps dare not go the length of saying, with the spouse, "My beloved is mine, and I am his;" yet it will be often saying, "O that he were mine! O that thou wert as my brother that sucked the breasts of my mother!" and if it could get out its breath it would even cry, "Abba, Father; My Lord, and my God;" but it is, as it were, suppressed and smothered, when it would say so, with prevailing unbelief. Where true faith is, there is a void, emptiness, and restlessness of the soul, like the fish out of its element, or a bone out of joint, till some view of Christ come, and then indeed it returns unto its rest. I remember, after the creation of Adam, God caused all the creatures to pass before him; but among them all there was not found an helpmate for him; there was something disagreeable and unsatisfying in all the inferior creatures, so that though he had them all at his command, yet still man was in a solitary condition, Gen. 2:20. But so soon as ever the woman was presented to him, he says, ver. 23, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh;" this indeed is a helpmate for me. Just so is it with the soul in whom there is a principle of true faith: present riches, profits, pleasures, and all worldly contentments to him, he still finds something unsuitable and unsavoury in them all; but let Christ be revealed to him, immediately he cries out, O this is a helpmate for me indeed! Is. 11:10, "To him shall the Gentiles seek, for his rest is glorious." Psal. 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

3. True faith, though in the lowest degree, will not rest there, but breathes after higher degrees of faith. Set the highest degree of faith before a weak believer, tell him of the faith of Abraham, how he believed without staggering; the man will indeed be humbled under a sense of his shortcomings, and lament his own unbelief; yet, at the same time, he will find a breathing, and eager desire in his soul to win such a length of believing. Thus, like Paul, he "forgets those things which are behind, and reacheth forth unto those things which are before," &c. When the weak believer hears of the full assurance of faith, his language is, "Lord, help my unbelief; Lord, increase my faith." I might tell you of many other evidences of faith in its truth and reality, though weak, as, that it works by love; it empties the soul, and humbles it; though the man cannot see himself great in God's eyes, yet he sees himself nothing in his own eyes; as he values Christ highly, so he values himself less than the least of all God's mercies. But I do not insist.

Inf. 5. Is it the will of God that we should draw near to him in Christ, with full assurance of faith? then let us study to do the will of God in this matter. Seeing the door of the holiest is open, the "way consecrated for us," and the "High Priest entered within the vail; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." I exhort you not only to believe, but to be strong in the faith. Study to have a faith proportioned, in some measure, to the grounds of faith already mentioned.

But here a question will readily be moved, Is it the duty of all the hearers of the gospel, at first to believe after this manner, or to draw near with a full assurance of faith? For answer,

1, I grant, that the first approaches of a sinner to God in Christ by faith, are for the most part weak and feeble, attended with much fear and trembling, through the prevalency and strength of unbelief, a sense of utter unworthiness, and awful impressions of the glorious majesty of God; all of which readily makes him, with the publican, to

"stand afar off, smiting on his breast, crying, God be merciful to me a sinner." But yet,

2, I affirm, that there is a sufficient ground laid, in the gospel revelation and promise, for a sinner, even in his first approach to God in Christ, to come with full assurance of faith. This will evidently appear, if we consider that, by the glorious gospel, a wide door of access is cast open unto all without exception; all grounds of unbelief and distrust are removed, every bar and impediment which might make them to halt and hesitate is rolled away. This is given in commission to ministers, to "prepare the way of the people, to cast up, cast up the highway, to gather out the stones, and lift up a standard for the people," Is. 62:10. When we call sinners to believe, we do not call them to come with a weak faith, or with a doubting, disputing faith; but we invite and call them to come with assurance of acceptance and welcome, grounded upon his infallible word of promise, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out."

3, I find the Lord directing sinners, even in their first approaches, to draw near to him in Christ, with full assurance of faith (Jer. 3:19), "But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?" Here is a very puzzling question, such as none can answer but God himself. Well, but what is the answer which the Lord puts in the sinner's mouth? "Thou shalt call me, My Father, and shalt not turn away from me." The first breath of the spirit of adoption is, "Abba, Father," Rom. 8:15, a word of faith or confidence. Christ puts words of assurance in our mouths, teaching us, when we pray, to say, "Our Father which art in heaven." And every one apart is to say, "My Father which art in heaven," &c. Agreeable unto which is the direction given, Jam. 1:6. We are told, ver. 5, that "if any man (be he a saint or a sinner) lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Well, here is noble encouragement to all; but they who would speed well are ordered to come in the full assurance of faith, ver. 6, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," &c.

4, I find sinners, in their first approaches, sometimes practising this direction, and coming with words of assurance (Jer. 3:22), says the Lord, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." And what is the first echo of faith unto this call? "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God." So Zech. 13:9, "I will say, It is my people," there is the word of grace, and ground of faith; and the language of faith, correspondent thereunto, immediately follows, "They shall say, The Lord is my God." Is. 45:24, "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Besides all this, none, I think, can doubt but it is the sinner's duty at first, in obedience to the first commandment, to know and acknowledge the Lord as God, and as our God; and how this can be done but by believing, I cannot tell.

Well, then, seeing there is such a door of faith opened to sinners in the gospel, let sinners enter in with boldness, and be saved. John 10:9, "I am the door (says Christ): by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

Object. 1. May the sinner say, How shall I adventure to draw near with assurance of acceptance? I have such a burden of sin and guilt lying upon me, and it has such a prevalency and ascendant over me, that my confidence is quite marred: for my part, I may well say with David (Ps. 40:12), "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me." To this I answer, (1), By way of concession, that it is indeed impossible for a person living in the love and practice of sin, to draw near to God with the confidence of faith; for, in the very act of drawing near, the heart is purified by faith, in the blood of Jesus; or, as it is expressed in the latter clause of the text, he hath his "heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and his body washed with pure water." In believing, we "cease to do evil, and learn to do well." Faith, apprehending the mercy of God in Christ, turns the soul from sin unto God. So that it is as impossible for a person to draw near to God with the confidence of faith, while he lives in the love and

practice of sin, as it is for a person to come to you, and go from you, at the same instant of time. While the heart is in league with sin, it is departing from the Lord: how then in this case can the sinner draw near to God? far less can he draw near with assurance of acceptance. There is a great difference betwixt iniquity prevailing in the heart, and iniquity regarded in the heart. In the last case, a person cannot draw near with acceptance. Ps. 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart: the Lord will not hear me." Q. d. If I love it, or give it kindly harbour in my heart, God will not accept of me or my prayers; because in that case he could not draw near with a true heart, which is an inseparable concomitant of the assurance of faith. But in the former case, viz. of prevailing iniquity, it is not only possible, but actually preceded, for a person to draw near with the full assurance of faith, as we see in the instance of David (Ps. 65:3), "Iniquities (says he) prevail against me." But what follows? "As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away." Now, this being the case pointed at in the objection, it ought to be no prejudice or hindrance to your drawing near unto the holiest by the blood of Jesus, with full assurance of faith, seeing he is faithful who hath promised acceptance in the beloved. (2), Whereas, O sinner, thou complainest of a burden of sin and guilt lying upon thee, which mars thy confidence; I only ask, For whom, thinkest thou, was the way to the holiest opened by the blood of Jesus? was it for the righteous, or for guilty sinners? An innocent or holy person needs no such way of access: it is only calculated and shapen for the guilty criminal and transgressor, such as thou art; and though "thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," that moment thou enterest in by the blood of Jesus: and, therefore, "let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Whither can a guilty sinner go, but to the Lord, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin? Whither can a polluted sinner go, save to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness? (3), The boldness and assurance of faith is not only consistent, but is always accompanied with a soul abasing sense of utter unworthiness, because of the guilt, and filth, and power of sin. And the reason of this is plain, because, in believing, the man, through an uptaking of



sin and guilt, is carried out of himself to seek his standing and the ground of his confidence in another, even in Christ, and the mercy of God in him. So David, Ps. 130:3, 4, "If thou Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayst be feared," &c. And therefore, let a sense of sin, in its guilt and prevalency, carry thee out of thyself, to draw near, by the blood of Jesus, with full assurance of faith. It was a preposterous way of reasoning in Peter, to say, "Lord, depart from me, for I am sinful man." He should rather have said, Lord, come to me, for I am a sinful man; for where can a sinner be better than with the Saviour of sinners?

Object. 2. You call us to draw near with the assurance of faith: but, alas! how can I do this, seeing I am in the dark about my interest in Christ? If I knew that I had peace with God, my sin pardoned, my person accepted, and that I were in a state of grace and favour, in that case I could draw near with confidence indeed. But the case is quite otherwise: clouds and darkness are round about me; I doubt if ever God dealt with my heart effectually by his grace: How, then, can I draw near with the confidence of faith? Answ. If you never draw near to God with the assurance of faith, till you come to a sensible assurance of your interest in Christ, and of your being in a state of grace, you will never draw near to him in your life: and the reason of this is, because a sensible assurance of an interest in Christ is the fruit and effect of the soul's drawing near by faith, and the effect can never go before its cause. The way to come at that assurance of a state of grace, is to draw near with the assurance of faith, grounded, not upon any gracious work within you, but upon the gracious promise of God in his word, and the mediation of the great High Priest over the house of God: Heb. 4:14, 16, "Seeing we have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace," &c. Faith (as I said just now) still seeks a ground of confidence, not in grace received, or anything within the man, but only in Christ, and the gracious promise of acceptance through him; and, therefore, the best way in the world to win above all these doubts, fears, and perplexities

anent your gracious state, is, by a direct act of faith, to go in to God by the new and living way, assuring and persuading your own souls, that a God of grace and love "hates putting away," Is. 50:10. He that "walketh in darkness, and hath no light," what course is he to take? "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God:" where, by the name of the Lord, we are to understand the grace and mercy, power and faithfulness of God, pawned in the promises of the covenant. Here we are to cast anchor; upon these we are to build the confidence and assurance of faith, when we have nothing to look or trust to. Faith, both in its first act, and in its after-actings, fastens upon this name of the Lord; when at first it fetches the soul out of the darkness of a natural state, and when afterwards, by its renewed actings, it brings the soul from under the dark and black clouds of desertion, temptation, and despondency, it still trusts in the name of God, as it is set in Christ, and set forth in the covenant, particularly in the absolute promises thereof. And therefore, though, indeed, in the duty of self-examination, we are to look inward for the marks and evidences of grace, in order to our arriving at an assurance of sense; yet, in the duty of believing, and in order to our coming at the assurance of faith, we must look wholly outward to the promise, and the name of God pledged therein. Thus did Abraham, the father of the faithful, Rom. 4:20, 21; and so must we, if we would be the true seed of Abraham.

Object. 3. You call sinners to believe, and to believe with an assured faith. But to what purpose is all this? may one say: faith is "the gift of God," the work of his Spirit; I have no power to believe, till God work in me, and therefore all this labour, in persuading us to believe, might be spared. I answer, Your own inability to believe, by any strength or power of yours, is so far from being an argument against, that it is one of the strongest arguments why you should believe; for when we call you to believe, we do not call you to work or do any thing by your own power, but, because you have no power, to trust in the doings and strength of another, who, as he has wrought all your works for you, so he engages himself by promise to work all your works in you; and particularly, being "the Author and Finisher of

faith," is ready and willing to "fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." Every creature answers its name, and will God be wanting to answer his? No, surely; the name that he takes to himself is declarative of his nature, and, therefore, since he has taken this name to himself, of being the Author of Faith, and the Finisher thereof, we may, with the greatest assurance of faith, "trust in this name of the Lord," that he will both begin the good work, and carry it on to the day of the Lord Jesus. And this very committing of the work of faith unto him, from a sense of your own inability, is that believing which we urge and call you to. Faith is a grace which just springs out of the ruin of all self-sufficiency and excellency; finding neither righteousness nor strength within, it looks abroad and cries, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

Unbelief and carnal reason are ready to argue, Because God by his Spirit must do all, therefore we will sit still and do nothing But the Spirit of God, whose reasonings I am sure are infinitely better, argues after a quite different manner, Phil. 2:12, 13, "Work out the work of your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." O what glorious encouragement is here for a poor impotent sinner to essay and mint at believing! Here is the arm of Omnipotency reaching forth itself for thy help and through-bearing in the work he calls thee to. Up, therefore, and be doing, for "thy God commands thy strength;" and therefore let him be "the glory of thy strength."

But, say you, seeing we cannot work the work of faith, why does he yet command it? Is it not a hardship to require of us what we have no ability to do? Ans. Why do you send your little children to school, with the A, B, C in their hand, before they can read one letter? You do not think it a hardship to put the book in their hand, and bid them read, though they know not a letter, because you offer to teach them yourself, or by another in your place. So here, we are commanded to "work the work of God," which is to "believe on him whom he hath sent;" which yet is no hardship, notwithstanding of utter inability for

it in ourselves; because, at the same time that he commands believing, he tells us, for our encouragement, that he himself is the Author of faith, and is ready to work in us both to will and to do. If a master should command a servant to poise or lift a burden which he is not able to move, or to work a turn which he has no skill to manage, it might indeed discourage the servant from attempting it, if he were required to do it by his own strength or skill; but when the master tells him, I will assist, I will direct, I will do all, only put to thy hand, what servant would refuse or decline the service in this case? or if he should, do you not think he would deserve to be beaten with many stripes? The application is obvious: it is God's ordinary way to come and join with the poor soul, and enable it to believe, while, in obedience to his command, it is minding to believe in Christ. Like a kind master of a school, when the child, in obedience to him, takes the pen in his hand, and scribbles the best way he can, the master takes his hand in his, and leads and learns him to write; so, when we take, as it were, the pen in our hand, and offer to write at his command, he takes our hand in his, directing, strengthening, and enabling us to believe; so that, if there be but a willing mind to this work, it is accepted; where he gives to will, he will also give to do, of his good pleasure: these two are inseparably connected in the order of God's covenant.

But you may still object, All the endeavours of a natural man are still but natural and sinful actions; and will ever God concur by his almighty power with the acts or endeavours of nature. Ans. Although God be not obliged to concur with the endeavours of nature, yet such is his grace, love, and goodwill towards man upon earth, such is the strength of his desire after our salvation, such pleasure has he in a sinner's believing, such a regard has he to what he himself has commanded, that we find him many times actually concurring with the poor helpless sinner, in his impotent mints at obedience to what he calls for. It was no gracious principle that moved Naaman the Syrian to go wash in the waters of Jordan; yet, because he did what was commanded, God was pleased to concur with the means of his own appointment, and cured his leprous body, and, for aught I know,

his soul also. Let us believe as we can, in obedience to God's command, and in a dependence upon his almighty power, and while we are doing so, although the act be at the beginning but natural, yet, in the very acting, promised and purchased grace strikes in, and turns it into a supernatural act of believing. As when Christ was about to work that famous miracle at Cana in Galilee, he does not first turn the water into wine, but he first bids them pour out the water, and, in pouring of it out, the water was changed into wine; so, the loaves were multiplied while the disciples, in obedience to the command of Christ, were dividing them among the multitude. Just so here, while the poor soul, in a subordination to the divine power, and in obedience to the divine command, is attempting to believe, a God of grace changes the attempt into a true genuine faith; so that the soul, through the mighty power of God, ere ever it is aware, is brought really to believe, and that in a way it knows not how; for "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Thus, I say, in the very acting of faith we are enabled to act it; when we take the pen in our hand, God takes us by the hand, and writes for us, leading us in the "way we know not." It is with us in believing many times, as in praying. The man goes to prayer with his heart as cold as the ice, and as hard as the nether millstone; he cannot open a mouth before the Lord: his tongue is tacked, his heart is locked up; but yet, while the poor soul is minting to pour out its heart into God's bosom, the Spirit of the Lord falls on him, even the Spirit of grace and supplication, whereby his bonds are loosed, and his soul made like the chariots of Amminadib. So, while the poor soul is minting at believing, the Spirit of faith comes and concurs with it, exerting that exceeding great and mighty power which raised Christ from the dead, whereby he comes to be "filled with joy and peace in believing."

Perhaps you may say, You urge us much to essay believing: but pray give us your best advice how to manage in this matter. O that the Spirit of God may concur! There are these two or three things I offer,

by way of advice, to you who are in good earnest; and O! what man is there, that has a soul to be saved, and who looks forward to a vast eternity of well or woe, that should not be in good earnest as to this matter!

1. My first advice, then, is this, Study to have your hearts well stored with all these considerations which are fit fuel and matter whereby faith is ingenerated, or begotten, in the hearts of sinners. Although the act of saving faith be the effect of the divine power and grace; yet it is in the power of nature, by a common concourse, to stock and store the mind with those things which are the seed of faith. The husbandman, though he cannot make one grain of corn to grow, yet he can plough and sow his ground, and when he has done his part, he leaves the seed under the clod, and looks up to heaven for the waterings of the earlier and latter rains; and accordingly, God for ordinary crowns his endeavours with success, making the heavens to hear the earth, and the earth to hear the corn, whereby it brings forth ten, twenty, or an hundred fold. So here, let us do what is incumbent on us, and what we have power in an ordinary way to do; let us sow the seeds, I mean, let us store our minds with the pure and precious truths of God, and acquaint ourselves with those things which are to be believed, as they are laid before us in the holy oracles of the scriptures of truth; and having thus laid in the seed into the ground or soil of our hearts, let us look heavenward, and wait for a shower of the Spirit's influences, according to that word of grace or promise, Is. 44:3, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." You know, they that offered sacrifices of old, though they could not make fire come down from heaven to consume their sacrifices, yet they could fetch the bullock out of the stall, or the lamb out of the fold; they could bring it to the altar, and bind it with cords to the horns of the altar; they could gather their sticks, and lay in proper fuel; and having done their part, they looked up to heaven for the celestial fire to set all on a flame together. In like manner, I say, do what is incumbent on you; gather your sticks, lay in the proper fuel of faith, store your minds with the materials of believing, which you are daily reading or hearing in the word. Study to impress your

souls with the doctrines of your lost estate in the first Adam, and the way of your salvation by grace, in and through the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Think upon the near approach that the high and lofty One has made to us in the person of his eternal Son, by his manifestation in our nature, when he passed by the nature of angels. O think on the excellency of his person, as he is Immanuel, God-man, God with us, God on our side, to bruise the head of the old serpent, who had spoiled and ruined us. Think upon his suretyship and substitution in our room; how he was "made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" how he was "made a curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse;" how he was "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." Think upon the fulness of grace and truth, of merit and spirit, that is in him; and how all that fulness of grace that is laid up in him, is laid out to us in a covenant of grace and promise, and that promise or covenant left to us, and put in our hands, and we required to take hold of it, to make use of it in a way of believing. These are some of the materials of faith; faith comes by hearing of these things, and by thinking and meditating upon them: "By these things do men live; and in all these things is the life of our spirits," Is. 38:16. And therefore revolve them in your minds, roll them like a sweet morsel under your tongues, think and think again upon them, and, in thinking, present them to your understanding, as things wherein your eternal state is concerned. You have as good ground to expect the concurring power of the Spirit of faith in this way and method, to fulfil in you the work of faith with power, as ever they of old had to look for the celestial fire to come down and consume their sacrifices, as a testimony of the divine acceptance, when they had, according to the command of God, done what was incumbent on them, in preparing their materials.

2, Another advice I give you is this, Study not only to gather these materials of faith, but to be fully persuaded of the truth and certainty of every thing that God has revealed in his word, especially of these things which relate more immediately to the mystery of salvation through Christ. We must needs believe the report of the gospel, and

set our seal to the record of God in his word. Particularly, be fully persuaded that you are bankrupt, ruined, and lost, to all intents and purposes, by the breach of the first covenant, being under the wrath of God, the curse of the law and the power of Satan; and that you have no more power to relieve yourselves out of this miserable condition, than the newborn infant cast out into the open field, Ezek. 16. And in digging into this rock whence you were hewn, be not afraid to go to the bottom, I mean, to know the worst of yourselves; for true faith springs out of the ruin of self. Despair and self loathing make way for a suitable prizing and improving of the blessed remedy. Want of necessaries at home oblige men to go abroad, either to beg or buy where they may have them. The denial of self, in point of righteousness and strength, lands the soul in Christ, saying, "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Again, study to be fully assured, that there is no help or relief for you out of your lost condition, but only by faith's acceptance and application of Christ, upon the warrant of God's word of grace; there is no coming to the Father but by him, no other name whereby men can be saved; every other door of access is barred and condemned since the fall. Be convinced of Christ's ability and sufficiency to save you from sin, and from all its dismal train of miseries; he is a mighty Redeemer on whom God hath laid our help, able to save to the uttermost. Be persuaded, that he is a Saviour every way calculated and suited unto thy necessity, being made of God unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and that his office as a Saviour, as well as his own promise, obliges him to save every one that comes to him in a way of believing: that everlasting life is yours, and you actually have it that moment you receive him as the free gift of God; "he that hath the Son hath life:" that there is no condition or qualification, no work or duty, required in the word of God, in order to procure a right and title to eternal life; but that you are to come in upon Christ's title, who is the righteous heir, and who has made a disposition or assignation of his right to us in his testament, without any clogs or conditions. And if you adventure to make your works, duties, or any good thing in you, the condition of Christ's latter-will, you alter the will of the deed, you in effect destroy the freedom of a



covenant of grace, and build up a partition-wall between Christ and you, which you shall never be able to climb over.

3. Another advice I give you is this, Believe that it is your duty to believe, in obedience to the express command of God, with an eye to his promised Spirit. First view the grounds that your faith has to go upon, already spoken to; and then cast your eye upon the divine command and call, warranting, encouraging, and requiring you to venture upon these grounds; and so long as these are kept in view, there is no fear of presumption; how can it be presumption to obey the express command of heaven? yea, the greatest command that ever was issued out to man from the throne of glory above, 1 John 3:23. He speaks as if there were no other command in the Word of God; because we fulfil the whole law as a covenant, in the very first act of believing, by renouncing our own, and submitting to the law-bidding and law-magnifying righteousness of the Son of God; and thereby our personal obedience also to the law as a rule is set upon such a footing as to be accepted in the beloved; for let us do what we will, we shall never please God, or be accepted of him, till we believe in the name of his Son, Heb. 11:6. And therefore I say again, mint at believing, in obedience to the command of God. It is as much your duty to believe as to obey any command of the moral law; and disobedience to this command of believing will damn you eternally; yea, do it more effectually than murder, adultery, theft, or any other breach of the law that I can name. Pray, tell me, Sirs, why do you ever bow a knee, or open a mouth to God in prayer? Do you set about this duty because you have power and strength in yourselves to pierce heaven by your prayers, or to order your cause before God? No, surely, but because God has commanded you to call upon him; therefore, powerless as you are, though you know not how to pray, or what to pray for, yet you essay it. Now, why do you not the same in the case of believing as in praying, since the one is commanded as well as the other? for I say, you have as little power in yourselves to pray aright as to believe aright. There are many who, as I was saying before, shift off the great duty of believing from day to day under this pretext, that they want power to believe. But this is an objection that

militates against all duties, as well as that of believing. We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, as the apostle assures us; but will you for this reason desist from any essay to think upon what is good and beneficial to your souls? No; we try meditation, we mint to think on what is good and, in musing, the fire burns: God comes in with the breathings of his Spirit, and then our meditations of him are sweet, and we are glad in the Lord. So, while the soul, from a sense of its lost estate, is minting to roll and rest itself on Christ in obedience to the command of God, God comes in with his Spirit of faith, and fills us with joy and peace in believing.

4. Although you should not find any sensible concurrence of the power of God coming along with your mint at obedience to the command of believing, yet give it not over, but still continue the attempt: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Object. I have often attempted to believe, but yet I am as far from it as ever; the power of God does not come along, and therefore I may quite give it over. For answer, I refer you to a word, Heb. 10:36, 37, "Ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." In trying to act faith in obedience to the divine command ye have need of patience, for "he that believeth doth not make haste." You must resolve to believe, and wait, and wait, and believe, and never give it over: and when ye have done the will of God in this matter as you can, you must hold on with them that have clean hands, even though you find no sensible influence concurring: for it is the command of God in his word, and not the influence of the Spirit, that is the rule and measure of your duty. And if you continue doing the will of God in this matter, with an eye to him who is the author and finisher of faith, you may assure yourselves that, "in a little while, he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." It is the will of God, and the work of God, which thou art aiming at, even to "believe in him whom he hath sent;" and will not a God of grace and love, with whom compassions flow, put to his hand to his own work, and help a poor creature to do what is his own will? yea, surely thou

may be confident of this very thing, when he has passed his word for it, that he will "work in thee, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." There is nothing in all the world so pleasing to God as to see a poor soul aiming to close with, and accept of his Christ: he is, as it were, pained at the heart when sinners are backward to believe in his Son; and will he not then be forward to help a poor soul that is aiming at it? You know, an indulgent mother, when her breasts are full and swelled with milk, will be ready, not only to draw out her breast, but to help her poor infant toward it, when in want of milk or minting to suck. Has a mother such compassion toward her sucking child; and is there not infinitely more compassion with the Father of mercies toward a poor soul that is minting to suck the full breasts of his grace and mercy drawn out to all in a gospel-dispensation? He whose bowels are sending out a sound after sinners in the gospel-call will not be wanting to lend his helping hand to enable you to believe; and therefore say with David, Ps. 42:5, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

Object. I have tried believing so long and so often, that I am quite wearied, my strength is gone, and yet no power from above; what shall I do? God takes no notice of me. Ans. Is. 40:27, 28, &c., "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? 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." Thou imaginest that God's helping hand is withdrawn, and that he takes no notice of thy mints to believe. But why sayest thou so? He is nearer than thou apprehendest: Behold, he standeth behind our wall, ready to give grace, and mercy to help in time of need, ready to give power to the faint, and strength to them that have no might: and power from on high to believe is nearest when we are most carried out of ourselves in point of strength and sufficiency. And therefore give it not over: "Wait, I say, on the Lord; for they that wait upon him shall renew their strength." It is only the weak man that will lean to the

help of another: now faith is a leaning on Christ when we cannot stand alone, Song 8:5, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" It is only the wearied man that will sit down and rest him: now faith is the soul's resting in or upon Christ, Ps. 37:7, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." Heb. 4:3, "We which have believed do enter into rest." When a man can do nothing else, when he is so feeble that he cannot put his hand to a turn, yet he can rest him: so here, because thou art weak, and without strength for any work of the law, therefore the Lord calls thee to rest thy weary, singing soul upon the Lord Jesus, on whom he has laid thy help. And therefore let thy weakness encourage thee to revive, instead of discouraging thee.

But now, I come to offer a word of exhortation to these whose hearts do fall in with the foregoing exhortation. Do ye now believe, though in the weakest degree? Let me exhort you not to rest in a low measure of faith, but press after the highest degree of it. Forget things behind, reach forth unto things that are before; believe better than ye have yet done. Go on from faith to faith, and thus learn to "draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith:" and thus you shall be the children of faithful Abraham, who "staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." You see what was the ground of Abraham's faith, by which he believed without staggering; it was nothing else but the promise of life and salvation, through a Messiah to come. Well, you have the very same ground of faith laid before you, with a far greater advantage now under the New Testament, namely, the promise of acceptance, peace, pardon, grace, and glory, through a Messiah who is already come, and finished the work which the Father gave him to do; and therefore believe without staggering, as he did.

That I may quicken you to press after a higher measure of faith I offer the following considerations,—

1. Little faith is not easily discerned: it is but like a grain of mustard seed lying in the ground, which one can scarce distinguish from the dust which lies under his feet; and when faith is not discerned, God loses the glory of his own grace, and you also lose the comfort of it.

2. The world we live in requires a strong faith. It is a den of lions, and a mountain of leopards; the roaring lion is going about seeking to devour: Red seas and Jordans of trouble lie in our way to Canaan, through the howling wilderness. Storms and tempests of persecution and tribulation may blow, which will make the strong believer to stagger and shake: and if so, has not the weak believer reason to fortify himself, by studying to believe better than he has done? for it is by faith that we stand in an evil day.

3. Contentment with little faith is no good sign of the reality of faith; for (as was hinted before) it is of the nature of true grace to breathe after its own perfection. They who have the least degree of it, press after the highest. They that know the Lord, follow on to know him.

4. Consider the advantages of a strong faith, beyond a weak. 1st, A strong faith hath a firm and solid peace coming along with it: Is. 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." But weak faith has its peace disturbed at every turn of providence. 2dly, Strong faith brings great joy with it; hence we are said to be "filled with joy and peace in believing;" yea, the "joy of a lively faith is a joy unspeakable, and full of glory," 1 Pet. 1:8. But now the weak believer, though he may perhaps sometimes be filled with the joy of sense, yet he has but little of the joy of believing. Hence it is, that, whenever sense is withdrawn, he is in the very suburbs of hell, crying, "The Lord hath forgotten to be gracious, his promise fails for evermore." 3dly, Strong faith is more steady in a storm than a weak faith is. Strong faith, when the storm blows, casts out the anchor of hope, and rides in safety, crying, "I will not be afraid, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, and though the waters thereof roar." But now, weak faith, like Peter walking on the waters, is ready at every

billow to cry out, "Master, I perish." When created comforts fail, when the fields yield no increase, weak faith is ready to say, I and my family will perish: but strong faith will say, Up the heart, there is no fear; "my bread shall be given me, my water shall be sure;" because a God of truth hath said it, whose is the "earth and the fulness thereof." He that "feeds the ravens," will not let his children starve; he that "clothes the lilies," will not let me go naked. 4thly, Strong faith has more confidence and boldness in entering into the holiest, and more moyen and interest in heaven, than weak faith has, John 14:13, 14; Mark 11:24; James 1:6. Weak faith, although God will not reject its suit, yet its returns are not so clear and full; yea, I will adventure to say, that unbelieving doubts, and fears, and jealousies, mar the success of many a good petition. 5thly, Strong faith makes the approaches of death more easy than they are to the weak believer. Strong faith takes up the telescope of the promise, and looks beyond death to the land afar off, and rejoiceth in the hope of the glory of God, saying, as the head Christ did, Ps. 16:9, "My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope:" for he hath "shewed me the path of life," the new and living way to these "rivers of pleasure," and that "fulness of joy," which are "at God's right-hand for evermore." Strong faith viewing an exalted Redeemer, it sees death and hell among the trophies of his victory, and thereupon triumphs over it as a vanquished and slain enemy, saying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through Jesus Christ my Lord." But now, weak faith shivers and trembles at the approaches of death, lest it should be swallowed up in the swellings of that Jordan. Let these considerations, I say, quicken you to breathe after the increase of your weak faith, that you may draw near with full assurance of faith.

I conclude this whole discourse with a word, 1st, of encouragement; and, 2d, of advice to weak believers: for our glorious Master has commanded us, to "strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees;" and to "say to them that are of a fearful spirit, Be strong, fear not."

1, A word of comfort and encouragement to the poor tender lambs and weaklings in God's flock, who are frequently halting and staggering, through the prevalency of unbelief.

(1,) Know, for thy comfort, that the weakest believer is as nearly related to God as a Father, as the strongest believer is. The weakest and youngest babe in a family is as sib to the father as the first-born, or the son who is come to his full strength and stature. Every branch of a tree is not alike strong or big; and yet the tenderest twig is as really united to the root, and as really partakes of the sap of the root, as the strongest and most principal branch. So here, the weakest believer, is in Christ, and partakes of his Spirit, as well as the strongest.

(2,) The weak believer is clothed with the white raiment of Christ's righteousness, and is as much justified thereby, as the strongest. Our great High Priest is clothed with a garment down to his feet, whereby every member of his body mystical is equally covered. It is equally true of every believer, that "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ," Rom. 8:1.

(3,) The least and weakest degree of faith shall hold out to the end. They are all "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax; where the good work is begun, his faithfulness is engaged to carry it on to the day of Christ. The weakest degree of faith has glory and salvation knit to it by God's promise, as well as the strongest: It is not, He that believes strongly shall be saved; but, He that believes indefinitely, whether his faith be weak or strong.

(4,) Our blessed Redeemer for ordinary vents his affection in a more tender and sensible manner toward weak believers, than toward the strong. The good Shepherd of Israel, he "carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young." Hence it comes, that weak believers have commonly more sensible ravishing joys and consolations than strong believers. Much like a wife and affectionate

parent, who will take his young infant on his knee, dandle it and hug it in his bosom, while he will not allow his affections to run out after such a manner toward his son of age and stature, for that were to make a fool of him.

May the poor weak believer say, These are strong consolations indeed, If I might lay claim unto them: but that is what I still fear, that I have no faith at all, no, not like a grain of mustard seed. Beside what was said to this in the former part of the discourse, I shall only ask these two questions: 1, Does not thy heart throb and faint within thee, when thou thinkst of a parting with the Lord Jesus? If so, this says, that his love is shed abroad in thy heart by the Holy Ghost, and consequently a root and principle of faith, from whence it flows, cleaving to the Lord like the iron touched with the loadstone. And I tell the good news, that as thou hatest to be put away from him, so "he hates putting away;" and therefore there never shall be a separation. 2. Dost thou not find a restlessness in thy spirit, an uneasiness in thy bosom, when the Lord withdraws, like a bone out of joint, or a fish out of its element? If so, the root of faith is within; Christ has been with thee in a way of grace and love, otherwise thou couldst not distinguish between absence and presence. And if ever Christ made thee a visit, his first visit shall not be his last; for "his goings forth are prepared (or secured) like the morning."

2, I come to shut up all with a few advices to weak believers, in order to the increase of their faith towards a full assurance.

(1,) Be humbled under a sense of remaining unbelief, and the weakness of your faith; for "the Lord giveth grace (and more grace) to the humble." The more that self is pulled down, the higher is Christ exalted in a way of believing.

(3,) Be greedy of more faith. Covetousness in other things of this world is idolatry: but this is among the best things which you are allowed earnestly to covet; and the more you covet and desire of the Spirit of faith, the more you shall get; for "he satisfieth the longing



soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

(3.) Be well acquainted with the grounds of faith, as they are laid in the gospel-revelation, some of which I have pointed at in the preceding discourse. I am persuaded, that one great reason why so many do not believe at all, and why the faith of many real believers remain so weak, is their unacquaintedness with the strong and sure grounds that their faith has to build upon. Weak timorous believers, fixed upon the foundation God hath laid in Zion, are just like a man standing on a firm immoveable rock, his head turns giddy, and he imagines that the rock is turning upside down with him, while the failure is not in the rock, but in his own head. Our faith fails us, through our unacquaintedness with the stability of God's covenant and promise. And therefore, I say, study to be better acquainted with the promise and faithfulness, power and love, of the promiser.

(4.) If you would have weak faith increased and strengthened, then be frequently exercising any weak faith you have; for gracious as well as natural habits are increased and improved by repeated acts: "To him that hath," and improveth well what he hath, "shall be given." This is the way to have your mite turned into a talent: and your talent of faith, by frequent exercise, shall in due time become as ten talents.

(5.) When you get any sensible experiences of the Lord's love, improve them, not as the grounds of your faith, but as encouragements to go on in trusting and believing, upon the grounds of faith laid before you in the word. These sensible tastes of the Lord's loving-kindness are given you, not that you should doat upon the sweetness of them, but to encourage and further you in trusting and believing: Ps. 36:7, "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." It is a common fault among many believers in our day, when they find anything of sensible presence, then indeed they rejoice, and they have good reason so to do; but no sooner doth a cloud come, but their faith, as well as their joy, evanishes, and they

have as little trust to put in the word and promise of the God of their life, when his back is turned, or he out of their sight, as though they never had received a kindness at his hand. And this is a reason, I am convinced, why it fares so ill with many of us at this day; and therefore let us amend it. And what comfort and joy we find in his presence, let it encourage and engage us to trust, and hope, and wait, and believe in him, when absent to our sense. And if we thus improve the marks of grace and consolations of his Spirit, the joy of the Lord shall be our strength; and our path shall be indeed "as the path of the just, and as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

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