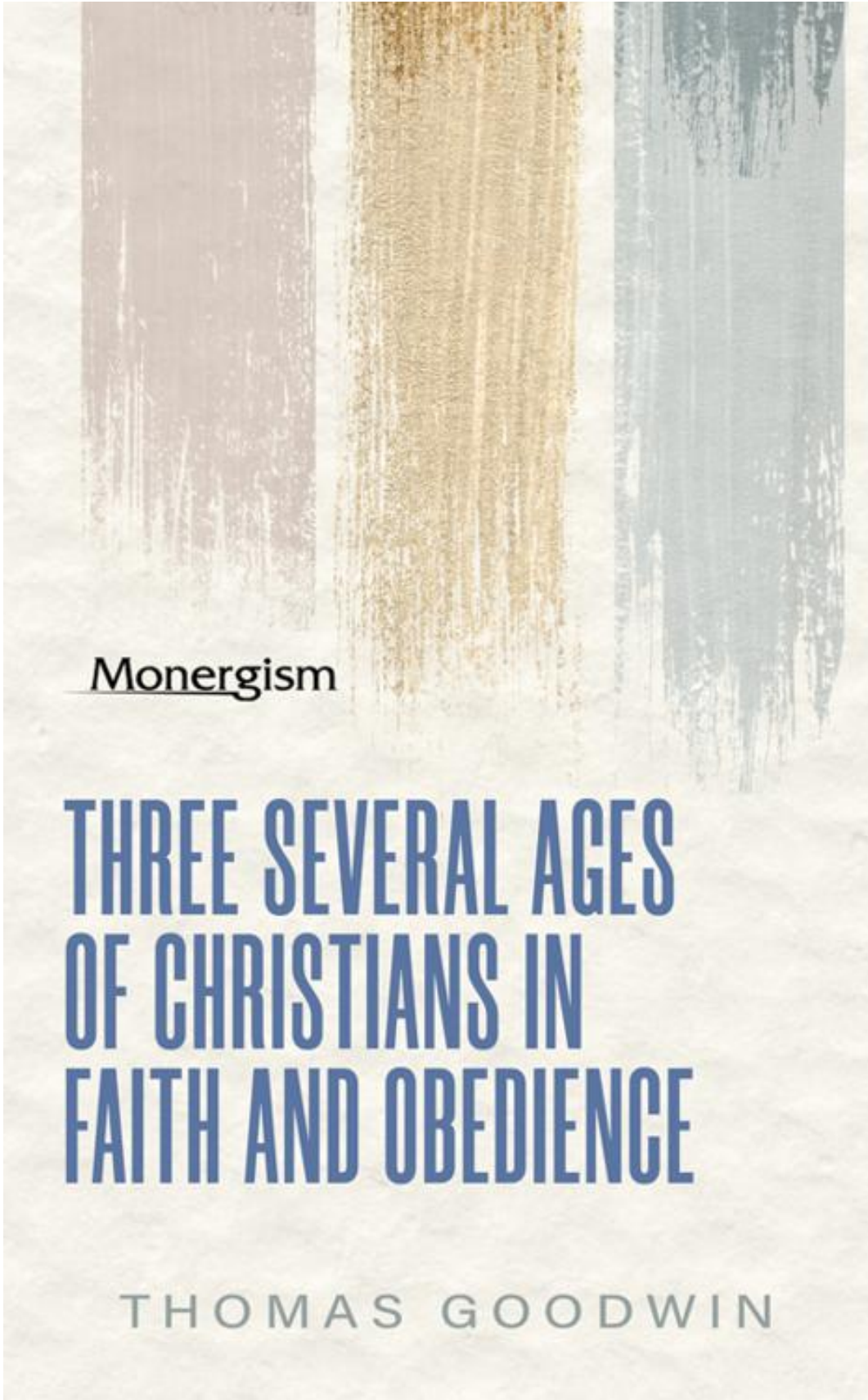




Monergism

**THREE SEVERAL AGES
OF CHRISTIANS IN
FAITH AND OBEDIENCE**

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CHAPTER I

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.—1 JOHN 2:13, 14.

The design of the apostle in the text explained. The characters of the several ages of Christians are drawn from what is found as an excellency in each of these ages in men's natural life.

This holy apostle, who had an advantage for holiness in his life above many of his fellow-apostles, in that he lived the longest of them, and so to grow up therein; and in the course of his life had run through all the several ages or seasons that any Christians do pass through; and having had experience in other Christians of what was eminent in and proper unto each age of men in Christ, writes distinctly unto all sorts accordingly, and sets down what eminency in things spiritual, and therewithal what duties, belonged unto these several ages.

These ages in Christ he divides into three, according to what nature divides them into, though custom of speech speaks four.

1. Fathers in Christ.
2. Men grown up, which is translated 'young men.'
3. Babes, or new converts not yet grown up, but true believers all.

But this must be noticed by the way, for the right apprehension of these three ranks or classes of Christians (which hath to our English readers occasioned a confounding of what the apostle intended should be differenced). The word 'little children,' twice so rendered in verses 13 and 14 by the translators, seems as if 'little children' in the 12th verse were the same with 'little children' spoken of in ver. 13, whereas the words in the Greek differ; τέκνια, little children, in ver. 12, is filioli, or little sons; but παῖδια, babes or infants, in ver. 13, is another word. The first, τέκνια, ver. 12, is the common appellation of saints in this life, involving the whole church, both fathers, young men, babes and all. Our Lord himself first used that word little children of and to his apostles, John 13:33, and chap. 21:5, for they are all sons, as Gal. 3:26, and but little children all of them whilst in this life, in comparison unto what in the other world they shall be; unto their elder brethren in heaven 'made perfect.' See 1 Cor. 13:10, 11: 'When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I

understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things,' &c. But in the 13th verse our apostle John distributeth those little children that are Christians into three sorts, expressed by three ages in Christ, and terms the new converted ones infants or babes; which are but one rank or sort distinguished from fathers and young men.

So that this first, this title of little children, ver. 12, denotes the whole church on earth jointly and in common; the second, in ver. 13, the whole church distributively cast into three ranges. In that first he mentions a privilege common to all three, namely, that 'their sins are forgiven them in the name of Christ;' as also Eph. 4:3, this belongs to them all first and last. Even babes have all their sins forgiven at first, as the Colossians from their first conversion, Col. 3. As the title sons or children is common, so is this benefit of forgiveness.

This I pass, and handle not.

The three several ages are my subject.

By which the ages of Christians, according to their years as men, are not so strictly and chiefly intended; for if the discrimination be meant according to nature, that is, their ages as they are men, then very infants, that are sanctified, should be intended; but not so, for it is those only that were capable of understanding this epistle written by John, or else it were frustrate to have said he wrote unto such babes; therefore he means not infants according to the course of nature. And besides, it may and doth fall out that some old men may be 'babes in Christ,' that is, new converts; and that Christians long converted, who should (for the time) be, as the apostle says to the Hebrews, of a full age, yet continue to be babes in Christ, Heb. 5:12–14, though then they are even old men, as men; and if they be in Christ, are to be treated and revered by all others as fathers, 1 Tim. 5:1, 2; because old age is 'found in the way of righteousness' in them, as Prov. 16:31. But these are not the fathers that are here meant by John.

So that these sorts of ages are three degrees in Christianity, or in Christ, sorted by their stature in Christ. There is a 'stature in Christ' spoken of, Eph. 4:13, and these three are the degrees unto that stature. And therefore the apostle is principally to be understood of what several ages Christians are of as they are grown up into Christ, according as their measure is of the true saving knowledge in them of Christ; for according to that measure we find their ages computed. Thus the Corinthians, whom the apostle calls babes, and adds, in Christ, 1 Cor. 3:1, to shew how he meant it, namely, as they were in Christ; for otherwise as men they were grown up in years, yea, and had been some years converted; and suitably as he says these babes in Christ, so you may add the same here to and of these whom our apostle speaks of, and say, to you fathers in Christ, old disciples, as in the Acts, of much standing and long experience; and in like manner, young men in Christ, and babes in Christ.

My scope in handling these is to shew the peculiar appropriation that belongs to each age, which here the apostle schematizeth them in, to the end that you may have some help to discern what age you are of in Christ. Many are to seek as to the knowledge of their age in Christ. My scope is also to direct what each sort should aim at, and apply themselves to seek for at God's hands; that they computing the time they reckon upon for their having been in Christ (though the exact time many know not), yet by several workings may guess at, and have lived such or so many years in having had such workings on them, so as for the time they might well be out of their babeship; they may see what for the time they ought to have attained, and seeing themselves to fall short, to humble themselves accordingly; perhaps when old in years, yet babes in Christ still. It is a great part of wisdom to know the times, so in Esther 1:13; and Christ speaks of 'discerning the times;' but this is more, to know what the seasons that our particular persons are under, to the end to provoke as still to forget what is behind, and to seek further.

I come now to open these three characters of the three several ages in particular.

Towards the understanding the difference of these characters in particular,

First, Some cautions are to be premised, to prevent a misunderstanding either of the apostle's or my intent.

1. The first and principal one, and which is to be remembered and taken all along, both as a note and guide of interpretation, and finding out the apostle's scope, and to prevent mistaking in judging ourselves or others, is, that in designing forth these special characters or notes to these several ages, his meaning is not as if what is attributed singly were appropriated to the ages mentioned, in such a manner, as that the same are not at all to be found in the other two. For instance, it is the character of babes 'to know the father;' this is not to be understood as if that old Christians did not also continue to know the Father. The like of that other of middle-aged Christians, as if they only were 'strong,' and as if they only did 'overcome that wicked one.' No; for that knowledge of the Father that is in babes, may be and is continued in them when grown up to be young men; and grows up in fathers to a higher degree than in either. And in like manner spiritual strength to overcome is continued also, yea, and increased in old Christians. We see that love of the Father, and so the knowledge of him, is common to Christians of all ages: ver. 15, 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,' that is, he is not a Christian. Likewise, whereas young men are said to have overcome Satan, that is, his temptations, noting also how that age is incident to them; yet babes also have their temptations to sin, and sometimes are enabled to overcome; they have their deliverances and victories, and babes and sucklings have strength to still the enemy and the avenger, Ps. 8, which Christ applies to the little children that cried Hosanna. So as it is not the meaning that any of these attributes are so peculiar to any of these sorts, but that there may be found the same in some degree in each other; but his design is to set forth what is more singular in every of these ages, what more eminent.

Again, These three appropriated notes are to be understood with a potius, with a 'rather;' as that babes do at that age rather apply themselves to pursue after, and are fond of the father and his love; and so of the rest in theirs.

Again, Nor as if, when they were babes, they had only this grace of knowing the father, and not of him that was from the beginning. 'Newborn babes,' says Peter, 1 Epist. 2:1-3, 'have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' and that Lord there meant is Christ, as it follows: ver. 4, 'To whom coming, as to a living stone, chosen of God, and precious;' it is Christ he speaks of.

Moreover, when I say, what is more eminent in any age, I speak it not comparatively to the other two, as if the other two had less of the love of the Father, as they grow to be young men or middle-aged Christians, than when they are babes; but it is specially in comparison of all other spiritual excellencies in themselves at that age, that this special character, that is appropriated thereto, is found eminere, and to abound in the practice of it. As, for instance, babes (which are the lowest) have their victories as well as young men, and the knowledge of Christ who was from the beginning, as fathers are said to have; yet if you would know what their hearts and affections are taken up with most, it is the fatherly mercy of God; to cry Abba, Father, to him, and to seek of him as such the pardon of their sins; and perhaps also, further, to have the apprehension of the love of the Father, in his love and design in sending his Son to be a propitiation for sins (which in the fourth chapter is treated of) so that this comparison is (not more or above the other two, but) in respect of other spiritual workings of heart in themselves, and which is often more stirring than any other.

Again, The meaning is negatively, that in comparison to those other two, babes have not yet attained to the excellency of the other two; that is, they are not grown up to that strength as to go through those conflicts and tentations that young men are exercised withal, nor to know Christ in that manner which fathers have attained unto.

Again, It may also be that not simply what their hearts do most abound in at that age, more than in any other age; but what is the top excellency which at that age they arrive at, in comparison to whatever else is in them; and so to the excellency of the thing itself at that age, he aims to set forth. The thoughts of babes may perhaps be exercised more about humiliation for sin, or the like; yet this of knowing the Father is the top excellency of any other exercise of grace they have in them.

Again, There is to be an allowance given to the liberty which God's free grace, in his various dealings with his children, is pleased to reserve to himself, and doth take and will take, according to his good pleasure; and his free grace will not be bound to such accessory rules as are not simply essential to our being Christians, nor of the essence of that Being, in the state of grace, and concern the bene esse, the well-being of them only; but his special grace will break in, where and how it pleaseth him. Some are begotten strong men in Christ (which is the property of the young men here), as Paul was from the first. He can ripen his corn soon, for his gathering them into his floor, as is seen in many converts, who shoot up to a strange degree and stature of holiness and communion with the Father and Son, when God means to take them to heaven to himself. Enoch attained to a higher strain of perfection, in three hundred years, than his fellow-patriarchs in nine hundred; it is therefore what, in the ordinary course of God's dispensation, falls out, plerumque, and for the most part. And to shew in what seasons saints converted grow up into, there are several seasons, for buds to shoot forth in one month, then blossoms in another, &c.

Lastly, These characters, although they belong not simply unto Christians, according to their ages as men in this world (as was said), but to their degrees of stature in Christ, yet the characters are borrowed from, and assimilated unto what is found as an excellency in each of these ages, in men's natural life, and not without a great elegancy transferred to the like falling out, in these ages in Christ.

1. Wisdom and experimental knowledge and remembrance of things long since past, is that which old men delight in, and is eminent in men wise; answering to which is, 'Fathers, you have known him who is from the beginning.'

2. The glory of young men, and men grown up, is their strength: Prov. 20:29, 'The glory of young men is their strength,' wrestlings and victories; answerable to which is, 'Young men, you are strong, and have overcome that wicked one.'

3. Infants, they rejoice in the sight and presence of their fathers and parents, and in their talking of them; answerably, 'Babes, you have known the Father.'

A second thing to be premised, is an account touching my method in handling these characters, because I shall not keep to the order the apostle hath set them in; which we see is fathers first, and the condition of young men or middle-aged Christians in the middle, and babes last; he proceeding and keeping to the order or time, and the due honour to be given, as to fathers first. But my aim in handling them being only to set out the just difference of the distinct characters appropriated here to them, especially between those two, or babes and fathers, whose character in common is to know and have communion with one or these two persons, but distinguished by some special acquaintance with the Father the one, or with Christ the other. Whereas in his mention of the middle-aged, he doth not all speak of their communion with either of these two persons (though it is to be supposed such a communion with each is, in the measure or their age in Christianity, found in them also); but their character carries us only to consider their conflicts with sin and Satan, and their overcomings, to set them forth by. Hence I judge it meet, as to my now mentioned purpose, to link the handling the characters of those two, babes and fathers, together, finding it also to be the fairest and best way to come to discern the difference between them, in respect to the difference of their communion, whilst we view and compare them together: the knowledge of, and communion with, the

Father in the one; and of and with Christ by the other; and then after this despatch to treat apart, and singly by itself, that of middle-aged Christians but, but these other two first.

And, thirdly, because a fellowship and communion with one of these persons, in a more eminent manner, is the difference the apostle intendeth, when he says, babes know the Father, and fathers Christ, I shall therefore enlarge my discourse, and take into my method the point of communion with these persons, not in the latitude thereof, but especially the point of inequality of communion with these persons (which is apparent from the instances of these two ages in the text) which Christians may, and do often meet withal in successive times of their lives (and not only at those two ages), sometimes to be more with one person, sometimes with the other, as God is pleased to dispense it; and then, in the end, to give a more apecial account how, and why, babes know the Father, and fathers Christ. The whole of what concerns these things, to which I limit myself, I shall proceed to prove, by God's grace, and explain by these gradual approaches fetched from out of the third and fourth verses of chap. 1, compared with the words of this 13th verse of chap. 2.

CHAPTER II

Of communion with the two persons of the Godhead, Father and Son; and how a believer, in his several ages, hath suitably communion sometimes more with the one, sometimes more with the other.

In successive times of a Christian's course he doth come to have more eminent communion with one of the persons than with the other, as with the Father more than with Christ, or with Christ more than the Father, in vicissitudes. This shall be treated and explained in several gradual proposals, with the reasons and uses thereof.

That which is common to both these ages of Christians is to have known either, or both of these persons; and to know is not a literal doctrinal knowledge only, that floats aloft in the understanding, and rests there, but which takes and overcomes the heart—Prov. 2:10, 'When wisdom enters into thine heart'—and is that knowledge which the apostle calls 'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' Philip. 3:10. And in our John here, chap. 4:7, 8, it is a knowledge wrought by regeneration and being born again: 'Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God;' and ver. 8, 'He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love;' and chap. 3:6, 'Whoever sinneth' (whose whole heart is in some sin or other) 'hath not seen him, nor known him.' So as to know either the Father or the Son, is to have our dearest affections and desires after, our love to, delights, and rejoicings drawn forth to them; to have faith on them,—'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' Ps. 9:10,—to have the multitude of our thoughts running still upon them: 'How precious are thy thoughts to me!' So David, 'I am continually with thee.' Also, it is to have our wonted special recourse unto that person we know, in all wants and needs: John 4:10, 'Jesus answered, and said to her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.' Also, to hold an intimate converse, communion, familiar fellowship with these persons in our treatings with them about our salvation, for the obtaining of it, upon those considerations which are most proper to that person whom we treat withal about it; as either according to what his person is, or his special work and band in our salvation is; according to what he hath done for us, and the relations he bears to us of God as the Father, and Christ as the mediator for us. Which latter, in the former chapter, the apostle had expressed in one word, to have 'fellowship;' and that fellowship mutual between us and them, 'one with another,' ver. 7. For thereby he means not the communion other saints have one with another, as the fruit of that fellowship with God; he is not speaking of that there at all; but it is a communion of God with us, and of us with God; and of Christ with us, 'one with another.' And of that he had spoken immediately before, ver. 3 and 6.

Obs. The height and prime of Christian religion lies in fellowship and communion with the persons of God the Father and Christ. This the apostle openly professeth to have been the top of his own and his fellow-apostles' religion; for in their names he speaks it and commends it to us, in saying, 'Truly our fellowship is with the Father and the Son.' And therewith (as their religion) commends it to all Christians to the end of the world. In that word 'our fellowship,' he speaks of themselves, the apostles, who also were those 'we who have heard,' &c., ver. 1, 2. And certainly what was the top of the apostle's religion must be accounted the height of our Christianity in this life. And therefore the apostle also proposeth it at the beginning of his epistle as the ultimate scope thereof, and thereby to draw on all sorts of believers to make it their mark also, and to bring them to such fellowship as themselves had.

The height of popish religion, and of many others also, is to converse with maxims and articles of faith; and take we the soundest of those truths they profess, yet their faith of them is but a fellowship as with so many propositions theological, with a general knowledge of and assent to them. And this faith they set up instead of faith justifying, which first draws our souls unto a communion with the person of Christ and to the Father, and to seek his grace and face through Christ to justify us, as persons that are in ourselves ungodly. This first brings us into fellowship with the Father. This faith is the first occasion of, and begins our acquaintance with either of them. But that other general faith is that which they cry up as the catholic faith, as they call it, without drawign our hearts unto the persons themselves; and our applying ourselves to both or either, leaves us without intimate acquaintance with them at all, which that justifying faith, as we teach it, doth; and it is the nature and property of it so to do. But to believe on the pope, and on the church, as the judge and formal ground of all their faith, which they term believing as the church believes; and so they finally issue in fellowship with the pope as their head. And the utmost end they have of exacting this kind of general faith is to bring men into, and retain them to hold

communion (forsooth) with their church; and that is the main they drive at.

And then in their worship also, whom have they communion with but saints departed? whom they pray to more than to Christ or the Father; and in prayer is exercised our highest communion; and theirs with God and Christ is conveyed mediately through them. And which falls lower yet, this communion in this worship is with the images of those saints; and accordingly they have but a dead, lifeless communion; for their images are dead, and their worship of them is like unto them, and at best but the image of what is true worship and fellowship with the person of the Father and the Son.

Others, ask them their religion; they declare it to be a belief of what the Scriptures say to be true, and to give assent to them (which we do also, and receive with all acceptation all the sayings and truths delivered in the word of God), as to believe that there is a God; that Christ is the Saviour of the world, and died to save sinners; and unto which general faith they add a devotion (which is in all naturally towards a deity) out of which they worship him; having this good hap, to be cast upon the true God and Christ as the objects of that devotion. And then they stir up the principles of virtue that are in them naturally, edged by gospel motives of heaven and hell, which, with the aids of the Spirit assisting them principles in the will, is the whole of their religion. But to have personal communion with the Father and Christ, and to keep such ado about getting Christ, and to hold and preserve communion with God the Father and Christ, and to make them the great aim and work of faith; this they think to be at least needless.

But let them and all the world know, that the top and summity of our religion is to obtain, and then to retain and hold, fellowship with the person of God the Father and of Christ; and that hereunto we exercise ourselves night and day, that though the general faith is our faith also, and that we make use of that great principle of faith as the great engine, instrument, and means whereby to have communion

with these persons, and that to live in a converse with them as persons; yet our faith rests not, can no way content itself with the belief of the things, truth or propositions, though about Christ and God the Father, or the Spirit, that is, those divine truths or maxims about them. For our communion is not with propositions, but the persons, and aspires and carries us still to come at and to the persons. We seek continually to have their love manifested, their hearts won to us, and behold the glory of God in the face and person of Christ; as the apostle speaks, Phil. 3, 'That I may win Christ,' and have the Father and Christ made ours; they are our rest, the centre of our souls. We make use indeed of the faith and belief of the things or truth aforesaid, to affect our hearts to the persons the more whom they are spoken of; as that 'It is God that justifieth,' 'it is Christ that died:' and therefore 'the love of God constrains us, because we thus judge, that Christ died for us, who were all (in ourselves) dead,' and condemned to death of soul and body; and this affects us, and draws forth love out of us, 'to live to him who died for us.' But the objects that ultimately terminate our faith are the persons of the Father and Christ themselves, to find and obtain their loves to our souls. They are not the things, abstracted from communion with their persons, that satisfy us, or which we live upon. Our faith makes use of them as helpers and inducers, and the bringers of our souls to them; and then soul and person plead together, and we plead and urge those things spoken of them persons in the Scripture in our treatings with them. But it is their persons, and their hearts or their desires to be towards us, as the spouse speaks in the Canticles, that we seek. Also, we pray and are conversant in all ordinances of public and private worship, serving God night and day; we seek, we pour out our souls, we repent, and turn from sin, and set ourselves to all known duties; but these are not our rest, no, not in this life. But all we do is in a tendency to arrive at an acceptable access and reception by those persons, even before we come to heaven, and thereby to keep up communion with them; as holy Jude, ver. 20, 21, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' If God would send angels

down to us, or Mary the mother of God to converse withal, whom the papists make their greatest object of converse, and would not vouchsafe a gracious intercourse with his person, that would not satisfy our hearts; yea, if God should take us up to heaven itself, and there are many glorious things and privileges to be had there: rest, felicity, joy, the best company of all the angels, and the spirits of men made perfect; we profess that our souls in the midst of the enjoyment of all these, if looking about us we should not spy out Christ and the glory of the Father, we should cry out, Oh, but where is Christ? we see not him yet; we should be at a loss for want of him. Col. 3:1, 'Seek those things which are above;' and so we profess to do; but how? Because Christ is there, to whom our hearts run: 'Where Christ,' says he, 'sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high.' It is he draws our hearts upwards to the things above. And if he would continue (as now to our faith) being 'hid in God,' when we come thither, we should be damped; but if 'he appear once, who is our life,' our hearts would live, and we should appear in glory with him. All the things there would not content our souls were he not there: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' You know who said it. And not Christ only, but God also, is the object of our aspiement: ver. 3, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' Even Christ's life is in God, and therefore ours much more; and to them by faith we go for it, even to their persons continually.

And our apostle John puts the reason for this upon the very same account that Paul doth there in that third of the Colossians. For having termed Christ 'the Word of life,' chap. 1:1 (and in verse 2, 'that eternal life which was manifested, and who was with the Father;' that is, who himself had his life in, and personal converse with the Father, during all eternity), hence, therefore, our eternal life also lies in communion with these persons of Father and Son: and therefore Christ in his last prayer to his Father, to move him towards us, proposeth this as the summary end of that errand, of his being sent by him into this world: John 17:2, 3, 'As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the

only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' And this life is not enjoyable only in that life to come, but this fellowship is begun and attained, for so it may be, in this life, and hath a 'fulness of joy,' as the product of it; verse 4, 'And these things write we unto you,' having of this fellowship, 'that your joy may be full.' I say, to be enjoyed in this life; for to that end it is, he says, he directeth them to these things which he wrote, whilst in this life; even whilst we walk with God here, as ver. 6. And our apostle expressly says, 'Christ who is our life,' Col. 3:4. And these persons are always living, for us by faith to have access unto: Eph. 2:18, 'For through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.' And we find them to be alive, and to give forth that life to our hearts when we come and make our addresses to them; and it is the converse with their persons, which puts life into the truths we believe, as without which they would be but dead things to our souls.

Let our opposites content themselves with their general faith for faith, and despise that faith of application and recumbency, and cry up their moral virtues, of which they boast that they are the principles and seeds gracious actings which are found in any; and that the whole and main their salvation in this life, is but the restitution of them by Christ unto that state of holiness which Adam was created in; unto which by the improvement of those virtuous dispositions left in corrupt nature, through an aid of the Holy Ghost, which is but external to the soul, they hope by their own endeavours, with imperfect steps, to attain unto. And in their catechisms, let some of them give this account why they omitted consulto to have put in the doctrine of the three persons, because forsooth they wrote a practical catechism; as if the notion of the three persons influenceth not at all the practice of a Christian! No; that is with them no part of their active exercise, but a mere contemplative speculation. Whereas we profess, with the apostle in this epistle, that the knowledge or and communion with these persons, is both that which is the ultimate end and tendency or all the other part of our practic religion; as also which all along quickens and gives life to our souls, in all that is of practice whatsoever, and also into all other the

doctrines that are found in that our religion. And observe but the scope and procedure of this holy man in this epistle, whose method in our religion and practice we profess to follow. Now he proposeth this fellowship as the supreme end of his writing, at the very beginning; and therewith propounding the doctrine of the Father and Son, against all errors then extant, chap. 2, he then exhorts to holiness, and keeping the commandments, as the means to obtain, and keep our souls in, this communion. We profess we can no longer enjoy this fellowship with either Father or Son, than that thus we walk; even as he thus expressly, chap. 1. verse 6, affirmeth, 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.' And chap. 3:3–6, 'Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby we know that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.' I need refer to no more passages, for you meet with this doctrine of his up and down the whole epistle; and this is the order and method of the practice which we profess in our religion.

I only add, to the end none may be discouraged, that Christians either enjoy this communion, or have their spirits restlessly carried on to seek it, and cannot sit down quiet short of it; and so are of 'that generation that seek his face,' as Ps. 24:6, which must necessarily proceed from God the Father's or Christ's having first made himself known to them; and so it is affirmed, 'God (first) said, Seek ye my face; and my heart said, I will seek thy face,' Ps. 27:8. And the constant seeking of communion with him is sanctified effectually to cause such souls to keep his commandments, as well as to rejoice in the sensible enjoyment of that communion.

Obj. It is a property common to all the saints, to have had from the first some knowledge of, and to hold and maintain some fellowship, in some measure and degree, with both these two persons, God the Father, and the Son. This is in common to all more or less, plainly or

obscurely, either implicitly or explicitly; therefore John in this epistle is not only peremptory that those who shall deny the one of them, doth consequently deny the other, chap. 2:23, 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father;' but on the positive too: chap. 4:15, 'Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.' He that confesseth, that is, believes on Christ, and receives him as a Saviour, treateth of his salvation with God in and through him,—according to that in Rom. 10:9, 10, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,'—and then it follows in that of John, that God, that is, 'the Father' (as in the verse before), 'dwells in him, and he in God;' which dwelling, in John's wonted phrase, notes such a mutual fellowship, as two that dwell in one and the same house, and under the same roof together, use to have one with the other; and therefore, 'he that knows the Son, knows also the Father;' and vice versa. And truly when these two persons are in the heart, the Spirit must be also; read the verse before that last, verse 13, 'Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.' It is not therefore, nor can it be, that any true Christian should be utterly a stranger unto either, but if he knows the one, he must know the other; although with Philip they may not so distinctly reflect upon that knowledge. God the Father to save through Christ, and Christ to save as sent by the Father, are those fundamental points of New Testament faith; and both comprised by Christ in that summary, the famous and ordinary sanctuary of believers: John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life:' unto which the 14th verse of our John the fourth chapter answers; 'And we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.' And the mind of that speech, 'Whosoever believeth on him,' in that third chapter, verse 16, is thus to be understood of Christ as sent and given, out of such a love, by the Father; and therefore Christ joins both: John 5:23, 24, 'He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not

the Father that sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' So then both Father and Son are the objects of our faith, if we be saved; and therefore some knowledge of both is requisite in every believer; as if their faith be chiefly or more explicitly carried forth to God the Father, yet it is God the Father in Christ. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world,' is the substance of the gospel ministry; and in Christ comes in, and must come in, as God's instrument, sent to merit our salvation.

The fourth assertion from the words of the text is, that although it is common to all New Testament Christians to have a true, distinct, saving knowledge both of the Father and of the Son Christ, in some measure or degree, yet that then the knowledge of the one may abound more than of the other; but specially that in their growing up into acquaintance and fellowship with both, it may and doth fall out, that in successive times of their lives, through God's dispensations therein, they are led into, and have, and enjoy a more intimate fellowship, free and open-hearted, and enlarged converse with some one of these three persons more than they find to be with the other of them; that is, both on those persons' part whom they converse with, they find one of them more accessible, more free and open-hearted towards their souls, more ready to entertain them, and receive them graciously; and also on their own part, as they find themselves more disposed, according to their various ages, to treat with one more than another.

Now to the end I may explain this point of successive communion with the several persons thus at times and in this manner indefinitely to be understood, I shall continue to have recourse for help and light unto the third and fourth verses of the first chapter, which I have already made so much use of, and joined with this my text of chap. 2, and shall give those animadversions upon those words, comparing them together with these words of my text, as will conduce to this my proposed aim.

1. That it is that fellowship and communion (which I term the after-fellowship) which Christians hold after conversion, that this interchangeableness I intend falls out in, in the course of the whole of their Christianity till death. I am not inquiring now into what falls out, as to the inequality of the knowledge of Father or Son at first conversion; for it is this after-fellowship the apostle intends, and which he here exhorts those he wrote to, when he says, 'That you may have fellowship with us, and truly ours is with the Father and Christ;' that is, the same fellowship which himself and his fellow-apostles, whereof some were yet alive (in whose names, or at least in his own, he speaks), who had been long since converted, and had grown up into a high and steady continued converse and fellowship with both persons, in which they had lived to that day, and now enjoyed. And that is the fellowship he invites all unto (as being capable of it), being already believers, as he supposeth them he wrote to; and it is such a fellowship which in process of time would produce in the course of it a 'fulness of joy,' ver. 4, which at first conversion usually falls not out. Lastly, it is that fellowship which Christians have in their walkings, that is, their course of Christianity, which he speaks of; for in ver. 7, 'If we walk in the light,' that is, in holiness, &c., 'we have fellowship,' &c., having oppositely refuted and discovered false professors: ver. 6, 'If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.' The mind of his invitation therefore is, that all you that have an entrance (which is Solomon's word in the Proverbs) or a beginning of the knowledge of God and Christ, set your hearts and endeavours, with your whole might, by and with holy walking, to grow up into a further and higher fellowship and acquaintance with these persons, and then your joy will at length be full when your communion comes to be with both.

2. The second animadversion from these words is, that our apostle John and the rest of the holy apostles had attained unto a fulness, so far as in this life men are capable, of this equal or like fellowship with both the Father and Christ in their daily walkings, and therefore it is attainable at once in this life by us Christians; for else he would not

have proposed his and their example to provoke us to communion with both. And when he speaks of himself and them he speaks indifferently, you see, of his fellowship with both, not mentioning either with any pre-eminence of one above the other. And his adding, 'that their joy may be full,' confirms it; for unless it be with both unto a like fulness, it would be but joy in part, not full joy. We find also the apostle Paul prays for the Thessalonians, for their communion with both, in 2 Thes. 2, that both Father and Son might 'comfort their hearts:' ver. 16, 17, 'Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts,' &c. And to them that are grown up into much holiness in the diligent and faithful keeping the commandments, Christ promiseth, John 14:23, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' Hence therefore Christians, in their future course of walking, are capable of intimate communion with both (as to the Thessalonians), through the distinct manifestation of the love of both to their souls, as that in John shews.

3. Yet, thirdly, de facto, or in the event, it so falls out, that in the long progress of God's more slow and ordinary dealings with Christians by reason of, and through their like uneven, unequal, and imperfect walkings with God, they attain not to a full enjoyment of fellowship with God and Christ in an eminency, in a constancy, and at once together; for unless it be thus with both, their fellowship ariseth not to a full joy here spoken of, which ariseth not unless an eminency of fellowship be held with both. But God with great intermissions vouchsafes it imperfectly; and what he doth is by turns and vicissitudes; sometimes more with one, sometimes with another. One time Christ doth personally more openly visit the soul with his presence and love, sometime the Father, and that singly. This seems plain to me from comparing this text and that other, chap. 1, that whereas in the first chapter he utters this as a general maxim, 'These things I write to you,' meaning all, 'that you may have fellowship with the Father and Son,' which is a general encouragement given unto all

Christians, and belongs to all to entertain it, as that which they were all capable of, and was their duty to seek; yet mark it here in this place, coming to the particular sorts of Christians severally and apart considered, that then he should in such a severed manner say of babes, 'I write to you, for you have known the Father;' and of fathers singly, 'I write to you, because you have known Christ the Son.' This his attributing it specially to babes to have known the Father, without mentioning their knowing of Christ, again in a special manner to fathers to know Christ, omitting the mention of their knowing the Father, argues that in the course and progress of the communion which Christians ordinarily do enjoy, it proves usually that babes do specially know the Father, and fathers Christ the Son; and that, de facto, it had so fallen out in the apostle's observation ordinarily. The apostle writes thus out of experience, and upon a survey of Christians in his days, which were patterns of the like ordinary dispensations in after ages. However, I acknowledge, there might and may be some special exceptions, and more frequently in such as live not many years after conversion, and so are ripened thereby for their complete communion with all the three persons in heaven, growing up unto much holiness in a short space; as also in such whom God out of his good pleasure vouchsafes extraordinary dispensations of grace unto, above what he does to many others.

This assertion thus stated, and for the present indefinitely only proposed, as to particular times and seasons, without defining that communion with the Father unto babes, or with Christ to old Christians, or confining the one and the other to either of these ages, I shall endeavour to prove by instances.

1. Take a view of God's general economy, or dispensation to his whole church, comprehensively taken in one prospect and set together, that is, of his church in the Old and New Testament, from the first to the end of the world; and perhaps it may serve aptly to represent unto you some image or pattern of his dealing with particular souls, the members of that church, and afford some semblance at least of the various manifestations of himself and his Son unto them. In the Old

Testament you know how God manifested himself as the Father, far more abundantly and clearly than he did Christ his Son; and their common, frequent converse with him did accordingly far more exceed that of theirs with the promised Messiah, whom they yet all looked for to come into the world. Their thoughts, affections, hearts, prayers, addresses, and recourse, ran out to God under the title of Father; yea, and directly, and plainly, and expressly to him as such by name, and under that notion ran out unto the Father with a full and open stream. Moses speaks it of him as a relation that was commonly known and taken for granted among those in his times: Deut. 32:6, 'Do you thus requite the Lord? is he not thy Father, that bought thee and made thee?' thus speaking to the whole people. A Father by a double title: of creation, 'that made thee;' of redemption, 'that bought thee,' which in the type is New Testament language. And they had it by tradition, for Moses speaks it as generally received. And so it follows, ver. 7, 'Ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee' as much. It was the common profession of that nation: Mal. 2:10, 'Have we not all one Father?' of that whole church, which therefore our translators in their margin parallel with that in the New Testament: Eph. 4, 'One body, one Spirit; one Lord Christ, one God and Father of all,' &c., ver. 4–6. And upon that account God, as owning it, urgeth them with it for obedience from them: Mal. 1:6, 'A son honoureth his father: if I be a Father, where is my fear?' And when they or any of them were in any distress, they used to urge that same upon God for help: Jer. 3:4–6, 'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? Will he reserve anger for ever? will he keep it to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest. The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain, and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.' This the wickedest hypocrites had learned; but the truly godly, when they began to repent, and turn truly and in reality to God, their conversion is set out by this, that they avouched him to be their Father indeed; and in another manner, renouncing all their sins, and cleaving to him as a Father; for in the same chapter, ver. 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? And I said, Thou shalt call me my Father, and shalt not turn away from me.' They cried Abba, Father, as well as we, and in the same sense that we; this was the foundation of their turning to him. And again, on God's part, he avowedly declares that to be the ground and motive in his heart, why he did work a saving work upon them, even that he was their Father—Jer. 31:9, 'They shall come with weeping, and with supplication will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born'—who from everlasting had loved them: ver. 3, 'The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;' and that, I am sure, is the Father in the New Testament language, Eph. 1:4, &c. And unto these passages in that chapter of Jeremiah do our translators refer that promise, 2 Cor. 6:18, 'And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty;' the same person God the Father intended in both, which I observe to prevent an objection, that God as God is only so called in the Old. And after conversion, their converse and fellowship with God was maintained, as with a Father to them, they claiming an interest in him, knowing him to be such, and pleading it with him: Isa. 63:16, 17, 'Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance.' Their hopes of mercy and forgiveness lay therein, Ps. 103:12, 13. And the mercies of God (which are so specially attributed to the Father, and he as the Father of them) are more often and more largely dilated on and set forth unto us in the Old Testament, as the other attributes of the Godhead are, than in the New. And unto those in God they mostly had recourse, as exposed to them in the promises and large declarations thereof to them; and conversed with God under the apprehension and faith thereon. It was a current character of an Old

Testament saint, one that 'hoped in his mercy,' 'trusted in his mercy,' and you find the pleas of it in every eminent prayer almost; as by Moses, Num. 14; David in the Psalms, and others of the prophets; read Neh. 9, Ezra 9, Dan. 9; also in their thanksgivings we know the constant song of praise in the temple was, 'For his mercy endures for ever,' &c., and of Isaiah the prophet, Isa. 64:1. And in this manner was their communion with God, distinctly and by name the Father, managed and transacted, and God's with them. Mercy's gates had all the suitors, the addresses went this way. All flesh came to him, because there was 'mercy with him, that he might be feared;' whereas Christ the Son was rarely in a plain, explicit manner named, that is, by his name spoken of, and his redemption was involved most in obscure types, which though they pointed their faith towards him as to come, yet their fellowship and converses with him were rare, as his also with men were extraordinary, and vouchsafed but to extraordinary persons upon extraordinary occasions: as to Abraham, in the case of Sodom; to Jacob, when Esau came with four hundred men to seek his life; to Joshua, under the title of captain of the Lord's hosts, to encourage him to those wars with the Canaanites. Nor did they put up their petitions in his name unto the Father; none that I remember of them, unless Daniel in his 'for the Lord's sake,' chap. 9; and David (as some interpret it), 'for thy Word's sake,' 2 Sam. 7:21. Or unless that in the sacrifices they offered, when they worshipped, which was a converse with Christ at second hand, and but in outward shadows and figures, as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, types of Christ's sacrifice, and hiddenly signified thereby, which the carnal Jew understood not, and but as something understood by the godly themselves remotely, but not so clear and professed as the Father.

There may perhaps an objection start up in some men's minds, which I preoccupied even now, by paralleling some of those scriptures alleged at first in the Old Testament with others out of the New.

Obj. The objection is, that it was the Godhead, or God in the three persons, was he whom, as so considered, the Old Testament saints

had recourse unto under the relation and title of Father; but not with the Father as in the New Testament sense Christ revealed him, the first person of the Trinity, the Father of Christ, and in him our Father; and therefore this instance will not hold, as to the present argument in hand.

And besides what I animadverted to prevent this, I further answer,

Ans. 1. That it is one and the same person bore the relation of Father in the Old, and whom Christ came more clearly to reveal under the New: John 1:18, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' It is God, as the Father of Christ the Son, who is especially spoken of there; and it was he, one and the same, who bore the title of God and Father under the Old. There is but one God and Father under both, as Eph. 4, who had been honoured with that title commonly (and no other person commonly but he) by the Jews; unto which Christ gives testimony in saying, John 5:23, 'That all men should honour the Son, as they had honoured the Father.' He speaks it to Jews of the Old Testament, who had all along in an open profession honoured the Father, who was the Father of Christ as the Son, and had committed all authority to him; that now under the New Testament they should honour the Son as professedly and knowingly as the Jews had done the Father.

Ans. 2. That under the Old he was known as the Father of the Son, and so as distinct from the Son, as the Father of him. To this assertion two scriptures, Ps. 2 and Prov. 30, give witness. Prov. 30:4, 'What is his name, and his Son's name, canst thou tell?' And the same is evidenced by promise to Solomon, 1 Chron. 22:10, which in the type was God the Father's speech, spoken to his Son, Heb. 1:8; and as a distinct person, as the Father is from the Son, the like to which see in Ps. 89:26.

2. The other instances of some primitive Christians that, long after the apostles had diffused the knowledge of Christ upon the world,

and it had taken root, and brought forth fruit over all the world, there yet continued upon divers Christians of these times, a very dim and obscure knowledge of Christ, through their being addicted to the Old Testament way; and this not only upon the Jews converted to Christianity, which the apostle Peter insinuates, when writing to his countrymen, Jewish Christians, his second epistle, as he had also done his first, chap. 1:1. And it was in the latter end of his days too, when the gospel had long been preached by himself and his fellows, as in the 2d Epistle 1:14, he declares, 'Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.' And Christ's words to him were, 'When thou art old.' He thereupon tells them, ver. 19, that though 'they did well to take heed unto that word of prophecy,' viz., the Old Testament prophesying of Christ, unto which they were so addicted, that they would entertain no more of Christ than they found fore-prophesied concerning Christ therein, as Paul before Agrippa testified of himself, Acts 26:22, that he 'said none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come'; yet that that word, Peter tells them, was but 'as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts;' and that day-star is Christ, Rev. 22:16; and the day dawn is the clear manifestation of the gospel, revealing Christ, as it had been preached in its full brightness, by himself and other his fellow-apostles. And the reason of their shortness herein was the want of an inward light of the Spirit, and manifestation of him that was yet further to arise and visit their hearts, whereby (as in 2 Cor. 4:6) 'God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in the apostles' hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ;' whilst yet the knowledge of God as Father, shining more brightly in that Old Testament, which they attended more unto, must needs accordingly be ascendant to them, in comparison of their knowledge of Christ from thence.

Nor did this divine* knowledge of Christ, and an Old Testament spirit, abide upon these Jewish Christians only, but among many new converted Gentiles also, which I have formerly shewn from the third chapter to the Philippians (who were Gentiles converted),

where the apostle having made discovery of his own personal exercise of spirit in his daily communion and fellowship with Christ, from ver. 8 to the 11th, 'Yea doubtless, and I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and may be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is by faith of Christ, even the righteousness of God which is by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, that I may be conformable to his death; if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.' And how much his soul was fired therewith, you may read in the verses that follow. But the close wherewith he shuts up that his discourse may seem strange: ver. 15, 'As many therefore as are perfect, let us be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you;' which manifestly refers unto that whole foregone narrative, how and what his mind and heart was, and had stood towards Christ and the excellent knowledge of him, so as to win Christ and have fellowship with him, even in his very sufferings; wherein as many as were perfect and complete Christians, he says, were like minded with him herein, and were addicted and affected towards this knowledge of Christ and fellowship with him as himself was. But there were but few of these (as his complaints and usage of that speech in other epistles shews); and if in anything of what I have now professed, says he, of the excelling knowledge of Christ, ye be otherwise minded (not in opinion so much as in the affections and exercise of spirit), otherwise, as the word in Col. 3:1 is used, 'addicted,' 'affected,' and 'carried out,' more towards other things revealed, so as that your minds should at present be diverted, the stream running in other channels more, 'God shall reveal even this to you.' Now I could not, when I considered the coherence of this text, and that how the occasion of the apostle's writing that epistle having been that the leaven of the doctrine of the circumcision, and thereby cleaving to the Mosaical law in force, had been urged by false teachers to be received by them; the doctrine of which, though we read not that it had taken place in their opinions, yet there remained

so much of an Old Testament spirit in them, and so much effect that noise of the circumcisionists' doctrine had upon them as to draw their eyes to look more wishtly upon the Old Testament way in the moral parts of it, as to incline and dispose their spirits more and more attentively that way. When I considered these things, I could not, I say, put any fairer interpretation upon this passage and that in the following verse, or give any other account about these 'otherwise-minded,' who were true Christians (for that he plainly supposeth, and distinguisheth them from circumcisionists), but that an Old Testament spirit did so abide upon them, as they entertained not nor took in that excellent knowledge of Christ, as it shone in the gospel, in that eminent manner that the light that had shined about them did require; which though they had received and professed, yet in so remiss a degree, as caused him thus to speak. Their spirits were addicted unto the way of the knowledge of God, and the exercise of the fear of God, and motives to his commandments, which they met with in the Old Testament, which damped much their practical light towards Christ; and to live by the faith of the Son of God, and from being so kindly affected and acted by the motives of the gospel drawn from Christ.

And the reason was, that although all truth belonging unto the whole of our common salvation was once for all delivered unto the saints, as Jude, ver. 3, even the whole body and system of faith by Christ his Son, Heb. 1, and his apostles, as fully as ever it was to be, yet in respect to the setting it on, and bringing home that faith unto their hearts (and we may say to ours of many to this day), in respect to such a 'sealing instruction' (as Elihu in Job), and in some with a deeper impression than other some, and even those points of faith that are of necessity to salvation itself (as the knowledge of God the Father and of Christ are), God is therein pleased to go over them in some hearts with a slighter hand, and but as the first draught of a picture, with dim colours and less bright, and so lets them abide for a while, though yet he makes a true resemblance, such as that you may know the person by, whose image it is; whereas in some other hearts he goes over the same again and again, and ceaseth not, but works to

up unto a far greater life and glory. God takes several pauses, so as we may say of these teachings, that he doth it at 'sundry times;' even as well as under the Old it is said he did. And herein God and his Spirit useth a liberty to whom and when, and knows not a certain method. 1 Cor. 12:8, 'For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.' And hence the apostle speaks of 'supplies of the Spirit,' Philip. 1:19, yea, of 'perfecting what is lacking in our faith,' 1 Thes. 3:10.

2. I shall give the reasons of this disposition.

(1.) These two persons are both in themselves and in their works for us distinct, and would therefore accordingly be known distinctly of us; and to be so fully known as to be honoured by us in the most ample manner in which they are in the New Testament revealed to us: John 5:23, 'That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father;' from which place I observe;—

1st. That it is the design of the Father, that both himself and his Son be honoured by all men, yea, and the Son as the Father; and this is the design of his 'sending his Son' into the world, and of his committing that 'power of quickening,' ver. 21, and of 'judging men,' ver. 22, unto him.

2dly. I observe that this is yet effected at and by successive times, which is the point before me. The Father's being honoured by men, he speaks of in the present time, 'as they honour;' as at that time when Christ spake this, the Jews generally did; but of the Son, as of that which was yet more and more to be done: 'That they should honour the Son, even as,' &c.

(2.) If they come to be known as fully as they ought to be by us, and as they are revealed in Scripture to us, there are a great many things concerning them, and belonging to either of them, to be known by us, which for us to do fully and distinctly will require successive

times and successive impressions for either, and such as to have our thoughts to dwell upon them too; as,

1st. For the Father.

(1.) There is the person of the Father, as the 'Father of glory,' Eph. 1, the fountain of the Deity, the begetter of so great a Son, and from whom the Holy Ghost proceedeth. This as to his person.

(2.) We ought to know the riches of his mercy, love; for these are more properly attributed to the Father, as in the same Eph. 1; so 2 Cor. 13:14, 'The love of God,' the Father, spoken with distinction from Christ and the Spirit; and 'Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. 1:3, said of him who is 'the Father of Christ.'

(3.) We should know the whole of his work and hand in our salvation, as in choosing us in Christ, Eph. 1, sending his Son into the world, which Christ in John's Gospel so dilates on, and our John in this Epistle, chap. 4:8–10, 'He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;' and all spoken of the Father. And ver. 14, 'We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.'

(4.) The bestowing on us all spiritual blessings ought to be known by us. It was he was the contriver, and is the donor of them all, Eph. 1, whereof that one of sonship and adoption wherewith we have a right to glory, our apostle in this epistle also so admires, and sets out with a 'behold,' in chap. 3:1–3 of this Epistle: 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew not him. Beloved, now are we the sons of God'; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this

hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.' There are multitudes of other things more like to these whereby the Father's part is set out, as in 'justifying us,' Rom. 4, 'drawing us to Christ,' John 6, &c. And to know the Father in and by all these distinctly, and to have our minds to dwell upon them, will ask time and multitude of thoughts, both to take them in, and then to be answerably affected with them: to dwell in God in the intuition of all these, which is our John's phrase up and down his epistle; but especially upon this theme and argument of the Father's love, chap. 4:16.

2dly. The like may be said of Christ, that we are to know and have fellowship with him, viewed in the excellency of his person; to know and have communion with him in his offices, priest, prophet, king; also to contemplate what he did for us, in that he took flesh, bore our sins, suffered reproach, all sorrows, died, bore the curse and wrath of his Father, rose, ascended into heaven, and there appears for us, and brings us to God; intercedes for us continually, pleads the fulness and over-sufficiency of his righteousness, his ability to save to the utmost; then his mercy, grace, likewise in all these, bowels to receive sinners; his gentleness, meekness, lowliness of mind to converse with them after they come to him; his long-suffering to bear with them that come to him, his faithfulness to stand by them in all their needs; his avowed resolvedness not in any wise to cast them out that come to him, but to raise them up at the last day.

I mention these on the persons' parts, and proceed unto those on our parts.

2. On our parts, we are in our capacities narrow-mouthed vessels, and cannot take in all at once all these things of either, which was seen in the apostles, as Christ tells them: John 16:12, 'I have many things yet to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now;' even the knowledge of the Father, wherein of the two they excelled in; yet thereof he says, John 16:25, 'These things have I spoken to you in proverbs; the time cometh when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.' In proverbs; that is, but obscurely.

We in this life are children, 1 Cor. 13, and our capacity of being taught is but as of children, 'here a line, and there a line,' as the prophet saith; and we say of the mind, *Intuitio est tantum unius*, as the eye looks wishly but on one thing at once; so our minds. But these things, the mystery of God the Father and of Christ, are so great as the mind need go over them by parts, one piece of them to be presented and set on upon our hearts at one time, other of them at another; as in your great optic glasses the eye is fain to go travel over the body of the moon by parts and quarters. This scantiness and clungness, that the intention of our minds is but upon some one thing at once, we find in our knowing and minding of other divine objects and duties or exercises. As in humblings for sin, our thoughts are swallowed up therewith abundantly at some times, and are as it were wholly in it; then at another time we are all upon seeking for grace and holiness; then at a third season, for faith and assurance, &c. We are as wholly intent on these by fits, if I may so speak, so as to be less on other duties and exercises. And so it may and doth fall out in our communion with the persons, as if we did cease to value the one as well as the other, or so as if we were wholly taken off from the other; but our actual intentions for that present are lessened through our narrowness, whilst they are intended and heightened towards the other.

But this deficiency on our parts is not simply to be understood in respect of that disproportion of our understandings, only considered as naturally, unto these so transcending divine objects; but from that dimness of true spiritual light in us, without which supernaturally given, the natural man understands nothing at all of communion with these persons, nor any other divine objects. Concerning which dependence upon spiritual light I propose these few things to clear this point to us.

1. We must know that there is a double sort of knowledge of spiritual things in the hearts of men. There is, first, a true spiritual understanding (which is proper to the regenerate), as the apostle, Col. 1:9, by way of distinction terms it: as likewise, in ver. 6, he calls

it a 'knowledge in truth;' and either phrase is used with connotating a difference from another sort or kind of knowledge, namely, a literal speculative knowledge of them. The first spiritual understanding is to be understood, not in respect of the object only, as because it is of spiritual things; but further, from the manner of knowledge, to know them spiritually; and so the apostle accurately distinguisheth, to shew the difference of it from that knowledge of them that is in natural man, 1 Cor. 2:14, 15. And in like manner the second, knowing them in truth; which is when the mind doth really attinge and take in spiritual things, all they are in themselves, being represented by the Holy Ghost to the minds of spiritual men in their real nature and excellency; and that is only true knowledge. The same you have in Eph. 4:20, 21, to know the truth as it is in Jesus; even, as in Col. 1, the knowing the grace of God the Father in truth; both which import a knowledge that is otherwise, and may justly be termed counterfeit, because it reacheth not to the reality of the things, but only entertains pictures of them. And the differing character and truth of this spiritual knowledge is, that it is operative, and carries on the heart with it unto the things spiritual it apprehends, and as they are represented and apprehended in their real spiritual nature, and as such attracts and draws the heart to them; which is by a divine seed of light cast into the heart, that hath a formative virtue accompanying it, and that forms Christ really in them; whereas natural light forms but false conceptions, as they are called; whereof the wombs that go with them do always miscarry in the end.

2. The second proposal is, that even in persons truly regenerated, especially that are knowing, there may be and is much of such literal knowledge of things that are spiritual, that yet is not true spiritual knowledge (in that sense it was explained and stated), but mingled with what is spiritual. This you may see in the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 1, who were 'saints,' ver. 2, and 'sanctified in Christ Jesus;' of whom he gives this eulogium for their knowledge of spiritual things, in verses 5 and 7: 'In every thing ye are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge; so that ye come behind in no gift.' And yet of those persons, of them he thus sets out for gifts, he gives the true character

of saints, 'waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' And yet of these saints he, in chap. 3:1, speaks thus: 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal; even as unto babes in Christ'; which could not have been, unless it be allowed that their knowledge in gifts and utterance about spiritual things far exceeded their true spiritual knowledge; of which spiritual knowledge he had discoursed in the latter verses of the foregoing chapter, ver. 14, 15, which I even now cited. And then this immediately follows, and in respect thereunto he plainly says they were not spiritual: which if that knowledge he speaks they had, had been such in the total of it, it would have made their hearts answerably spiritual; which they were very far from, as if you read on in that chapter you will easily acknowledge. And the reason why and how it comes to pass it is so, is clear; for as you all acknowledge that in a regenerate man there is in every faculty a great part that is unrenewed, a mixture of flesh and spirit, so by consequence it follows that there is such a knowledge of spiritual things as is common to other professors that yet remain unregenerate. And that part of understanding in men regenerated but in part, so far as it is unregenerate in them, is yet capable of a knowledge of them by common gifts spiritual, as well as those that are not truly as yet renewed are. Therefore the apostle distinguisheth in those believing Corinthians, spiritual gifts, and saving love and charity, 1 Cor. 12:13.

It is true that this difference of knowledge being most conspicuous in what is in the several persons of men regenerate and unregenerate, in that in the unregenerate there is no true spiritual knowledge at all, no, not in the lowest degree, but it is but notional and literal; whereas in the regenerate there is by regeneration a principle of this real knowledge inlaid; and therefore we difference the spiritual estates of the one and the other by the difference of their knowledge, as well as by other characters: yet there is a mixture of notional knowledge with spiritual in the same regenerate person; which, though it prejudiceth not his being in the estate of grace, no more than his having sin in him, and darkness in his understanding doth, yet still that mixture is from a distinction and difference of the

knowledge itself that is in him. When, therefore, we difference the knowledge of a man truly regenerate from that which is in a common professor and temporary believer, our meaning is not as if all and the whole heap and bulk of knowledge of spiritual things, that is in a regenerate man, were in the total of it all of it holy and sanctifying, affective and effective, according to the full extent of that his knowledge of them; whereas in the other, the common professor, it is wholly unsanctified. Nor is it that the height, breadth, depth of a regenerate man's affection towards those spiritual things he anyway knows, should be adequately answerable to the dimensions of his knowledge, every way considered: no, but knowledge by gifts for the good of others and himself, and knowledge of saving grace, are distinct in such a man regenerated: and both being mixed and put together in his understanding, doth bear the name of knowledge, or the knowledge which that one man hath, and is the possessor of; we may as so considered in the general affirm, that his knowledge compounded of both, doth far exceed his holy affections, and that his heart is not in a measure sanctified according to the measure of his knowledge. And to that Christian that discerns by experience the difference of these two knowledges in himself (which is a great and true sign of grace to discern it), it becomes the greatest matter of humiliation to find that his knowledge of holy things objectively, doth exceed the holiness of his heart affectionately and effectively, his life falling so short of it: yet still take it with this caution to be added, that their knowledge objectively considered, doth extend with some degree of spiritual affection accompanying it even unto all things which they know; and which, in respect of the sincerity of their hearts, they have a respect and affection unto all which they know. But yet this is no more intensive, than according to that degree of true spiritual knowledge, more or less, that is blended with that notional knowledge; so as in respect of that additional of speculative and gift knowledge, their hearts fall so much short, and are not adequate unto that knowledge.

If it be replied, But is not all the knowledge a godly man bath, sanctified to him?

Ans. Yes; in that sense that all other things are sanctified to him, to be some way or other for his spiritual good. But it is not all of it sanctifying knowledge, and directly operative; and yet it hath this more near and appropriate tendency unto the sanctification of him than other things have, that it is in his heart as fit combustible matter, as tow and flax that lie near sparks of fire, ready to be enkindled by that true spiritual knowledge that is in him; and his case is, as if we suppose as if tow and fax encompass fire in the same hearth, and there wanted but a blowing up the fire, and it readily inflames the tow presently, and assimilates it into fire; and then both work together upon the heart. Yet this falls out but as the Holy Ghost shall vouchsafe a special assistance, and shut up the spiritual light and fire in a man; which similitude agrees with the apostle's phrase in his exhortation to Timothy, 'Stir up the gift that is in thee,' which is done by the Holy Ghost's assistance. You have commonly heard that word stir up is in the original, as you do a fire. And the gift that was in him was that additional knowledge, which is always larger than a man's gracious knowledge, and lies in a great part of it like materials unkindled, yet laid upon the fire, to the end to be kindled by it; and so that gift knowledge becomes spiritualised and sanctifying knowledge together.

The use I put these premises to, and the corollary I draw from these two proposals, is to prevent a great objection which might be otherwise made against what was alleged in the former instances. The objection may be this, that the doctrine of Christ and his apostles having as fully discovered Christ as the Father, and the Father as Christ, unto their disciples in the primitive times, and that they were affected in some degree to either of the persons according to that doctrine, yet how should it come to pass that their spirits should be carried forth and addicted to communion with, and towards one, rather than the other?

The resolve of this appearing difficulty lieth in this, that though their literal notional gift knowledge, by the doctrine of the one, might be equal with their knowledge of the other, yet the true spiritual

knowledge, which affects and turns the heart, was unequal; the Holy Ghost did not blow the fire to enkindle the one as much as the other. And so they came not to have that intimate, affecting, operative knowledge towards Christ as towards the Father, and so their hearts were not drawn out to a like communion with both of those persons at once. And then it was they were otherwise minded as to the knowledge of Christ (as the apostle's phrase is in that Philip. 3); that is, otherwise affected, addicted, &c., as I opened it; unto which, the third proposal being added, will further clear.

3. The third proposal, that indeed the Holy Ghost doth direct, draw out, and intend more or less that true spiritual knowledge in the actings of it towards spiritual objects, that yet are of equal weight and moment, according to his own good pleasure, and therefore an unequal communion of believers with the Father and Son at one and the same time may and doth often fall towards them. This is certain, that the degrees of our spiritual communion with either of them depends upon a more large or less degree of spiritual knowledge, and that as it is at the instant time acted and drawn forth more or less by the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost may enlighten us with such an affecting and inflaming light, in a more intense degree to the one, whilst to a lesser degree towards the other. I added, when it is acted and drawn forth, &c., and the reason is, that though every regenerate man hath an inherent principle or habitude of spiritual knowledge, capable alike of all and each of spiritual objects, yet that which makes them more or less manifest is a divine light which God causeth to shine into the heart, and hereby to actuate that principle: 'It is light,' says the apostle, 'that makes things manifest.' And as the degree of light about them is, accordingly are our apprehensions of them; and according to our apprehensions of them, our hearts and spirits are affected, our communion with them is higher or less intense. We see in nature that it is not only the less or greater vigour in the eye, which is the principle of seeing inherent in us, which causeth the difference in seeing, but it is the light also shining more or less doth actuate and bring forth things to a visibility, to a greater or less degree, which, if wanting, the clearest eye in the world, if in the dark,

sees nothing; or if the proportion of light be dim and small, it discerns less. Now, the vouchsafing of this spiritual light, and the degrees of it, doth depend wholly upon God's good pleasure, who takes a liberty to dispense it as he pleaseth; and the reason of this is, because we of ourselves are not sufficient to think one good or holy thought. And that though we are not totally in habitual darkness, but have a spiritual principle of seeing spiritually, yet in respect of true actual sight, and the degrees of it, in that respect we should be continually but men in the dark. And therefore in the same place the apostle says, 2 Cor. 3:5, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;' we are not to be able to educe one good thought. And chap. 4:6, 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' It is not that God did at first once shine into our hearts and enlightened us, or that we have an abiding principle of light in us, but he must give us every moment light to see withal. And we are no wiser, nor spiritually know any more of things spiritual, than at the instant he gives it, which is the apostle's phrase to the Ephesians, 'Christ shall give thee light,' yea, command it, or create it continually, as he did light out of darkness.

And, which is yet more to this purpose, whereas other light, of the sun, moon, or any other lightsome body, do alike irradiate all the objects that are near them in a house or other open place, this of spiritual light from God doth not equally enlighten all or any spiritual objects, but doth in a more especial manner irradiate some one particular divine object at once more than another, which he casteth light upon more than others, and terminates the eye of the mind thereto; or, like as a hand that manageth the light in a dark lantern (and such is his spiritual light shining in our dark hearts), that he 'opens and shuts,' as the phrase in the Revelation is, as he pleaseth. And the Spirit of God, who is given to reveal these deep things of God, is the freest agent in this, and takes a liberty, 'dividing to every man as he will,' 1 Cor. 12:11. Even as in John 3 he is said as the wind to blow where he listeth, and as to what person he pleaseth,

unto what light or degree thereof he pleaseth; and hence also comes the inequality in the point in hand. These reasons are from what is on our parts. I return again to such as concern the persons of the Trinity, to be now added after those that concern us, for I said I should sort and handle the one and the other intermingledly.

There are these farther reasons that concern the persons, that move them to this dispensation of this alternate communion with themselves.

1. They are willing and content to take their turns and vicissitudes of manifesting themselves, sometimes the one, sometimes the other, in our narrow hearts, to the end that each of them may have in the issue the fuller and more distinct manifestation of themselves, they are pleased to give way one to the other in their communion. From hence it was, as we said, that the Son suffered himself to be so much and so long concealed during the time of the Old Testament; and the Father had the vogue in the church then. And under the New, although all judgment is originally the Father's, yet 'hath he committed all judgment to the Son,' and 'judgeth no man' but in and by the Son, to the end that all 'might honour the Son,' &c., John 5:22, 23. We may observe, likewise, the Spirit under the New; also the third person conceals himself, insomuch as though it was he who indited all the epistles of the New, and therein wisheth grace and peace from God the Father and from Christ, not mentioning himself, from whom yet grace and peace do proceed equally with the Father and the Son, and although it is true that both Father, and Son, and the Spirit also, be in some measure and degree known by every believer, which the words of baptism shew, 'In the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit,' as having a joint and equal interest in our salvation, yet are they content that our intentions of mind and affections should run with a shallower stream at times towards some one than they do towards another; although appretiativè, or in the esteem of them in their judgments, all Christians value and honour all three alike, as one God, three persons, blessed for ever. So that it must not be understood as if I meant that our minds were quite taken off from

the one, whilst they are carried forth to the other, whilst thus our affections are more intentionally taken up with any one of them.

Yea, these persons are so far from jealousy in this case of one another, lest one should have more of us than himself, that they do help forward and advance the glorifying of one the other onto us. Jesus Christ the Son, when he hath once been thoroughly revealed and made known to any soul himself, it is he, when once believed on by it, that reveals the Father unto us: Mat. 11:27, 'No man knows the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son reveals him.' And, vice versa, when Christ is revealed and made known to you, and your hearts drawn to him, and your hearts taken up with the communications of him, you must know it is the Father that concealedly doth this: John 6:45, 'It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God: every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me;' so Gal. 1:15. And then Christ taketh his turn afresh and anew to reveal the Father: John 16:25, 'The time cometh that I will shew you plainly of the Father.' And the Spirit is as zealous and forward to glorify both: John 16:14, 'He (the Spirit) shall take of mine and glorify me' (and take of the Father's too, and glorify him also to your hearts), 'by shewing it to you.' And I say, he glorifies the Father as well as Christ; for so Christ intends his speech: ver. 15, 'All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.' Herein they take their turns also: John 17:1, 'The hour is come that thou, O Father, shouldst glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee;' in their courses to glorify one another. And they, having an eternity of time to glorify themselves unto us in, are not hasty for themselves; they have time enough afore them to do it in, and take their seasons. And, however, in heaven they will be sure then to manifest themselves to us at once, to the full, and together.

2. Seeing that by reason of our great sinfulness that remains in us, and through want of growth to a perfect holiness, we are long a-growing to be fit, prepared, and disposed to enjoy an eminency of fellowship with both at once, and together alike (which is yet

attainable), yet till then each person is pleased to take a singular contentment in such sole, single, private visits with a soul by turns. And the very privacy, that is done alone, doth afford a special delight to the person; and the privacy of them, in that they are single thus alone, doth afford a special delight in the mean time to that person that communes with us, till we grow up to be meet company for both. This the whole book of the Canticles shews, wherein Christ hath those intercourses with his spouse, he and she alone. You may see how he caresseth her, and talks to her, and she again to him: 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,' as if none's else; whenas yet she was the Father's as much as Christ's. But Christ was her husband, and by that relation having a special and appropriate interest in her, thence a peculiar private converse with her, came to have an answerable solace in it. The sweetness of a friend when alone enjoyed, hath some advantages in it in some respects, which a joint society of others with him, though friends also, hath not; as that alone one can be more free and enlarged in expressions of mutual love one to the other, and more particularly direct his love to that one friend alone, and the like. As in the way of our friendship we often do; when we would enjoy a special friend indeed, we invite him to supper alone, to have his company alone. And there is a resemblance of some such thing, as affected, as it were, by Christ himself, in that overture of Christ's: Rev. 3:20, 'If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' That reduplication, 'and he shall sup with me,' denotes an aloneness of them two together, supping hand to hand, as we say. And he names no other but himself, to come with him in that eminent way that he himself came. It denotes also that it is mutual, that she entertains him, and he her, and each bring their cost with them. He sups with her, and she with him. He feeds her with his fruits and viands, and his love better than wine. Read Cant. 5:1, 'I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' And she again invites him to eat of hers: Cant. 7:12, 13, 'Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the

vine flourish, whether the tender grapes appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved: there will I give thee of my loves.' It is all of it her speech to him; and thus this private intercourse of loves, proper to them two alone, doth, in the interim, serve to please, till the fulness of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, come together in upon the soul.

3. They are all there in the mean while stayed and contented with private transactions during our narrowness and non-age; even this, that when we have a more eminent communion with any one person, we have a secret under-communion with the other two, though implicitly with the other, and more distinctly with some one. And it is well it is so; for otherwise we should be guilty of a forgetting the Holy Ghost in the most, whilst we have communion with the Father and the Son objectively; that is, at the persons whom our souls are taken up with, as the subjects of our converse, whilst the Holy Spirit is content to be the revealer of both, and to have the honour of that, as also that he knows he is honoured in their being honoured by us. And the reason is, because the foundation of our comfort in our communion with any one person lies in this, that that person we have the joyful fellowship with is God; that is, it makes our joy 'a full joy,' as chap. 1, in such a fellowship. That is the spring, the source of all comfort, that in that person the fulness of the Godhead is, without which our converse would be empty, and but as with a shadow. Now if our fellowship with one of the persons be fundamentally with him as he is God, and all three are but one and, the same God, then in having communion with that one we have it with the rest. The common interests of the Godhead (which is one and the same in all) is glorified thereby in us, to us, and by us, and some give that as the full intent of the apostle's speech, 2 Cor. 4:6, 'We beheld the glory of God in the face or person of Jesus Christ.' For why? Because both he is looked upon by us to be God, and as in whom we apprehend, whilst we exercise our faith, &c., on him, and that the fulness of the Godhead dwells personally in him, and so we have communion with

him as God, and in beholding him we behold the glory of God the Father also. Yet because this enjoyment of all three in some one is but impliedly, therefore hath God ordered a further special distinct fellowship with each. And hence the love of the Spirit is made mention of, Rom. 15, as well as of the Father or of Christ. The Spirit is God, and he that dwells in God dwells in love with any of the persons. And so, in having communion with the Holy Ghost in his love, or with any other person in their love, we have communion with God. And therefore in this case it is not a leaning to one person more than to another; for they are all but one God, and each one glorified as one God: 'I and my Father are one,' says Christ. Likewise in honouring the Son we honour the Father who hath such a Son; a wise son is an honour to his parents, as often in the Proverbs.

CHAPTER III

The character of young men, or middle-aged Christians in Christ.—1 JOHN 2:14.

The word here translated 'young men,' says Grotius, notes out men *militaris ætatis*, that have attained to the age and fitness of being soldiers, and in that semblance is here applied unto men in Christ, those that in a special manner are drawn out into the field against Satan. And this condition being the middle between that of babes, new converts, and that of old age in Christ, who in nature use to be exempted from war, hence therefore all that space between old age in Christianity and that of infancy in Christ is comprehended under the title of young men, who are in a special manner military men. By this rule the Christian era, or account of ages in Christ, is measured here; whereas in nature, according to our wonted division, we reckon four—babes, young men, middle-aged, and old men; whereas here but three, and upon this it is that the greater space of time is allotted to this of young men. New converts in Christ, though men grown, are not young men in Christ presently the first hour, and there is a middle age besides to be passed through ere they come to be fathers;

and thence all that time between those two, of babeship in Christ and old age in Christ, must be understood and meant by what is translated young men, comprising and taking also in that which answers to what in nature we call middle age, even all that time from babeship, till old age in Christianity comes, as a time of more usual conflict and fighting against lusts (which are the bloody battles); and it ordinarily falls out, God converting men more generally whilst young in natural years, that that middle age in nature is coincident with this middle age in Christianity.

There are two things to be handled as touching this age.

1. That during that age or space of time Christians are most assaulted with lusts.
2. How it is that they are said to have overcome, and that this should be attributed to them in so special a manner.

For the first.

1. The condition of a Christian is described to be a warfare: 'fighting against sin,' Heb. 12:4. Their interest is to fight against sin and the tentations of it; and that is the ground of all other quarrels with the world.
2. Satan and his angels are at the head of this battle: 'That wicked one,' says the text; and Eph. 6:12, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'
3. There are special seasons for war; so in the world, as Solomon says, Eccles. 3:8, a time when kings go forth to battle; and so in Christianity.
4. The special time of this conflict against fleshly and worldly lusts is this middle age of Christians in Christ. It is true that old men to the

last become not wholly emeriti, are not 'discharged from this warfare' (as Solomon's phrase is of death), for, Eph. 4:13, the apostle speaks to them that have fought to the last, 'that after you have done all, you may be able to stand.' There are therefore assaults upon old Christians to the last to cast them down; even those who have yet done all that good Christians are supposed they ought to have done in the foregone part of their lives; yet 'when you have done all,' says the apostle, it is well ye have grace given 'to stand,' and keep your posts at last. And above all their danger lies, that the world is apt to ensnare them, and therefore the exhortation here in the 15th verse, 'Love not the world,' &c., is made unto both the middle-aged men and the fathers, according to their several inclinations. Piscator hath observed this. But to take heed of errors in faith, and the way of believing, is incident to babes, and therefore that exhortation, ver. 18, is more peculiarly made to them, παιδία, babes, &c. The Thessalonians were new converts, babes, when he wrote his epistle. And what was Paul's fear of them at that age, but lest their faith had been assaulted? 1 Thes. 2:5, 'For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness.'

5. Yet this middle age is the eminent time of warfare unto Christians during that age of their Christianity. Overcoming importeth a fight, a warfare; and in that overcoming is attributed in a special manner to them, it argues the assault to be the fiercest then, then to be the heat of the battle with the adversary.

The reasons of this.

1. They are in a middle condition, between that lower of babes, and that of old age; and so they partake in a great proportion of both. The working of corruptions doth follow men's inclinations in nature; and middle-aged Christians, in the posture of their natural inclinations, are precipitant* of both; of lusts of youth, as the apostle calls them, because of their violence and predominion, which is most in them, that flow from fancy, heat, vigour of nature; as mirth, jollity,

frolicness of youth, as you call them. And truly I think Christ had some little reflection upon such as these, in what he said to Peter: John 21:18, 'When thou wert young, thou girdedst thyself, and wentest whither thou wouldest.' Peter had shewn a forward youthfulness in verse 7, in casting himself into the sea with his coat girt on; it was a youthful trick, and what of folly and ostentation was in it Christ seems to reprove. Pride of parts also, and of gifts; 'Let him not be a young novice, lest he be puffed up.' Voluptuousness, incontinency, intemperance, overmuch delight in vain company, and such lasts as these, are not yet so abated and cooled in these middle-aged ones, but that they retain a great inclination to them. And then they partake of old men's lusts. Pride and lusts of carnal wisdom, love of the world, and honour, and riches, are already begun to grow up in them, for they come to a ripeness of temper; cares likewise begin to enter, and to come about a man, and to grow up with the word; their heads are full of business, intent upon things earthly. Children grow up, and call for a provision for them. And thus being in the middle of both, when it falls out as middle age, as they are Christians, doth contemporise with a middle age in nature, as often they do; they are then under their equinoctial, under which climate men's bodies are incident most unto distemper.

Babes are more obnoxious unto doubts and tentations about their estate in grace. The sun's rising is accompanied with clouds and mists, which, as it ariseth higher, are scattered; and Christians, in their infancy, are by the mixture of the remains of the spirit of bondage, with some dawnings of faith, and hopes of God's favour (which they are usually yet fully assured of), kept more awful of yielding to sin, and indulgence to lusts, which by John Baptist's work of humiliation had stounded them more than mortified them; but the middle age having somewhat outgrown those fears, and attained more quietness of spirit, as to the hopes of their spiritual estate, the spirit of bondage being much worn out; and yet perhaps those are not grown up to a full and settled assurance neither, so continually actuated in them, so as to keep lusts down. Their lusts, therefore, are apt to gather up much of their crumbs again; and assurance not

being full and spiritual enough yet in them, they walk in a greater exposedness to the rising up of lusts, and Satan's stirring them up in them.

Then, 2, their adversary the devil, he is let loose more by God upon Christians in that age, as to the point of stirring up lusts, for so still I state it. In the parable, at the first when he is cast forth of a man, he is much restrained as to entering into a man again, when he is thrown out for a while; and the measures and methods of his assaulting are ordered and disposed of by God; his times are in God's hands: 'Satan shall cast you into prison for ten days.' Now, in the parable, Mat. 12:43, 'He walks a while in dry places, seeking rest, and finding none:' being put out of trade and dealings with that man he is cast forth of, as he had afore; not having power over and upon the man, as he had wont, in point of carrying him to sin and several lusts. This confinement thus against his will, notes a restraint of him from God, that in a punishment interdicts him to places that are dry, and as a wilderness to him; even as it is thought that when Satan hath tempted a man to actual murder, or to perpetrate some such great villany, which cannot be known by man, God often in that case confines that devil that tempted him to the house or place where it was committed, till by the disturbance he makes (which you call haunting the house), notice is given to some of mankind, whereby it may be known both that, and sometimes what the murder was, and where the man murdered was buried; that being come to men's cognisance, then let man look to it to search it out. Then the devil is released; God having made that promise, that by whom man's blood is shed, by man shall his blood be shed. So it is here: God for a present punishment to that devil, who had so long borne rule over a poor sinner, whom he had taken captive at his will, and been the tempter of to so much evil, throws him out, and banisheth him; takes away his power as to the violence of such kind of temptations, as formerly he had wont to use, namely, unto grosser evils of sinnings; puts him out of that employment; lessens his trade that way with his old customer, though he may permit him to tempt in another kind,

as to despair or presumption, but not this way; which is the worst and most grievous of temptations, when a man is overcome by them.

And it is as to such defilements in point of lusts that Satan is thus restrained; for the man had reformed greatly upon the casting out of Satan; and there is both time and season allowed and allotted by God to do it in; for he sweeps the house, throws out the filth and dust, and garnisheth it with the outward paintings of many new virtues and gifts; insomuch as Peter, referring to this, says, 2d Epist. 2:20, that he is 'clean escaped the defilements of the world,' or which the world lieth in. And by the coincidence of the matter in both places, of Christ's here, and Peter's there, it is evident the apostle refers to this parallel of Christ's. Compare but the apostle's words—ver. 21, 22, 'For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire'—with Christ's words in the parable; ver. 44, 45, 'Then he saith, I will return unto mine house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.' So as they are worldly and miry lusts he assaulted them with, to turn them from the holy commandment.

And this is for some time also, that the state of this man continues in this freedom from Satan in these respects; for when he hath walked his walk through dry places, vexed and melancholy at his disappointments, he, after a while, thinks thus with himself, to return to his old exercise and employment, and makes trial (but so at first, ver. 44); 'then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came,' &c., and finding a man yielding, he takes more and worse devils to aid him.

If the objection be, that this instance is of a man that falls away, and so not applicable to true Christians that hold out,

My answer is,

1. It is true that, in the point of falling away, these two, a true Christian and this instance, agree not.

2. My assertion stands good in this, that if God restrains Satan from tempting or prevailing over such temporary professors in grosser evils at their first reforming for a time, then he doth it much more unto true and real converts of his own.

3. Satan's new invading and returning upon this man who after apostatizeth is not from this, that he knew him to be not a sincere convert, with difference from one that is sincere. No; God reveals no such thing to him. Nor can he discern that soon; but the one and the other are alike at first in his eye. And so he returns upon the same opinion and apprehensions that are common and alike of either, one as well as the other. He makes his assault upon the like ground, hoping to prevail upon the one as well as the other, not knowing which God will preserve and cause in the end to stand, and which not. And therefore the argument I have used from that scripture doth hold good, and the case of a sincere convert and another comes all to one in respect to Satan's renewing his assaults; for the reason for his new assaulting the one is the same for the other, and he is by God alike restrained from the one as he is from the other, and let loose again by God in a like manner upon either. For otherwise, if God should therein put and discover a difference, Satan would have knowledge aforehand who are sincere and who not, if any constant difference were observed by God in this particular.

And 4. God thus orders it in a tender, gracious dispensation towards his own, whose condition at first needs this: 'They fall into temptations, if need be,' 1 Peter 1:6. But truly there is no need of the falling into, much less prevailing of such temptations at first; for they

would utterly put them off, and split their faith quite. God reserves them till they are habitually grown stronger in grace, as the text here: 'I write to you, young men, for ye are strong.' God suffers not his east wind to blow upon tender plants at their first shooting forth: Isa. 27:8, 'In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it: he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.' Nor lets he out 'any temptation they are not able to bear.' This holds in point of sinning as well as in point of suffering; yea, much more.

5. This dispensation is in conformity unto Christ. When was it that Christ began to be tempted (and indeed he with all sorts of temptations by Satan at once), but when he arrived at the years of the middle age of man, at thirty years? You read not that during his private life he was tempted afore (though we cannot affirm that he was altogether free and devoid of them), but there is an intimation that sometimes afterwards Satan did return: 'He departed from him,' says the story, 'for a season.' And to be sure that all along after his entrance into that public life he was exercised with continual temptations from Satan and the world, insomuch as himself notes that time whilst he had walked with his disciples, to have been his special time of temptation: Luke 22:28, 'Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations.' And at or about those years of natural age, unto most converts may the account of their middle age of Christianity begin.

Thus much for their incidency unto temptation, insinuated in that there is a conflict, an overcoming, which was the first thing singled out.

But there is a second, and of greater difficulty, and that is, How and in what respect they are said more eminently to have overcome Satan? For are they not in their conflicts apt to be overcome, and to yield to corrupt affections? and how far they may be overcome, is not to be determined by man.

1. This as a difficulty Calvin and others have took notice of. *Vicisse dicit, qui adhuc sunt in ipso bellandi; alia conditio in hoc bello, Mars enim aliis dubius, et eventus belli anceps: Nos priusquam congregiamur, jam sumus victores,* quia caput nostrum Christus semel totum mundum vicit.* 'He saith these have overcome, who are yet in the very act of warring; the case is otherwise in this war, for the battle to other warriors is doubtful, and the event of the battle uncertain; whereas we, before we encounter, are already conquerors, because our head Christ at once hath overcome the whole world.'

2. If Christ maintains a conflict in thy heart against sin, that there is a seed of God yet abiding in thy heart, that doth never, can never yield to sin, or an act of sin, although the corrupt law in the members carry them to the outward act, yet this reluctancy is a keeping the field, a not laying down the sword; thus our apostle in his third chapter verse 9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.' And Rom. 7:24, 25, when you hear that outcry in your hearts, 'O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me?' As Jehoshaphat cried out, when environed with chariots, fighting against him: 1 Kings 22:32, 33, and 2 Chron. 18:31, 'And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel; therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him.' So that man there in Rom. 7:24 cries out, and by faith gives thanks aforehand, in the assurance of the victory; 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' When it comes to be a confidence, God hears our cry; we then 'have the petitions we ask of him.' It is our apostle's rule, though the performance be delayed, and thou mayest still be actually overcome. Here this passage is added, 'The word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one;' whence I gather, that if the word of God (which is that 'seed of God,' chap. 3:9, as Peter tells us, 1 Epistle 1) abideth in thee unexcused, not shaken out of thy heart, unchoked (as I may difference the case of true believers from others, the thorny ground, from Christ's word used in the parable, in saying that in the thorny

ones lusts choke the word in their hearts), but in thee it remains rooted, and as a spring works out the mud that stopped it, and humbles you, and reduceth you to God again, this is a victory. Join these two together that are in the text, 'the word of God abides in you,' and 'you have overcome that wicked one,' to this sense, that this is an evidence you have overcome, because a seed of God still abides in your hearts unconquerably, so as the assaults of sin and Satan have not, cannot totally prevail against you.

3. But you will say, These are but generals, common to all ages of Christianity. They all, yea, babes, in these respects may be said to have overcome, as well as young men.

4. The answer is, that this last mentioned consideration may in a more special respect be attributed unto middle-aged Christians, rather than babes; for by that time this age is come and gone, they must be supposed to have run through much, and a long space in fighting against sin, and to have had many bloody noses given and taken in those conflicts; and yet that they should be able to say after so many wounds received, I have still the same spiritual life of Christ abiding in me, I am yet alive, I am still heartened to fight it out, I will never lay the weapons down, this is an evidence to them, namely, that after so long a time, the word of God is still abiding in their souls; 'the root of the matter is in them.' A single evidence it is that there is that in them that cannot sin, nor close with sin. Conscience alone will not keep the field so long, nor hold out; at best it doth clamour against sin, but will soon be flatted, and the edge of its resistance be taken off. But this is a constant principle of holiness abiding in them, that really fights against sin, which can never be stilled nor return thither. And this is a pawn and pledge of a certain victory in the end; and a surer pledge thereof than that which young beginners, who have not run through so great a time in so sore and so reiterated temptations of all sorts, can have experience of, such as these middle-aged Christians have; and therefore this honour is rather attributed unto them than unto babes, that grace is preserved in the midst of violent assaults, tending to extinguish it; that a drop

of oil should maintain itself above water, or in the end still get uppermost, notwithstanding all the stormy surges of the Sea, when they rage most to overwhelm it.

5. Take the most of Christians, and their experience will tell you that, in their conflicts against grosser evils and lusts, they oftener not yield to the act, than are overcome unto it; for which I refer you to other writings.

6. Instead of many other answers, I will add this: that the estimate of overcoming lies not in accounting how off thou hast been foiled, rather than overcome by not yielding; but in this, that if thou hast had many times in thy life, yea, and at any time thou canst remember (for such overcomings as I shall now mention, are more rare and less seldom discerned, than in reality they fallout and occur) that thou hadst a clear victory, out of pure motives and considerations, which are proper to true grace; as which were drawn from the interest that God and Christ have in thy soul, and thy soul in them; as from the grace of God, union with Christ, the power of his death applied, through faith its having recourse to it, and the power thereof brought home to thy heart thereupon; thou that hast overcome, shalt overcome. There fall out often to God's children many frustrations of temptations from lusts and Satan's assaults by providential occurrences and motives, whereby God restrains his own in the nick or opportunity, as he did David by Abigail, which we are indeed to bless God for, as David there did, 1 Sam. 25:32–34, for they are out of grace and favour towards us, when not out of pure grace in us. And therefore David blesseth God for that of his there, and so should we. Yet these are not so evidential to us of our overcoming, or of victories on our parts; they are 'ways to escape' (as 1 Cor. 10:13) rather than victories; but such as are purely from our having had recourse to Christ for strength against them; and then motives that arise precisely from our converses and communion with God and Christ, as aforesaid, with strength coming in, with downright blows to dead them, and not per modum diverticuli, by way of diverting the mind; for so any other thoughts that get in do; they may take off and turn

aside for the present the mind from a lust, a fancy, a strong incursion; but such over-comings mentioned are signal, in open field, and by force of arms, spiritual arms, and may be recorded exploits of spiritual chivalry, and among the famous and wondrous works that God works in us and for us.

Use 1. The first use is an admonition to middle-aged Christians. It is an hour, or rather a long season of temptation; and no man knows what trials he may in temptations to sin run through, nor at what time most; we are therefore called to stand upon our 'watch' continually, and to 'be sober,' as in 1 Pet. 5:8, where at ver. 10, 'But the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory by Jesus Christ; after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.' suffering a while is not only or mainly in a time of persecution for Christ, whereof he had spoken chap. 4:17, but from temptations to sins, which are the greatest sufferings; and the devil watcheth that he may devour or drink up a man's soul (as the word is), he swallows down some professors, as we do a draught; and so Judas was served by him. He springs a mine, and suddenly blows them up. Cities besieged stand upon their guard when an enemy is at the gates, and keep double watch and ward, and especially in the seasons, as in the nights, when the season is for onsets and assaults, and countermine their mines. This middle age is the time wherein most temporaries fall away, as the thorny ground, in whom lusts grew up with the word, till they had choked the word; so that there was some long time of profession passed first. Whereas the stony ground presently gave out, when the sun of persecution was up, they withdrew in the infancy of profession, and did not stay till their middle age. These were as rath ripe fruits, and are nipped with an April frost before summer comes. Those other, the thorny, abide longer, for their humiliation was deep; yet not so deep but that the sense of the bitterness of sin went off and decreased, and so they proved unfruitful for some time before they died: they are withered trees, as Jude compares them; autumnal fruits, as his expression is. They fall as leaves in the autumn, in the declension of their years,

before the winter of old age comes, and seldom or never continue till then.

Use 2. Again, you middle-aged Christians, set yourselves to overcome at that season with all your might; for as it is the special season of temptation, so of overcoming. Make it your glory to obtain victory during that season: 'The glory of young men is their strength,' Prov. 20:29, which was seen in the wrestlers and strivings at the Olympian games, where crowns upon the public charge were given unto the overcomers; unto which the apostle alludeth, 2 Tim. 2:5, 'And if a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully.' And if you will know what it is to strive lawfully, read 1 Cor. 9:25, 'And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.' Therefore go on thus to fight that good fight, that you may lay hold upon eternal life, 1 Tim. 6:12. And though you be often foiled and put to the worse, yet rise up, and to it again. And there are two motives: 1, it is a good fight, wherein you are to overcome, if you continue to fight, and faint not; 2, lay hold on eternal life; this is the reward, the bravium of your eye: 'He that is slow to anger, and ruleth his spirit,' that is, overcomes himself, 'is better than he that takes a city,' Prov. 16:32.

Use 3. Reckon with thyself how many victories thou hast had, how oft you have overcome, and how often been foiled; how many set battles thou hast fought, wherein the archers have shot sorely at thee, but thy bow abode in its strength. These do turn greatly to thy glory at last at the day of judgment, and thy comfort now in this life. The promise that concludes all the epistles to the churches runs thus, 'To him that overcometh.' The Indians in New England, fighting with short hand-clubs, wherewith they knock down their enemies, look how many men they have killed in several fights, they set down at the club-ends so many notches, which they keep and shew for their glory. How often thou hast kept thyself from thine iniquity, and how often thou hast been overcome, keep an account, to the end to humble thyself the more.

I come now to the opening of the first character given to these young or middle-aged Christians: 'I write to you young men,' says he, 'because ye are strong.' There is a double spiritual strength: one that is radical in the soul itself, consisting in the strength and vigour of habitual graces; the other assistant thereto from the Spirit, according as he is pleased to arm and fill the soul with himself, joining with it by strengthening the graces in us, which you read of Eph. 3:16, 'That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.' And this latter accessory strength is here meant, as that which is granted by God, as we have need of it, which we have every moment; but in special assaults and temptations, so as to overcome, it is a strength given to help 'in time of need.' There is some likeness in both these in the strength of the body; there is an inward and abiding hability in the limbs and inward parts, a sprightly vigour fit for any action whereto strength is needful to be put forth, which others that are children or sickly want; and this is abiding in them when asleep, as in the body of a lion or elephant; in Job 40:17–19, 'He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his stones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron. He is the chief of the ways of God: he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him.' And there is an assistant strength which strong wine or some spiritful cordial gives over and above the natural. The psalmist's similitude of a giant implies both: 'like a giant,' who is stronger than other men in his natural hability, 'refreshed with wine,' which adds thereunto, and makes him more potent to act. So there is an habitual strength in the inner man of a Christian, grown up from a child to be a man to a full age, which here the apostle hath in his eye. That as in nature babes are weak, children are weak, but middle-aged men are strong in respect of such an inward abiding strength in them; and so it is here intended. And in respect to this habitual strength it is that in other scriptures some Christians are termed strong, others weak, as in the 14th and 15th chapters to the Romans, and the prophet Zechariah, 12:8, of the times of the New Testament saints: 'In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as

David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.' The angels they are said to 'excel in strength,' and so the opposition runs between weak and strong Christians. But then the assistant strength of the Spirit filling that inward man, whereof, Eph. 4:18, 'Be not drunk with wine in excess, but be filled with the Spirit;' who filling you strengthens, cheers you as wine, and wherein is no excess, but an access of a mighty power, when he mingles with our spirits, and is as wine that flushes our natural spirits. And that is the strength that petition Eph. 3 specially intends; and the main strength also in respect of which these middle-aged Christians are said to be strong, and by which to overcome, for therein it is that indeed our strength now lies.

But although this habitual strength of the inward man may be intended here by John, yet we must know that the compare of our spiritual strength with that of the body, instanced in, runs upon unequal feet; for our spiritual strength lies principally in the supplies of the Spirit, as Phil. 1 they are styled, and not in our habitual graces; whereas the chief of bodily strength lies in the body itself and natural spirits; and the additional strengtheners are small comparatively. I would therefore, for illustration's sake of this great point, fetch my parallel or comparison from such persons, whose bodies, though by natural constitution strong, yet had that strength intended and elevated by the Spirit's coming upon them, enabling them to act, and fight, and overcome, which was Samson's case; and that indeed will serve to set forth this. Samson had no doubt a natural strength, far exceeding other men, in himself and in his limbs, such perhaps as giants, which yet we find not that he was: but then he had superadded to that the might of the Holy Ghost, falling upon him at times, and upon occasions; as when he pulled down the pillars of that playhouse of the Philistines, like as it was aforesaid said of him: Judges 15:14, 'And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.' And ver. 15, 'He found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.' And chap. 13:25, 'And the Spirit

of the Lord came upon him at times,' &c. And this assistance he sometimes had by faith and confidence in God, that he would vouchsafe; as in the story of that 13th chapter he ventures unarmed, yea, bound, to meet more than a thousand Philistines, that were resolved to kill him; and the Spirit came not in him till he was amongst them: yet he ventured it afore. This was therefore in faith (whereof the apostle speaks, Heb. 11) that such an assistance would come upon him: and so in the other case of the two pillars.

And this extraordinary supply of strength by the Spirit, suits best to set forth spiritual strength here; though withal I profess not to compare such extraordinary exploits and achievements, wherein Samson was made to excel all other men whatever, and himself at other times, by the Spirit's coming on him, with those ordinary overcomings here; as if I intended that the middle-aged should be acted by such miraculous excesses and actions, comparatively to other Christians, [by] the Spirit's coming on them. No; but I make use of it to this purpose, to illustrate how as Samson's strength to do what he did lay not in his own inherent strength, but the Spirit's assisting him with his power, hiddenly joining with his, and elevating of his; and that therein it was his strength did lie. Thus so here, in the Spirit's supplies it is that these middle-aged men's strength doth also lie, or any others' in spiritual actings and overcomings; and that it was not the habitual strength of their own graces. And the Scriptures are express in it: 2 Tim. 2:1, 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' It were to contradict this passage, and dishonourable to Christ our head, to narrow this grace that is in Christ Jesus, unto that habitual grace inherent in us from Christ, as if that were our strength. No; it is that which is in Christ Jesus his person, in his keeping, and his giving forth, as we are to act; for when he exhorts, 'Be ye strong,' &c., he speaks it as in order unto doing and acting, and the increase of strength. And it would soon be ill with us, if we should be left to that kind of strength alone, to act withal, as Adam was. No; ours is in the person of Christ, the power of an endless life residing in him, and assisting us according to his strength, which by faith going to him for, he gives forth to us. For as

'he is our life,' Col. 3:4, so he must be acknowledged our strength; for what is strength but life in an active vigour? And this the apostle tells us, from his own experience, was it that enabled him to do all things: Philip. 4:13, 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me.' It was a strength in and for the act, 'that strengtheneth me;' and it was in what he was to do, 'I am able to do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me,' in the doing. Let us walk, therefore, in an habitual emptiness of self-confidence, waiting on Christ for strength, remembering that of the apostle, that 'when I am weak, then I am strong;' and be in this sense weak, that the power of Christ may rest upon you. There was one king, of whom it is said, he was helped till he was strong. Peter's confidence in the present sense of his own grace, 'Though all men leave thee, I will not,' was the ground of his fall; he went out in his own strength: Isa. 45:24, 25, 'Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.' We all profess that righteousness of justification—and that is meant there, as appears by verse 25, 'In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified'—that is alone in Christ, 'the Lord our righteousness.' Now the same is said of strength: our strength lies in him, and as he will give it forth, we have strength; and as he withholds, we are weak. And there is the same reason for this as for that other, in their several proportions, wherein they may differ; that in him we should glory, as it follows there: therefore look out to him for it, as the word is, ver. 22, 'And unto him shall men come.' Ver. 24, 'Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come.' Therefore go to him, come to him for strength; he will strengthen you.

But you will say to me, If you interpret this of middle-aged Christians, 'because you are strong,' to intend chiefly the strength of the Spirit of Christ, in respect of assistance to act; and not so much that inward strength, which is in themselves, wrought by Christ and the Spirit; how could he make this to be middle-aged men's eminent property? for this strength, though it works in us, yet is extrinsecal to

our spirits. And again, even babes may be influenced as much with such a kind of strength as middle-aged Christians may be supposed to be; for it is wholly what is without themselves, till sent in at the time of acting; and babes are as capable and receptive of this kind of strength to overcome temptations (which is the matter whereto we speak) as the middle-aged, if the Spirit of the Lord come upon them. And what can the middle promise themselves more thereof than babes may do; or the apostle for them, that he should say comparatively to babes, 'ye are strong'? Doth not the prophet, speaking of the Messiah's times, Isa. 35:3, 4, say, 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; he will come and save you'? And at verse 6, 'Then shall the lame man leap as the hart,' even from the first hour that the power of Christ and the Spirit comes upon him; which is spoken not of the miracles in such men's bodies only, but of spiritual strengthenings also. For those words in verse 3, 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees,' that precede these other, are applied by the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews unto spiritual feebleness and strength.

It is true that the dispensations of assisting grace in the acting our inward man is depending wholly on God's good pleasure, as Philip. 2:13, and he can and does sometimes 'ordain,' that is, vouchsafe, 'strength unto babes and sucklings,' Ps. 8; and they are often carried at; first as with a spring-tide of extraordinary assistance, which yet afterwards, when that land-flood extraordinary is run and spent, the stream is contracted to an usual channel, and falls into and becomes ebb-tides, and greatly decrease, as in my treatise of Growth in Grace I have observed. Yet for answer to the objection.

Ans. 1. That God more ordinarily vouchsafeth adjuvant efficacious grace to overcome temptation, according to the measure of grace habitual or inherent; and therefore when men are grown up to more radical inward strength, he gives more effective assisting strength; he meteth forth temptations to the ability our inward man is furnished withal, as that we are able to bear them, as, 1 Cor. 10, he declares his

measure to be. And then he vouchsafes his actual supply of aiding strength, according to the proportion of that inherent stock of ability he sees in the inward man, which, if it effectually assist us, will prevail; and then as the conflicts grow greater, our additional aids are together therewith increased. Now, if it be thus, then the objection comes to be in a great measure solved; for the additional is ordinarily proportioned to the inherent habitual grace, and so the measure of both comes to one. It falls out in this as it was with Samson; the Spirit assisted Samson, when grown up to the full strength of a man, far more than when he was a child and naturally weaker; although when of younger years he at times fell on him and by fits, as we heard out of Judges 13:25, yet not to perform such prodigious exploits as after he was grown elderly. The Spirit observed a decorum of his assistance, proportioned to his years.

The grace of God works freely indeed, and will shew his freedom; he obligeth not, nor ties himself absolutely to such rules and measures as these always, and to all persons; but at his good pleasure takes liberty to withhold his supplies from such as have most of this inherent grace we speak of, to shew the weakness of all our grace as it is in us, without his further active influencing grace working the will and the deeds, and also that his grace is tied to none. This we see in David, when he was left to sin more foully in his middle age than in his first days (as they are called); and so in like manner Hezekiah, both grown up to a middle age in grace. Yet this assertion of ours concerns only what his more ordinary dispensations are. And truly of those I may say, that although God's grace is free, yet it delights to observe set rules in those dispensations, as to give promise that 'he that bringeth forth much fruit, he will purge to bring forth more fruit,' John 15:2. That is one rule with himself likewise, 'He that is justified, let him be justified still.' Yet more and more, Rev. 22:11, and 'to him that hath, shall be given,' and the like. For therein his grace is seen to give grace, that he may be moved to give more grace. And thus it comes to pass that habitual grace being increased by the exercise and using of it itself, where it is once begun by regeneration, that then the influences of active and overcoming grace from God

come to abound more, as habitual grace through long exercise hath abounded. It is like God's blessing some men in their outward callings (and it is God that gives power to get wealth), the promise being, that the diligent hand makes rich. God giving a man power to be diligent, superadds riches as cast in, over and beyond that diligence, as the reward of it. This we see in some merchants, who through diligence having obtained a large stock for trade, God in his good providence vouchsafeth them special hits (as they call good haps), singular overplus advantages that fall out in their way; and thus it is here. And that God increaseth the inward stock of habitual grace within us by gracious diligence in holy actings, I have long understood to be the mind of that in Rom. 6:22, 'If ye be servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness.' To be the servants of God is to be holy; the fruit therefore of serving God is a communication of more holiness. Fruit imports what is of the natural growth of a tree, according to its kind. If the good tree increaseth in bulky holiness, the fruit thereof will be more and larger holiness. And which is strange in nature, the tree will grow bigger in the body and sap of it by how much it bears more fruit. The fruit it brings forth in holy actions causeth the stock to grow more in quantity still greater. The ground I interpret that place thus is, that in the foregone verse 19 it is said that yielding our members servants to righteousness unto righteousness, that is, that our active righteousness in our walkings and obedience, or righteousness acted and exercised, is 'righteousness unto righteousness;' that is, tends to an increase of habitual, intrinsecal righteousness, which is the principle of further acting.

Whereunto I add, that God gives assisting grace in proportion to the measure of grace acquired and gained. He crowns his graces in us with more grace; ten cities to him that had increased his one talent to ten. He crowns habitual strength, gotten by exercise of holiness, with more enlarged strength. And so the apostle might well say of them who through long exercise of grace had acquired much inward grace, that 'ye are strong;' and that in both these senses of a being strong, in comparison to babes.

Nor doth that objection wholly or universally enervate this assertion, viz., that he suffers some in their middle age much to decline and fall away in strength; for still it often in experience proves to be in the issue, that they are recovered to their wonted vigour again, and act more strongly than ever; as Sampson did at last, when his hair was grown again, which was the signal, and as a sacramental token, of his recovering the Spirit again, as it had been before the cutting of it. And it may perhaps prove the truth, that by falls, and great and long languishments, and gradual decays in actings of grace in some middle-aged Christians, it proves there is not so much a decay of the stock itself of habitual strength, in the root and principles of it, but in the exercises of it; such as we see in strong-bodied men, that fall into a consumption, or some other infirmity, that occasions a present languishing, that they become for outward motions as weak as children, when yet the radical strength of their constitution, and of that which they were grown up unto, recovers again, as Samson's hair did, and they die in a far greater spiritual vigour than ever; as Samson at his death was empowered and clothed with a far more mighty strength by the Spirit than ever he had in his whole life, after the recovering of his hair.

Ans. 2. Middle-aged Christians have through long use and experience learned self-emptiness in their acting holiness more, so as to make them not to be so confident they can do this or that, in the strength of grace inherent. And this is a lesson long a-learning, and perhaps more hard to be learned than to go out to Christ for the righteousness of justification. And it is taught by long experience; for as experience breeds hope in the way and course of believing, so experience of having so often been foiled, through going about to act from the strength of inherent grace in ourselves, doth at last teach us the most effectually this dependence on Christ.

And truly there are divers things that concur upon and after our first conversion, that give occasion to us, if not to think it is from the strength of inherent grace received by regeneration that we do then act, yet so far at least as to divert our thoughts from so attentive

looking out of ourselves for a further efficacious assistance from Christ, to work in us both the will and the deed. As,

1. They find in themselves, as other men, a will, which by God is appointed to be the free principle of its own motion and of our actings.

Then, 2, upon regeneration we find a new principle of holiness wrought in us by Christ, which, as another nature, poiseth and inclineth our hearts unto what is holy; and residing in our wills, disposeth them in some measure, though imperfectly, so to act; there being, by reason thereof, a natural agreeableness and suitableness between our hearts and such actions as such, so far as we be regenerated.

3. Christ leaves not this his new creature to itself, but himself with his Spirit dwelling therein cherisheth and acteth it, as the mother doth the child in her womb, and nurseth it as when she hath brought it forth; yet this he doth unknown that it is he that doth all. He is a God that hides himself in these his actings at first, as in other things he useth to do; whether the soul puts forth acts of faith and dependency for his special help in the acting of it, yea or no. Christ bears from the womb as well as to the hoary age, as the prophet Isaiah, under this similitude, expresseth it; and it is said of Ephraim, when he was a child, God holding him up in his arms, taught him to go. In which case, though a child useth his own strength, else it were not a teaching him to go, yet the weakness of his limbs is such, as it is the strength of him who holds him up in the virtue of which he goes; and yet when it is thus holden up, it takes no notice of the other's supporting of it, but is ready to ascribe it chiefly to its own ability, and so to be confident is venturing to go alone, and then it falls. And yet Christ bears us, and carries the lambs, and those which are with young, in his arms; thus assisting, because he would encourage it in our weakness, and also to make a discovery of the quality and kind of this new creature acting itself in us.

And, 4, this new creature thus assisted, being a divine nature, and inclining us, as a nature useth to do, unto good works, to walk in, although we cannot but be sensible that the infusion of that new principle itself has been wholly from the power and efficiency of Christ, and not of ourselves, the new inward frame of our hearts being in a good degree so contrary to what was formerly in the unregenerate estate we had lived in; yet still as to the actings of that new creature, after it is wrought, we are not presently made so sensible and aware of that great power that carries it on, and so not of dependence on Christ without us, as of our Head that influenceth all those our actings also, but are apt not to look an it further than that it is, or as if it were, the pondus and sway of that new creature, which as a new creature carrieth on our wills and affections, as in a natural way, so far as we are regenerated; even as in sinning we had found afore, and do after, that our corrupt inclinations naturally carried us unto the contrary. And this new infused nature we look upon working as a contrary nature to that other of sin, as two contrary streams running cross, as indeed they are. And having been but newly brought acquainted with Christ, that acquaintance begins at first chiefly in our seeking out our righteousness of justification in him, and receiving from him therewith this inherent principle of holiness, which is his image; as both being absolutely necessary to that season and the condition of a new convert, who having come forth newly from a state of sinning with full career and consent of will, and made sensible of sin and damnation, and possessed with fears of hell and wrath, the grudging fits of which we for a long time are not quite rid of; the strength and intention of the mind is swallowed up with these so necessary things, at that present to be had from Christ, as the sole remedy to the present case. And then the Spirit secretly supplying us with that assistance, we by faith should from the first go to him for it, but he hiddenly performing that in us and for us, without our minding it or looking out for it, the Spirit mingleth his power (unperceivably to us) with the activity of our wills in the new creature. And further, we being as then fresh-water soldiers, not trained up enough to the observations of the many ebbings of the stream and the flowings again thereof to be from the

Spirit of Christ, we do not discern his either increasing and raising up the flood, or his withholding so to do, to be the causes of such a variation in our actings, according to his good pleasure.

These things considered, it is no wonder if we be more strangers, for a while at the first, unto this great point in our Christianity (and all of Christ is not learned at once), of this continual dependence on Christ for acting, than we were of his power in regenerating us. For at regeneration we were convinced of that total contrary corruption that had invaded, possessed, and filled our souls, so that we saw no one spiritual good to have been in us; but now the activity of our will being thus furnished anew with that new stock of habitual grace so set up withal, and so vigorously assisted (though insensibly to us) by the aids of the Spirit, we are prone to think that we have a spring of good within ourselves, that bubbles up continually what is good; and so our thoughts are far removed from the sense that we are not able to think one good thought within ourselves, but that all our sufficiency is of God. And although it may be supposed we might more easily be brought to receive the doctrine of this our emptiness and insufficiency to act, yet practically to discern it, so as to set our spirits a-work upon it, and inure our hearts to the exercise of it, it is no wonder if (considering what hath been said to be our case) we be in the course of our spirits apt and inclinable to put much of that hidden assistance the Spirit supplies us with upon the natural tendency and activity of the new creature, as a divine nature in us; ascribing the power and force of the wind we see not, that carries on and drives the stream, unto the natural pondus and propenseness of the stream itself to run that way; till we come to have had the experience of such interchanges, ebbings, and flowings mentioned, and thereby come to see and judge what little strength we of ourselves have, with all our inherent graces, and when left never so little by the Spirit, and his ceasing to act us, and what difference there is when we are enlarged by Christ and his strength, to run the ways of his commandments.

But, 5, there is yet a further thing at the bottom of this matter, and is the ground of our aptness to be misled in this point; which is, that we are prone to it by nature, both that corrupt nature by the fall, yea, and pure nature also, as it was in Adam's first state by creation; for in that pure estate he, and we his posterity, if he had stood, had been under the covenant of works, in all its differences from the tenor of the covenant of grace; whereof this was one part, to work and act from what is in ourselves. And though by conversion we are brought into the covenant of grace, yet the principles of the covenant of works do mightily abide in us, and the secret unperceived influences thereof greatly prevail in us, and at least obstruct us, and keep back our hearts from the clear knowledge, at least practice and exercise, of gospel principles. Although they be by conviction entertained by our judgments, yet the principles of the covenant of works cleave as the skin to our flesh; for they are the law of nature. This needs not to be largely insisted on.

It is evident enough that corrupt nature in men unregenerate, but enlightened and endowed with excellent spiritual gifts, gratis given them, together with some supernatural assistances vouchsafed in, and for the exercise of them in holy duties, doth convert them all, both gifts and assistance, to its own selfish ends predominantly, and from the strength of such ends moving and acting them, they perform what they do in holy things. I need not insist on this neither. But I carry up my demonstration higher, and deduce it from that of pure nature in Adam afore the fall.

1. Now Adam had first a will, that was to be the free inward mover and author of its own motion, and of those imperate acts his will should command to be put forth by him.
2. He had a full and perfect stock of holiness, and of love to God, concreated with and residing in his will, poising it only unto what was holy.

3. He had a concourse (as they speak) or concurrency (which we better understand) of an aid and strength from God, giving sufficient power to will and act what was holy and good; a posse si vellet, a power if he would act holily.

And these he had from God, as due by creation, or, which is all one, by the law of pure nature, which it was meet God should furnish him withal. If he would create such a creature reasonable, it was meet that then God should, at and by virtue of his first creating him, furnish him with all these; especially giving withal promises of life and threatenings of death according to his holy actings, or the contrary. And if we suppose him not sufficiently furnished with all these, his fall or deficiency had not been imputable as sin to him.

Now he that hath those two first principles of a will—1, its being the mover of itself from within itself; and, 2, a complete holiness swaying that will only to what is holy; 3, joined with a power of assistance from God as shall excite the will, and give his will sufficient power to act, if he will,—he may and must be said to act and will from himself when he acts or wills; for the will is his own, the holiness he acts from and with is his own due, and in that respect natural to him by creation-law; and the concurrent assistance from God, that is, so much and so far as to have power to act and to will, is no less his creation-due likewise. And God, in vouchsafing such an assistance requisite to enable him to will, did therein no more for him in his kind—that is, according to the natural law and due of a free-will agent, which was to be its own mover from within itself unto the act—than he did in his concourse with each and every one of his creatures in their actings in their kind, who keep his ordinances to this day, through that concourse God gives them. But man, through his free-will, not using that power, fell by what was purely his own.

But my scope in this recital of these three principles, which may be styled Adam's own strength, due to him by the law of nature, is to shew that these principles of acting from ourselves, naturally sticking in us, as κοινὰ ἐννοιαί, common principles of nature use to do, are

so prevalent, even after we have been entered into the estate of grace, and received the knowledge of Christ, that we are exceeding apt and obnoxious to those principles still, and to be misled and misguided by them in the actings of grace, and to go their way in seeking of salvation; and that, therefore, it is no wonder if new converts do so, when they find they have a will that must still be the immediate mover within itself of its own action now when regenerate; and that by regeneration they have a new principle also of holiness, the very same for the bulk and matter of it that Adam was created in after the image of God, Col. 3:10, and find that principle to be fitted, suited, and disposed agreeably to every good and holy work; and though when they act, and have efficacious assistance, that works the will and the deed in them, they have it all from Christ living in them, effectually working in their hearts, beyond giving them a bare posse, power to act holily. Yet this exceeding greatness of his power they discover not, and therefore, Eph. 1, the apostle prays that the eyes of their minds may be more and more enlightened, to know the exceeding greatness of his power that works in them whilst they act holily and spiritually, and yet conveying its influences so hiddenly, that they are apt to think it the efficacy of a new nature. For they finding they are, though supernaturally, yet secretly assisted by the Spirit in holy ways, so as to think and to find that it is as a nature in them, that they do it naturally with delight, &c.,—such is the suitability between their hearts and the duties of holiness, when they are drawn out to them,—I say it is the less wonder that their hearts should think they act in that manner that Adam did from this strength as if it were their own (though, indeed, wholly received), and from themselves; or that they should attempt to act from those principles within them, and put so much confidence therein, so as to omit to look out for a continual renewed assistance from Christ, their new constituted head. We see the like ensnarement lies in the point of justification. Men find they have good works, perform holy duties, &c., and the Scriptures term it a righteousness, and the principle of pure nature in Adam having been, that he was justified by that righteousness of and in himself, how doth this principle, because it is the law of nature, adhere and' cleave to men's souls, and caused Paul

to be afraid of his own righteousness, lest he should be found in it; so that it is a long time that believers stick in those weeds clinging about them, and obstructing them in their way of believing on Christ's righteousness alone. But so it falls out, that when they have, through long and often renunciation of their own, and wonted endeared embracements of Christ's righteousness alone, got free of that entanglement, they yet remain longer encumbered and obstructed in this other I treat of, of acting in their own strength. And as in a tree that is to be pulled up by the roots, after that some greater roots, whereby it was naturally fastened in the earth, are loosened and cut, yet it will stick still by some other lesser fibres, smaller strings that have no less holdfast than those other had, even so it is here. And till all whereby we cleave to old Adam's state be broke, which is long a-doing by degrees, we are not grown up into that completeness in Christ which we ought to have, and which union with Christ affordeth. And although I dare not say the Holy Ghost may not secretly act them efficaciously beyond these principles, whilst they discern it not, and so help them to overcome; and that the acts of holiness which the Holy Ghost draws forth of them, according to these principles, may not be acceptable to God, being in reality and truth from the image of Christ wrought in them by Christ; and Christ effectually working in them, though they have not the cognizance of it, nor recourse to him for it, as hath been the case of many true professors; yet still there is this wanting to make them strong indeed, to act steadily and constantly.

And this hath been the case of many true professors at first for some time, and was of the apostle Peter, till by the woeful experience of so dreadful a fall he saw his own utter dependency on Christ, as without him he could do nothing, and therefore was to abide in him; as Christ in his last sermons a little before had instructed him, which he then understood not. And his sin lay not in this, that he had not a true and real resolution at that present time never to forsake his master (yea, to me it seems certain that it was a resolution sprung from out of true grace, and cleaving to Christ at that time, and drawn forth by the Spirit, and it was not feigned; and take that purpose of his

abstractedly considered, and it was acceptable so far); but his sin lay: 1. In that he discerned not that it was Christ and his Spirit who was the author thereof at that present, and was to be the maintainer of it and finisher of it in him, and ought to have, in the sense of his own insufficiency, prayed as David for the people: 1 Chron. 29:18, 'Keep, O Lord, this purpose in the heart of thy servants.' 2. His sin lay in the confidence he had for the future, or time to come, that he should ever retain that Spirit, whereas a man is no further holy than at the instant God makes him so to be. 3. In vain boasting of his present strength comparatively to all others: 'If all men forsake thee, yet not I;' and for this cause Christ let him fall, with this reserve, praying his faith might not fail, that he might learn, what Paul did in another case, not to trust in himself, but in Christ to strengthen him. And in like manner thus it is and hath been with many professors, till in the end, through experience of their own inability, they come to see and know what it is to have Christ a supernatural head to them as members, for motion, and a spiritual root to them as branches; and thus as branches to bring forth fruit in and by him, Philip. 1, and in him all their fruit is to be found, and therefore juice, and sap, and strength to bring forth, is to be fetched from him. And that therefore they in spiritual actings are to walk in an habitual self-emptiness, and a daily renunciation of this active power of their wills, as strengthened by inherent grace alone, though wrought in them by Christ, and still to be saying within themselves that which Isaiah prophesied of, 'One shall say, In the Lord have I strength,' Isa. 45:24, and sensibly to acknowledge that that power that is in Christ as their head united to them must give their effectual casting stroke in holy actings, and carry on the will to them with power. And this is the strength the apostle Paul, Philip. 4, and John here speaks of, which Christians, till grown and beaten out of self-confidence in their wills and inherent grace, do not learn sufficiently, and for want of this they come so much to fall, as Peter did, God having pronounced that in his own strength no man shall prevail. Now the experience of the saints' failings, through the want of these things, as also, on the contrary, the experience positive, that when they are weak in respect of their own strength, Christ's power doth rest upon them; these two

experiments, besides other lessons given by Christ in time, cause middle-aged Christians to live in a greater dependence upon Christ's strength to be communicated, as without whom they find they can do nothing, and that all their fruit is found in him. And this, I say, caused the apostle here in both respects, whether of habitual grace or assisting efficacious acting grace, to say of them, Ye are strong.

For it is a certain truth, that the more we walk in a constant sense of our own weakness, and dependence and waiting for Christ's strength to be put forth in us, the more strong we are; not in ourselves, but as the coney is in their rock, as Solomon says. And this justly and deservedly is to be said in comparison of babes, who, like young boys in fighting with their fellows, have more eagerness and stomach, but find themselves weak, and easily overcome; whereas to say in our hearts, as David did against Goliath, 'I come against thee in the name of the Lord of hosts,' confirms our strength.

Ans. 3. God vouchsafes occasional helps and assistances, according as our temptations do grow and increase, according to the rule of Paul the apostle, that as his distresses abounded, so his consolations abounded also. And this proves true in temptations to sin, our greatest sufferings, as well as in any other. Now God having (as the doctrine was) allotted temptations greater to middle-aged Christians than unto babes, hence he is graciously pleased in the end and issue to afford strength to overcome; and in the view of this the apostle might deservedly say of them rather, 'Ye are strong.'

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