

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY



WHEREFORE LET THEM THAT SUFFER ACCORDING TO
THE WILL OF GOD, COMMIT THEIR SOULS TO HIM IN
WELL-DOING, AS TO A FAITHFUL CREATOR.—1 PET. 4:19.

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by Richard Sibbes

Table of Contents

[The Saint's Safety in Evil Times - Psalm 7:14](#)

[The Saint's Safety in Evil Times - 2 Timothy. 4:17, 18](#)

[The Church's Visitation Discovering the many difficulties and trials of Gods Saints on earth - 1 Peter 4:17-19.](#)

[The Ungodly's Misery - 1 Peter. 4:17.](#)

[The Difficulty of Salvation - 1 Peter 4:19.](#)

[The Saint's Hiding=Place in the Evil Day- 1 Peter. 4:19.](#)

[The Saint's Hiding-Place in the Evil Day- 1 Peter. 4:19, Part II](#)

THE SAINT'S SAFETY IN EVIL TIMES

Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth a lie.—Ps. 7:14.

THESE be the words of David. The title shews the occasion, which was the malicious slander and cruel practices of Ahithophel or Shimei, in the time of Absalom's rebellion. The words express the conception, birth, carriage, and miscarriage, of a plot against David. In which you may consider, 1. What his enemies did. 2. What God did. 3. What we all should do: his enemies' intention, God's prevention, and our duty; his enemies' intention, he travaileth with iniquity, and conceiveth mischief; God's prevention, he brought forth a lie; our duty, Behold.

His enemy's intention or action is set out by proportion to a bodily conception. The Holy Ghost delights to present unto us the plots of wicked men under the resemblance of a bodily conception and birth, by reason of the analogy between both. The mind hath its conceptions as well as the body. The seed of this conception was some wicked thought either raised up by the heart itself, or cast in by Satan, that envious man. Not only Wicked men, but their devices, are the seed of the serpent. The understanding was the womb to conceive, the will to consent. The conception was the hatching of a mischievous plot; the quickening of it was the resolution and taking it in hand; the impregnation, growing big, and travailing of it, was the carriage of it the due time; the birth itself was the execution expected, but yet miscarried and stillborn. They intended the destruction of David, but brought forth their own ruin.

1. Quo minor necessitas peccandi, eo majus peccatum. For the conception, observe the aggravation of the sin, he conceiveth. (1.) He was not put upon it, or forced unto it; it was voluntary. The more liberty we have not to sin, makes our sin the greater. He did not this in passion, but in cold blood. The less will, less sin. Involuntarium minuit de ratione peccati. Here could be no plea, because nothing is more voluntary than plotting. Where the will sets the wit a work to devise, and the body to execute mischief, it shews the spreading and largeness of sin in any man; for the will being the desire of the whole man, carries the whole man with it.

Voluntas appetitus totius suppositi. Besides, when a man sins voluntarily, there is less hope of amendment, because his will is not counselable; if the defect were in the understanding of a man, then sound direction might set it right; but where the will is set upon a thing, and is the only reason of itself (as when a man will, because he wills) there counsel will not be heard; for, tell a roving person that he is out of the way, he knows it well enough already, and means not to take your direction; but tell an honest traveller that ignorantly mistakes his way, and he will thank you. So tell a popish atheist that he is in an error, he heeds it not, because he is a papist for bye-ends, not in judgment, and resolves to be so, bring what reasons you can, his hope being to rise that way. Though the will follow some kind of understanding, yet it is in the power of the will what the understanding shall consult and determine of; and, therefore, unless the malice of the will be first taken away by grace, it will always bias our judgments the wrong way.

2. Neither was this plot only voluntary, but with delight, because it was a conception; births are with more pain. Delight carries the whole strength and marrow of the soul with it; much of the soul is where delight is.

3. Again, it was a spiritual sin. The spirit of a man is the chief seat of God's good Spirit, wherein he frames all holy devices and good desires. The spirit is either the best or the worst part in a man. Here Satan builds his nest and forges all his designs, his masterpieces, his powder-plots. The chief curse or blessing of God is upon the spirits of men. If men be raised never so high in the world, yet if they are given to a malicious and devilish spirit, they are under a most heavy judgment, carrying Satan's stamp upon them. Diseases that seize upon the spirits of men, as pestilential diseases, &c., are more deadly than those that seize upon the humours. Spiritual wickednesses are the most desperate wickednesses. Sins are more judged by the mind than by the fact.

4. And as it was a spiritual sin, so it was artificial. There was a great deal of art and cunning in it; and in evil things, the more art, the worse. Art commends other things, but it makes sin the more sinful. *Doli non sunt doli, ni astu colas.* When men are witty to work mischief, and wise to do evil, then they are evil in grain. It is best to be a bungler at this occupation. Ingenuous men carry their hatred open; but this plot was spun with so fine a thread as could not easily be discerned.

5. Again, they were very diligent in it, for it was a curious web. And as in weaving, head and hand, eye and foot, all go together, so here they mustered up all their wits. Judas is awake when Peter sleeps.

6. And which is worst of all, they were so well pleased with the brat of their own brain that they travailed of it. It increases guilt when men upon view and sight of their plot grow so far in love with it that they long to be delivered of it. The more the soul dwells upon any sinful plot, the more estrangement there is from God; because the happiness of the soul consists in cleaving to God the fountain of all good. The more deliberation any man takes in sinning, the more his soul is pleased with wickedness. A heart long exercised in sin will admit of no impression of grace; for the spirits are so absorbed with other designs that they are dry and dead to better things. Many thousands are in hell at this day for suffering their spirits to shove them too far into sin. Many suck out the delight of sin before they act it, as Esau pleased himself by thinking 'the day of mourning for his father would come, wherein he might be revenged of his brother,' Gen. 27:41.

7. Yet this sin was not only spiritual and imminent, but transient likewise. It reached against the second table, and, therefore, against the principles of nature, and against society, out of which God gathers a church. There was false witness and murder in this sin. In this respect it is that the sins of the second table are greater than the sins of the first, because they are against more clear light. A natural conscience hath a clearer eye in these things. Here is light

upon light; for both grace and nature condemn these sins. Yet for order in sinning, the rise of all sin against man, is our sinning against God first, for none sin against men, but they sin against God in the first place, whereupon the breach of the first commandment is the ground of the breach of all the rest; for if God were set up in the heart in the first place, there parents would be honoured, and all kind of injury suppressed for conscience sake. The Scripture gives this as a cause of the notorious courses of wicked men, 'that God is not in all their thoughts,' Ps. 10:4. They forget there is a God of vengeance and a day of reckoning. The fool would needs enforce upon his heart, 'that there is no God,' Ps. 14:1, and what follows: 'Corrupt they are, there is none doth good, they eat up my people as bread,' &c. They make no more bones of devouring men and their estates, than they make conscience of eating a piece of bread. What a wretched condition hath sin brought man unto, that the great God who 'filleth heaven and earth,' Jer. 23:24, should yet have no place in the heart which he hath especially made for himself! The sun is not so clear as this truth, that God is, for all things in the world are because God is. If he were not, nothing could be. It is from him that wicked men have that strength they have to commit sin, therefore sin proceeds from atheism, especially these plotting sins; for if God were more thought on, he would take off the soul from sinful contrivings, and fix it upon himself.

But by whom and against whom was this plotting? by children of the church, not uncircumcised Philistines. Opposition is bitterest betwixt those that are nearest, as betwixt the flesh and the spirit in the same soul, between hypocrites and true-hearted Christians in the same womb of the church. Brethren they were, but false brethren; children, but strange children. Children by the mother's side, all bred in the same church, but had not the Same father. Children by the mother's side only, are commonly persecutors. Popish spirits count it presumption to know who is their father, which shews them to be bastard children. The greatest sins of all are committed within the church, because they are committed against the greatest light; whereupon that great sin against the Holy Ghost

(which, like Jonah his whale, devours all at once) is not committed out of the church at all. Oh! beloved, how should we reverence the blessed truth of God and gracious motions of his Spirit! If it be sin to kill infants in the womb, what is it to kill the breed of the blessed Spirit in our hearts!

But against whom was this plot directed? Even against David, a prophet and a king, a kingly prophet, a man after God's own heart, 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22, though not according to theirs; a sacred person, and therefore inviolable. 'Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,' Ps. 105:15, was a prohibition from heaven. David was a man eminent in goodness, and goodness invested in greatness is a fair mark for envy to shoot at. What men for sloth care not to do, for weakness cannot, or for pride will not, imitate, that they malign, sitting cursing and fretting at the bottom of the hill, at those which they see go above them, whose life giveth witness against them. When goodness shines forth, it presently meets with envy, until it come to the height to be above envy, as the sun at the highest hath no shadow. Envy hath an ill eye. It cannot look on goodness without grief. The spirit that is in us lusteth after envy. Pursuing of goodness in men, and men for goodness, is a sin of a deep dye, because whosoever hates a man for goodness, hates goodness itself; and he that hates goodness itself hates it most in the fountain, and so becomes a hater of God himself; and if Christ were in such a man's power he should escape no better than his members do. For Christ is joined either in love or hatred with his cause and children. He and his have common friends and common enemies. Men think they have to deal with silly men, but they shall one day find that they have to deal with the great Lord of heaven and earth.

But what was the manner of carrying their design? This cruel plot was cunningly carried, for they kill him in his good name first, and accuse him as an enemy to the state, that so their slanders may make way for violence. Satan is a liar first, and then a murderer, yea therefore a liar that he may be a murderer the better. He is first a

serpent, then a liar; and first a lion couchant, then a lion rampant. He teaches his scholars the same method. Cruelty marcheth furiously, and under warrant with privilege, when it hath slander to countenance it. Taint men once in the opinion of the world, and then they lie open to any usage. It is not only safe but glorious to oppose such, and thus virtue comes to have the reward due to wickedness, and passes under public hatred. The open cause and pretence is one, and the inward moving cause another, which perhaps lies hid till the day of 'revelation of the secrets of all flesh,' Rom. 2:5, as in a clock the wheels and the hand appear openly, but the weights that move all are out of sight.

But what course took David herein? Innocency was his best apology, and when that would not do, then patience. He saw God in the wrongs he suffered, 'God bade Shimei,' &c., 2 Sam. 16:10. But this invites more injuries, therefore by prayer he lays open his soul to God. David's prayer prevailed more in heaven than Ahithophel's policy could do on earth. Carnal men are pregnant and full of wiles and fetches* to secure themselves, but godly men have one only refuge and hiding-place, yet that is a great one, namely, to run to God by prayer, as to their rock and tower of defence in their distresses. From all this that hath been said there ariseth these conclusions:—

First, that even the best of God's saints are liable to be the subjects of the plots of wicked men. (1.) From an antipathy between the two contrary seeds in them. (2.) Because God will not have his children love the world, therefore he suffers the world to hate them. (3.) They are strangers here, and therefore no wonder if they find strange entertainment from them that think themselves at home. There hath ever been from the beginning of the world a continual conspiracy of Satan and his instruments against God and goodness. Emperors and kings became Christians, but Satan never yet became a Christian, but hath always bestirred himself to maintain the first division, and never yet wanted a strong faction in the world.

Secondly, observe that it is the character of a man wicked in an high degree, to contrive wickedness. The reason is: (1.) Because it is a disposition of such as are given up by God to a reprobate sense, and it is reckoned among other vile sins, that they are full of maliciousness, and inventors of ill, &c. A son of Belial carries a forward heart and devises mischief, Prov. 6:14. (2.) It shews that malice is so connatural to such, that they cannot sleep unless they cause some to fall; 'wickedness comes from the wicked' (as naturally and speedily), Prov. 4:16, as poison from a spider. (3.) It argues such kind of men work out of a vicious habit, which is a stamping of a second ill nature upon the former, whenas their hearts are exercised to do mischief. (4.) It shews they are of the devil's trade, whose only work is to hurt and mischief all he can, those that are broken loose from him. Certainly such people as these are the children of the devil in an higher degree than ordinary. It is said, when Judas began to betray Christ, 'the devil entered into him,' Luke 22:3. He was the child of the devil in some degree before, but now the devil took stronger possession of him; his unnatural treason did in some sort change him into the very form of the devil. When Simon Magus sought to turn away the deputy from the faith, St Paul had no fitter terms for him than to style him, 'Thou full of all subtlety and mischief, and child of the devil,' Acts 13:10. And indeed there is no disposition so contrary to the sweet Spirit of God, which is a Spirit of love and goodness, as this is.

Use 1. Learn hence therefore, as you love God, to abhor this hateful disposition. The serpent indeed was 'wiser than all the beasts of the field,' Gen. 3:1, yet when he became an instrument of mischief, he was cursed above all the rest, Gen. 3:14. Satan labours to serve his turn of the best wits; but what greater curse can befall a man than to serve the basest creature in the basest service, and that with our best abilities? Men of a devilish spirit carry God's curse under zeal,* yea, they carry the devil in their brain, in all their works of darkness; for, alas, what should the subtlety of foxes, and fierceness of lions, and malice of devils do, in an heart dedicated to Christ? Such men work from a double principle, the illness of their own disposition

within, and Satan going with the tide of that, whose chief labour is to make a prey of men of the best parts, that by them he may either snare others, or else vex them that have so much wit or grace as not to be caught by his baits. This is a course contrary to humanity as we are men, contrary to ingenuity[†] as we are civil men, and contrary to religion as we are Christian men, and plainly argueth that such persons are led with another spirit than their own, even by the prince that ruleth in the air.

Our care and duty, therefore, should be to submit our spirits to the sweet guidance and government of God's good Spirit, to be contented that every device and imagination of our hearts should be captivated to higher and better reasons than our own.

We are not wise enough of ourselves that our own wills and wit should be our first movers. Everything is perfected by subjection to a superior; where there should be a subordination to higher wisdom, there to withdraw our understanding and wills, is mere rebellion. That which the prophet speaks is too true of many in these days, 'Thy wisdom hath made thee to rebel,' Is. 47:10. Such are too wise to be saved.

Use 2. We need not be ashamed to learn some things of our very enemies. If they be so pragmatrical for evil, why should not we be as active for good? I am sure we serve a better Master. True love is full of inventions; it will be devising of good things. So soon as ever our nature is changed, the stream of the soul is turned another way, the bent of it is for God. Alas, it is a small commendation to be only passively good, and it is a poor excuse to be only passively ill. A good Christian thinks it not enough to see good done by others, but labours to have a hand in it himself; and he that suffers evil to be done, which he might have opposed and hindered, brings the guilt thereof upon his own head. 'Curse you Meroz,' saith God, 'for not helping the Lord against the mighty,' &c., Jud. 5:23. What shall we think then of those that help the mighty against the Lord, that cast oil to kindle where they should cast water to quench, that inflame

the rage of great persons, when they should labour to reduce all to a moderation? Of this spirit was that apostate which stirred up the emperor to kill man, woman, and child of the Protestants, with all their kindred and alliance, fearing lest any living should revenge the other's quarrel.*

We see God hath stooped so low as to commend his cause unto us, as if he stood in need of our help, and usually what good he doth to us is conveyed by men like ourselves; therefore, we should labour to appear on his side, and own his cause and children. In the house of God there be vessels of all kinds. Some are of more honourable use than others. Some make the very times and places good where they live, by an influence of good. Others, as malignant planets, threaten misery and desolation where-ever they come. These are the calamities of the times. Men may know whether they be vessels of mercy or no, by the use they are put to; the basest of people are fit enough to be executioners; the worst of men are good enough to be rods of God's wrath. How much better is it to be full of goodness, as the Scripture speaks of Josiah and Hezekiah, &c.! Indeed, what is a man, but his goodness? Such men live desired, and die lamented. Yea, their very 'name is as the ointment of the apothecary poured out,' Cant. 1:3. They leave a sweet savour in the church behind them.

Now I come to their miscarriage. They brought forth a lie; a lie in regard of their expectation, their hopes deceiving them, but a just defeating in regard of God. It was contrary to their desire, but agreeable to God's justice. Neither were they disappointed only so as to miss of what they intended, but they met with that misery they intended not; yea, even with that very misery which they thought to bring upon David.

This defeating ariseth by five steps: 1, they were disappointed; 2, they fell into danger; 3, they were contrivers of this danger themselves; 4, there was a penal proportion, they fell into the same danger which they plotted for another; 5, they were a means of

doing good to him whom they devised evil against; and raised him, whom they thought to pull down. David sped the better for Shimei's malice, and Ahithophel's policy. See all these five likewise in the example of Haman and Mordecai. 1, Haman missed of his plot; 2, he fell into danger; 3, he fell into the same danger which he contrived himself; 4, he fell into the same danger which he contrived for Mordecai; and 5, was the means of Mordecai's advancement. It had been enough to have woven a spider's web, which is done with a great deal of art, and yet comes to nothing; but to hatch a cockatrice's egg, that brings forth a viper which stings to death, this is a double vexation. Yet thus God delighteth to catch the 'wise in the imagination of their own hearts,' Luke 1:51, and to pay them in their own coin. The wicked carry a lie in their right hand; for they trust in man, which is but a lie; and, being liars themselves too, no marvel if their hopes prove deceitful, so that, while they sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind, Hosea 8:7.

Reason. (1.) The reason of God's dealing in this kind is, first, in regard of himself. God will not lose the glory of any of his attributes; he will be known to be God only wise, and this he will let appear, then especially, when wicked men think to overreach him.

(2.) Secondly, in regard of his tender care over his children, they are as the apple of his eye; and as they are very near, so they are very dear to him. They cost him dear; they are his jewels, and he gave a Jewel of infinite price for them. He is interested in their quarrels, and they in his. If they be in any misery, God's bowels yearn for them. He is always awake, and never slumbereth, as we see in the parable, the master of the house waked while the servants slept, Mat. 25:1, et seq. God's eye is upon them for good. He hath them written in the 'palms of his hands, Isa. 49:16. Christ carries them always in his breast. Christ, who is the husband of his church, is Lord of heaven and earth, and hath all power committed to him, Mat. 28:18, John 17:2, and will rule in the midst of his enemies. He is the only Monarch of the world, and makes both all things and persons serviceable to his own end and his church's good. He is

higher than the highest. Satan, the god of the world, 2 Cor. 4:4, is but his and his church's slave. All things are the church's, to further its best good.

(3.) Another reason is, the insolence of the enemies, whose fierceness turns at length to God's praise, Ps. 9:16; for as he is a just Lord, so he will be known to be so by executing of judgment. It shall appear that there is 'a God that judgeth the earth,' Ps. 58:11.

(4.) Again, God's children will give him no rest. When he seems to sleep, they will awake him with their prayers. 'They will not let him go without a blessing from him,' Gen. 32:26. They will prevail by importunity, as the widow in the gospel, Luke 18:5. Having to deal with a just God, in a just cause, against common enemies, his as well as theirs, they bind 'him with his own promises; and he is content to be bound, because he hath bound himself first. He will not lose that part of his title whereby he is known to be a 'God hearing prayers,' Ps. 65:2.

Obj. But it will be objected that wicked men do not only set themselves against the people of God, but prevail over them, even to the scorn of the beholders. Tully could say 'The gods shew how much they esteem of the Jewish nation, by suffering them so often to be conquered.'* Hath not antichrist a long time prevailed, and was it not foretold that the beast should prevail? Rev. 13. Where is, then, the bringing forth of a lie?

Ans. I answer, (1.) the enemies have power, but no more than is given them of God, as Christ answered Pilate, John 19:11. They prevail indeed, but it is for a time, a limited time, and that a short one too, ten days, &c., Rev. 2:10: and what is this to that vast time of their torment? The time will come, when there shall be no more time for them to persecute in.

(2.) Besides, even when they do prevail, it is but over part only, not over the whole. They prevail over persons, it may be, not over the

cause: that stands impregnable. They prevail over men's lives, perhaps, but not over their spirits, which is that they chiefly aim at. A true Christian conquers when he is conquered. Stephen prevailed over his enemies when they seemed to prevail over him. God put glory upon him, and a spirit of glory into him, Acts 7.

(3.) The church's enemies may prevail in some place, but then, as the sea, they lose in another. The more they cut down God's people, as Pharaoh did the Israelites, the more they multiply; and the more they are kept straight,[†] the more they spread and are enlarged. God suffers the enemies of his truth to prevail, in some passages, to harden their hearts the more for destruction, as Pharaoh prevailed in oppressing the Israelites, and Herod in killing John, &c. But yet, lay the beginning and the end together, and then we shall see they prevailed not, and so far as they did prevail, it tended only to hasten their own ruin, because the present success lifts up the heart. We see antichrist prevailed, but spiritually, only over those 'whose names were not written in the Lamb's book of life,' Rev. 13:7, and outwardly over the saints; for so it was prefixed, Rev. 18:24, than he should make war with the saints, and overcome them: and this was objected as a fiery dart against the Christians in those times, that therefore they might think their cause naught, because they were so prevailed over;* but they, by help of the Spirit of God, understood so much of the Revelation as concerned themselves, and used this as a weapon, confessing that they were the conquered people of God, but yet the people of God still. But the chief stay and satisfaction of the soul herein, is to look to the day of the righteous judgment of God, when we shall see all promises performed, all threatenings executed, and all enemies trodden for ever under Christ and his church's feet.

Use 1. This is a point of marvellous comfort, when Israel can say, 'They have afflicted me from my youth, but yet they have not prevailed over me,' Ps. 129:1. The gates of hell may set themselves against the church, but shall not prevail. The church is not ruled by man's counsel. We neither live nor die at man's appointment. Our

lives are not in our own hands, or Satan's, or our enemies', but in God's. They can do no more, they shall do no less, than God will, who is our life, and the length of our days. God may give way a while, that the 'thoughts of many may be revealed,' Luke 2:35, and that his glory may shine the more in raising his children, and confounding his enemies; but he will put a period in his due time, and that is the best time. There is a day of Jacob's trouble, when his enemies say, 'This is Sion, whom none regards,' Jer. 30:7; but God sets bounds both to the time of his children's trouble, and to the malice of the wicked. 'Their rod shall not rest over-long upon the back of the righteous,' Ps. 125:3. God will put a hook into the nostrils of these leviathans, and draw them which way he pleaseth.

Use 2. Again, we see here that mischievous attempts are successful in the end; for did ever any harden themselves against God and prosper long? Let Cain speak, let Pharaoh, Haman, Ahithophel, Herod; let the persecutors of the church for the first two hundred years; let all that ever bore ill-will towards Sion, speak, and they will confess they did but kick against the pricks, and dash against the rocks. The greatest torment of the damned spirit is, that God turns all his plots for the good of those he hates most. He tempted man to desire to become like God, Gen 3:5, that so he might ruin him; but God became man, and so restored him. God serveth himself of this archpolitician and all his instruments; they are but executioners of God's will while they rush against it. Joseph's brethren sold him that they might not worship him, and that was the very means whereby they came at length to worship him. God delights to take the oppressed party's part. Wicked men cannot do God's children a greater pleasure than to oppose them, for by this means they help to advance them.

Why wicked plots miscarry. The ground of the miscarriage of wicked plots is, that Satan and his, maintain a damned cause, and their plots are under a curse. Every one that prays, 'Thy kingdom come,' prays by consequence against them as opposers of it; and how can the men and plots of so many curses but miscarry, and prove but as

the untimely fruit of a woman? They are like the grass on the house-top, which perks above the corn in the field, but yet no man prays for a blessing upon it. When men come by a goodly corn-field, every one is ready to say, God bless this field, &c. Beloved, it is a heavier thing than atheistical spirits think of, to be under the curse of the church; for as God blesseth out of Sion, so usually the heaviest curses come out of Sion. Woe be to the Herods and Julians of the world, when the church, either directly or indirectly, prays against them.

Use 3. This is a ground of staying the souls of God's people in seeming confusion of things. There is an harmony in all this discord. God is fitting his people for a better condition even when they are at the worst, and is hardening and preparing the wicked for confusion, even when they are at the best. 'The wicked practise against the righteous, but God laugheth them to scorn,' Ps. 2:4; for he seeth all their plottings, and his day is a-coming. Whilst they are digging pits for others, there is a pit a-digging and a grave a-making for themselves. They have a measure to make up, and a treasure to fill, which at length will be broken open, which, methinks, should take off them which are set upon mischief from pleasing themselves in their plots. Alas! they are but plotting their own ruin, and building a Babel which will fall upon their own heads. If there were any commendation in plotting, then that great plotter of plotters, that great engineer, Satan, would go beyond us all, and take all the credit from us. But let us not envy Satan and his in their glory. They had need of something to comfort them. Let them please themselves with their trade. The day is coming wherein the daughter of Sion shall laugh them to scorn. There will be a time wherein it shall be said, 'Arise, Sion, and thrash,' Micah 4:13. And usually the delivery of God's children is joined with the destruction of his enemies; Saul's death, and David's deliverance; the Israelites' deliverance, and Egyptians' drowning. The church and her opposites are like the scales of a balance; when one goes up, the other goes down.

Haman's wife had learned this, that if her husband began once to fall before the Jews, he should surely fall. Wicked men have an hour, and they will be sure to take it; and God hath his hour too, and will be as sure to take that. The judgments of the wicked are mercies to the church. So saith David, 'He slew mighty kings, Og king of Bashan, for his mercy endureth for ever,' &c., Ps. 136:20.

God hath but two things in the world that he much regardeth; his truth, and his church, begotten by his truth;* and shall we think that he will suffer long, wretched men who turn that wit and power which they have from him against his truth and church? No, assuredly; but he will give them up by that very wit of theirs, to work their own destruction; they shall serve their turn most whom they hate most. God sits in heaven, and laughs them to scorn. Shall God laugh, and we cry? They take counsel together on earth, but God hath a counsel in heaven that will overthrow all their counsels here. Mark the bitter expressions in Scripture, 'Why do the heathen rage,' Ps. 2:1, without fear or wit? 'Go to now, saith God, gather a council,' &c., Isa. 8:9. Beloved, it goes to the heart of proud persons to be scorned, especially in the miscarriage of that which they count their masterpiece; they had rather be counted devils than fools. Let us work wisely, saith Pharaoh, when he was never more fool, Exod. 2:10. They usurp upon God, and promise themselves great matters for the time to come, whereas that is only God's prerogative, and they neither know what the womb of their counsels, nor what the womb of to-morrow, may bring forth. That which they are big of may prove an abortive, or a viper to consume the womb that bred it. 'Go to now,' saith the prophet, 'all ye that kindle a fire: walk in the light of your fire, but take this of me, you shall lie down in sorrow,' &c., Isa. 51:11. The Scripture is full of such expostulations and upbraidings. 'Man is become like one of us, saith God,' Gen. 3:22. When men will have a way of their own, and think themselves wiser than God, then it stands upon God's honour to outwit them. 'Yet God is wise,' saith the prophet, Isa. 31:2. You think to go beyond God. Deceive not yourselves. God is wise, and you shall find him to be so. He hath a way to go beyond you. Do not many men spin a fine

thread, and weave a fair web, when by their turnings and devices they turn themselves into hell? 'Woe be to them that dig deep,' saith the prophet, 'and think to hide their counsels from the Lord,' Hosea 9:2, 3. God hath an eye to see into the most secret and dark conveyances of business. God hath a key to open the closet of their hearts, let them be never so close locked up. Oh, that men would more fear this all-seeing eye of God, and be wise for themselves, and not against themselves. It is a miserable wisdom when men are wise to work their own ruin. Beloved, when men have had all their plots, God hath a plot still beyond them. He takes them failing in something or other. Their devices are like a curious clock; if the least thing be out of frame, all is marred. God suffers them to spin a fine thread a great while, and at length cuts the web, and there is an end. And they may thank themselves for all this, for they carry a justification of God in their own breasts. They perish because they will perish; and this will be the torment of all torments to graceless persons, that they pulled destruction upon themselves. Malice blinds the understanding in Satan and his instruments; for, if their malice were not above their wit, would they, to gratify their ill affections, knowingly rush into the displeasure of God, and into such courses as will unavoidably bring their ruin? Malice drinks up the greatest part of its own poison. 'His own iniquity shall take the wicked himself,' saith Solomon, and he shall be holden with the cords of his own sin,' Prov. 5:22.

This may be enlarged to all sinful courses. Every sinner worketh a deceitful work, and bringeth forth a lie. Augustine saith well, every sin is a lie (a). Men would be happy, yet they will not live so as they may be happy; what more deceitful than this? It will be the complaint of every sinner at length, that was Eve's, the 'serpent hath deceived me,' Gen. 3:13. It was St Paul's complaint, Rom. 8:8, and it will be the complaint of all sinful wretches at the last day. What hath pride profited us? what can the favour of men, upon whom we bear ourselves, do us good now? Sin promiseth us contentment, continuance, secrecy, full satisfaction, &c., but doth it make good this? Were ever any, when the beginning and ending was laid

together, established by wickedness? Take it from God himself (we have a commission to speak it), 'Say, it shall not go well with the wicked, though they escape an hundred times,' Eccl. 8:12, 13, yet it is but a reprieve for some further service which God hath to do by them. 'Be not deceived, Gold is not mocked,' Gal. 6:7. When we can be more subtle than the devil, or more strong than God, we may think to thrive by sin. Can we think God will alter the course of divine justice for us? had we not better believe this than find it so hereafter? Beloved, hell is for those to feel that will not believe. Certain it is, that those who will sin, notwithstanding God's justice, shall be severely punished, notwithstanding his mercy. God is not more peremptory in any one thing than in this, 'If any man bless himself in an ill way, my wrath shall smoke against him,' Deut. 29:19, 20; therefore it is a good prayer, Lord, give me not over to lying, that is, not to trust in that which will lie and deceive me.

This is the unhappiness of us ministers, all other professions are believed when they discover danger, but 'who believeth our report?' Isa. 53:1. We are men's 'enemies, because we tell them the truth,' Gal. 4:16; we labour to take away the sweet morsels from men, their Herodias (b), and to divide betwixt men and their sins, which they love better than their souls. No creature but man, loves that which will be its own bane. Only wretched man seeks happiness in the way to misery, and heaven in the way to hell. I beseech you therefore, as you would not be deceived, (as indeed who would?) take heed of the deceitful works of darkness. Satan that tempts us is but a lying spirit (which he is not ashamed to confess), 1 Kings 22:22, and sin is like unto him. What got Ahab by his vineyard? Judas by his thirty pieces of silver? what got Haman, and so of the rest, by their sins at the last? Men are usually ashamed of an ill bargain, because the very thought thereof upbraids them with weakness and folly. Whatever we get by sin for the present, it will prove the worst bargain that ever we made. Oh, therefore, let us use our wits and parts to better purpose; if we will needs be plotting, let us plot for eternity; that is worth the plotting for. Let us plot how to avoid Satan's plot. Our time is short, opportunity, the flower of time, shorter. Our talents

are many, our accounts strict, our judge impartial. Let us be 'sowing to the Spirit,' Gal. 6:8; let us labour to be like our Judge, who went about doing his Father's work, John 17:4, and came to destroy the works of the devil, 1 John 3:8. Oh, beloved, shall we build up that which Christ came to destroy? All his miracles tended to good; he wrought the salvation of those that wrought his destruction; he shed his blood for those that shed his blood. Satan is all for mischief, and rather than he will not do hurt, he is content to be set about drowning of swine, Mark 5:14. And such are all those that are led with his spirit, men witty to destroy and acute to malice others, who take a great deal of pains to go to hell and carry others with them. Those that are skilful in the story of nature, write of the scorpion, that he whets his tail often upon stones, that so it may be sharp and ready for a mischief. Some crooked wits there are which make it their exercise to vex the quiet of the land; it is as natural to them as poison to a scorpion.

But our happiness is, how to be like the idea, the pattern of all grace, and the glory of our nature, by whom we hope to be saved. Our happiness is to bring forth fruit, and our own fruit 'in due season,' Ps. 1:3; to have Opportunity, ability, and a heart to do good. How comfortable is death when it takes men so doing? The time will be ere long, when it will comfort us above all things in the world besides, that we have been honoured to be instruments of doing good, and stood in the gap to hinder evil. Beloved, we serve a good master. We shall not lose a good word for a good cause. There is a 'book of remembrance, Mal, 3:16, for every good word and work we do. When wicked men have beaten their brains, spent their spirits, and wasted their strength, what becomes of them at length? A conscience often wounded will receive no comfort, but take God's part against itself. When the other powers are wearied, then conscience comes and doth its office; then the eyes of the soul are open to see what it would not see before, then sin that 'lay at the door,' Gen. 4:7 (c), at the going out of this life, flieth in our faces. Pleasure and profit, for which wicked men project and contrive so much, comes all to nothing; but sin itself, and the punishment of it,

abides for ever. Men, like popes, will dispense with themselves, and conceit a latitude and breadth in their courses, that they may do so and so, and yet do well at last, but who tells them this? Is it not a spirit of illusion? Indeed, punishment is often deferred; it comes not like thunder and lightning all at once, yet as sure as God is true, sin will be bitterness in the end. When the honey is gone, the sting will remain.

To conclude this point; when we are tempted to any hurtful design, let us look upon Christ, and that great project for our redemption undertaken by him, and reason thus with ourselves: hath he plotted and wrought my salvation, and shall I plot against him in his members?

I beseech you, stir up your hearts to conceive and bring forth good purposes. Satan is an enemy to all strong resolutions and masculine conceptions, endeavouring to kill them in the very birth. Alas, how many good thoughts are conceived whilst the word is hearing, which yet prove abortive and stick in the birth! How few actions come to their due ripeness and perfection! I am sure our encouragements to good are far more than our encouragements to evil. We serve a better master, and for better wages. They may prosper for a time, but nothing is more wretched than the happiness of wicked men; it first hardens them, and then destroys them, Prov. 1:32.

Our only way is, 1, to get into Christ 'the true vine,' John 15:1, then we shall take and bear fruit presently, and draw and suck out of him the same disposition.

2. And then lay up good principles, and look with a single eye to the main end of our life, and see that all the particular passages of our life tend to that. It is an argument of a narrow heart to be wise in some particular business, for some particular end, and yet to be careless in the main. Other creatures are carried by a particular instinct to some particular thing. A spider is witty to catch flies, a

bird to build nests, &c. As man hath larger parts, so he should have larger aims.

That which we should especially labour for is, 1, to be good in ourselves; and 2, to do all the good we can to others, even as God our Father is good, and doth good; and the further our good extends, the more we resemble our Father. Such as we are, such are our thoughts, such are our devices. A good man will devise of liberal things, &c. Every vermin can do mischief. We see some are never in their element but when they are plotting or working mischief, as if they were born for no other end but to exercise the graces of men better than themselves. It is a poor commendation to be counted a cunning person for self ends. Alas! the heart of man, which is 'deceitful above measure,' Jer. 17:9, hath abundance of turnings and windings in it, and can suggest tricks enough to circumvent the best of us.

I come, in the third place, to our duty, which is to 'behold,'—the ordinary beacon kindled to discover some extraordinary thing.

Quest. But what is here to be beheld?

Ans. Behold the subtlety, malice, and restless endeavour of the enemies of goodness. Is it not a matter with grief to be beheld, that one member should tear another? that one, professing the same religion, should study to supplant and devour another? Behold, likewise, their bootless enterprise, they bring forth a lie.

But especially behold the mercy of God to his children; his wisdom in discovering, his justice in confounding, the mischievous practices of their enemies, making them the workers of their own ruin.

The things which especially deserve our beholding are either, 1, things excellent, and so are all God's works in their season, yea, justice itself; or, 2, things rare, as comets and eclipses; or else, 3, great things, as stars of the first magnitude, &c.

Even such, and much more, is God's mercy to his children, and justice against his enemies. Behold what great things he hath done for them, Ps. 126:2. Shall the heathen say so, and shall not Israel much more? Beloved, we ought to seek out God's works, and shall we not take notice of them when they are offered to our view? This is especially the duty of the saints of God. 'All thy works praise thee, and thy saints bless thee,' saith David, Ps. 145:10. The works of God praise him by our mouths and by our tongues. Were it not for some few that by a more divine light and spiritual eye see more of God than others do, what glory should God have in the world? God hath not brought us on the stage of this world to be mere gazers, but to extract something out for our own use, and to give him the glory of his excellencies. But we are too wise to admire anything. It is a matter too mean for our parts to take notice of God and his works. You have some that can see nothing in the works of God worth the admiring; and yet they will have men's persons in admiration, in hope of some advantage by them. We are apt to admire any outward excellency, like the disciples, before the Holy Ghost came upon them, who stood admiring of the goodly stones of the temple. When our minds are thus taken up, it were good if we heard Christ speaking to us as he did to them, 'Are these the things you wonder at?' Mark 13:1.

Beloved, it is our duty to observe special occurrences, not out of any Athenian curiosity, but to begin our employment in heaven now, whilst we are upon earth; to take occasion from thence to bless God. We should compare the rule and the event together, and observe what truth or attribute God makes good by that which is so fallen out; see how God commenteth upon himself by his own actions; and from observation of particulars it is good to rise to generals, as Deborah from the destruction of one enemy to the destruction of all. 'So let all thy enemies perish, O Lord,' Judges 5:31. This was Moses's song, and Hannah's, and the Virgin Mary's, &c. They mounted from a consideration of their own particular, and had their thoughts enlarged with the mercy and justice of God, to others in succeeding generations.

And among all God's works we should more take notice of his mercy to the church than of his justice towards his enemies, because his justice is, as it were, a foil to give lustre to his mercy. God delighteth more in mercy, as being his proper work, issuing from his own bowels, than in works of justice that are occasioned by the malice of men. God is wonderful in his saints, and more in saving them than in destroying his enemies. Considering, therefore, that mercy bears the chief office in the great works of God, we ought to dwell most in consideration thereof, and feed our thoughts more with the meditation of his saving works to his church than of the ruin of his enemies.

We pray hallowed be thy name. Unless we practise what we pray for, we mock God, and deceive our own souls. Let not God lose any glory by us; let not us lose such a pledge of future happiness as glorifying God is. 'Oh that men would praise the Lord,' saith David, who, fearing lest God should lose any glory from his creatures, stirs up angels and all creatures to 'bless the Lord,' Ps. 148:2, 3. God takes it very unkindly when we do not observe especially, the excellent pieces of his workmanship. 'A fool considereth not this,' &c., Ps. 92:6.

The Lord hath done marvellous things for his church of late, whereof we should rejoice. We should do as Moses did when he came out of the sea, and as the church, in resemblance of that deliverance from Egypt, did, who sang the song of Moses, being delivered from their spiritual Pharaoh, Rev. 15:3.

We see now the vial poured upon the sun, we see the prophecies against antichrist's kingdom in fulfilling. God hath vouchsafed to strengthen our faith by experience. We have something to lay hold on, which may encourage us to expect more from God, and to look for those hallelujahs to be sung from all creatures in heaven and earth, upon the utter confusion of antichrist; which, whosoever labours to hinder any kind of way, hinders the glory of God, and the joy of his people.

It is good to observe how the Scripture sets out the enemies of God's church, in a double representation, 1, as terrible, terming them lions, bulls, &c.; 2, as base, comparing them to chaff and dust before the wind, dung, &c., Ps. 10:4, that when we see them in their present ruff and jollity, we should stay ourselves with consideration of their future baseness. Faith looks on things as present, because it looks upon them in the word of Jehovah, who will give a being to all his promises and threatenings; and therefore faith is called the subsistence of 'things not seen,' Heb. 11:1, (d) because it gives a kind of being of things to the mind and affections of man, as if they were present. Therefore the believing of the final deliverance of God's people, and the ruin of his enemies, cannot but raise up the souls of good men to a marvellous degree of joy and thankfulness to God. Who would not fear to cleave to antichrist, if they did but present to themselves by faith, the certain ruin of that state, which the Scripture sets down, in a prophetical manner, as a thing already present? 'Babylon is fallen,' &c., Rev. 18:2.

But to come to a more particular application, suitable to the present time. The occasion and the text are as parallel as may be. Our gun-powder-plotters (e) were as pregnant in mischief as ever these. For conception, it could not but come from beneath the vault. There was the very quintessence of devilishness in it. Satan emptied all his bowels, as it were, in this project. If all the devils in hell were set awork to devise the like, they could hardly do it. There was scarce from the beginning of the world, a design more prodigious and unmerciful, of greater depth and extent of villany. Were [it] not [for] this anniversary commemoration of it, posterity would hardly believe that a plot so hellish could be hatched in the hearts of men, of English men, of Catholic men, as they would be termed, of men so borne withal, notwithstanding their dangerous correspondency with foreign enemies, and but half subjects, their better parts, their spirits, being subject to another visible head, who can untie the bond of allegiance at his pleasure.

Neither did they only conceive this hellish wickedness, but were big of it, and kept it close many months, and pleased themselves in the same, as monstrous and misshapen as it was. There wanted neither wit, nor counsel, nor combination, nor secret encouragement to effect it.

Nay, it was an holy villany, sealed with oaths, sacrament, and all the bonds of secrecy that could be invented. Oh horrible profanation, to set God's seal to Satan's plot. But God, who delighteth to confound all presumptuous attempts, discovered it when it should have come to the birth, and so it proved but the untimely fruit of a woman.

They brought forth a lie, for whereas they intended to have blown up king and kingdom, churchmen and church, statesmen, yea, the whole state itself, all at once, without any warning to prepare themselves for another world, they not only missed of this, but brought that ruin upon themselves which they intended to others; whereas they thought for ever to have established their (religion, shall I call it, or idolatry, or) superstition, they have by this means made it more odious than ever before; as the northern gentleman could say, that though he was not able to dispute, yet he had two arguments against popery, equivocation and the gunpowder-treason. But they turn it off easily, as they think. Alas! it was but the plot of a company of unfortunate gentlemen. It was our happiness that they were unfortunate; whereas if it had succeeded well, they would have had other terms for it. Successful villany goeth for virtue.

Well, the net is broken, and we are delivered. God thought of us when we thought not of him, and awaked for us when we were asleep (here is a place for behold), for what a miserable face of things would there have been If their plot had succeeded!

Now what return shall we make for all this? They conceived mischief, let us conceive praise, and travail of holy resolutions to give up ourselves to God, who hath given us our king, our state, yea,

ourselves to ourselves. He hath given us our lives more than once, every one of us in particular, especially in the last heavy visitation.* But had it not been better for many in regard of their own particular, to have been swept away in that deluge, than to live longer to treasure up further wrath to themselves? Many are not content to go to hell alone, but they will draw as many others as they can into their fellowship here, and torment hereafter. Oh beloved, the preservation of such, is but a reservation to further judgment! What good got the king of Sodom by being delivered once, and then after to be consumed with 'fire and brimstone from heaven? Gen. 19. What got Pharaoh by being delivered from ten plagues, and then to perish in the sea? Exod. 14. What are all our temporal deliverances, if we live still in sin, go on in sin, die in our sins, and so perish eternally? Blessings, without return of due thanks, increase the guilt of sin, and the increase of guilt causeth the increase of judgments.

The most proper homogeneal way of thanks, is to stir up ourselves to a greater hatred of that religion. They would fain free it, as if it were the fault of some persons only; but alas! what can be else distilled from those dangerous points they hold (as that, the pope hath temporal jurisdiction over princes, that he may excommunicate them; that he may, out of fulness of power, dispense with the oath of allegiance: that he cannot err; that subjection to him is a point of absolute necessity to salvation, &c.) What, I say, can be distilled from these opinions, but treason in a people that live under a prince of a contrary religion? The dispositions of many of them are better than their positions.

However perhaps the present pope † may be more moderate and neutral, yet this is the infusion of their religion wherever it prevails, and these tenets shall be acted and in full force when they please, and it will please them when it shall be for the advantage of the Catholic cause. This was Bellarmine's tenet (g), If the pope should err in commanding vice or forbidding virtue, the church is bound to believe vice to be good, and virtue to be ill, or else it should sin

against conscience; for it is bound to believe what he commands.* Thus they make the judgment of man the rule of truth and falsehood, good and evil; whereas truth is truth, and that which is false is false, whether men think so or no. There is an intrinsical evil in evil, which the judgment of any man cannot take away; and the truth and goodness of things stands upon eternal grounds, not flexible or alterable by the will of any creature; otherwise it were all one as to think the course of the sun should be guided by a dial. Is there any hope of their coming to us when they had rather have the rules of nature and religion, which are as unmoveable as a mountain of brass, to vary, than be thought to confess that the pope may err! which indeed is the grand and leading error of all. But how should we expect our words should prevail, whenas the great works of God prevail not at all with them? The efficacy of error is so strong in many, that though they should see the vial poured out 'upon the throne of the beast,' Rev. 16:10, yet will they not repent.

For ourselves, we cannot better shew our thankfulness for this deliverance, by means whereof we enjoy our lives and our religion, than to preserve that truth, that is grounded upon the foundation of truth, which hath been derived unto us from those that went before, who held out the same truth; that hath been sealed by the blood of so many martyrs; that hath been established by the authority of gracious princes; that God hath given witness to by so many deliverances; that concurs with the confessions of all reformed churches; that God hath blessed with a constant tenor of peace, even to the rejoicing of all neighbour churches, to the envy of our enemies, and to the admiration of all.

We see all countries round about us in a confusion, and we, as it were the 'three young men in the fiery furnace,' safe, Dan. 3, without so much as smoke or smell of fire; as if we were the only people of God's delight. Now, what is that which God careth most for amongst us, but his truth? which, if we suffer, as much as in us lieth, to take any detriment, God may justly make us the spectacles of his wrath to others, as others have been to us. Beloved, God hath

a cause and a people in the world, which he esteemeth more than all the world besides. Let us therefore own God's cause and people; his side one day will prove the better side.

I beseech you consider, what hurt have we ever had by the Reformation of religion? hath it come naked unto us? hath it not been attended with peace and prosperity? hath God 'been a barren wilderness to us?' Jer. 2:31. Hath not God been a wall of fire about us? which, if he had not been, it is not the water that compasseth our island could have kept us. So long as we keep Christ's truth, Christ will keep us. Otherwise, trust to it, Christ and his truth will leave us. No nation under heaven hath so much cause to say 'Behold' as we have. Men are ready upon all occasions to be sensible of civil grievances (as in Solomon's time gold was as stones in the street, 2 Chron. 1:15, 9:27), but we should be sensible of the spiritual favours we enjoy. If we look upon other kingdoms abroad, what nation under heaven hath the like cause to bless God for religion, for prince, for peace, &c., as we have? Beloved, we cannot better deserve of our king, church, and state, than to give up our lives to God who hath thus blessed us. The greatest enemies of a church and state, are those that provoke the highest Majesty of heaven, by obstinate courses against the light that shineth in their own hearts. It is seriously to be considered what Samuel saith to the people; and therefore, if not for love of ourselves, yet for the love of our king, religion, and state, let us take heed of provoking courses, and take heed of tiring the patience of God over-long. To conclude all, it is prayer that gets, but thankfulness witnessed by obedience that keeps, blessings. And what can our thoughts devise, our tongues utter, or our lives express, better, than the praise of our good God, that ever loadeth us with his benefits? that so God may delight still to shew himself unto us in the ways of his mercy, and think thoughts of love towards us, and dwell amongst us to the world's end.

THE SAINT'S SAFETY IN EVIL TIMES:*

MANIFESTED BY ST PAUL, FROM HIS EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S GOODNESS IN GREATEST DISTRESSES

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.—2 TIM. 4:17, 18.

BLESSED St Paul, being now an old man, and ready to sacrifice his dearest blood for the sealing of that truth which he had carefully taught, sets down in this chapter what diverse entertainment he found, both from God and man, in the preaching of it. As for men, he found they dealt most unfaithfully with him, when he stood most in need of comfort from them. Demas, a man of great note, in the end forsook him; Alexander the coppersmith (thus it pleases God to try his dearest ones with base oppositions of worthless persons) did him most mischief; weaker Christians forsook him, &c. But mark the wisdom of God's Spirit in the blessed apostle, in regard of his different carriage towards these persons. Demas, because his fault was greater, by reason of the eminency of his profession, him he brands to all posterity, for looking back to Sodom and to the world, after he had put his hand to the plough. Alexander's opposing, because it sprung from extremity of malice towards the profession of godliness, him he curseth. 'The Lord reward him,' &c. Weaker Christians, who failed him from want of some measure of spirit and courage, retaining still a hidden love to the cause of Christ, their names he conceals, with prayer that God would not lay their sin to their charge. But whilst Paul lived in this cold comfort on earth, see what large encouragement had he from heaven! 'Though all forsook me, yet,' says he, 'God did not forsake

me, but stood by me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me,' &c.

In the words, we have, in Paul's example, an expressing of that general truth set down by himself: 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope,' &c., Rom. 5:3. So here affliction breeds experience of God's mercy in our deliverance, and experience breeds hope of deliverance for the time to come; and both his experience and hope stirs him up to glorify God, who was his deliverer; so that here offer unto us to be unfolded—

1. Paul's experience of God's loving care of him in his deliverance past.

2. His assured hope, built upon his experience, for the time to come; set down in two branches:

(1.) The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.

(2.) He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.

3. The issue he maketh of both; as they flow from God's grace, so he ascribes him the glory of both. 'To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

For the first, I find that most, both ancient and modern writers, by lion understand Nero, that cruel tyrant, thirsty of blood, especially of Christians (h). Some also understand it to be a proverbial speech, to express extremity of danger, both which are true. But if we take the words in the just breadth of the apostle's intent, we may by lion understand the whole united company of his cruel enemies, as David in many places hath the like; and, by the mouth of the lion, the present danger he was in by reason of their cruel malice. Whence observe:

1. That enemies of the truth are (oft for power, always for malice) lions.
2. That God suffers his dearest children to fall into the mouths of these lions.
3. That in this extremity of danger God delivers them.

For the second, his hope built upon his experience; both* branches thereof hath its limitation and extent. The Lord shall deliver me, not from evil suffering, but from evil works. This he could boldly build on. He could not conjecture what he should suffer, because that was in the power of others; but he could build upon this, what God would give him grace to do. And so he limits his confidence, 'He will deliver me from evil works, and he will preserve me.' From what? From danger? from death? No; here is the limitation: 'He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.' He will not preserve me from death (and yet he will do that whilst I can do his service by my life), but sure I am he will preserve me beyond death to a state of security and happiness. 'He will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.'

And then for the third. After his experience, confidence, and hope well built, as his fashion is, when his heart was once warmed, he breaks out into thanksgiving, in the consideration of God's favours past, and to come. His tongue is large thereupon, and God hath the fruit of it. 'To whom be glory for ever;' and lastly, he seals up all with the word, 'Amen.'

'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion,' &c. Beloved, by nature we are all lions, and nothing will alter us, save the effectual knowledge of Christ. Education may civilise, but not subdue. A sound knowledge of God's truth hath a changing power; for when the spirit becomes tender, and when the heart, which lies in a cursed estate, under and in danger of, the wrath of a just God, whose eye cannot spare iniquity unrepented of, is cited and affrighted effectually by the spirit of bondage, it will cast down, and

pull sorrow from the strongest spirit, making it melting and tender. Again, in this estate, when the soul hath felt favour shining upon it; when the eye is opened to see the high prerogatives and exceeding riches of Christ; when we find ourselves that we are delivered from the lion's mouth, we cannot but shew that pity to others, which we felt from God ourselves. Paul thirsts as eagerly after the conversion of others now, as ever he did for their blood before, Acts 9:22. The jailor also, a man by nature, custom, and calling, hardened in the practice of cruelty, Acts 16:33; yet after he had felt the power of God's blessed truth, shewed forth those bowels of pity he felt from Christ, which were shut before (i).

Let us then be thankful, that God hath changed us from being lions, and with meekness submit ourselves unto God's ordinances, desiring him to write his law, not only in our understandings, but in our very hearts and bowels, that we may not only know that we should walk harmless and full of good, Jer. 31:33, but be so indeed, resembling him by whom we hope to be saved, in a right serviceable pliability to all duties of love.

And because our imperfect measure of mortification in this life, hinders us from a full content in one another's communion, let this make us the more willing to be translated to God's holy mount, where, being purged from all such lusts as hinder our peace and love, we shall fully enjoy one another, without the least falseness or distrust. Then shall we see total accomplishment of these promises, which are but in part fulfilled in this life.

Obs. 1. That God suffereth his children to fall into the mouth of lions, or into some danger proportionable, wherein they shall see no help from him, is a truth clear as the sun. The history of the church in all ages shews as much. Was not Christ in the mouth of the lion, so soon as born, when Herod sought to kill him? Mat. 2:13. Did not Satan and all the spiritual powers of hell daily come about him, like ramping and roaring lions? And hath it not been thus with God's church from Abel to this present, as appears by the children of

Israel in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in their journey to Canaan, being environed round about with cruel enemies, and dangers on every side, like Daniel in the midst of lions? So far God gave them up to the power of their enemies, that the wisest of the heathen judged them a forlorn people, hateful to God and men.* For particular instances, see Job and David, so near as there was but a step between them and death.

Besides, God often awakens the consciences of his children, and exerciseth them with spiritual conflicts; their sins, as so many lions, stand up against them, ready to tear their souls. Nay, rather than those that belong to God shall want that, which will drive them unto him, God himself will be a lion unto them, as unto Ephraim, Hos. 5:14, † which made David pray, 'Oh Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure,' Ps. 6:1. Of all the troubles which a child of God undergoeth in his way to heaven, these bring him lowest. When the body is vexed and spirit troubled, it is much; but when God frowns, when neither heaven nor earth yields comfort to a distressed soul, no evil in the world is like to this. Imagine the horror and straits of such a soul, when all things seem against it, and itself against itself, as near to the pains of the very damned in hell.

The reasons of this dispensation of God are: 1, because we are so desperately addicted to present things, and so prone to put confidence in the arm of flesh, that unless God driveth us from these holds, by casting us into a perplexed estate, we shall never know what it is to live by faith in God alone, when all other props are pulled away, and when the stream of things seems cross unto us. That God therefore may train us up to live the spiritual life of the just, which is by faith in him, when all else fail, he suffereth us to fall into the lion's mouth, that so our prayers, which are the flame of faith, may be more ardent and piercing, rather cries than words. 'Why criest thou unto me,' saith God to Moses, Exod. 14:15. When was this? Even when he knew not what way to turn him. It was out of the depths that David cried most earnestly unto God, Ps. 130:1;

and Christ, in the days of his flesh, cried unto God with strong cries and tears, in a deep distress, and was also heard in that which he feared, Heb. 5:7. Strong troubles force from the afflicted strong cries. Even experience shews, in prosperity, and a full estate, how faint and cold the prayers and desires of men are.

2. Besides, it is meet that the secrets of men's hearts should be discovered; for when all is quiet, we know not the falsehood of our own hearts. Some over-value their strength, as Peter, Mat. 26:33; others underprize themselves, and the gifts and graces of God's Spirit in them, thinking that they want faith, patience, love, &c., who yet, when God calleth them out to the cross, shine forth in the eyes of others, in the example of a meek and faithful subjection. The wisdom of God therefore judgeth it meet, that there should be times of sifting, that both the church and ourselves may know what good or ill is in us, what soundness or looseness remains in our hearts. When, therefore, we are wanting in fanning ourselves, God in love takes the fan into his hand.

It is likewise behoveful that false brethren may be discovered. Afflictions are well called trials, because then it is known what metal men are made of, whether pure or reprobate silver. Think it not strange then, when our estate seems desperate. It is but with us after the manner of God's dearest ones; why should we have a severed condition from them? Remember this, that God, as he suffers his children to fall into the lion's mouth, so he delivers them out; and that he never leaves his, especially in extremity, but in fit case of soul to receive the greatest comfort, and to render him the greatest glory. For then it is known to be God's work: our extremity is his opportunity. God will especially shew himself at such a time, and make it appear that the church stands not by man's strength. When Christians are at a loss, and know not which way to turn themselves, then is God nearest hand and careth most for them.

And this the Lord doth, both for the greater shame of those that contrive mischief (when they make themselves surest to bring their

wicked plots and purposes to pass, then their designs are most frustrated); as also to draw on others not yet called; that they, seeing God's immediate care over his church and children, may come in and obtain like protection and deliverance.

The manner how God delivereth his children out of the lion's mouth is diverse.

Divers ways how God delivers from the lion's mouth:—1. By suspending their malice for the time. As in Noah's ark the fierceness of the wild creatures was stopped by divine power from preying upon the tamer, so the lions' mouths were stopped from preying upon Daniel in the lions' den, Dan. 6:22.

2. By stirring up one lion against another; as the Persians against the Babylonians, Grecians against Persians, Romans against the Grecians; and the other barbarous nations, as the Goths and Vandals, against them; so whilst lions spit their fury one upon another, the sheep are quiet. Thus the Turks and other enemies have kept popish princes from raging and tyrannising over the church to the height of their malice.

3. By casting something unto these lions, to divert them another way from their intended prey; as when a man is in danger, a dog is cast unto the lion (j). Thus, when Saul was ready to devour David, the Philistines made a breach upon him, invaded the land, and turned his fury another way, 2 Sam. 23:27.

4. By altering and changing lions to be lambs; as when Paul was set upon havoc and mischief, God, by changing his heart, gave the churches cause to glorify God for him, of whom before they were most afraid.

5. God shews himself a lion to these lions; by breaking their teeth and jaw-bones, striking them with sudden and fearful judgment; as Herod, Acts 12:23, and the persecuting emperors; and as in '88,

when God with his four winds fought for us against the enemies of his truth.*

6. By making them lions to themselves: witness Ahithophel, Saul, and other such-like enemies of God's children.

7. Again, God maketh them friends without changing their disposition, by putting into their hearts some conceit for the time, which inclineth them to favour: as in Nehemiah, God put it into the king's heart to favour his people, Neh. 2:8. Esau, Gen. 33:4, was not changed, only God for the time changed his affections to favour Jacob. So God puts it into the hearts of many, groundedly-naught, to favour the best persons.

8. Lastly, God maketh his own children sometimes lions to their adversaries; for the image of God shining in his children, hath a secret majesty in it, and striketh an awe upon wicked men. So Pharaoh at length could not endure to see Moses and Aaron any more, Exod. 10:28; and Felix trembled whilst Paul disputed of temperance and judgment, Acts 24:25.

Use: of instruction and consolation. Thus we see the Lord knows how to deliver his, and can if he will; and will do it in their extremities, when is most for his glory, his people's comfort, and confusion of his own and their enemies. Never despair therefore of thyself or the church of God: it shall, rather than fail, breed in the lion's den. Paul salutes the Philippians, from the church in Cæsar's house, Phil. 4:22, a place in appearance little fitter for a church than hell itself. What though things seem past recovery abroad? When they are at the worst, then are they nearest mending. When the task of brick was doubled by Pharaoh upon Israel, Exod. 5:11, then came Moses to work out their deliverance. When the Jews heard news of their liberty to return from captivity, they were as those that dreamed, Ps. 126:1; they could not suddenly believe it, it seemed so strange a thing, in that their hopeless estate. Learn we then, from this dealing of God with his people, in the midst of all extremities,

to allege unto God the extremity we are in: 'Help, Lord, for vain is the help of man,' Ps. 60:11, is a prevailing argument. Allege the pride of enemies, the presumption of those that fear not God, &c., and that he only, can give issue from death, when he will. And as God brings us to heaven by contraries, so let us in one contrary believe another: hope against hope, in misery look for mercy, in death for life, in guiltiness for forgiveness. Learn to wrestle with God when he seemeth thy enemy; oppose unto God his former dealings, his nature, his promise, &c. Job had learned this, 'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him,' Job 13:15. Be of Jacob's resolution, 'I will not leave hold of thee, until I get a blessing,' Gen. 32:26. Whatsoever we are stript of, let us never forsake our own mercy, Jonah 2:8. This one word, 'I despair,' takes away God and Christ all at once. We must remember our sins are the sins of men, but mercy is the mercy of God. God will never leave us, but be with us, whilst we are with him. The world and all comforts in it, leave a man when they can have no more use of him nor he of them. Satan leaves his sworn vassals at their wits' end when he hath brought them into danger. But blessed be for ever our gracious God, then of all other times he is nearest to help us, when we stand most in need of him. He was never nearer Moses than when Moses seemed furthest from comfort, Exod. 3:2; never nearer Jacob than when heaven was his canopy and a stone his pillow, Gen. 28:12; never nearer Joseph than when in prison; Jonah, than in the belly of the whale, for God went down with him; never nearer Paul than when in the dungeon, Acts 16:25. A Christian is not alone when left alone, not forsaken when forsaken, 2 Cor. 4:9. God and his angels supply them the want of other comforts. Is it not a greater comfort that a prince should come in person to a subject and cheer him up, than send a meaner man? 'And whence is this to me,' said Elizabeth, 'that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? Luke 1:43. Is it not the greatest comfort to a Christian soul when God, in want of means, comes immediately himself unto us, and comforts us by his Spirit? For in defect of second causes, comforts are ever sweetest. Therefore, in all extremities let us wait and hope still for mercy. 'If the vision stay,' saith Habakkuk, 'wait, for it will come,' Hab. 2:3.

Differences of godly and wicked. This is a main difference betwixt the child of God and a person destitute of sound grace; for the child of God in extremity, recovers himself, as David, after a great conflict, gets still the upper hand, 'Yet, my soul, keep thou silence unto God, for God is yet good to Israel,' Ps. 73:1, as if he should say, Though, when I look upon my present outward condition, I stagger, yet, when I consider more deeply of his dealing, I am resolved God is good to Israel. Thus, after much tossing, they get up upon that rock which is higher than they. But those who are not upright-hearted, in any great extremity, sink down with despair, as heavy bodies, to the centre of the earth, without stop. The reason is, in their best estate they never were acquainted with relying upon God, but bore themselves up with fleshly helps, which, being taken away, they must needs fall downright. But a sincere Christian, in midst of his flourishing estate, acquainteth himself with God, and sets not his heart upon present things. Job says, that which he feared in his best case, that befel unto him, Job 3:25. Therefore they can rest upon God's mercy when other props are taken away.

Of our support in spiritual losses. Yet there be divers degrees of upholding us when we are at a spiritual loss. For usually, in what measure we, in the times of our peace and liberty, inordinately let loose our affections, in that measure are we cast down, or more deeply in discomfort. When our adulterous hearts cleave to outward things more than becomes chaste hearts, it makes the cross more sharp and extreme. For that which is not enjoyed with over much pleasure, is parted withal without over much grief. But for spiritual extremities, oftentimes the strongest, feel them with quickest sense; for God herein respects not always sins past, or more or less measure of grace, as in Job's case, who could, without much distemper of soul, endure extremities of body and estate, but when God wrote bitter things against him, presently he begins to sink, and but begins only; for when he was at worst, he stays himself upon his Redeemer, to the glory of God's grace, and shame of the devil. Thus sometimes God makes his children triumph, whom he sets as champions in defiance of Satan. They, in weakness, think they shall

utterly fail and perish, but their standing out in greatest conflicts shews the contrary.

But to come to that which I intend chiefly to insist on, 'the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,' &c., wherein we may see—

1. The author of his safety.
2. The deliverance itself.

The author is the Lord. No less than an almighty power is necessary to deliver from any evil work. For such is our inclinableness to join with temptation, such the malice and strength of our enemy, so many be the snares, and so cunningly spread in everything we deal withal, that whatsoever delivereth us must be above Satan and our own evil hearts; more wise, more powerful, more gracious to preserve us than any adverse power can be to draw us unto evil works. In which case, well said Moses when God, in his wonted glorious presence, refused to go along with them. O, saith Moses, if thou go not with us, carry us not hence, *Exod. 33:15*.

'Deliver' supposeth danger, possible or present. Beloved, our lives are such as stand in need of perpetual deliverance. Our estate here is wavering. The church lives always in tents, and hath never any hope of rest until the day of triumph. Therefore, after forgiveness of sins, follows 'lead us not into temptation;' because, though sins past be forgiven, yet we are in danger to be led into temptation. Let none promise a truce to himself, which God promiseth not. If Satan and our corruptions join, we cannot be quiet. After sins of youth we are in danger of sins of riper age; for though by grace, in some sort, sin be subdued, yet, until it be wholly mortified, there will be some stirring up, until that which is imperfect in us be abolished.

But I hasten to that which follows. 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.'

Whence, from the form of the argument, observe that we ought to reason with God from former experience to future, 1 Sam. 17:37; 2 Cor. 1:10. Yea, it is a binding argument with God. He loves to be sued and pressed from former mercies, and suffers them to be bonds unto him. Men will not do so, because their fountain is soon drawn dry; but God is a spring that can never be emptied. As he was able to help in former time, so he is also for the time to come. He is always, I AM JEHOVAH; always where he was; his arm is not shortened. What he hath done heretofore he can do now.

Use. We should therefore register God's favours, which is the best use we can put our memories to, and make them so many arguments to build upon him for time to come, as David, 'The Lord that delivered me,' saith he, 'out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine,' 1 Sam. 17:37. Oh, were we but acquainted with this kind of reasoning with God, how undaunted would we be in all troubles! We should be as secure for the time to come as for the time past, for all is one with God. We do exceedingly wrong our own souls, and weaken our faith, by not minding of God's favours. How strong in faith might old men be, that have had many experiences of God's love, if they would take this course! Every former mercy should strengthen our faith for a new, as conquerors, whom every former victory encourageth to a new conquest. So old favours should help us to set upon God afresh.

But what is the limitation here? 'From every evil work.' Which words we will first touch a little severally, and then consider more particularly of them.

Sometimes God speaks of duties as they issue from man, because, indeed, the will is man's, from whence the duty comes, and therefore the Scripture speaks, as though the duty came from us, because the powers are ours from whence they spring. Sometimes the Scripture speaks of holy duties as they issue from a higher power, from God. So here, the Lord will deliver me from every evil

work, he means that God would stir up his heart to a care to avoid evil works. We are agents and patients in all we do. We are agents, because the powers are ours; we are patients, because the Lord doth all. Now it is the language of the Holy Ghost for the most part, when he speaks of good duties, to go to the fountain, especially when faith is to be strengthened.

Quest. But how doth God deliver?

Ans. By keeping us from occasions, or by ministering strength if occasions be offered. By giving occasions of good, and by giving a heart to entertain those occasions. He preserves us from evil works, (1) by planting the graces of faith and of fear in us, whereby we are preserved; and by peace, which guards our souls from despair and tumultuous thoughts. Yea, he preserves us from evil works, through faith, unto his heavenly kingdom, Phil. 4:7.

In a word, (2) God preserves his children by making them better, by weakening corruptions, by his Spirit stirring up a clear sight and hatred of the same in them, and by withdrawing occasions which might prevail over us, and by keeping us from betraying ourselves unto them; by chaining up Satan until our strength be such as may encounter him. A great mercy it is, though little thought on, that God letteth not loose Satan upon us every moment. How should this stir us up, with David, to thankfulness and dependence upon God.

He delivers also wicked men from dangers, not out of any love to their persons, but because he hath some base service for them to undertake, to exercise the patience of his children, and vex others better than themselves, which is not fit for godly men to do. They are only God's rod, and their deliverance is no preservation, but a reservation to worse mischief. It is not a bettering deliverance.

But God delivers his, graciously, not only from danger, but from those evil works they are subject to fall into in their danger. It is not

ill to suffer ill, but to do ill. For doing ill makes God our enemy; suffering ill doth not. Doing ill, stains and defiles the soul, and blemisheth the image of God in us; suffering ill doth none of this. Doing ill, hinders communion and acquaintance with God; suffering ill doth not. God is more immediately acquainted with the soul in suffering ill. Doing ill is the cause of all ills; suffering ill comes from doing ill. The ill of sin, is the ill of ills, because it is evil itself, and the cause of all other whatsoever. We may thank our ill in doing, for our ill in suffering; and therefore the apostle is well assured what he says, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work,' not from every inward infirmity and weakness, but from every evil work that is scandalous and offensive to him.

It is an aggravation of ill when it is manifested; for then it either taints or grieves others. Indeed so soon as the resolution of the soul hath passed it, when the will resolves on such a thing, it is done, both in good and evil, before God. But in regard of the world, and of the church we live in; the bringing of the work upon the stage, as it were, is an aggravation of evil; because, besides the hurt which is done to evil men, good men are either hurt or vexed at it. Therefore the apostle saith, 'the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.' This, a Christian should especially labour for, that God in all things would keep him free from sin. Yea, this differenceth a Christian from another man. Take a carnal man when he is like to fall into danger, he studies how to get out of suffering evil, not how to prevent doing evil; he plots, devises, and entangles himself in his own wit, and makes the matter worse by equivocation, and such like sinful courses, as we might learn from the papists, if we had not enough from our own breast. But Paul's care was to be delivered from evil works. For a man indeed is never overcome, let him be never so vexed in the world by any, till his conscience be cracked. If his conscience and his cause stand upright, he prevails still; 'in all these things we are more than conquerors,' Rom. 8:37, saith the apostle. The meaning is, sufferings cannot quell our courage, they cannot stain our conscience, they do not hurt the cause, but it gets victory in despite of them; so that our courage is undaunted and our

conscience abides unstained. Let it be our care therefore to take heed of evil works. Look into the world and see what is the care of most men we converse with, Oh, if they can get such a place, if they can get such an estate! Aye, but it cannot be had without sinful abasement, without cracking of conscience, and unlawful engagement. Oh, say they, it is no matter, God will pardon all, I care not so I may have my wish. This is the heart of many graceless persons that are not led with heavenly respects. But take a Christian, and he had rather beg, do anything in the world, than do a thing unworthy his profession, unbeseeming the gospel, or that high calling where-unto he is called. 'Shall such a man as I do this?' Neh. 6:11; he will not, and therefore his care is to take heed of ill works; for then he is sure to have God his friend, who hath riches and honour enough for him, because 'the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof,' Ps. 24:1. This is the care of a judicious well-instructed Christian.

But mark the extent from every evil work. St Paul' scare is not for one or two, but that God would keep him from every evil work. Why so?

Why St Paul says from every evil work. Because he that truly hates one sin, will hate all the kinds of it. Both come from the same love of God. He that loves God as he should, will hate whatsoever God hates; 'and have respect to all God's commandments,' as the psalmist speaks, Ps. 119:128. Partial obedience is indeed no obedience at all; for he that obeys one, and not another, obeys not simply because of the commander, to yield obedience unto him; but only to satisfy his own corrupt nature, picking and choosing what pleases himself, which belongs not to an inferior, but to a superior to do. And therefore, such make themselves gods, in that they single out easy things that do not oppose their lusts, which are not against their reputation, &c., and therein perhaps they will supererogate, and do more than they need, only because they will have a compensation with God, that he should quit with them for other things. I have done that, and therefore he must bear with me in this.

Oh! but there is no compensation here. A man is never so straitened but he may escape without sin. There is no pretence will serve; but we must abstain from every evil work. Satan keeps many men in his snare by this, and so he hath them safe in one sin, he cares not; therefore he will suffer them to hear, read, and pray, &c., holding them fast in one reigning sin, wherein he will let them alone till the time of some great affliction, or death; and then he will roar upon them. Oh beloved! we cannot provide worse for our own souls, than to cherish a purpose of living in any one sin, for that is enough for the devil to hold his possession in us by, and at the hour of death to claim us for his own. 'If we regard any iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear our prayers,' Ps. 66:18. I beseech you therefore, let us labour to have clear consciences, freeing ourselves from a purpose to live in any sin; that in all our slips and failings we may say with an honest heart, my purpose was not to do this, but to refrain from wickedness.

Again, he speaks of this for the time to come; the Lord will deliver me from evil. A true Christian is as careful to avoid sin for the time to come, as to be freed from the guilt of sins past. Judas may desire to have his conscience freed from former sins, but Judas cannot desire to be a good man for the time to come. Nothing argues a good conscience more than this. The most wicked wretch that breathes, may desire to have his conscience stilled, and yet never have any purpose or power to abstain from sin; but like a dog, after he hath disgorged himself, return to his vomit again. True repentance is a turning from former evils to a contrary good. Our grief no further yields comfort of sound repentance, than it hath care attending, for prevention of sin; according to that which Christ said to the woman taken in adultery, 'Go, and sin no more,' John 5:14, and as David prays, 'Purge me, O Lord, and cleanse me, but withal, establish me with thy free Spirit for the time to come,' Ps. 51:2, 12. As if he should say, Lord, I know it is not in man to order his own ways, I desire not the forgiveness of my sins that thereby I might with more liberty offend thy majesty, but with pardoning grace, I beg preventing grace. No false heart can move such a desire as this to God. A

gracious heart that prays aright, prays as well that God would preserve him from future sin, as forgive him his former sins. It is a ridiculous thing of the papists to make confession of a sin which they mean to commit: as some late traitors confessed such and such things which they were to act, and were straight absolved for it. So your cursed duellists, that will pray and repent, when they mean presently to fall one upon another. Is this repentance, when a man is inveigled with the sin he means to commit; and cannot overcome himself in the case of revenge? Do these men think they repent? No, certainly; repentance is of sins past, and the carriage of every true Christian is to avoid evil for the time to come.

Again, it is here a perpetuated act: The Lord will deliver me still from every evil work. Whence you see that in every evil work we are tempted to, we need delivering grace; as to every good work, assisting grace. Indeed, our whole life, if we look upwards, is nothing but a deliverance, but if we look to ourselves, it is nothing but danger and a warfare, and therefore we have need of a deliverance. How little a temptation turns over a great man! as sometimes a little wind turns over your mighty galleys. We see this in David and Solomon; and, if God leave us to ourselves, even the strongest man in the world, how soon is he overturned! In the midst of sinful occasions, how ready are we to join with them, and betray our own souls!

But from the whole, take it as it comes from God altogether, the truth is thus much, that a Christian, who is privy to his own soul of good intentions to abstain from all ill for the present, may presume that God will assist him against all ill works for the time to come. I say a Christian, that hath his conscience telling him that he means to be better, and is not in league with any sin, may believe this for the time to come, that God will keep him from evil works. I speak this, because many who are yet sinners think it in vain to strive, for they shall never be better. What dost thou talk, man? Hast thou a mind to be better? God will meet thee one time or other. Is thy will at liberty? He that gives thee the will, will also give thee the deed. Is

not this the promise, that God will deliver thee from every evil work? And, therefore, away with all discouragements.

Obj. O but there are sons of Anak, mighty giants, that molest me; my sins are as so many giants to stop my proceeding; I shall never be better!

Solution. Say not so; nay, rather thou wilt not be better. Thou art in league with some secret sin, thy heart riseth against those that reprove thee of it, thine own conscience tells thee that thy heart is naught; for if thou wouldst set thyself to obey God in truth, assuredly he would deliver thy soul. And therefore the apostle, to prevent such doubts, speaks of deliverance from evil works as coming from God.

Obj. But some may object, We sin every day; and 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,' 1 John 1:8.

Ans. You must not understand this phrase legally, in the rigour of it, as that God will deliver us from every ill thought, or rising in the heart, or from every outward slip and failing, &c.; but by every evil work, the apostle means every reproachful sin that breaks the peace of our conscience, that swallows up a man's salvation. From such kind of sins that bring a stain and discredit unto a man's profession, that wound his soul, and may discourage others, the Lord will deliver his; he will keep them from greater sins altogether, and from being in league with lesser. You know in falls there are several degrees; there is a slip, a falling, and a falling on all four; as we say, a flat falling. Now God will deliver his children from falling so foully.

2. How God delivers from ill works by not delivering. Nay, sometimes he will deliver them from evil works, by not delivering them from evil works. He will deliver from great ill works, by letting them alone in lesser ill works. God delivers from evil divers ways; he delivers from falling into ill, and he delivers out of ill when we

are fallen; he delivers from ill likewise by supporting us; nay, which is more, he delivers from ill works by ill works.

Quest. How is that?

Solution. How do physicians deliver from an apoplexy? from a lethargy? Is it not by casting the sick person into an ague, to awaken that dull sickness? So God, to cure the conscience of a man, when he sees him in danger of security by those soul-killing sins, pride, covetousness, looseness, hypocrisy, and the like, suffers him sometimes to fall into less offences, to awake his conscience, that being roused up he may fly to God's mercy in Christ. So infinite is God's care this way, that he will deliver either from ill works, or from the evil of ill works; or, if he deliver not from ill works, yet he will deliver us from worse works by those ill works. Austin saith, I dare presume to say, it is profitable for some men to fall.* If a man be of a proud, peremptory disposition, or of a blockish, dull, and secure nature, it is good he should be acquainted what sin he carries in his breast, where his corruptions are, &c., that so he may know himself and his danger the better.

Use. I beseech you make use of this, to help your faith and thankfulness. When we are delivered from evil works, it is God that doth it. The consideration whereof, methinks, should strengthen our faith against Satan and all his fiery darts, and encourage us to set confidently upon any corruption that we are moved to by others, or our own natural inclination. It is God's enemy, and it is my enemy; it is opposite to God's will, and it is an enemy to my comfort. God will take my part against that which is opposite to him. He hath promised me to assist me against every evil work by his Holy Spirit. A Christian is a king, Rev. 1:6; and he hath the triumphing Spirit of Christ in him, which will prevail over all sin in time.

Obj. But some poor soul may object, Alas! I have been assaulted by such a corruption, a long time, in a grievous manner, and am not yet

delivered from it.

Ans. God doth by little and little purge out corruption. As every stroke helps the fall of the oak, the first stroke helps forward; so every opposing of corruption, never so little, helps to root it out, and it is weakened by little and little, till death accomplish more mortification.

But to proceed. God doth not only deliver from evil works, but preserves us to his heavenly kingdom. We must take preserve here in its full breadth. He preserves us whilst he hath any work for us to do in this life; and when he will have us live no longer, he will preserve us to heaven; howsoever, by death he takes us away, yet even then the Lord still preserves us.

Under-preservers of the saints. He will preserve us in our outward estate, by himself, and by under-preservers, for there be many such under God; as angels that are his ministering spirits, and magistrates, who are the shields of the earth; they may preserve under God; and likewise ministers, that are the chariots and horsemen of Israel, and good laws, &c. But God is the first turner of the wheel; we must see him in all other preservers whatsoever. And therefore the apostle, in the language of the Holy Ghost, and of Canaan, saith here, 'The Lord will preserve me,' Ps. 47:9; 2 Kings 2:12. And rather than a man shall miscarry when God hath anything for him to do, God will work a miracle.

The three men could not be burned in the fire, Dan. 3:25 and 6:12; God so suspended the force thereof. Daniel could not be devoured of the greedy lions, &c. Rather than God's purpose shall fail, that a man should perish before the time that God hath allotted him, the lions shall not devour, and the fire shall not burn. God hath measured our glass and time, even to a moment; and as our Saviour Christ, out of knowledge of this heavenly truth, saith, 'My time is not yet come,' John 7:6, so let us know that, till our hour comes, all the devils in hell cannot hurt one hair of our head. And this is a

wondrous ground of confidence, that we should carry ourselves above all threatenings, and above all fears whatsoever. 'Thou canst do nothing except it were given thee,' John 19:10, saith Christ to bragging Pilate, who boasted of his power. Alas! what can all the enemies of God's people do except God permit them?

If a king or a great man should say to an inferior, Go on; I will stand by thee, and preserve thee; thou shalt take no harm: what an encouragement were this! Oh, but when God shall say to a Christian, Walk humbly before me, keep close to my word, be steadfast in the ways of holiness, fear not man, you are under my protection and safeguard: what an encouragement is this to a believing soul!

But put case we cannot be preserved from death; for so it was here with the apostle, he died a bloody death. Why, let us observe his blessed carriage in all this, and do likewise. I regard not that, saith he; do your worst, God will preserve me still. So it should be the bent of a Christian's soul to come to God with this limitation, in his faith and in his prayer: Lord, if thou wilt not deliver me from suffering ill, preserve me from doing ill; if thou wilt not preserve me from death, preserve me from sinful works. This we may build on, that either God will preserve us in life, or if we die, he will preserve us in death to his heavenly kingdom. And sometimes God preserves by not preserving from death; for indeed death keeps a man from all danger whatsoever. He is out of all gun-shot, when he is once dead. Death is a deliverance and a preservation of itself: it sends a man to heaven straight; and therefore the apostle knew what he said, 'The Lord will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.'

That is, he will preserve me till I be possessed of heaven; he will go along with me in all the passages of my life; he will carry me through all, and bring me thither at last. As the angel that struck off Peter's bolts, 'shined in the prison,' Acts 12:7, and carried him out into the city, so God by his Spirit shines into our souls, and carries

us through all the passages of this life, never leaving us, till he have brought us to his heavenly kingdom.

And not to open unto you things that are beyond my conceit, much more my expression, what a state this heavenly kingdom is, unto which St Paul hoped to be preserved! Observe, briefly, thus much:— 1, It is a kingdom of all conditions the freest; 2, the most glorious; 3, the most abundant in all supplies; 4, it is a heavenly kingdom; 5, it is an everlasting kingdom.

The excellency of the heavenly kingdom. Things, the nearer the heavens they are, the purer they are. 1, heaven is a most holy kingdom: no uncleanness can enter there; 2, it is a large kingdom; and 3, an everlasting kingdom. Other men's kingdoms determine with their persons; perhaps they may live to out-live their glory in the world, as Nero did (the king that Paul was under now, when he wrote this epistle), who came to a base end. But this kingdom can never be shaken. God's preservation shall end in eternal glory.

Use 1. Here is a special ground to God's children of perseverance in well-doing. What! doth God undertake even from himself, to deliver us from evil works, which might endanger our salvation, and to preserve us until he have put us into heaven! Where is the popish doctrine of falling away, then? Obj. Oh, but I may sin, and so fall away. Sol. Aye, but God will deliver us from evil works; he takes away that objection. He that keeps heaven for us, keeps us for heaven, till he have put us into possession of it. 'We are kept (we are guarded (k), as the word is) by the power of God to salvation,' 1 Pet. 1:5. Salvation is kept for us, and we for that. If we endanger heaven any way, it is by ill works, and God keeps us from them. What a most comfortable doctrine is this!

Use 2. But, to add a second against that foolish, vain, and proud point of popish merit. We see what a strain they are in. 1. Before conversion they will have merit of congruity, that it befits the goodness of God, when we do what we can, that we should have

grace. 2. When we are in the state of grace, they will have merit of condignity; but how can that be, whenas free grace runs along in all? God preserves us from evil works, and preserves us to his heavenly kingdom, of his mere love and mercy. Where then is the merit of man? Indeed, we do good when we do good, but God enables us; we speak to the praise of God, but he opens our mouth; we believe, but God draws our heart to it: as Austin says, we move, but God moves us.*

Use 3. I beseech you, observe further here: How complete God's favours are to his. He deals like a God, that is, fully and eternally, with his children. If he deliver, it is from the greatest evil; if he preserve, it is to the greatest good. Who would not serve such a master? Oh, the baseness of the vile heart of man, that is a slave to inferior things, and afraid to displease men, never considering what a blessed condition it is, to be under the government of a gracious God, that will keep us from ill, if it be for our good, for ever, outwardly from evil works, inwardly from the terrors of an ill conscience, that will preserve us here in this world, and give us heaven when we have done. I beseech you, let this complete and full dealing of God quicken us to a holy courage and constancy in his service.

Use 4. And see here a point of heavenly wisdom; to look, when we are in any danger, with the apostle, to the heavenly kingdom. When we are sick, look not at death. Paul cared not for that, but says he, 'The Lord will preserve me to his kingdom.' He looked to the bank of the shore. As a man that goes through a river hath his eye still on the shore, so the apostle had his eye fixed upon heaven still. I beseech you therefore, in all dangers and distresses whatsoever, if you would keep your souls without discouragements, as you should, be much in heaven in your thoughts, minding the things above, and conversing with God in your spirits. Look to the crown that is held out to us; let our minds be in heaven before our souls. It is a wondrous help to our weakness in the time of trouble, not to think, I am full of pain, I must be turned into the grave, and rot, and what

shall become of me then? &c. Away with this carnal reasoning. It much weakens faith, and damps the hearts of Christians.

Use 5. Again, How doth this arm the soul with invincible courage in any trouble. God may call me to trouble, but he will preserve me in it that I shall not stain my conscience. What a ground of patience is this! Patience is too mean a word; what a ground of joy and triumphing is it! 'We rejoice under the hope of glory,' Rom. 5:2. A Christian should triumph in soul over all evils whatsoever, and be, as the apostle saith, 'more than a conqueror,' Rom. 8:37; considering that God will be present with him all his life long, and after that, bring him to an everlasting kingdom. What an encouragement is this! Heaven is holy, and shall we not fit ourselves for that blessed estate? There is much holiness required for heaven; the sinful, wicked, malicious, poisonous world, lays reproaches upon holiness; but 'without it no man shall see God,' Heb. 12:24. Doth that man believe he shall obtain a heavenly kingdom, who never fits himself with holiness for it? Oh no; 'Faith and hope have this efficacy in the breast, wheresoever they are, to frame the heart to the thing believed.' If I believe a kingdom to be where righteousness and holiness dwelleth, this belief forceth me to carry myself answerable to the state there, 2 Pet. 3:13. And therefore, saith the apostle, 'our conversation (l) is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour,' &c., Philip, 3:20. Because he was assured of heaven, therefore he conversed as a citizen of heaven before he came there. He praised God, kept himself undefiled of the world, and conversed with the best people; every way he carried himself, as much as earth would suffer him, as they do in heaven. Certainly, 'he that hath the hope of a heavenly kingdom, is pure as Christ is pure,' 1 John 3:3. He endeavours and aims to be holy as God is holy, who hath called him. Faith is of efficacy to conform a Christian's carriage to the likeness of him whom he believes to be so excellent. And therefore they are infidels, and have no saving faith; profane persons, who live in sins that stain their consciences, and blemish their conversation, not believing that there is a heaven. 'Deceive not yourselves; neither whoremongers, nor adulterers, nor

extortioners,' &c., 1 Cor. 6:9, shall inherit the kingdom of God. Do men who live in these sins, without remorse, think to come to heaven? as though they should come out of the puddle to heaven? No, no; 'away, you workers of iniquity, I know you not,' Mat. 25:41, saith Christ. Let no man cherish presumptions of a heavenly kingdom, except he abstain from all sins against conscience. The apostle, when he would urge to holiness of life, uses this argument: 'If you be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, at the right hand of the Father,' Col. 3:1.

Well, let us oft, I beseech you, present unto our souls the blessed condition to come, which will be effectual to quicken and stir us up to every good duty, and comfort us in all conditions whatsoever. What will a man care for crosses and losses and disgraces in the world, that thinks of a heavenly kingdom? What will a man care for ill usage in his pilgrimage, when he knows he is a king at home? We are all strangers upon earth, now in the time of our absence from God; what if we suffer indignities, considering that we have a better estate to come, when we shall be somebody! What if we pass unknown in the world! It is safe that we should do so; God will preserve us to his heavenly kingdom, and all that we suffer, and endure here, it is but a fitting for that place. David was a king anointed many years ere he was actually possessed of his kingdom; but all that time between his anointing and his investing into the kingdom, it was a preparation of him by humility, that he might know himself, and learn fitness to govern aright. So we are anointed kings as soon as we believe; for when we believe in Christ, who is a king, priest, and prophet, we communicate with his offices; we have the same blessed anointing poured on our head, and runs down about us, Ps. 133:2. But we must be humbled by crosses, and fitted for it; we must be drawn more out of the world, and be heavenly-minded first.

Rules to discern what our interest in heaven is. Would you know some rules of discerning whether heaven belongs to you or not? In brief, do but remember the qualification of them that must reign;

those that labour daily to purge themselves of all pride and self-confidence; that see no excellency in the creature, in comparison of heaven; that see a vanity in all outward things which makes them humble in the midst of all their bravery; those that see themselves empty of all, without God's favour, 'the poor in spirit, &c., theirs,' saith Christ, 'is the kingdom of heaven,' Mat. 5:3.

2. Faith makes us kings, because thereby we marry the King of heaven; the church is the queen of heaven, and Christ is the king of heaven. Where this grace is in truth, happiness belongs to that soul.

3. Those that are kings have a royal spirit. The hopes of a young prince puts into him a great deal of spirit, otherwise, perhaps, above his disposition. So all that are kings have a royal spirit in some measure, which raiseth them above all earthly things, and maketh them see all other things to be nothing in comparison of Christ, to be but 'dross and dung,' as holy St Paul saith, Philip. 3:8. Those therefore that are slaves to their base lusts, to riches, honour, pleasure, &c., know not what belongs to this heavenly kingdom. What, do men think to reign in heaven, when they cannot reign over their own base corruptions! We see David prays to God for an 'enlarged spirit,' Ps. 51:12, that he might be capable of the best things; and certainly those that have this knowledge are of a spirit above the world, 'more excellent than their neighbours,' as the wise man saith, Prov. 12:26. You cannot shake them with offers of preferment, or with fears; they will not venture their hope of eternity for this or that base earthly thing; they are of a more royal spirit than so.

I beseech you therefore, let us discern of our spirits what they are; whether God hath established us with a free spirit or not. The kingdom of heaven is begun upon earth; the door whereby we must enter in is here. Those graces must be begun here which must fit us for happiness hereafter. As the 'stones of the temple,' 1 Kings 6:7, were first hewn and then laid upon the temple, so we must be hewn and fashioned here, ere we can come thither. Those that are not

fitted and squared now, must never think to be used of God as living stones of his temple then. A word now of Paul's use of all, and so I conclude:

'To whom be glory for ever and ever.'

When he had mentioned the heavenly kingdom, and set himself by faith, as it were, in possession of it, he presently begins the employment of heaven, 'to praise and glorify God,' even whilst he was on earth. For faith stirs us up to do that which we shall do, when we obtain the thing believed. It is called 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1; and makes them, as it were, present to the soul. Because when we are in heaven indeed, we shall do nothing else but praise God. Faith apprehends it, as if he were now there, for all is sure to faith, God having said it, who will do it; and sets the soul upon that employment here, which it shall have eternally with God hereafter.

It is therefore Christian wisdom, to fix our souls on good meditations, to have them wedded to good thoughts, to have those praclaras cogitationes, befitting Christians, that may lead us comfortably in our way to heaven. Let a man think of God's deliverances past, and that will strengthen his faith for the future deliverances. Let him think of future deliverances, and that will lead him to a kingdom, to praise God; and this praising of God will stretch his soul, for ever and for ever; as if there were no time sufficient to glorify God, that is so excellent and glorious. What a blessed condition is this, to have God's Spirit warming our souls and perfuming our spirits with holy ejaculations, continually putting us upon the employment of heaven, till at length it hath safely brought us thither.

Here then is the use of all uses. What is the former use which Paul makes of the experience of God's deliverance? The Lord hath delivered me, and therefore he will deliver me. But what use doth he make of this, that God will deliver him? To glorify God. Here is the

end of all ends, to praise God. Happy we when God's end and our end meet together. He path made all for his own glory; and when we, with a single eye, can aim at that too, what a sweet harmony is there!

1. To direct us in this duty in praising God, let us with Paul, for I go no further than the text leads me, seriously meditate on God's mercies, both past and to come. Nothing moves thankfulness more than this. A Christian when he looks backward hath comfort, and when he looks forward he sees comfort still: for preservation, and kingdoms, and crowns abide for him. If a man would praise God, therefore, let him consider how graciously God hath dealt with him. He hath delivered me already by Jesus Christ, from, sin and eternal wrath; and he will deliver me from every evil work to come, that may endanger my salvation. Think of these things, and see whether your hearts can be cold and dead or no; see if your spirits can be straitened. Certainly both heart and mouth will be full. Thou canst not but say, in the apprehension of God's mercies, 'To him be glory for ever.'

2. Consider the kinds of favours thou receivest. They are either positive or privative, spiritual or temporal. Positive—the Lord will preserve me; privative—the Lord will deliver me from every evil work. Temporal—the Lord in this life will keep me; spiritual—he will deliver me from the power of sin. Eternal—he will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom. Think forward or backward, outward or inward, spiritual or temporal: wherever you look, tell me if you can do otherwise than break out with the holy apostle in the praises of so good a God.

And 3. Think of the greatness of all these: the greatness of the deliverance from sin and damnation. The apostle, to make himself the more thankful, saith he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. He had large apprehensions of God's goodness. So should we, beloved, consider the greatness of the misery we are in by nature, being slaves of Satan, in danger to slip into hell every moment; and

when God hath secured us from this, think of the greatness of the benefit, a 'heavenly kingdom.' When we think, not only of the benefits, but of the greatness of them, it is a wondrous encouragement to be thankful. Labour then to have a due and high esteem of every mercy. God hath brought us out of darkness into marvellous light, saith the apostle, 1 Pet. 2:9; great is the mystery of godliness, 1 Tim. 3:16; and the unsearchable riches of his grace, Eph. 3:8. He had not words big enough to express God's goodness. 'Oh, the height, and breadth, and depth, and length of his love,' Eph. 2:18. When we consider these dimensions, our thankfulness must be answerable.

4. Again, if you would be thankful, labour to have humble spirits, to see God in all things; and then you will sacrifice to him alone; not to thy parts and graces, friends, abilities, &c. The meek are fit to pray to God. 'Seek the Lord, ye meek of the earth,' Zeph. 2:3; and an humbled, meek, soul, is the fittest to praise God of any other. He that knows he is worthy of nothing, will bless God for anything. He that knows he hath nothing in himself, will be thankful for the least measure of grace. An humble soul is a thankful soul. We see it was Paul's disposition here. He gives all to God, which makes him so break out in praising his name.

5. Again, if we would be thankful, as Paul here, and begin heaven upon earth, labour to be assured of salvation, and perseverance in thy Christian course. The papists, that speak against assurance and perseverance, kill prayer and praising of God. Shall a man praise God for that which he doubts of? I cannot tell whether God will damn me or not; perhaps I am but fitted as a sheep to the slaughter, &c. How shall a man praise God for any blessing he enjoys, when these thoughts are still with him? How shall a man praise God for salvation, when perhaps he shall not come to it? How shall a man praise God for that which perhaps he may fall from before he die? when perhaps he is God's to-day, and may be the devil's tomorrow? How can there be a hearty thanks, but when a man can say, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work,' that by mine own

weakness, and Satan's malice, I may occasionally fall into, betwixt this and heaven? Therefore, if we would praise God as we should, let us work our hearts to labour after assurance of God's favour; let us redeem our precious time, and every day set some time apart to strengthen our evidences for heaven, which will set us in a continual frame to every good work.

Thus we see, out of Paul's example, how we should be disposed here, to be in heaven before our time. For undoubtedly he who praiseth God is so much in heaven, as he is given to thankfulness; for he is in that employment now, which shall be there altogether. But how long doth he desire that God should have glory? For ever and ever.

Obs. A Christian should have the extent of his desires of God's glory carried to eternity. Upon what ground? Because God intends him glory for ever and ever. A Christian that is assured of his salvation, is assured that God will eternally glorify him. He knows that Christ is king for ever; he knows that Christ is a priest for ever; he knows that the state and condition that he is kept for, is everlasting: 'it is an inheritance immortal and undefiled, that fadeth not away,' 1 Pet. 1:4; and therefore he saith, Hath God eternal thoughts of my good? and is Christ an eternal head, an eternal king to rule me, both in life and in death? Surely I will extend my desires of his glory as far as he extends his purpose to do me good. Now, his purpose to do me good is for eternity, and my desire that he may have glory shall be for eternity, world without end, Eph. 3:21. This is the disposition of a gracious soul, not that God may be honoured by him alone, but of all. To whom be praise, not by me, but by all. I am not sufficient enough to praise him. To him be praises in the churches, throughout all ages, for ever. David had not largeness enough in himself to bless God; and therefore he stirs up his spirits and all within him to praise his holy name, Ps. 103:1, as if all were too little to set out the glory of God's infinite goodness, mercy, wisdom, and power: those gracious attributes that shew themselves glorious in bringing man to salvation, and in governing the church.

Use. Learn this duty therefore: if we will make good to our own souls, that we are in the state of grace, we must plot for eternity, and endeavour to lay a ground and foundation, that the church may flourish for eternity. No man can warrant himself to be a good Christian, but he that labours to have the church and commonwealth flourish; to have a happy kingdom, happy government, and happy laws. Not only to have the church in his own family, but that the church may flourish in those that stand up when we are gone the way of all flesh; and therefore to declare the mind of God, and his favours to us, and our children, that they may strengthen their experience, with their fathers' experience, and say to God, Thou art the God of my fathers, therefore be my God. Those that are called to places of dignity, should consider that it is required at their hands to labour that there should be means to continue religion, even to the world's end, if it may be, and to stop all the breaches in this kind. And if it were possible, it were to be wished that there were set up some lights in all the dark corners of this kingdom, that might shine to those people that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

2. One way is, to have a care that there be no breaches made upon the sound doctrine that is left unto us, and hath been sealed up by the blood of so many martyrs. We had it dearly. It hath been taught by our forefathers, and sealed with their blood; and shall we betray it? No; let us labour to deliver it to our posterity, from hand to hand, to the coming of Christ; and then we shall in effect, and not in word only, do that which Paul saith here—labour to glorify God for ever and ever, both in the church and in heaven. Surely those that will glorify God in heaven, he will have them so disposed to glorify him on earth.

It is a dangerous thing when persons are naught. We see what comes of it, especially if they be great. It is said of Manasseh, when God had forgiven him his sin, yet afterwards God plagued the kingdom for the sins that Manasseh committed, 2 Kings 24:3. How can this be? Because he by his sin, though he repented himself, yet

set the kingdom in an evil frame. And no question but he had naughty principles; and among people that are given to licentiousness, if there be anything in great men, it will go to posterity after them. So that when governors are naughty, they are not only a poison to the church and state while they live, but the mischief of it is after and after still. And so it is in the best things. If the governor be good, he lays a foundation of good for the kingdom in time to come, as well as for his own time.

How will it shame a man when he shall think, I do these things now, but what will posterity think of me? what will be the remembrance of it when I am gone? Then my name will stink. The wicked emperor Nero was of this resolution when he should die: 'Let heaven and earth mingle together,' saith he, 'when I am gone.'* He knew himself to be so naughty, and that he should be so evil spoken of, that he wished there were no posterity, but that the world might end with him. So it is the wishes of those that are wretches themselves, and that lay a foundation of wretched times after. They wish that heaven and earth may mingle, that no man might censure them when they are gone. What a shameful condition is it for men to gratify a number of unruly lusts, and give such sway to them as to do ill while they live, and to lay a foundation of misery for after times.

On the contrary, what a good thing is it, like Josiah and Nehemiah, to be full of goodness while we live, and to lay a foundation of happiness and prosperity to the church and state when we are gone! What a happy thing is it, when a man is gone, to say such a man did such a thing! He stood stoutly for the church, for religion; he was a public man; he forgot his own private good for the public; he deserved well of the times wherein he lived. What a blessed commendation is this, next to heaven, to have a blessed report on earth, and to carry such a conscience as will comfort a man that he hath carried himself well, and abounded in well-doing.

I beseech you let us think of this 'for ever and ever.' It is not enough that we be good in our times that are circumscribed to us. But as God hath given us immortal souls, and preserves us to immortal glory, and a crown of immortality, so let our thoughts and desires be immortal, that God may be glorified in the church, world without end. Oh, what a sweet comfort will it be when we are on our deathbed, to think what we have done in our lifetimes! Then all our good actions will come and meet together, to comfort and refresh our souls.

Encouragements to glorify God. The better to encourage us to glorify God while we are here, and to lay a foundation to eternise his glory for the time to come, consider, 1. God's gracious promise: 'Those that honour me I will honour,' 1 Sam. 2:30. If we had enlarged hearts to honour God, God would honour us. He hath passed his word for it. If a king should say so, O how would we be set on fire! how much more when the King of kings saith it!

2. Consider that we honour ourselves when we honour God. Nay, the more we honour God, the more we are bound to God; for it is from him that we honour him. The sacrifice comes from him, as well as the matter for which we sacrifice. He found a ram for Abraham to sacrifice, Gen. 22:13. He gives the heart to be thankful. The more we are thankful, the more we shall be thankful, and the more we ought to be thankful for our thankfulness.

3. The more we praise God, the more we should praise him, for it is the gift of God. When God sees we honour him, and frame ourselves that we may be such as may honour him, by emptying and disabling ourselves to be sufficient to do him any service, he will bestow more upon us. As men cast seed upon seed where there is fruitful ground, but they will sow nothing upon a barren heath. So the more we set ourselves to do good in our places, the more we shall have advantage thereunto; and the more we do good, the more we shall do good. When God sees we improve our talents so well that he trusts us withal, he will trust us with more.

4. Again, consider our glorifying and praising God causeth others to do so, which is the main end wherefore we live in this world. It is the employment of heaven, and we are so much in heaven as we are about this work. And when God gives us hearts to glorify him here, it is a good pledge that he will afterward glorify us in heaven. Who would lose the comfort of all this, to be barren, and yield to his base, unbelieving, dead heart? to save a little here? to sleep in a whole skin? and adventure upon no good action? Who would not rather take a course that hath such large encouragements attending it both in life and death? I beseech you think of these things. Christ, ere long, will come to be glorified in all those that believe, 2 Thes. 1:10. He will come to be glorified in his saints. Our glory tends to his glory. Shall we not glorify him all we can here, by setting forth his truth, by countenancing his children and servants, by doing good, and deserving well of ungrateful times we live in? Let men be as unthankful as they will, we look not to them, but to the honour of God, the credit of religion, the maintenance of the truth, &c. Let men be as they will be, base and wicked, enemies to grace and goodness, we do it not to them, but to God. Consider this. Will Christ come from heaven ere long to be glorified in us, and shall not we labour to glorify him while we are here? He will never come to be glorified in any hereafter, but those that glorify him now. As we look, therefore, that he should be glorified in us, and by us, let us glorify him now; for so he condescends to vouchsafe to be glorified in us and by us, that he may also glorify us.

Quest. St Paul saith, the wife is the glory of the husband, 1 Cor. 11:7. What means he by this? Solution. That is, she reflects the graces of a good husband. If he be good, she is good; she reflects his excellencies. So let every Christian soul that is married to Christ, be the glory of Christ, reflect his excellencies, be holy as he is holy, 1 Pet. 1:15, fruitful as he was in doing good, meek and humble as he was; every way be his glory; and then, undoubtedly, when he comes to judge us, he will come to be glorified in us, having been before glorified by us.

Beloved, these and such considerations should set us on work how to do Christ all the honour we can. As David saith, 'Is there any of Jonathan's posterity alive, that I may do good unto them for his sake?' 2 Sam. 9:1, so, considering we shall be so glorified by Christ, and that he will do so much for us in another world, we should inquire, Is there any of Christ's posterity here, any of his children in this world, that I may do good unto them? Is there any way wherein I may shew my thankfulness, and I will do it? Let us consider that we shall be for ever and ever glorified. The expression of it is beyond conceit. We shall never know it till we have it. Let this, I beseech you, stir us up to study how we may be thankful to God, set forth his glory, and deserve well of the church and times wherein we live. God hath children and a cause in the world which he dearly loves, let us own the same, and stand for it to the uttermost of our power, maugre all the spite and opposition of Satan and his wicked instruments.

The Lord in mercy settle these truths upon our hearts, and encourage us in his most holy way.

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY.*

SERMON IV

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. 4:19.

THOUGH divinity be clear in other differences from carnal or natural reasons, yet it hath homogeneal reasons and grounds of its own, whence come inferences as natural as for the tree to bear fruit, or the sun to shine; so upon the former divine grounds (for it is a matter of suffering wherein we must have pure divinity to support our souls), the apostle comes to bring a spiritual inference suitable to the same in the words read unto you. Wherefore, concluding all

to be true that was said before, let them that suffer, &c. Wherein consider, 1. That the state and condition of God's children is to suffer. 2. The dispensation of that suffering, they suffer not at all adventures, but according to the will of God. 3. Their duty in this estate, namely, to commit the keeping of their souls to God.

In the duty we have these particulars comprehended:—1. An action, to commit. 2. An object, what we must commit, the soul. 3. The person to whom, to God. 4. The manner, in well-doing. Lastly. The reason which should move us hereunto, implied in these words, as unto a faithful Creator. Whatsoever may support the doubting of a godly man in any trouble, and enforce upon him this duty of committing his soul to God, is briefly comprised in this, that God stands in that near relation of a Creator, yea, of a faithful Creator, to us. This is the scope of the words.

Obs. 1. That the state of God's children is to suffer, yea, to suffer of God; for sometimes he seems to be an enemy to his dearest servants, as unto Job. But chiefly they are in a militant estate and condition here.

1. Why God's children must suffer here. Because they live among those that they cannot but suffer from, wheresoever they live. Suppose they live among Christians, yet there are many Christians in name that are not so in deed. There hath been secret underminers in all ages; and what else may they look for but suffering from these? All that ever truly feared God and made conscience of their ways have found afflictions among false brethren. It was never heard of that a sheep should pursue a wolf.

2. They must suffer also in regard of themselves; for the truth is, the best of us all have many lusts to be subdued, and a great deal of corruption to be purged out, before we can come to heaven, that pure and holy place into which no unclean thing can enter, Rev. 21:27. Though a garden be never so fruitful, yet after a shower it will

need weeding. So, after long peace, the church of God gathers soil, and needs cleansing.

Obj. But some carnal wretch will say, I thank God I never suffered in my life, but have enjoyed peace and prosperity, and my heart's content in everything.

Ans. In the best estate there will be suffering one way or other. Then, suspect thyself to be in a bad estate, for every true Christian suffers in one kind or other, either from without or within. Sometimes God's children are troubled more with corruption than with affliction; at other times their peace is troubled both with corruption within and with affliction without; at the best, they have sufferings of sympathy. Shall the members of Christ suffer in other countries, and we profess ourselves to be living members, and yet not sympathise with them? We must be conformable to our Head before we can come to heaven. But the dispensation of our suffering is according to the will of God, where note two things.

1. That it is God's will we should suffer.
2. When we suffer we suffer according to his will.

To pass briefly over these, as not being the thing I aim at,

God's will concerning our suffering is permissive in respect of those that do us harm; but in regard of our patient enduring injuries, it is his approving and commanding will. We are enjoined to suffer, and they are permitted to wrong us.

Obj. It seems, then, there is some excuse for those that persecute the saints. They do but according to God's will: and if it be so, who dares speak against them?

Ans. It is not God's commanding will, but his suffering will. He useth their malice for his own ends. God lets the rein loose upon their necks. As a man is said to set a dog upon another when he

unlooseth his chain, so God is said to command them when he lets them loose to do mischief. They are full of malice themselves, which God useth as physicians do their poison to cure poison. God and they go two contrary ways, as a man in a ship walks one way, but is carried another. In the death of Christ the will of Judas and the rest went one way, and God's will another. So, in all our sufferings, when God useth wicked men, their will is destructive and hostile, but God's will is clean otherwise, aiming at the good of his people in all this. Nebuchadnezzar did the will of God in carrying the people captive. However, he thought not so, Isa. 10:7. Every sinful wretch that offers violence to the poor saints, imagine they do God good service in it, whenas, indeed, they do but execute the malice and venom of their own hearts. In the highest heavens, as they say in philosophy, the first thing moved is by a violent motion. The sun is carried about the heavens violently against its own proper motion, which inclines to a clean contrary course. So God dealeth with wicked men; he carries them they know not whither. They are set to do mischief, and God useth their sinful dispositions for his own ends, which plainly shews that God is without all fault, and they without all excuse.

Obs. But observe further, that we never suffer but when God will. And, beloved, his will is not that we should always suffer, though generally our estate be so in one kind or other. God is not always chiding, Ps. 103:9, but hath times of breathing and intermission, which he vouchsafes his children for their good. He knows if we had not some respite, some refreshment, we should soon be consumed and brought to nothing. 'The Lord knows whereof we are made, and considers we are but dust,' Ps. 103:14. Therefore he saith, 'Though for a season you are in heaviness, yet rejoice,' &c., 1 Pet. 1:6.

And this the Lord doth out of mercy to his poor creatures, that they might not sink before him, but gather strength of grace, and be the better fitted to bear further crosses afterwards. You know, Acts 9:31, after Saul's conversion, when he was become a Paul, then the church had rest, and increased in the comforts of the Holy Ghost.

God gives his people pausing times, some *lucida intervalla* (a). Our time of going into trouble is in God's hands; our time of abiding trouble is in God's hands; our time of coming out is in God's hands. As in our callings he preserves our going out and our coming in, so in every trouble that befalls us we come in and tarry there, and go out of the same when he pleaseth. He brings us to the fire as the goldsmith puts his metals and holds them there, till he hath refined them and purged out the dross, and then brings them out again. 'Our times,' as David saith excellently, 'are in thy hands, O Lord,' Ps. 31:15. Beloved, if our times were in our enemies' hands we should never come out. If they were in our own hands we should never stay in trouble, but come out as soon as we come in; nay, we would not come into trouble at all if we could choose. Beloved, everything of a Christian is dear unto God; his health is precious, his blood is precious; especially precious to the Lord is the death of his saints, Ps. 116:15. Do you think, therefore, he will let them suffer without his will? No; he will have a valuable consideration of all those that are malignant persecutors of his people at last. And it is for matters better than life that God lets his children suffer here; for, alas! this life is but a shadow, as it were, nothing. God regards us not as we are in this present world, but as strangers; therefore, he suffers us to sacrifice this life upon better terms than life, or else he would never let us suffer for his truth, and seal it with our dearest blood, as many of the saints have done.

Use. I beseech you, therefore, considering all our sufferings are by the appointment and will of God, let us bring our souls to an holy resignation unto his Majesty, not looking so much to the grievance we are under as to the hand that sent it. We should with one eye consider the thing, with another eye the will of God in the same. When a man considers, I suffer now, but it is by the will of God; he puts me upon it, how cheerfully will such an one commit his soul to the Lord! It is as hard a matter to suffer God's will as to do his will. Passive obedience is as hard as active. In the active we labour that what we do may please God; in the passive we must endeavour that what he doth may please us. Our hearts are as untoward to the one

as to the other. Therefore, let us beg of God to bring our wills to the obedience of his blessed will in everything. Would you have a pattern of this? Look upon our blessed Saviour, to whom we must be conformable in obedience if ever we will be conformable in glory. 'Lo, I come,' saith he; 'I am ready to do thy will, O Lord,' Heb. 10:9. What was the whole life of Christ but a doing and a suffering of God's will? 'Behold, it is written in the volume of thy book that I should do thy will,' ver. 7, and here I am ready pressed for it. It should be, therefore, the disposition of all those that are led by the Spirit of Christ, as all must be that hope to reign with him, to be willing to suffer with Christ here, and say with him, Lord, I am here ready to do and suffer whatsoever thou requirest! When once we are brought to this, all the quarrel is ended between God and us.

I come now to that which I chiefly intend, which is the Christian's duty.

Let him commit his soul to God in well-doing. Wherein observe,

1. The manner how he must commit, in well-doing.
2. What, his soul.
3. To whom, to God.
4. The reasons moving, implied in these words, as unto a faithful Creator.

Now this well-doing must be distinguished into two times.

1. Before our suffering. When a son of Belial shall offer violence to a poor saint of God, what a comfort is this, that he suffers in well-doing! Oh, beloved, we should so carry ourselves that none might speak evil justly against us, that none, unless it were wrongfully, might do us hurt. We should be in an estate of well-doing continually in our general and particular callings. We must not go out of our sphere, but serve God in our standings, that if trouble

comes it may find us in a way of well-pleasing, either doing works of charity or else the works of our particular calling wherein God hath set us. In all that befalls thee look to this, that thou suffer not as an evil doer, 1 Pet. 4:15.

2. So likewise in suffering, we must commit our souls to God in well-doing in a double regard.

1. We must carry ourselves generally well in all our sufferings.

2. In particular, we must do well to them that do us wrong.

First, I say, in affliction our carriage must be generally good in respect of God, by a meek behaviour under his hand, without murmuring against him.

2. In regard of the cause of God, that we betray it not through fear or cowardice, through base aims and intentions, &c., but endeavour to carry it with a good conscience in all things. When we make it clear by managing anything, that we are led with the cause and conscience of our duty, it works mightily upon them that wrong us. (1.) It wins those that are indifferent; and (2.) confounds the obstinate, and stops their mouths. Therefore, let us carry ourselves well, not only before, but in suffering. We may not fight against them with their own weapons, that is, be malicious as they are malicious, and rail as they rail. Beloved, this is as if a man should see another drink poison, and he will drink, too, for company; he is poisoned with malice, and thou, to revenge thyself, wilt be poisoned too. What a preposterous course is this! Ought we not rather to behave ourselves as befits the cause of Christ, as becomes our Christian profession, and as befits him whose children we are?

We should have an eye to God, and an eye to ourselves, and an eye to others, and an eye to the cause in hand; so we shall do well. We must not commit our souls to God in idleness, doing nothing at all, nor yet in evil doing, but in well doing. We must have a care, if we would suffer with comfort, not to study how to avoid suffering by

tricks, so to hurt the cause of Christ. This is to avoid suffering, by sin, to leap out of one danger into another. Is not the least evil of sin worse than the greatest evil of punishment? What doth a man get by pleasing men, to displease God? Perhaps a little ease for the present. Alas! what is this to that inexpressible horror and despair which will one day seize upon thy soul eternally for betraying the blessed cause and truth of Christ? How can we expect God should own us another day, when we will not own him in his cause, and his members, to stand for them now? Think on that speech of our Saviour, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father,' Mark 8:38.

Therefore, avoid not any suffering by sin. See how blessed St Paul carried himself in this case. 'The Lord,' saith he, 'hath delivered me, and will deliver me,' 2 Tim. 4:18. From what? from death? No; from every evil work. What! will God keep him from evil sufferings? No; for immediately after he was put to death. What then? Why! he will preserve me from every evil work, that is, from every sinful act, which may hurt the cause of Christ, or blemish my profession. This was it Paul chiefly regarded; not whether he will preserve me from death or trouble, I leave that to him; but this I hope and trust to, that he will preserve me from every evil work to his heavenly kingdom. Thus should it be with every Christian in the cause of religion, or in a cause of justice, &c.; for there is not any good cause but it is worth our lives to stand in, if we be called to it. It is necessary we should be just; it is not so necessary we should live (b). A Christian's main care is how to do well; and if he can go on in that course, he is a happy man.

Obj. But I cannot do well, but I shall suffer ill.

Ans. Labour, therefore, to carry thyself well in suffering evil, not only in the general, but even in particular, towards those persons that do thee wrong; endeavour to requite their evil with good. There is a great measure of self-denial required to be a Christian,

especially in matter of revenge, 'to pray for them that curse us, to do good to them that persecute us,' &c., and so 'heap coals of fire upon our enemies' heads,' Prov. 25:22, Rom. 12:20. How is that? There are—

1. Coals of conversion.

2. Coals of confusion.

How in suffering we heap coals of fire. You know coals do either melt or consume. If they belong to God, we shall heap coals of fire to convert them, and make them better by our holy carriage in suffering. If they be wicked, graceless wretches, we shall heap coals of fire to consume them; for it will aggravate their just damnation when they do ill to those that deserve well of them.

Obj. Some will say, Christianity is a strange condition, that enforceth such things upon men, that are so contrary to nature.

Ans. It is so, indeed, for we must be new-moulded before ever we can come to heaven. We must put off our whole self; and he is gone a great way in religion, that hath brought his heart to this pass. None ever overcame himself in these matters out of religious respects, but he found a good issue at last. It is a sweet evidence of the state of grace, none better, when a man can love his very enemies, and those that have done him most wrong; it is an argument that such a man hath something above nature in him. What is above nature, if this be not, for a man to overcome himself in this sweet appetite of revenge? Revenge is most natural to a man; it is as sugar, as the heathen saith; and for a man to overcome himself in that, it argues the power of grace and godliness in such a one.

As Christianity is an excellent estate, an admirable advancing of a man to a higher condition, so it must not seem strange for those that are Christians to be raised to a higher pitch of soul than other men. See how our Saviour dealt in this particular, 'Father, forgive

them, they know not what they do,' Luke 23:34; and so likewise Stephen, being led by the same Spirit of Christ, desired God 'not to lay this sin to their charge,' Acts 7:60; and so all the martyrs in the first state of the church, when the blood of Christ was warm, and the remembrance of Christ was fresh, were wont to pray for their enemies, committing their souls to God in well doing.

The excellent victory of suffering. I beseech you let us labour by all means possible to bring our hearts hereunto. If anything overcome, this will do it, to suffer well. The church of God is a company of men that gain and overcome by suffering in doing good. Thus the dove overcomes the eagle, the sheep overcomes the wolf, the lamb overcomes the lion, &c. It hath been so from the beginning of the world. Meek Christians, by suffering quietly, have at length overcome those that are malicious, and have gained even their very enemies to the love of the truth. What shall we think, then, of the greatest part of the world, who never think of suffering, which is the first lesson in Christianity, but study their ease and contentment, accounting the blessed martyrs too prodigal of their blood, &c.?

Others there are, who, if once they come to suffer, presently fall to shifting and plotting, how to get forth again by unlawful means; oftentimes making shipwreck of a good conscience, and dishonouring the gospel of God. I beseech you consider these things. Every man would have Christ, and be religious, so long as they may enjoy peace and quietness; but if once trouble or persecution arises, then farewell religion; they cast off their profession then. I wish this were not the case of many seeming Christians in these our days.

But suppose a man carry himself ill in suffering?

There is not the least promise of comfort in Scripture to such a man, unless he return, and seek the Lord by timely repentance; for all encouragement is to well-doing. Oh, what a pitiful thing is it for the soul to be in such a state, as that it dares not commit itself to God! A

man in evil doing cannot go home to his own conscience for comfort, nor have any inward peace in the least action he performs, so long as he doth it with false aims, and carnal affections, &c. Who would deprive himself of the comfort of suffering in a good cause for want of integrity? I beseech you, therefore, carry yourselves well in anything you either do or suffer, otherwise no blessing can be expected; for we tempt the Lord, and make him accessory to us, when we commit our souls to him in ill-doing: even as your pirates and other miscreants in the world, that will rob and steal, and do wickedly, and yet pray to God to bless them in their base courses (c); what is this but to make God like themselves, as if he approved their theft and horrible blasphemy?

But what must we commit to God in well-doing? The keeping of our souls. The soul is the more excellent part, witness he that purchased the same with his dearest blood. 'What will it profit a man,' saith our Saviour, 'to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Mark 8:36. Who could know the price of a soul better than he that gave his life for redemption of it? Yea, if the whole world were laid in one balance and the soul in another, the soul were better than all. Therefore, whatsoever estate thou art in, let thy first care be for thy soul, that it may go well with that. You know in any danger or combustion, suppose the firing of an house, that which a man chiefly looks after is his jewels and precious things, 'I have some wealth in such a place, if I could but have that I care for no more, let the rest go;' so it is with a Christian, whatsoever becomes of him in this world, he looks to his precious soul, that that may be laid up safely in the hands of God. Suppose a man were robbed by the highway, and had some special jewel about him, though every thing else were taken away from him, yet so long as that is left he thinks himself a happy man, and saith, they have taken away some luggage, but they have left me that which I prize more than all: so it is with a Christian, let him be stripped of all he hath, so his soul be not hurt, but all safe and well there, he cares not much.

Quest. But what should we desire our souls to be kept from in this world?

Ans. From sin and the evil consequences thereof. Beloved, we have great need our souls should be kept by God; for alas! what sin is there but we shall fall into it, unless God preserve us in peace and comfort, and assurance of a better estate. What would become of our poor souls if we had them in our own keeping? Ahithophel had the keeping of his own soul, and what became of him? First, he did run into the sins of treason, and afterwards, being a wicked politician, and an atheist, having no delight in God, was the executioner of himself (d). We shall be ready, as Job saith, to tear our own souls if God hath not the keeping of them; we shall tear them with desperate thoughts, as Judas, who never committed his soul to God, but kept it himself, and we see what became of him. The apostle bids us go to God in prayer, and committing our souls to him, to keep from sin, despair, distrust, and all spiritual evil whatsoever, 'and then the peace of God which passeth all understanding,' as the word in the original is, 'shall guard* our souls in Christ,' Phil. 4:7. Our souls have need of guarding, and we of ourselves are not sufficient to do it; therefore we should commit them unto God, for except he preserve us we shall soon perish.

Wicked men think that they have no souls. I am ashamed to speak of it, and yet notwithstanding the courses of men are such, that they enforce a man to speak that which he is ashamed of. What do I speak of committing your souls to God, when many thousands in the world live as if they had no souls at all? I am persuaded that your common swearers, and profane wretches, who wrong their souls to pleasure their bodies, and prostitute both body and soul, and all to their base lusts, think for the time that they have no souls; they think not that there is such an excellent immortal substance breathed into them by God, which must live for ever in eternal happiness or endless misery. Did they believe this they would not wound and stain their precious souls as they do; they would not obey every base lust out of the abundance of profaneness

in their hearts, even for nothing, as many notorious loose persons do. Oh could we but get this principle into people, that they have immortal souls, which must live for ever, they would soon be better than they are; but the devil hath most men in such bondage that their lives speak that they believe they have no souls, by their ill usage of them.

Obj. But must we not commit our bodies and our estates to God, as well as our souls?

Ans. Yes, all we have; for that is only well kept which God keeps; but yet in time of suffering we must be at a point[†] with these things. If God will have our liberty, if he will have our life and all, we must hate all for Christ's sake; but we must not be at such a point with our souls, we must keep them close to God, and desire him to keep them in well-doing.

Obj. Suppose it come to an exigent, that we must either sin and hurt our souls, or else lose all our outward good things?

Ans. Our chief care must be over our souls. We must desire God to preserve our souls, whatsoever becomes of these; our principal care must be that that be not blemished in the least kind; for, alas! other things must be parted with first or last. This body of ours, or whatsoever is dear in the world, must be stripped from us, and laid in the dust ere long. But here is our comfort, though our body be dead, yet our souls are themselves still; dead St Paul is Paul still. Our body is but the case or tabernacle wherein our soul dwells; especially a man's self is his soul; keep that and keep all. I beseech you, therefore, as things are in worth and excellency in God's account, let our esteem be answerable. You have many compliments in the world, how doth your body, &c., mere compliments indeed, but how few will inquire how our souls do? alas! that is in poor case. The body perhaps is well looked unto, that is clothed, and care taken that nothing be wanting to it, but the poor soul is ragged and

wounded, and naked. Oh that men were sensible of that miserable condition their poor souls are in.

Beloved, the soul is the better part of a man, and if that miscarries, all miscarries. If the soul be not well, the body will not continue long in a good estate. Bernard saith sweetly, 'Oh, body, thou hast a noble guest dwelling in thee, a soul of such inestimable worth that it makes thee truly noble.' Whatsoever goodness and excellency is in the body, is communicated from the soul; when that once departs, the body is an unlovely thing, without life or sense. The very sight of it cannot be endured of the dearest friends. What an incredible baseness is it therefore, that so precious a thing as the soul is, should serve these vile bodies of ours! Let the body stay its leisure; the time of the resurrection is the time of the body. In this life it should be serviceable to our souls in suffering and doing whatsoever God calls us unto. Let our bodies serve our souls now, and then body and soul shall for ever after be happy; whereas, if we, to gratify our bodies, do betray our souls, both are undone.

Beloved, the devil and devilish-minded men, acted with his spirit, have a special spite to the soul. Alas! what do they aim at in all their wrongs and injuries to God's children? Do they care to hurt the body? indeed, they will do this rather than nothing at all; they will rather play at small game than sit out. The devil will enter into the swine rather than stand out altogether. Some mischief he will do, however; but his main spite is at the soul, to vex and disquiet that, and taint it with sin all he can. Considering therefore that it is Satan's aim to unloose our hold from God, by defiling our souls with sin, so to put a divorce betwixt his blessed majesty and us, oh! let it be our chief care to see to that which Satan strikes at most! He did not so much care, in Job's trouble, for his goods, or for his house, or children, &c. Alas! he aimed at a further mischief than this! his plot was how to make him blaspheme and wound his soul, that so there might be a difference betwixt God and him. He first tempts us to commit sin, and afterwards to despair for sin.

Quest. But to whom must the soul be committed?

Ans. Our souls must be committed to God. Commit the keeping of your souls to God. Indeed, he only can keep our souls. We cannot keep them ourselves; neither can anything else in the world do it. Some when they are sick will commit themselves to the physician, and put all their trust in him. When they are in trouble they will commit themselves to some great friend; when they have any bad, naughty cause to manage, they will commit themselves to their purse, and think that shall bear them out in anything. One thinks his wit and policy shall secure him, another that his shifts may shelter him, &c.; and indeed the heart of man is so full of atheism, that it can never light upon the right object, to trust God alone, until it sees everything else fail, as being insufficient to support the soul, or to yield any solid comfort in times of extremity and distress.

Quest. But why must we commit our souls to God?

Ans. Because he is a faithful Creator. Whence observe,

Obs. That the soul of man being an understanding essence, will not be satisfied and settled without sound reasons. Comfort is nothing else but reasons stronger than the evil which doth afflict us; when the reasons are more forcible to ease the mind than the grievance is to trouble it. It is no difficult matter to commit our souls to God when we are once persuaded that he is a faithful Creator. A man commits himself to another man, and hath no other reason for it, but only he is persuaded of his ability and credit in the world; that he is a man of estate and power to do him good. So it is in this business of religion. Our souls are carried to anything strongly when they are carried by strong reasons, as in this particular of trusting God with our souls. When we see sufficient reasons inducing thereto, we easily resign them into his hands. This shews that popery is an uncomfortable religion, which brings men to despair. They have no reason for what they maintain. What reason can they give for their doctrine of doubting, transubstantiation,

perfect obedience to the law, &c.? These are unreasonable things. The soul cannot yield to such absurdities. It must have strong reasons to stablish it, as here, to consider God as a faithful Creator, &c. There is something in God to answer all the doubts and fears of the soul, and to satisfy it in any condition whatsoever. This is the very foundation of religion; not that any worth can accrue to the Creator from the creature, but that there is an all-sufficiency in the Creator to relieve the poor creature. If a man consider in what order God created him, it will make him trust God. Paradise and all in it were ready for him, so soon as he came into the world. God created us after his own image, that as he was Lord of all things, so we should be lord of the creatures. They were all at his service, that he might serve God. Therefore after everything else was created, he was made, that so God might bring him as it were to a table ready furnished.

And not only in nature, but in holiness, having an immortal and invisible soul resembling God. We must take God here as a Creator of our whole man, body and soul, and of the new creature in us. God made man at the first, but that was not so much as for God to be made man, to make us new creatures. God created our bodies out of the dust, but our souls come immediately from himself. He breathes them into us, and in this respect he is a higher Creator than in the other; for when we had marred our first making, and became more like beasts than men, for indeed every one that is not like God sympathiseth with beasts or devils one way or other, God in Christ made us new again. Yea, God became man to enrich us with all grace and goodness, to free us from the hands of Satan, and bring us to an eternal state of communion with himself in heaven. For all the old heaven and the old earth shall pass away, and the old condition of creatures, and a new life shall be given them. God that made the new heaven and the new earth, hath made us for them. Considering therefore that God gave us our first being, and when we were worse than naught, gave us a second being in regard to our new creation, how should it stir us up to commit our souls unto him! especially if we consider that in him we 'live and move and

have our being,' Acts 17:28; that there is not the least thought and affection to goodness in us but it comes from God; we are what we are by his grace.

Quest. What is the reason that love descends so much?

Ans. Because a man looks upon that which is his own and loves it. Now God looks upon us as upon those into whom he hath infused mercy and goodness, and he loves his own work upon us; and therefore having begun a good work, will perfect the same. Do not men delight to polish their own work? As in the first creation God never took off his hand till he had finished his work, so in the second creation of our souls he will never remove his hand from the blessed work of grace till he hath perfected the same; therefore we may well commit our souls to him.

Obj. But suppose a man be in a desperate estate, and hath no way of escaping?

Ans. Remember that God is the same still; he hath not forgot his old art of creating, but is as able to help now as ever, and can create comforts for thee in thy greatest troubles. As in the first creation he made light out of darkness, order out of confusion, so still he is able out of thy confused and perplexed estate to create peace and comfort. Thou knowest not what to do perhaps, thy mind is so troubled and disquieted; why, commit thy soul to God; he can raise an excellent frame out of the chaos of thy thoughts. Therefore be not dismayed; consider thou hast God in covenant with thee, and hast to deal with an almighty Creator, who can send present help in time of need. Dost thou want any grace? dost thou want spiritual life? Go to this Creator, he will put a new life into thee; he that made all things of nothing can raise light out of thy dark mind, and can make fleshy thy stony heart, though it be as hard as a rock. Therefore never despair, but frequent the means of grace, and still think of God under this relation of a Creator; and when he hath begun any good work of grace in thee, go confidently to His Majesty,

and desire him to promote and increase the same in thy heart and life. Lord, I am thy poor creature, thou hast in mercy begun a blessed work in me, and where thou hast begun thou hast said thou wilt make an end. When thou createdst the world, thou didst not leave it till all was done; and when thou createdst man thou madest an end. Now, I beseech thee, perfect the new creature in my soul. As thou hast begun to enlighten mine understanding and to direct my affections to the best things, so I commit my soul unto thee for further guidance and direction to full happiness.

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY*

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. 4:19.

I AM now to treat of that other attribute of God, which should move us to trust in him, namely, as he is a faithful Creator. Now God is faithful, 1. In his nature. He is I AM, always like himself, immutable and unchangeable. 2. In his word. He expresseth himself as he is. The word that comes from God is an expression of the faithfulness of his nature. 3. In his works. 'Thou art good, and dost good,' as the psalmist saith, Ps. 119:68. God being faithful in himself, all must needs be so that proceeds from him. Whatsoever relation God takes upon him, he is faithful therein. As he is a Creator, so he preserves and maintains his own work. As he is a Father, he is faithful in discharging that duty to the full, for his children's good. As he is our Friend, he likewise performs all the duties of that relation, &c. And why doth God stoop so low to take these relations upon him, but

only to shew that he will certainly accomplish the same to the utmost? Whence is it that men are faithful in their relations one towards another, that the father is faithful to his child? Is it not from God, the chief Father? That a friend should be faithful to his friend, is it not from God, the great Friend?

All his ways are mercy and truth, Ps. 35:10. They are not only merciful and good and gracious, but mercy and truth itself. If he shew himself to be a Father, he is a true father, a true friend, a true creator and protector. As one saith, 'Shall I cause others to fear, and be a tyrant myself?'[†] All other faithfulness is but a beam of that which is in God. Shall not he be most faithful that makes other things faithful?

Now, this faithfulness of God is here a ground of this duty of committing ourselves to him; and we may well trust him whose word hath been seven times tried in the fire, Ps. 12:6. There is no dross in it. Every word of God is a sure word; his truth is a shield and buckler; we may well trust in it. Therefore, when you read of any singular promise in the New Testament, it is said, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c., 1 Tim. 1:15; that is, this is such a speech as we may trust to; it is the speech of a faithful Creator.

Considering, therefore, that God is so faithful every way in his promises and in his deeds, let us make especial use of it. Treasure up all the promises we can of the forgiveness of sins, of protection and preservation; that he will never leave us, but be our God to death, &c., and then consider withal that he is faithful in performing the same. When we are affrighted by his majesty and his justice, and other attributes, then think of his mercy and truth. He hath clothed himself with faithfulness, as the psalmist saith. In all the unfaithfulness of men whom thou trustest, depend upon this, that God is still the same, and will not deceive thee.

When we have man's word, we have his sufficiency in mind, for men's words are as themselves are. What will not the word of a king

do? If a man be mighty and great, his word is answerable. This is the reason why we should make so much of the word of God, because it is the word of Jehovah, a mighty Creator, who gives a being to all things, and can only be Lord and Master of his word. We know God's meaning no otherwise than by his word. Till we come to the knowledge of vision in heaven, we must be content with the knowledge of revelation in the word.

And in every promise, single out that which best suiteth with thy present condition. If thou art in any great distress, think upon the almighty power of God. Lord, thou hast made me of nothing, and canst deliver me out of this estate. Behold, I fly unto thee for succour, &c. If thou art in perplexity for want of direction, and knowest not what to do, single out the attribute of God's wisdom, and desire him to teach thee the way that thou shouldst go. If thou art wronged, fly to his justice, and say, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, hear and help thy servant. If thou be surprised with distrust and staggering, then go to his truth and faithfulness. Thou shalt always find in God something to support thy soul in the greatest extremity that can befall thee; for if there were not in God a fulness to supply every exigent* that we are in, he were not to be worshipped, he were not to be trusted.

Man is lighter than vanity in the balance. Every man is a liar, that is, he is false. We may be so, and yet be men too, but God is essentially true. He cannot deceive and be God too. Therefore ever, when thou art disappointed with men, retire to God and to his promises, and build upon this, that the Lord will not be wanting in anything may do thee good. With men there is breach of covenant, nation with nation, and man with man. There is little trust to be had in any; but in all confusions here is comfort. A religious person may cast himself boldly into the arms of the Almighty, and go to him in any distress, as to a faithful Creator that will not forsake him.

Use. Oh, let us be ashamed that we should dishonour him who is ready to pawn his faithfulness and truth for us. If we confess our

sins, 'God is faithful to forgive them,' 1 John 1:9. He will not suffer us to be tempted 'above that which we are able,' 1 Cor. 10:13. When we perplex ourselves with doubts and fears whether he will make good his promise or not, we disable His Majesty. Do we not think God stands upon his truth and faithfulness? Undoubtedly he doth, and we cannot dishonour him more than to distrust him, especially in his evangelical promises. We make him a liar, and rob him of that which he most glories in, his mercy and faithfulness, if we rest not securely upon him.

See the baseness of man's nature. God hath made all other things faithful that are so, and we can trust them; but are ever and anon questioning the truth of his promise. We may justly take up Salvian's complaint in his time, 'Who hath made the earth faithful to bring forth fruit,' saith he, 'but God? Yet we can trust the ground with sowing our seed. Who makes man faithful, who is by nature the most slippery and unconstant creature of all other, but God only? Yet we can trust a vain man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and look for great matters at his hands, before an all-sufficient God, that changeth not. Who makes the seas and the winds faithful, that they do not hurt us, but God? And yet we are apt to trust the wind and weather sooner than God, as we see many seamen that will thrust forth their goods into the wide ocean in a small bark, to shift any way, rather than trust God with them.'

Yea, let Satan, by his wicked instruments, draw a man to some cursed politic reasons, for the devil doth not immediately converse with the world, but in his instruments, and he will sooner trust him than God himself. So prone are our hearts to distrust the Almighty, to call his truth in question, and to trust the lies of our own hearts and other men's, before him. Let us, therefore, lament our infidelity, that having such an omnipotent and faithful creator to rely upon, yet we cannot bring our hearts to trust in him. There are two main pillars of a Christian's faith:—

1. The power of God.

2. The goodness of God.

These two, like Aaron and Hur, hold up the arms of our prayers. Let our estate be never so desperate, yet God is a Creator still. Let our sins and infirmities be never so great, yet he hath power to heal them. Oh, how should this cheer up our souls, and support our drooping spirits in all our strivings and conflicts with sin and Satan, that we yield not to the least temptation, having such an almighty God to fly unto for succour.

We must not trust the creature. 'Cursed is that man which makes flesh his arm,' Jer. 17:5. He that we trust in, must be no less than a Creator. 'Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,' saith God, he is a poor creature as thyself is; raised of nothing, and shall come to dust again. If we would be trusting, as we needs must, for we are dependent persons, and want many things whilst we are here, let us go to the fountain, and not to broken cisterns for comfort.

It is no small privilege for a Christian to have this free access to God in times of extremity. Be we what we can be, take us at our worst in regard of sin or misery, yet we are his creatures still. I am the clay, thou art the potter; I am a sinful wretch, yet I am the workmanship of thy hands. O Lord, thou hast framed me and fashioned me, &c. No wicked person in the world can, upon good ground, plead in this manner, though they may say to God, I am thy creature, yet they have not the grace in their troubles to plead this unto him. Why, Lord, though I be a rebellious son, and am not worthy to be called thy servant, yet I am thy creature, though a sinful one. Surely, had we faith, we would take hold by a little. The soul of man is like the vine, it winds about and fastens upon every little help. Faith will see day at a little hole; and where it sees anything it will catch at it, as the woman of Canaan. Christ calls her dog. Why, be it so, Lord, I am a dog, yet I am one of the family though I be a dog; therefore have mercy on me.

Oh, it is a sweet reasoning thus to cling about God, and gather upon him; it is a special art of faith. Though a carnal man may reason thus, as having a ground from the truth of the thing, yet he hath not grace to reason out of an affection thereunto. Though he should say, Lord, I am thy creature; yet his heart tells him thus, if he would hearken to it, I am thy creature, Lord, but I have made all my members that I have received from thee, instruments to sin against thee, and I purpose not to reform; my tongue is an instrument of swearing, lying, and profane speeches; my hands are instruments of bribery and violence, continually working mischief in thy sight; my feet carry me to such and such filthy places, and abominable courses; mine own heart tells me that I fight against thee, my Creator, with those very limbs and weapons which thou hast given me. Beloved, the conscience of this so stifles the voice of a wilful sinner, that notwithstanding he acknowledgeth himself to be God's creature, yet he cannot with any comfort plead for mercy at his hand in times of distress.

But to a right godly man this is an argument of special use and consequence; in the midst of troubles he may allege this, and it binds God to help him. We see great ones when they raise any, though perhaps there is little merit in them, yet they call them their creatures; and this is a moving argument with such to polish their own work still, and not to desert them. Will it not be a prevailing argument with God then, for a Christian to plead with him? Lord, thou hast raised me out of nothing, yea, out of a state worse than nothing; I am thy poor creature, forsake not the work of thine own hands. We may see what a fearful thing sin is in God's eye, that the works of our hands should make God depart from the work of his hands, as he will certainly do at the day of judgment: 'Depart, you cursed,' &c., Mat. 25:41. Though we be his creatures, yet because we have not used those gifts and abilities which he hath given us to serve His Majesty, he will not endure the sight of us in that day.

But that you may the better practise this duty of committing your souls to God, take these directions.

1. Directions how to commit our souls to God. First, see that thou be thy own man. It is an act of persons free to covenant. Our souls must be ours before we can commit them to God. Naturally we are all slaves to Satan; the strong man hath possession of us, and therefore our first care must be to get out of his bondage, to which purpose we should much eye the sweet promises and invitations of the gospel, alluring us to accept of mercy and deliverance from sin and death, as—'Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., Mat. 11:28, and so cast the guilt of our souls upon God to pardon first, and then to sanctify and cleanse, that we may no more return to folly, but lead an unspotted life before him for the time to come.

It is therefore a silly course and dangerous, which poor worldly wretches take, who think Lord, have mercy upon them, will serve their turn, and that God will certainly save their souls; whenas they were never yet in the state of grace or reconciliation with him, nor never had any divorce made between them and their sins, and consequently never any league between God and their souls to this day.

Beloved, when once a man hath alienated his soul from God by sin, he hath then no more command of it; for the present it is quite out of his power. Now, when we would commit our souls to God aright, we must first commit them to him to pardon the guilt of sin in them. When this is done, God will give us our souls again, and then they may truly be said to be our own, and not before. It is the happiness of a Christian that he is not his own, but that whether he live or die, he is the Lord's.

Direction 2. In the second place, we must labour to find ourselves in covenant with God; that is, to find him making good his promises to us, and ourselves making good our promises to him. For a man cannot commit himself to God, unless he find a disposition in his heart to be faithful to him.

There is a passive fidelity, and an active. 1. Passive faithfulness is in the things that we give trust unto, as, such a one is a sure, trusty man, therefore I will rely upon him. 2. Active faithfulness in the soul is, when we cast ourselves upon a man that is trusty, and depend upon him. The more a man knows another to be faithful, the more faithful he will be in trusting of him; and thus we must trust God, if ever we expect any good at his hands; and our dependence on him binds him to be the more faithful to us. He is counted a wicked man indeed, that will deceive the trust committed to him. Trust begets fidelity; it makes a good man the more faithful, when he knows he is trusted.

Learn therefore to know thyself to be in covenant with God, and to trust him with all thou hast; train up thyself in a continual dependence upon him. He that trusts God with his soul, will trust him every day in everything he hath or doth. He knows well, that whatsoever he enjoys is not his own, but God's; and this stirs him to commit all his ways and doings to his protection, esteeming nothing safe but what the Lord keeps. He sees 'it is not in sinful man to direct his own steps,' Jer. 10:23; and therefore resigns up his estate, his calling, his family, whatsoever is near and dear unto him, to the blessed guidance and direction of the Almighty. Oh, thinks he, that I were in covenant with God, that he would own me for his, and take the care of me, how happy should my condition then be!

He will likewise commit the church and state wherein he lives to God; and strengthens his faith daily by observing God's faithful dealing with his people in every kind.

How behoveful it is for Christians thus to inure themselves to be acquainted with God by little and little, first trusting him with smaller matters, and then with greater. How can a man trust God with his soul, that distrusts him for the petty things of this life? 'They that give to the poor are said to lend unto the Lord,' Prov. 19:17; and 'if we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall find it again,' Eccles. 11:1. Beloved, he that parts with anything to relieve a

poor saint, and will not trust God with his promise to recompense it again, but thinks all is gone, and he shall never see it more, &c., exceedingly derogates from the truth and goodness of the Almighty, who hath promised to return with advantage whatsoever we give that way. He hath secret ways of his own to do us good, that we know not of. A man is never the poorer for that which he discreetly gives. It is hard to believe this; but it is much harder for a man to commit his soul to God when he dies, with assurance that he shall partake of mercy, and be saved at the last day.

Direction 3. Again, take heed of these evil and cursed dispositions that hinder us from the performance of this duty; as namely, carnal wit and policy, and carnal will and affection, &c. There is a great deal of self-denial to be learned, before we can go out of ourselves and commit all to God; ere we can cast ourselves into his arms, and lay ourselves at his feet. Therefore take heed that we be not ruled, either by our own carnal policy or others', to knit ourselves to that; for I beseech you, do but think, what is true in all stories, not only in the Scripture, but elsewhere, the most unfortunate men that ever were, otherwise wise enough, were always too confident of themselves. The greatest swimmers, you know, are often drowned, because relying overmuch on their own skill, they cast themselves into danger, and are swallowed up of the deep. Even confidence in wit is usually unfortunate, though it be great. Let Solomon be an example. You see how he strengthened himself by carnal supports; but what became of all? Alas, it soon vanished and came to nothing. The Jews would run to the reed of Egypt, and that ran into their hands; instead of helping, it hurt them. God takes delight to overthrow the ripeness of all the carnal policy of man, that advanceth itself against his word and gospel. Take heed of confidence in prosperity, in wit, in strength; take heed of whatsoever hinders the committing of our souls to God; and always remember, that honesty is the best policy; and that God reconciled in Christ is the best sanctuary to flee unto. 'The name of God is a strong tower,' saith Solomon; 'the righteous flee thereto, and are safe,' Prov. 18:10.

That carnal policy hinders our safety. Let Christians therefore have nothing to do with carnal shifts, and politic ends; for they have a strong rock, and a sure hold to go to; the Almighty is their shield. Beloved, God will be honoured by our trusting of him, and those that will be wiser than God, and have other courses distinct and contrary to him, must look for confusion in all their plots. A Christian should thus think with himself, let God be wise for me; his wisdom shall be my direction; his will shall be the rule of my life; he shall guide me and support me; I will adventure upon no course that I dare not commit my soul with comfort to God in.

Oh beloved, if we tender our own welfare, let us shun all unwarrantable courses, and adventure upon no action whatsoever, wherein we cannot upon good grounds desire the Lord's protection. It is a fearful estate for a man to undertake such courses, as that he cannot if he were surprised by judgment, suddenly commit himself to God in. The throne of iniquity shall not abide with God; he will not take a wicked man by the hand, nor own him in a distressful time.

Study therefore, I beseech you, to be always in such a blessed condition, as that you may, without tempting of God, in a holy boldness of faith, resign up your souls to him. A guilty conscience cannot seek the Lord; naturally it runs away from him. Peace is not easily gotten, nor the gap soon made up; therefore preserve conscience clear and unspotted, if thou wouldst have God thy refuge in time of need. Adam when he had sinned ran from God; Peter, when our Saviour discovered more than an ordinary majesty in his miracles, said, 'Lord, depart from me, I am a sinful man,' Luke 5:8. It is the work of flesh and blood to depart from God, but when a man goes to God, it is a sign he hath more than flesh and blood in him; for this cannot be done without a supernatural work of faith; which alone will make a sinful conscience fly to God, and look to him as a father in Christ, and desire him by his almighty power, whereby he created heaven and earth, to create faith in the soul. And when thou hast cast thy soul into the arms of the Almighty,

labour to settle it there, and to quiet thyself in the discharge of thy duty; say thus, now I have done that which belongs to me, let God do that which belongs to him; I will not trouble myself about God's work, but in well-doing commit my soul to him, and let him alone with the rest.

Christians should not outrun God's providence, and say, what shall become of me? this trouble will overwhelm me! &c. but serve his providence in the use of the means, and then leave all to his disposal. Especially this duty is needful in the hour of death, or when some imminent danger approacheth; but then it will be an hard work, except it be practised aforehand.

Direction 4. Labour therefore for assurance of God's love betimes, get infallible evidences of thy estate in grace, that thou art a renewed person, and that there is a thorough change wrought in thy heart; that God hath set a stamp upon thee for his own, and that thou hast something above nature in thee; then mayest thou cheerfully say, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; I am thine, Lord, save me, &c.,' Luke 23:46, otherwise having no interest in God, how canst thou expect any favour from him? Oh the sweet tranquillity and heaven upon earth which those enjoy who have God to be their friend!

This lays a heavy prejudice upon antichristian religion, which maintains a doctrine of doubting, affirming that we ought not to labour for assurance of God's favour. Oh beloved, what deprives a poor Christian soul of comfort more than this? Alas! how can a man at the hour of death commit his soul into the hands of Almighty God, that staggers whether he be his child or no? and knows not whether he shall go to heaven or hell? Therefore it should be our daily endeavour, as we would have comfort in the time of resigning and giving up our souls to God, to gather evidences of a good estate; that we are in covenant with him; that he is our Father; and that we are his children in Christ Jesus.

For will a man trust his jewels with an enemy, or with a doubtful friend? How can the swearer commit his soul to God? How can loose livers and your filthy, unclean wretches, that live in continual enmity against the Lord, commit themselves with any comfort unto him? They pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' Mat. 6:13, and yet run daily into temptations, into vile houses and places of wickedness, wherein they feed their corruptions, and nothing else. They say, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and yet use unwarrantable courses, seeking to thrive by unlawful means.

Beloved, a man can commit his soul with no more comfort to God than he hath care to please him. If a man knows such a one hath his evidences and leases, and may hurt him when he list, how careful will he be of provoking or giving offence to such a man? Suppose we knew a man that had the keeping of a lion, or some cruel beast, and could let it loose upon us at his pleasure, would we not speak such a one fair, and give him as little cause of discontent as may be? Beloved, God hath devils and wicked men in a chain, and can, if we offend him, set loose all the powers of darkness upon us; he can make conscience fly in our faces, and cause us to despair and sink. All our evidences and assurances of salvation are in God's hands; he can bring us into a state full of discomfort and misery, and make us in a manner to feel the very flashes and scorplings of hell itself. Oh who would offend this God, much less live in the practice of any sin, and yet think of committing their souls to him!

Direction 5. To encourage you the more to trust in God, observe the constant course of his dealing towards you. 'Lord, thou hast been my God from my youth,' saith David; 'upon thee have I hung ever since I was took out of my mother's womb; forsake me not in my gray hairs, when my strength faileth me,' &c., Ps. 71:6, 9, 17:18. We should gather upon God, as it were, from former experience of his goodness, and trust him for the time to come, having formerly found him true. Beloved, it is good to lay up all the experiments of God's love we can, that we may trust him at the hour of death; for all our strength then will be little enough to uphold our faith. When

many troubles shall meet in one, as it were in a centre, then a world of fears and distractions will seize upon our souls, the guilt of sin past, thoughts of judgment to come, forsaking of our former lusts and delights, trouble of mind, pain of body, &c. We have need of much acquaintance with God, and assurance of his love at such a time. Therefore let us learn daily to observe the experience of his goodness towards us, how when we have committed ourselves to him in youth, he hath been a God from time to time in such and such dangers to us. Ancient Christians should be the best Christians, because they are enriched with most experiences. It is a shame for ancient Christians to stagger, when they yield up their souls to God, as if they had not been acquainted with him heretofore. You see how David pleads to God, 'Thou hast redeemed me,' Ps. 31:5; he goes to former experience of his mercy; therefore now into thy hands I commend my spirit in this extremity. This psalm is a practice of this precept; here is the precept, 'Commit your souls to God, as a faithful Creator;' here is the practice of David, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth,' &c. Therefore, I beseech you, let us treasure up experience of God's goodness, that so when extremities shall come, we may go boldly to him, upon former acquaintance with his majesty; and being strengthened with former experience. I beseech you, let us labour to practise these and the like rules prescribed, to encourage us in the performance of so necessary a duty.

Obj. But will not God keep us without we commit ourselves unto him?

Ans. We must commit our souls to God if we would be preserved. I answer, God having endued us with understanding and grace, will do us good in the exercise of those powers and graces that he hath given us; he will preserve us, but we must pray for it. Christ himself must ask before he can have: 'Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,' Ps. 2:8, &c. We should therefore make it a continued act, every day of our lives, to commit all we have to the Lord's disposal; and to that end observe how he

dischargeth the trust committed to him upon all occasions; how faithful he is in delivering his poor church in greatest extremities, and ourselves also even in our worst times. 'Thou never failest those that trust in thee,' saith David, and 'How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God, therefore the children of men shall trust under the shadow of thy wings,' Ps. 36:7. Daily experience of God's lovingkindness will make us daily to trust under the shadow of his wings. It should therefore be our continual course to observe the goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and other attributes of God, and often to support our souls with them.

Think, I beseech you, how he numbers the very bones of men; they are all written in his book of providence; he knows every joint, every part which he hath made; he knows his own workmanship; therefore we may well commit our souls to him. Doth God number our superfluities, and not our natural and essential parts? Even our very hairs are numbered; our tears are taken notice of, and put into his bottle; our steps are told; our desires are known; our groans are not hid. We shall not lose a sigh for sin, so particular is God's providence. He watcheth continually over us. There is not any of our members but they are all written in his book, so that he will not suffer 'a bone to be broken,' Ps. 34:20. We should therefore daily resign up our souls to his merciful tuition,* and bind ourselves to lead unblameable lives before him, resolving against every sinful course, wherein we would be afraid to look his Majesty in the face. What a comfortable life were the life of Christians, if they would exercise themselves to walk as in the presence of the Almighty! This is that which the Scripture speaks of Enoch, Gen. 5:24, and the rest, who are said to have walked with God; that is, to have committed themselves and their souls to him, as to a faithful Creator.

Obj. Of wicked men's preserving, who do not commit their souls to God. It may be objected, here is a great deal of labour and striving against corruptions indeed; may not a man walk with God without all this ado? We see wicked men, that never commit their souls to

God, grow fat and lusty, and have as good success in the world as the strictest men that are.

Ans. 1. I answer, God many times preserves such wretches; but, alas! that preservation is rather a reservation for a worse evil to come upon them. 'There is a pit a-digging for the wicked,' Ps. 37:13, 38. He flourisheth and bears out all impudently, under hope of success; but his grave is a-making, and his present prosperity will but aggravate his future misery.

2. Sometimes God preserves wicked men for other ends. It may be he hath some to come of their loins, who of wicked shall be made good.

3. Again, God will be in no man's debt. Those that are civilly good shall have civil prosperity, as the Romans had. They had a commonwealth well governed, and they prospered many years together. As Chaucer observes, God preserves wicked men from many calamities; he gives them civil wisdom, good carriage, &c.; and answerable to those common gifts, he gives them preservation and protection, &c.; but then there is vengeance on their souls the while. Those that commit not themselves carefully and watchfully to God, have dead, secure souls, without any life of grace or power of godliness in them. I speak this to waking Christians, that would know in what case they should live; walking in the sense and assurance of God's love; they, I say, ought to practise this duty of committing the keeping of their souls to God in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.

What it is to commit our souls to God. Neither is it so easy a matter to commit our souls to God as many fondly imagine. It is not the mumbling over a few prayers, saying, Lord, receive my soul, &c., will serve the turn. These are good words indeed, and soon learned; but, alas! who cannot do this? Our study, therefore, should be to know the depth and meaning of the same; how that we are not only to commit the essence of our souls to God, that he would take them

into heaven when we die; but also to commit the affections of our souls to him, that he might own us and govern us whilst we live; for how are our souls known, but by those active expressions in our affections, which immediately issue from them, when we commit all our thoughts, desires, and affections to him, setting him highest in our souls, and making him our hope, our trust, our joy, our fear, &c.?

Thus I have spoken of the duty, and of the thing to be committed, our souls; and to whom, to God; and the manner, in well-doing; and why? because he is a faithful Creator.

Now, I beseech you, consider how nearly it concerns us all to be thoroughly acquainted with the practice of this duty. God knows what extremities we may fall into. Certainly in what condition soever we be, either public or private, whether in contagion and infection, or war and desolation, happy are we if we have a God to go to. If we have him to retire to in heaven, and a good conscience to retire to in ourselves, we may rest secure. 'Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea,' Ps. 46:2, 4, yet we shall be safe; that is, though the order of nature were confounded, yet there is a river shall refresh the house of God. There are chambers of divine protection, that the Christian enters into, as the prophet saith, 'Enter into thy chambers,' Isa. 26:20; and God is his habitation still. If a Christian had no shelter in the world, yet he hath an abiding place in God continually; as God dwells in him, so he dwells in God. Satan and all other the enemies of man must break through God before they can come to us, when once we commit ourselves to him, as to a tower and habitation, and enter into him as into an hiding place. The enemies must wrong him before they can hurt us, so blessed an estate it is to be in God, having commended our souls to him, as unto a faithful Creator.

Obj. But we see many of God's dear children, that commit themselves to his care and protection, miscarry, and go by the worst in the world.

Ans. 1. Beloved, it is not so, for when they commit themselves to God, they are under safety; and if he keep them not out of trouble, yet he will preserve them in trouble. 'I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water,' saith God, Isa. 40. He saith not, I will keep you out of the fire, and out of the water, for he brought many holy martyrs into it; some were drowned, some burned, &c. Though God will not keep us out of trouble, yet he will preserve our spirits in trouble; nay, God many times by a small trouble preserves us from a greater. Even the sufferings of the godly are oft preservations to them. Was not Jonah preserved by the whale? What had become of him if that had not swallowed him up? A whale that one would have thought should be a means to destroy him, was a means to carry him to the coast, and bring him safely to land.

Again, God seems for a time indeed to neglect his children when they commit themselves unto him, but mark the issue; 'all the works of God are beautiful in their season,' Eccl. 3:11. He suffers them it may be, a long time to be in danger and trouble, till he hath perfected the work of mortification in their hearts, and crucified their confidence in earthly things, till he hath made them more sensible of the evil of sin, and watchful against it; but wait a while, and you shall see 'that the end of the righteous man is peace,' Ps. 37:37.

God's presence and assistance to support his children in trouble is invincible; they have gladness and comfort that we wot not of; they commit the safety of their souls to God, and he seems to neglect them, if we look to their outward man, but they have a paradise in their conscience. God preserves their souls from sin, and their consciences from despair. They have an invisible protection. There was a fence about Job that the devils saw, and a guard of angels that Elias saw, and that his servant saw afterwards, 2 Kings 6:14, 15. Wicked men see not the guard of spirits that is about the children of God; as Christ saith, 'they have meat the world knows not of,' John 4:32; they feed on hidden comforts.

As for carnal men, they do not commit themselves to God; they have no preservation, but rather a reservation to further evil. Pharaoh was kept from the ten plagues, but was drowned in the sea at last; and Sodom was kept by Abraham; he fought for them, but yet it was destroyed with fire and brimstone afterwards.

Let us then try our trust in God. Those that intend to embark themselves and their estates in a ship, will be sure to try it first. This committing of our souls to God, must be our ship to carry us through the waves of this troublesome world to the heavenly Canaan of rest and peace. We should therefore search and prove the same, whether it be indeed safe and sound, able to support our souls in the evil day, and not leak and prove insufficient for us.

How to know when we trust God aright. Trial 1. Those that commit themselves to God aright, are far from tempting his majesty. God will be trusted, but not tempted. What though things fall not out according to thy expectation; yet wait thou, and think God hath further ends than thou knowest of. God will do things in the order of his providence, therefore if we neglect that, it is our own fault if he do not help us. If Christ had committed his health to God, and had cast himself down from the pinnacle, what an act had this been! but he would not so tempt the Almighty. Neither should we unadvisedly run into dangers, but serve his providence upon all occasions. God useth our endeavour to this very end. He saves us not always immediately, but by putting wisdom into our hearts to use lawful means, and using those means he will save us in them. A Christian therefore should be in a continual dependence upon God, and say, I will use these means, God may bless them; if not, I will trust him; he is not tied to the use of means, though I be.

Trial 2. Again, those that commit their souls, or anything to God, find themselves quieted therein. Is it not so amongst men? If a man commit a jewel to a trusty friend, is he not secure presently? Have we not God's word and faithfulness engaged, that he will not leave us nor forsake us, but continue our all-sufficient God and portion to

our lives' end? Why then are we disquieted? Those that are full of cares and fears may talk their pleasure, but they never yet had any true confidence in God: for faith is a quieting grace, it stills the soul; 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. 5:1. Those that are hurried in their life with false doubts and perplexities, 'What shall become of me? What shall I eat, and what shall I drink?' &c., though they use lawful means, yet commit not themselves to God as they should; for where there is a dependence upon God in the use of means, there is an holy silence in the party. All stubborn and tumultuous thoughts are hushed in him. 'My soul, keep silence to the Lord,' saith David, 'and trust in God; why art thou so vexed within me?' Ps 42:11. Still there is a quieting of the soul where there is trust. Can that man put confidence in God that prowls for himself, and thinks he hath no Father in heaven to provide for him? Doth that child trust his father, that, besides going to school, thinks what he shall put on? how he shall be provided for, and what inheritance he shall have hereafter? Alas: this is the father's care, and belongs not to him. Wheresoever these distractions are, there can be no yielding up of the soul to God in truth.

There be two affections which mightily disturb the peace of Christians. 1. Sinful cares; and 2. sinful fears. To both which we have remedies prescribed in the Scripture. 1. 'Fear not, little flock,' saith Christ, 'for it is your Father's will to give you a kingdom,' Luke 12:32; as if he had said, Will not he that gives you heaven, give you other things? In nothing be careful, saith the apostle, that is, in a distracting manner, but do your duty, and then 'let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God shall keep you,' Phil. 4:7; and therefore were we redeemed from the hands of our enemies, that we might 'serve him without fear all our days,' Luke 1:74.

A Christian should keep an inward sabbath in his soul, and go quietly on in doing all the good he can. What a fearful thing is it to see men lie grovelling in the earth, and live without God in the world, troubling and turmoiling themselves how to compass this

thing and that thing, as if they had no God to seek unto, nor no promise to rely upon.

Trial 3. Again, where this committing of a man's self and his soul to God is, there will be a looking to God only, in all a man doth, not fearing any danger or opposition that may befall him from without. As the three young men said to Nebuchadnezzar, 'Our God can keep us if he will,' Dan. 3. But what if he will not? 'Yet know, O king, that we will not worship nor fall down before thy image.' So it is with a Christian; foreseeing some danger, disgrace, or displeasure of this or that man which may befall him, he resolveth notwithstanding, in despite of all, to commit himself to God in doing his duty, come what will. Whether God will save him or no, he will not break the peace of his conscience, or do the least evil. He is no fool, but foresees what may befall him for well-doing. This inconvenience may come, and that trouble, yet he sets light by these. He hath an eye to heaven, and sees more good to himself in the Creator that gave him his being of nothing, and more good for the time to come, that will make him a blessed saint in heaven, than there can be ill in the creature. Therefore, come what can come, his heart is fixed to trust the Lord, and rather than he will displease him, desert his honour and his cause, or do any unworthy action, he will commit himself to God in the greatest dangers.

Reason of trusting in God. The ground hereof is this: a Christian is the wisest man in the world, and he understands well enough that God is all-sufficient. He sees there is a greater good in God than he can have in the creature, and counts it madness to offend God to please the creature; because there is a greater evil to be expected from God than from the creature, though it were the greatest monarch in the world. Considering, therefore, that he hath his best good in his union with God, and in keeping his peace with him, he will not break with him for any creature. And thus he doth wisely, for he knows if he lose his life he shall have a better life of God than he hath in his body; for God is his life, God is his soul and his comfort, and he hath his being from God. He is his Creator, and he

hath a better being in God when he dies than he had when he lived; for our being in God makes us happy, and therefore Christ saith, He that loves his life, before God and a good cause, hates it, and he that hates his life when Christ calls for it, loves it, John 12:25, for he hath a better life in him. We give nothing to God, but he returns it a thousand times better than we gave it. Let us yield our lives to him. We shall have them in heaven if they be taken away on earth. He will give us our goods a thousandfold. We shall have more favour in God than in any creature, and therefore a Christian, out of this ground, commits himself to God, though he foresee never so much danger like to fall upon him.

Trial 4. Again, if we do in deed and not in pretence commit ourselves to God, as to a faithful Creator, we will not limit his majesty, as many carnal hearts do. Oh, if God will do so and so for them, then they would trust him. If they had but so much to live on a year, and such comings in, &c., then they would depend upon God. But they must have a pawn and so much in hand first. What a shame is it that we should trust the vilest man in the world as far as we see him, and yet, unless we have somewhat to lean on, we will not trust God! Beloved, when a man limits God in anything, such a one may talk, but he trusts him not at all. Indeed, we should indent with God, and tie him to look to the salvation of our souls; but for other things leave them to his own wisdom, both for the time, for the manner and measure, do what he will with us. Suppose it come to the cross, hath he not done greater matters for us? Why then should we distrust him in lesser? If times come that religion flourish or goes downward, yet rely on him still. Hath he not given his Son to us, and will he not give heaven also? Why do we limit the Holy One of Israel, and not cast ourselves upon him, except he will covenant to deal thus and thus with us?

A true Christian hath his eye always heavenward, and thinks nothing too good for God. O Lord, saith he, of thee I have received this life, this estate, this credit and reputation in the world. I have what I have, and am what I am of thee, and therefore I yield all to

thee back again. If thou wilt serve thyself of my wealth, of myself, of my strength, thou shalt have it. If thou wilt serve thyself of my credit and reputation, I will adventure it for thee. If thou wilt have my life, of thee I had it, to thee I will restore it, I will not limit thy majesty; come of it what will, I leave it to thy wisdom; use me and mine as thou wilt; only be gracious to my soul, that it may go well with that, and I care not. Thus we should wholly resign ourselves to the Lord's disposal, and thereby we shall exceedingly honour his majesty, and cause him to honour us, and to shew his presence to us for our good, which he will assuredly do if we absolutely yield up ourselves to him. But if a man will have two strings to his bow, and trust him so far but not so far, so he may be kept from this danger or that trouble, &c., this is not to deal with God as an omnipotent Creator; for he that doth a thing truly in obedience to God, will do it generally to all his commands. So far as the reason of his obedience reaches, his trust extends. He that commits anything to God will commit all to him. He chooseth not his objects. But upon the same ground that he commits his soul to God when he dies, he commits his estate, liberty, and all he hath while he lives. He can never rely on God for greater matters, that distrusts him in lesser.

Trial 5. Again, a man that truly trusts God will commit all his ways unto him; he will take no course but what he is guided in by the Lord. He looks for wisdom from above, and saith, Lord, though it is not in me to guide my own way; as thy word shall lead me, and the good counsel of thy Spirit in others direct me, so I will follow thee. He that commits not his ways to God, will not commit his comforts to him. God must be our counsellor as well as our comforter. Therefore the wise man bids us 'acknowledge God in all our ways, and lean not to our own wisdom,' Prov. 3:5. Most men look how safe their counsels are, not how holy and agreeable to God. Is this to trust in him? Will God save us at last, and yet suffer us to live as we list now? Deceive not yourselves; he that will have his soul saved must commit it to God beforehand to be sanctified.

Trial 6. Again, those that commit themselves aright to God will commit their posterity to him, their wives and children, &c.

Obj. Why! do not men make their wills and commit their goods to them?

Solution. Oh! but how do they resign them? How covetous and full of distrust are they! I must leave such a child so much and so much; and why, I pray you? Because God cannot bless him else? O fearful! is God tied to means? cannot he bless with a little as well as with a great deal? Is not 'the earth the Lord's, and the fulness thereof?' Ps. 24:1. Why must God have so much in hand, or else he cannot enrich and raise up thy children? Oh! consider, he hath declared himself to be the father of the fatherless, and looks to the widow in a special manner; he doubles his providence there; he provides for all, but takes special notice of them; therefore quiet thyself, they are in covenant with God, and God is thy God, and the God of thy seed also; therefore if thou wilt commit thy soul, why not thy wife, children, goods? &c.

Look into the course of God's people in all times. Those that have left but little with honest dealing, God hath blessed the same exceedingly; whereas those that have left great matters ill gotten, instead of a blessing have often left a curse and a snare behind them. Why then should men take indirect courses, and wound their consciences for worldly pelf?

Consid. 1. Consider, 1, thy children are God's and not thine; he gave them to thee at first, and he can provide hereafter when thou art gone. Thou art the father of their body, but he is the father of their soul.

2. He provided for them before they were born. Doth not he provide care and affection in the mother's heart? Doth he not provide suck in the mother's breasts? and will he not care for them now they are born as well as he did before they came into the world? It is atheism

to think such a thought. Those that commit themselves to God in one thing will do so in all things, otherwise they deceive their own souls; for it is a universal act that runs through their whole life. Committing is an action of trust, and there is a kind of intercourse of trust between God and a Christian continually.

Trial 7. Lastly, those that commit themselves to God will be faithful stewards in whatsoever he hath trusted them withal. Thou committest thyself and thy health and estate to God, and at length thou wilt commit thy soul when thou diest unto him. Very well; but what doth God trust thee withal? Hath he not trusted thee with a body and a soul, with a portion of goods, with place, time, strength, and abilities to do good? Hast thou not all thou hast from God as a steward, to improve for thy Master's advantage? If ever thou expectest the performance of what thou hast put in him, be faithful in that trust which he hath committed to thee. Those that have misused their bodies and wounded their souls in their lives, how can they commit them to God at their deaths? How dares the soul look up to him, when the life hath been nothing else but a perpetual offending of his majesty?

I beseech you, let us learn this wholesome lesson! Great is our benefit thereby. 'He that trusts in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, that cannot be moved.' We may be shaken, but shall never be removed. The earth is shaken with earthquakes, but the earth keeps its own centre still. Our best peace is in God, and our chiefest safety in his protection. 'I laid me down to rest, because thou, Lord, watchest over me,' Ps. 3:5, saith the prophet; and, 'Return, O my soul, to thy rest, for the Lord hath been very beneficial to thee,' Ps. 116:7. Is it not a good thing to have a sweet security of soul that whether I sleep or wake, whether I be at home or abroad, live or die, I have a providence watching over me better than mine own? When I yield myself up to God, his wisdom is mine, his strength is mine; whatsoever he hath it is for me, because I am his. What a heaven upon earth is this, that a Christian, out of a holy familiarity with God, can resign up his soul to him upon all occasions! Set heaven

and salvation aside, what greater happiness can be desired? How sweet is a man's rest at night after he hath yielded himself to God by faithful prayer?

Use. Exhortation. I beseech you, let us be acquainted with the practice of this duty, and labour to be in such a state as God may own us, and receive our poor souls to himself. Let us keep them pure and undefiled, and labour to improve our talents, that when we give anything to God, we may say, Lord, according to the grace I have received I have kept it, and therefore now return it to thee again.

Beloved, when trouble of conscience comes, when sickness and death comes, what will become of a man that hath not this sweet acquaintance with God? He was a stranger to God in the time of prosperity, and God is now a stranger to him in adversity. Saul was a profane-spirited man; he did not acquaint himself with God in the time of his happiness, and therefore in time of distress he goes first to the witch, and then to the sword-point. So fareth it with all wicked wretches in their great extremities. No sooner doth any evil betide them, or the least danger approach them, let conscience never so little fly in their faces, &c., but presently they go to cursed means, and run upon desperate conclusions.

Therefore, as we desire to die even in God's arms, and yield up ourselves into the very hands of the Almighty with comfort, let us daily inure ourselves to this blessed course of committing ourselves and all our ways to him in doing good.

'Come and see,' saith the Scripture, John 1:46. Beloved, if you will not believe me, make trial of this course a while. Did you once taste the sweetness of it, how would your drooping spirits be cheered up!

Let a man continually keep a good conscience, and he shall be satisfied with peace at last. Suppose he meets with danger and opposition in the world, this may seem harsh at the first. Oh, but he

shall know afterwards what it is to part with anything for Christ's sake, to commit his cause, or whatsoever he hath, unto God, as to a faithful Creator! Then we taste of God to the purpose when we put him to it, for God will not be indebted to us. We never find such sweet immediate comfort from him as when we deny ourselves comfort of the creature for his sake.

Little do we know what times may befall us. There is much danger abroad, and we have cause to fear, not far from us. It may be the clouds even now hang over our heads. On, if we would be hid in the day of the Lord's wrath, and have no evil come nigh our dwellings, let us, above all things in the world, make sure our interest in Christ, and title to the promise. We should seek to know God more, and then we would trust him more. 'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' saith David, Ps. 9:10. Oh, the blessed estate of a Christian, that now he may be acquainted with God; that through Christ there is a throne of grace to fly unto! I beseech you, improve this happy privilege; and then, come what will, come famine, come danger of war or pestilence, &c., God will be a sanctuary and an abiding place to you. A Christian carries his rock and sure defence about him. 'I will be unto them a little sanctuary in all places,' saith God. What a comfort is it to have a 'wall of fire' still compassing us about, a shield that our enemies must break through before they can come at us! He that trusts in God shall be recompensed with mercy on every side. It is no matter what dangers compass him. Though he be in the midst of death and hell, or any trouble whatsoever, if he commits himself to God in obedience, out of good grounds of faith in his word, he shall be safe in the evil day.*

THE CHURCH'S VISITATION

SERMON I

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel? &c.—1 PET. 4:17, 18, 19.

OUR nature, as it is very backward to do good, so likewise to suffer evil; therefore the blessed apostle exhorts us at the latter end of this chapter, 'not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial, but to rejoice, inasmuch as we are made partakers of Christ's sufferings; wherein are many grounds of patience and comfort to the children of God.

(1.) That the thought of troubles should not be strange but familiar to them. Acquainting our thoughts with them, taketh away offence at them; though it be a fiery trial, yet it shall consume nothing but dross.

(2.) Then Christ joineth with us in suffering. Better to be in trouble with Christ, than in peace without him.

(3.) The issue will be glorious; for the Spirit of glory will not only support us with his presence, but rest still upon us.

To other grounds of comfort, he addeth some in the words of my text, as,

1. First, that the church is God's house, and therefore he will have a care of it.

2. That he will do it in the fittest season. Such is the exigence of the church and people of God, that they require a sharp visitation; and, therefore, such is God's love, that he appoints out a certain time for them.

3. From the different conditions of the godly and ungodly in suffering; both suffer, but differ much; (1) in order, God begins with

his own house; (2) in measure, where shall the ungodly appear? Their judgment shall be most terrible and certain. It is set down by way of interrogation and admiration; what shall their end be? And as Pharaoh's dreams were doubled for more certainty, so here is a double question to make the matter more out of question, [1] what shall their end be that obey not the gospel? [2] where shall the ungodly and sinners appear?

Here is no unnecessary waste of words and arguments, for the Spirit of God knows that all is little enough to fortify the soul against the evil day. Unless the soul be well balanced, it will soon be overturned when storms arise. Therefore, the apostle in these three verses sets down, 1, some foundations of comfort; and, 2, an encouragement to build upon them, 'wherefore let them that suffer,' &c.

The points considerable in the 17th verse are these:—

1. That God's church is his house.
2. That this house of his will need purging; it will gather soil.
3. When God sees the exigent of it, that it must be so, he will be sure to visit and judge his own house.
4. That there is a certain time when he will do it, which those that are wise may easily gather. For God comes not upon his church on the sudden, as a storm, or tempest, &c., but he gives them fair warning. There is a season when God begins judgment with his own house.
5. Lastly, Why God begins with his own church and people.

Of these in order.

Obs. 1. That the Church of God is his own house. First, The Church of God is God's house. God hath two houses, the heavens, which are called his house, because he manifests his glory there, and the

church here below, wherein he manifests his grace. Yea, the whole world, in a sort, is his house, because he manifests his power and wisdom in it; but heaven and his church, in a more peculiar manner; and that in these respects:

(1.) Because God by his grace hath residence in his church.

(2.) Because by the means of salvation,—the word, and sacraments there administered,—he doth feed his church, as in a house.

(3.) A man rests and takes contentment in his house; so God takes his best contentment in his church and people; they are the most beloved of all mankind.

(4.) As in a house we use to lay up our jewels and precious things; so God lays up in his church whatsoever is precious,—his praises, his graces, yea, whatsoever is good and of high esteem, that he bestows upon his church and people.

For the further clearing of this, we must know that the church and children of God are said to be his house, either,

[1.] As a family is said to be a house; or,

[2.] As the fabric or building is said to be the house.

God provides for his church as his own house. First, a man provides for his family, and he that neglects it, is worse than an infidel, 1 Tim. 5:8; so doth God provide for his church. The very dragons and ostriches, the worst of the creatures, all have some respect to their young ones; much more will God provide for his own. And as a man protects his house from all enemies, so will God protect his church and people, and be a wall of fire, and a defence round about them.

Now there is a mixture in the church, as in a house, of good and bad vessels; but the godly are especially God's house. As for hypocrites and false professors, they are no more in the house, than the

excrements are in the body; they are in the body, but not of the body; and therefore, as Ishmael, Gen. 21:10, they must be cast out at length.

The heart of true Christians is God's private closet. And as in every house or building, there are some open places, and some private closets, &c., so is it here. God hath his private chamber, and his retiring-place, which is the heart of every true Christian. He counts it not sufficient to dwell in his house at large, but he will dwell in the best part of it, the heart and the affections. Therefore 'he knocks at the doors of our hearts for entrance,' Rev. 3:20, and his best children are glad he will reside in them. They set him up in the highest place of their souls, and set a crown upon him; their desire is, that God may govern and rule their whole conversation; they have no idol above God in their hearts.

Use 1. What a wonderful mercy is this, that we are God's house; that he will vouchsafe to dwell and take up his lodging in such defiled houses as our souls are. It is no mean favour, that God should single out us poor wretches, to have his residence and abiding place in our souls, considering there is so much wickedness in the hearts of the best of us.

Oh what comfort ariseth to a Christian soul from the due meditation of this point. If we are God's house, then God will be our house; 'Thou art our habitation,' saith Moses, 'from generation to generation,' Ps. 90:1. Howsoever we shuffle in the world, now here and now there, having no certain place of abode, but are here to day, and gone to-morrow, yet in God we have an house, 'Thou art our habitation;' he is ours, and we are his. And what a comfort is this that we are God's house. Certainly God will provide for his own house. He that lays this charge upon others, and hath put that affection and care of provision into others for their families, will he neglect his own? he that makes us love, and puts that natural affection into us of those that belong unto us, hath he not infinitely

more in himself? whenas that which we have, is but a beam or ray from his infinite brightness.

Use 2. This should then, instruct us to labour that God may dwell largely and comfortably in us, to deliver up all to this keeper of our house, and suffer him to rule and reign in us. The Romish Church is become the habitation of devils; that which was Bethel, is now become Bethaven (a). Why? because they would not suffer God to rule in his own house, but would have coadjutors with Christ, as if he were not a sufficient head of the church to govern it, but he must have a vicar, the pope; who, as if Christ were too* weak, will not suffer him to exercise his kingly office, unless he may support and help him. Thus they set up the abomination of desolation in the temple of God.

O beloved, it much concerns us to cleanse and purify our hearts, that so we may entertain Christ, and he may delight to abide and dwell with us. You know how heinously he took it, when his house was made a den of thieves, Luke 19:46, and will he not take it much worse that our hearts should be made the very sinks and cages of all manner of uncleanness?

How should we beg and cry to God that he would whip out these noisome lusts and corruptions out of the temple of our hearts by any sharp correction or terror of conscience whatsoever, rather than suffer them to reside there, still to grieve his good Spirit. We should take a holy state upon us, as being temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore too good to be defiled with sin. Our hearts should be as the holy of holies; and therefore the apostle exhorts us 'to abstain from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,' for this cause, 'that God may dwell amongst us,' 2 Cor. 7:1; for, 'what communion hath light with darkness?' 2 Cor. 6:14.

Use 3. Are God's people his house? Then let the enemies of the church take heed how they deal with them, for God will have a special care of his own house. Howsoever he may seem for a time to

neglect his children, yet remember this, they are his house still; and no ordinary house, but a temple, wherein sacrifice is offered to him continually; and 'he that destroyeth the temple of God, him will God destroy,' 1 Cor. 3:17.

Quest. Here a question would be answered, which some uncharitable spirits make, and that is this, Whether England be the house of God, or no?

Ans. That the Church of England is God's house. I answer: the whole catholic militant church is but one house of God, though there be divers branches of the same. As there is but one main ocean of the sea, yet as it washeth upon the British coast it is called the British sea; and as it washeth on the Germans, the German sea, &c. It hath divers names of the divers countries which it passeth through, nevertheless there is still but one main sea; so it is with the house of God. God hath but one true church in the whole world, which spreads itself into divers nations and countries upon the face of the earth; one branch whereof is among us at this day.

Quest. How prove you that?

Ans. Doth not Christ dwell amongst us by his ordinances, and by his Spirit working effectually in the same? If a house be not in perfect repair, is it not still a house? I beseech you, let us rather give God cause to delight to dwell within us, than call in question whether he dwelleth amongst us or no.

Obs. 2. That the house of God needs visiting and purging, and the reasons of it. But to proceed. Hence further we see that the house of God after some time will need visiting and purging, seeing it will soon gather soil. There will abuses and disorders creep into it, so that it will need reformation. And this the apostle seems to insinuate when he saith, 'The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.' The Lord saw cause for what he did. For,

1. First,—Such is the weakness of man's nature, that evil things soon discourage us; and good things, except we wrestle with our spirits, prove a snare to the best. Even the church of God, after a long time of peace, is apt to gather corruption, as water doth by standing, and as the air itself will do if it have not the wind to purge it. And as it is in the bodies of men, if they be not curiously looked unto; after a certain time, they will gather such a burden of humours as will rise to a distemper, so that they must be let blood or purged, &c., so it is with the church of God. Such is the infirmity of man's nature and the malice of Satan, that enemy to mankind, that the best of God's people will quickly gather some distemper or other, and stand in need of purging. You know a house will gather dust of itself, though clean at the first.

2. Most certain it is that the church of God cannot be long without some affliction, considering that it is now in a state of pilgrimage, absent from God, in another world as it were. We live in a gross, corrupt air, and draw in the corruption of the times, one defiling another. 'I am a man of polluted lips,' saith Isaiah, 'and dwell with men of polluted lips,' Isaiah 6:5; ill neighbours made him the worse.

Use. This should stir us up to lament the miserable estate of man's nature, that even the best of men, the church and people of God, whilst they remain in this world, stand in need of continual purging and winnowing. Crosses are as necessary to us as our daily bread, because we carry that about us which wants them. We are as much beholden to God's corrections as to his comforts, in this world. The church needs keeping under, for the most part. God will not have us settle upon our dregs, Ps, 55:19; Jer. 48:11. This should teach us to bewail our condition, and to desire to be at home, where we shall need no purging, where we shall be as free from sorrow as from sin, the cause of it.

Obs. 3. That God will come to visit and purge his house when need is. Observe we further, that as the church will stand in need of chastisements, so God will come and visit his temple when need is,

and but when need requires neither;* for God is no tyrant, yet he will shew that he hates sin wheresoever he finds it, even in his own dear children and servants, Amos 3:2.

If God should bear with the abuses and sins of his own church and people, it would seem that sin was not so contrary to his holy disposition as it is. Therefore, in whomsoever he finds sin, he will punish it. Our blessed Saviour found this true, when he took upon him the imputation of our sins, and became but only a surety for us. You see how it made him cry out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mat. 27:46. Those glorious creatures, the very angels themselves, when they kept not their own standing, God would endure them no longer, but thrust them out of heaven.

Obj. But why doth God chiefly afflict his own people more than others?

Ans. 1. Why God afflicts his own people before others. Because they are of his own family, and are called by his name, Num. 6:27. Now the disorders of the family tend to the disgrace of the governor of it. The sins of the church touch God more nearly than others, and therefore 'judgments must begin at the sanctuary first,' Ezek. 4:6. 'I will be sanctified in all that come near me,' saith God when he smote Aaron's sons, Lev. 10:3. The nearer we come to God, if we maintain not the dignity of our profession, undoubtedly the more near will God come to us in judgment. We see the angels, who came nearest to God of all others, when once they sinned against him, they were tumbled out of heaven, and cast into the bottomless pit. Heaven could then brook them no longer.

2. Beloved, the gospel suffers much through the sides of professors. What saith the wicked worldling? These be your professors! See what manner of lives they lead! what little conscience they make of their ways! &c. Little do men know how much religion is vilified, and the ways of God evil spoken of, through the loose carriage of professors of the gospel, as if there were no force in the grace and

favour of God to make us love and obey him in all things; as if religion consisted in word only, and not in power. What a scandal is this to the cause of Christ! It is no marvel God begins with them first. 'You have I known above all the families of the earth, and therefore will I punish you,' Amos 3:2. A man may see and pass by dirt in his grounds, but he will not suffer it in his dining chamber; he will not endure dust to be in his parlour.

3. The sins of the godly more heinous than others. The sins of God's house admit of a greater aggravation than the sins of others; for, (1) they are committed against more light; (2) against more benefits and favours; (3) their sins in a manner are sacrilege. What! to make 'the temple of God a den of thieves,' to defile their bodies and souls, that are bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, is this a small matter? Again, (4) their sins are idolatry; for they are not only the house of God, but the spouse of God.

Now, for a spouse to be false and adulterous, this is greater than fornication, because the bond is nearer; so the nearer any come to God in profession, the higher is the aggravation of their sin, and as their sin grows, so must their punishment grow answerable and proportionable. They, therefore that know God's will most of all others, must look for most stripes if they do it not, Luke 12:47, 48.

Use 1. No privilege can exempt us from God's judgment. Hence, therefore, learn that no privilege can exempt us from God's judgments, nay, rather the contrary. Where God doth magnify his rich goodness and mercy to a people, and is, notwithstanding, dishonoured by them, he will at last, magnify his righteous justice in correcting such disobedient wretches. Some of the fathers (Augustine, Salvianus) were forced to justify God in visiting his church more sharply than other people, because Christians are so much worse than others, by how much they should be better. Their sins open the mouths of others to blaspheme. We should not bear out ourselves on this, that we are God's house, but fear so much the

more to offend him, else all our privileges will but increase our guilt, not our comfort.

Use 2. Secondly, if God begins with his own house, let the church be severe in punishing sin there most of all; because God's wrath will break out first there. What a shame is it that the heathen should make such sharp laws against adultery and other sins, and we let them pass with as slight or no punishment at all! No doubt but God blesseth a State most, when sin is discountenanced and condemned most; for then it is the State's sin no longer, but lieth upon particular offenders. But I hasten.

Obs. 4. God appoints a particular time for his visitation. As God will visit his church, so there is a certain time for it. God, as he hath appointed a general day to judge the world in, so he appoints particular times of judgement in this life; he is the wise dispenser of times. God doth not always whip his church, but his ordinary course is to give them some respite, as, Acts 9:31, after Paul's conversion, the church had joy, and grew in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. God hath rejoicing days for his people as well as mourning days; fair weather as well as foul; and all to help them forward in the way to heaven. Beloved, God gives many happy and blessed times to encourage weak ones at their first coming on, that they may the better grow up in goodness, and not be nipped in the bud; but after a certain time, when through peace and encouragement they grow secure and careless, and scandalous in their lives, then he takes them in hand and corrects them. God hath scouring days for his vessels.

Quest. What be those times wherein God will visit his church?

Ans. 1. What be the times of God's visitation? I answer, in general, the time of visiting the church of God is from Abel to the last man that shall be in the earth. The church began with blood, continues with blood, and shall end with blood. The whole days of the church are a time of persecution. 'From my youth upward,' saith the

psalmist, 'I have suffered,' Ps. 88:15. So may the church of God say, 'Even from my cradle, from my infancy,' I have been afflicted; yea, 'for thy sake we are killed all the day long, and counted as sheep for the slaughter,' Ps. 44:22. But this is not here meant.

2. The church is afflicted when the light of the gospel hath most clearly shined. The time for the church of God to suffer is when the glorious manifestation of the gospel is more than in former times. We see the ten first persecutions were after that general promulgation of the gospel, whereby the world was more enlightened than formerly (b). We read in the Revelation of a white horse that Christ rides on, and a pale horse of famine, and a red horse of persecution that followed after him, Rev. 6:2, 4, 8. So presently after the preaching of the gospel, comes the fan and the axe, or though not very presently, yet after a certain time, when our need requires it; for God will wait a while to see how we entertain his glorious gospel, and whether we walk worthy of it or not.

3. That now is the time of the church's affliction. More particularly, even now is the time of Jacob's trouble; even now God hath put a cup into the church's hand, and it must go round. The sword hath a commission to devour, which is not yet called in.

Quest. But what be the more especial times wherein a man may know some judgment is like to fall upon the church of God?

Ans. 1. How we may know when some judgment approacheth. The Scripture is wondrous full in the point. God usually, before any heavy judgment, visits a people with lesser judgments. His footsteps first appear in some small token of his displeasure; but if that prevails not, then he brings a greater.

Sign 1. 'This, and this have I done,' saith the Lord, 'and yet ye have not returned unto me,' Amos 4:6, 7. There be droppings before the ruin of a house. Lesser judgments make way for greater, as a little wedge makes way for a greater; and, therefore, where less afflictions

prevail not, there cannot but be an expectation of greater. 'Why should I smite you any more?' saith God; 'you fall away more and more,' Isa. 1:5; that is, I must have a sweeping judgment to carry you clean away.

Sign 2. Again, usually before some great calamity God takes away worthy men, 'the councillor, and the captain, and the man of war,' Isa. 3:2, 3. This is a fearful presage that God threateneth some destruction, for they are the pillars of the church and the strength of the world; they are those that make the times and places good wherein they live; for they keep away evil and do good by their example and by their prayers many ways. A good man is a common good. The city thrives the better, as Solomon saith, for a righteous man, Prov. 9:10, 11, Eccles. 9:15. Therefore, we have cause to rejoice in them, and it is an evil sign when such are removed.*

Sign 3. God usually visits a people when some horrible crying sins reign amongst them, as (1) atheism. Beloved, God stands upon his prerogative then, when he is scarce known in the world; when they say, Where is God? God sees us not, &c. So, likewise (2), when idolatry prevails. This is spiritual adultery and a breach of covenant with God. Again (3), when divisions grow amongst a people. Union is a preserver. Where there is dissension of judgment, there will soon be dissension of affections; and dissipation will be the end if we take not heed. For the most part, ecclesiastical dissensions end in civil; and therefore we see, before the destruction of Jerusalem, what a world of schisms and divisions were amongst the Jews. There were Pharisees and Sadducees, &c. It was the ruin of the ten tribes at length, the rent that Jeroboam caused in religion. It is a fearful sign of some great judgment to fall upon a church, when there is not a stopping of dissensions. They may be easily stopped at first, as waters in the beginning; but when they are once gotten into the very vital parts of the church and commonwealth, we may see the mischief, but it is hardly † remedied.

Sign 4. Again, when sin goes with some evil circumstances and odious qualities, which aggravate the same in the sight of God, as when sin grows ripe, and abounds in a land or nation. At such a time as this a man may know there is some fearful judgment approaching.

Quest. But when is sin ripe?

Ans. 1. When it is impudent; when men grow bold in sin, making it their whole course and trade of life. When men's wicked courses are their 'conversation,'^z they cannot tell how to do otherwise.

2. When sin grows common and spreads far. It is an ill plea to say, Others do so as well as I. Alas! the more sin, the more danger.

3. When there is a security in sinning, without fear or dread of the Almighty, as if men would dare the God of heaven to do his worst. Oh, beloved, such persons as go on still in their sins to provoke the Lord, do put a sword, as it were, into God's hands to destroy themselves.

The old world, you know, was very secure. No doubt, they mocked at holy Noah when he made the ark, as if he had been a doting old man. Notwithstanding, he foretold them of the wrath to come. And our Saviour, Christ, saith, 'Before the end of the world it shall be as in the days of Noah,' Mat. 24:38. Beloved, God hath his 'old worlds' still. If we have the same course and security of sinning, we must look for the same judgments. And, therefore, compare times with times. If the times now answer former times, when God judged them, we may well expect the same fearful judgments to fall upon us.

Sign 5. Unfruitfulness threateneth a judgment upon a people. When God hath bestowed a great deal of cost and time, he looks we should answer his expectation in some measure. The fig-tree in the gospel had some respite given it, by reason of the prayers of the vine-dresser; but afterward, when it brought forth no fruit, it was cut

down and cast into the fire. Beloved, who amongst us would endure a barren tree in his garden? That which is not fit for fruit is most fit for fire. We can endure a barren tree in the wilderness, but not in our orchards. When God, the great husbandman in his church, sees that upon so great and continual cost bestowed upon us, we remain yet unfruitful, he will not suffer us long to cumber the ground of his church.

Sign 6. Again, decay in our first love is a sign of judgment approaching. God threatened the church of Ephesus to remove his candlestick from among them, for their 'decay in their first love,' Rev. 2:4; that having surfeited of plenty and peace, he might recover her taste by dieting of her. Decay in love proceeds from disesteem in judgment; and God cannot endure his glorious gospel should be slighted, as not deserving the richest strain of our love. The Lord takes it better where there is but little strength and a striving to be better, than when there is great means of grace and knowledge, and no growth answerable, but rather a declining in goodness. I beseech you lay these things to heart. The Lord is much displeased when Christians are not so zealous as they should be; when there is not that sweet communion of saints among them, to strengthen and encourage one another in the ways of holiness as there might be; when there is not a beauty in their profession to allure and draw on others to a love and liking of the best things; when there is not a care to avoid all scandals that may weaken respect to good things, and bring an evil report on the ways of God; when they labour not with their whole hearts to serve the Lord in a cheerful manner, &c. The very not serving God answerable to encouragements, is a certain sign of ensuing danger, Deut. 28:47.

Use. Therefore, I beseech you, let us look about us whether these be not the times wherein we live, that judgment must begin at the house of God. The Lord complains in Jeremiah, Jer. 8:7, that the turtle and other silly creatures knew the time of their standing and removing, but his people did not know his judgments. Do the creatures know their times and seasons, and shall Christ complain

that we know not the day of our visitation? What a shame is this! I beseech you, let us know and consider our times. If we have a time of sinning, God will have a time of punishing.

And have we not just cause to fear that judgment is not far from us, when we see a great part of God's house on fire already in our neighbouring countries? We have had lesser judgments, and they have not wrought kindly with us; we need a stronger purge. If we look to the carriage of men, what sin is less committed now than formerly? How few renew their covenant with God, in sincerity of resolution, to walk closely with him!

And what the judgment will be, we may probably foresee, for usually the last judgment is the worst. We have had all but war, the worst of all; for in other judgments we have to deal with God, but in this we are to deal with men, whose very mercies are cruelties, Prov. 12:10. The sword hath a long time been shaken over our heads, a cloud of war hath hung over us to affright us, but we rest still secure in our sinful courses, and think 'to-morrow shall be as to-day,' Isa. 56:12, and that 'no evil shall come nigh us,' &c., Micah 3:11. O the frozen hearts of Christians, that thrust the evil day far from them! do we not see the whole world in a manner in a combustion round about us, and we, as 'the three young men in the fiery furnace,' Dan. 3, untouched? Beloved, we have outstripped them in abominable wickedness; and however the Lord is pleased that we should only hear a noise and rumour of war, yet we in this land have deserved to drink as deep of the cup of the Lord's wrath as any people under heaven.

Quest. What course should we take to prevent the judgment of God, and keep it from us?

Ans. Of the means to prevent and escape God's judgments. 1. Labour to meet God by speedy repentance, before any decree be peremptorily come forth against us. As yet there is hope to prevail; for, blessed be God, as we have many things to fear, so we have

many things to encourage us to go unto God with comfort. We have enjoyed a succession of gracious princes that have maintained the truth of God amongst us; we have many godly magistrates and ministers, together with the ordinances, and many other experiences of God's love vouchsafed unto us. We have yet time to seek the Lord. Let us not defer till the very time of judgment come upon us; for that is but self-love.

Note. Assure thyself thus much, thou canst have no more comfort in troubles and afflictions when they do come, than thou hast care to prevent them before they come; answerable to our care in preventing now, will be our comfort then.

Therefore if we would be hid in the day of God's wrath; if we would have God to set his mark upon us, and write us in his book of remembrance, and to gather us when he 'makes up his jewels,' Mal. 3:16; if we would have him to own us then, look to it now, get now into Christ, be provided now of a sound profession of religion, and that will be as an ark to shelter us in the evil day. What we know let us do, and then we shall be built on a rock, that if waves or anything come, we shall not be stirred.

Usually God in dangerous times leaveth some ground of hope, which worketh differently with men. Such as are carnal, grow presumptuous hereupon; but the godly are drawn nearer to God upon any appearance of encouragement; the good things they enjoy from God, work in them a more earnest desire to please him.

It is the custom of the Spirit of God to make doubtful, imperfect, and as it were half promises, to keep his people still under some hope; whence we read of these and such like phrases in Scripture, 'It may be God will shew mercy,' Amos 5:15; and 'who knoweth whether he will hear us?' &c., Joel 2:14.

2. Again, examine and try, upon what ground thou professest religion, whether it will hold water or no, and stand thee in stead

when evil times shall come. Beloved, it nearly concerns us all, seriously to consider and narrowly to search, upon what grounds we venture our lives and souls; try our graces, our knowledge, repentance, faith, love, &c., of what metal they are. Those that have coin, bring it to the touchstone, and if it prove counterfeit they presently reject it and will have none of it. O that we had this wisdom for matters of eternity! If men would search and plough up their own hearts, they would not need the ploughing of God's enemies. We should not need God's judgments, if we would judge ourselves. The church complained that the enemies had made long furrows on her back, but if she had ploughed herself, she had saved the enemies that labour, Ps. 129:3.

3. Before any judgment comes, let us store up the fruits of a holy life; every day be doing something; do that now, which may comfort thee then; store up comforts against the evil day. When the 'night is come, we cannot work,' John 9:4. Let us therefore 'walk while we have the light,' John 12:35; let us look about us and do what good we can 'whilst we have time,' as the apostle saith, 1 Cor. 7:29. The time will come ere long that thou wilt wish, O that I had that opportunity and advantage of doing good as I have had! O that I had such means of doing good as I have had! but then it will be too late; then that whereby thou shouldst do good, will be in thy enemies' hands; and therefore, while we have time, let us be doing and receiving all the good we can.

4. Again, if we would have God to shield us, and be an hiding-place in the worst times, let us mourn for our own sins and the sins of the times wherein we live. Let us keep ourselves unspotted of the sins of the world; let us not bring sticks to the common fire; let us not make the times worse for us, but better, that the times and places we live in may bless God for us.

And let us not only mourn for the sins of the times, but labour also to repress them all we can, and stand in the gap, endeavouring by our prayers and tears to stop God's judgments.

5. And we should set a high price upon that religion and the blessings of God which we do enjoy, lest we force God to take them from us; and so we come to know that, by the want of it, which we did not value when we possessed it. Oh, let us esteem the treasure of the gospel at a higher rate than ever we have done. We see how it is slighted by most of the world; how they shake the blessed truths of God, and call them into question, being indifferent for any religion. Is this our proficiency, beloved? It behoves us to store up all the sanctified, knowledge we can, and to take heed we yield not to any, that would either weaken our judgment in religion, or our affections to the best things. We should, every one in his place, labour to stop dissensions in this kind, and knit our hearts together as one man in unity and concord. Factions have always fractions going with them. Unity makes strong, but division weakeneth any people. Even Satan's kingdom, Mat. 12:25, 26, divided against itself, cannot stand.

What is the glory of England? Take away the gospel, and what have we that other nations have not better than ourselves? Alas, if we labour not to maintain truth, we may say with Eli's daughter, 'The glory of God is departed from us,' 1 Sam. 4:21.

Sarah had her handmaid; and so hath religion been attended with prosperity and peace, preservation and protection amongst us, even to the admiration* of other countries. Shall we not, therefore, make much of that religion, which, if we had it alone, joined with many crosses and sufferings, yet were an inestimable and unvaluable blessing? And shall we not now much more, considering it hath been attended by so many mercies, cherish and maintain the same all we can? Do we think it will go alone when it goes, whensoever God removes it from us? No, no. Therefore, I beseech you, let us highly esteem of the gospel, whilst we do enjoy it. If we suffer that to be shaken any way, our peace and prosperity will then leave us, and judgment upon judgment will come upon us. If we will not regard the truth of God, which he esteemeth most, he will take away outward prosperity, which we esteem most.

But I come to the fifth point, that judgment must begin at the house of God.

Quest. Why doth God begin with his own church and people?

Ans. Reason 1. Usually because he useth wicked men and the enemies of his church for that base service, to correct and punish them.

Reason 2. To take away all excuse from wicked men. That they, seeing how severely God deals with his own dear children, might be stirred up to look about them, and consider what will become of themselves at the last, if they go on in their sinful courses. So many crosses as befall God's children, so many evidences against secure carnal persons; for if God deal thus with the green tree, what will he do with the dry? If he scourge his children thus with rods, certainly the slaves shall be whipped with scorpions.

Reason 3. God begins with his own servants, that his children might be best at last. If he should not begin with them, they would grow deeper in rebellion against him, and attract more soil and filth to themselves, and be more and more engaged to error and corruption. God's love to his people is such, that he regards their correction before the confusion of his enemies.

Reason 4. Again, God doth this, that when he sends them good days afterwards, they might have the more taste and relish of his goodness. After an afflicted life, we are more sensible of happy times. God deals favourably, therefore, with a man when he crosseth him in the beginning of his days, and gives him peace in his latter end.

This is a point of marvellous comfort and encouragement to the faithful servants of God; for,

Use 1. Though God correct them sharply, yet he shews thereby they are of his household. When a man corrects another, we may know it

is his child or servant, &c. God shews that we are of his house and family by the care he takes to correct us. The vine is not hated because it is pruned, but that it may bring forth more fruit; the ground is not hated because it is ploughed, nor the house because it is cleansed.

Quest. But what is meant by judgment here?

Ans. Judgment is correction moderated to God's children. Judgment is twofold in Scripture. The statutes of God are called judgments, and the corrections of God are called judgments. The statutes are called judgments, because they judge what we should do, and what we should not do. Now, when we do not that we should, he is forced to judge us actually with real judgments.

The real judgments of God are either (1), upon the wicked, and so they are judgments in fury, for there is not the least taste of his love in them to wicked men. They can make no sanctified use of them, because they are not directed to them for their good; or (2), to God's children, and so they are moderate corrections; and therefore the prophet so often urgeth, 'Correct us, Lord, in judgment,' &c., Jer. 10:24. God always moderates afflictions to his own children, but as for the wicked, he sweeps them away as dung, as dross, and as chaff, &c.

Use 2. Again, it is a comfort to God's children that he begins with them first. Rather than God will suffer them to perish and be condemned with the world, he begins with them here. They have their worst first, and the better is to come.

Use 3. This likewise is some comfort, that the time when God corrects his children is most seasonable and fit for them. God pruneth his trees in the fittest time. A plant cut unseasonably, dieth, but being cut in due time it flourishes the better. All the works of God are beautiful in their season. Every Christian may truly say, God loves me better than I do myself. He knows the best time of

purging and visiting his people. 'This is the time of Jacob's trouble,' &c., Micah 2:3. Therefore we should lay our hands upon our mouths, kiss the rod, and stoop under judgments, as considering God's time to be the best time, and that he knows better what is good for us than we do ourselves.

Thus you see, though we have cause of fearing God's judgments, yet there is something to comfort us in the midst of all. God mingles our comforts and crosses together whilst we are here, both to keep us in awe of offending his Majesty, and to encourage us in well-doing. *Securitatis custos timor*. Therefore let us always look what matter of fear and what matter of hope we have, for both these are operative affections. *Spes exercitat ad opus*. Oh that I could stir up this blessed fear in you. It is that which preserves the soul; and God hath promised that 'he will put his fear into our hearts, that we shall not depart from him,' Jer. 32:40. I beseech you, ply the throne of grace, and desire the Lord that it may be to every one of your souls according to his good word.

Labour likewise for encouragement in the ways of holiness. Blessed be God, yet we have a time of respite. God forbears us with much patience and goodness. Answerable to our good courses that we take now, will be our comfort in the evil day. If we carelessly go on in sin, and think it time enough to renew our covenant with God then, when his judgments are abroad and ready to cease* upon us, we do but delude our own souls, and expose ourselves to inevitable dangers. Mark what the Lord saith, Because I called, and you would not hear, &c., therefore will I laugh at your destruction, Prov. 1:24, 26. Is it not strange that the merciful God should laugh at the calamity of his poor creatures? Yet thus it is with every wilful sinner that dallies with God, and puts off his repentance from time to time. God will take pleasure in the ruin of such a man, and laugh when his fear cometh, because those that seek him then, do it not out of any love or liking of God and the ways of goodness, but merely out of self-love and respect to their own welfare.

THE UNGODLY'S MISERY

SERMON II

And if it first begin at us, what shall the end of those be that obey not the gospel!—1 PET. 4:17.

THESE words are propounded by way of admiration,* as if the apostle had been at his wits' end, and could not certainly set down how great the judgment should be, of those that obey not the gospel, it was so terrible and unavoidable. The points considerable are these:—

Three points considerable. 1. That the seeming prosperity of the wicked shall have an end.

2. That it is wisdom to consider the end of graceless persons.

3. The description of them; in these words, they are such as obey not the gospel.

Obs. 1. The seeming prosperity of the wicked shall have an end. It is naturally in the hearts of carnal persons, to think it shall be always well with them, whereas the prophet saith, the happiness of a wicked man is but 'as a candle, that ends in a snuff,' Prov. 24:20, or like a rose, the beauty whereof suddenly fades, and nothing remains but the prickles. The favours of men, for which they so much offend God, shall have an end; their strength shall end, their pleasure shall

end, (alas, they are but pleasures of sin for a season!) their life itself, the foundation of all their comforts, that shall have an end; but their sins, by which they have offended God, shall never have an end. See what a fearful judgment follows every wicked wretch; that which he sins for, his honour, riches, delights, all shall vanish and come to nothing; they shall not be able to afford him one drop or dram of comfort at his dying day; but the sin itself, the guilt of that, and the punishment due to the same, shall endure for ever, to torment his soul, without serious repentance and turning to God in time.

Obs. 2. The happiness of the wicked is momentary; their misery endless. But secondly, if the happiness of wicked men shall have an end, and their misery shall have no end, let us not be dazzled with their present happiness, so as to imitate their evil ways; let us tremble at their courses, whose end we tremble at. If we walk in the same path, shall we not come to the same end? All wicked men that delight in the company one of another here, are brethren in evil, and shall be like a company of tares, all cast into hell-fire together hereafter. It is pity they should be severed then that will not be severed now. Those men's courses, therefore, which we follow here, of their judgment we shall participate eternally afterwards.

Use. Let this admonish us to have nothing to do with sinful persons, nor to be troubled with their seeming prosperity. 'They stand in slippery places,' Ps. 73:18. God lets them alone for a while, but their pleasure will end in bitterness at last; all their riches shall end in poverty and beggary. 'They shall not have a drop of water to cool their tongues,' Luke 16:24, 25. All their honour and greatness shall end in confusion and shame, and lie in the dust ere long. Indeed, we should rather pity them, if we consider their latter ends. Alas, what shall become of them ere long! The fall of these wretches shall be so terrible, that Peter could not set it down, but leaves it to the admiration of the reader, What shall the end of such be! &c.

One difference betwixt a wise man and a fool is, that a wise man considers his end, and frames his life suitable thereunto. Therefore if we would be truly wise, let us consider the end of those things in this world, which wicked men offend God for, and set so light by heaven and everlasting happiness for the procurement of. Alas, whatsoever is here, shall have an end! A Christian should frame his course answerable to eternity, that when his happiness shall end in this world, it may begin in the world to come, else we may outlive our happiness.

Present happiness aggravates future and eternal misery. This is the misery of wicked men, that their souls are eternal, but their happiness is determined in this life. Here that ends; but their misery is infinite, and hath no end at all. Look what degree of excellency any creature hath, if it be good; the same degree of misery it hath if it be evil. What made the angels worse than other creatures when they sinned, but only this? they were most excellent creatures, and therefore when they became evil, their excellency did but help them to subsist and be more capable of punishment. A wise man understandeth his misery. Sapiens miser plus miser. Now the angels when they fell became more miserable, because they were more capacious, and sensible of it, being spirits.

So man being sinful and evil, his end will be more miserable than any inferior creature, because he was more happy. His happiness helps him to more misery. How should this stir up every one to look about him, and not to prize himself by any outward excellency whatsoever! The more excellent thou art, the more miserable if thou sin against God. It is of all unhappiness the most unhappy thing, for a man to live happily here a while, and be eternally miserable afterwards; for our former happiness tends to nothing else but to make us more sensible of future miseries. What is all the felicity of great persons, when they die and leave this world? Alas, it soon comes to nothing, and serves but to make them apprehensive of more misery than meaner persons are capable of: what shall the end of such be? &c.

Obs. 3. The endless miseries of the wicked should warn us from the love of their present pleasures and profits. From this, that the apostle leaves the punishment of all sinful wretches to admiration and wonderment, rather than to expression, for indeed it is above expression, we may learn—when, we are tempted to any sin or unlawful course, to consider thus with ourselves Shall I, for a pleasure that will end, have a judgment that shall never end? for the favour of men that will fail, shall I lose the perpetual favour of God, whose wrath is a consuming fire, and burns to hell? shall I for a little profit, lose my soul eternally? Beloved, as the good things of a Christian, even in this life, are admirable beyond expression, 'peace that passeth all understanding,' Philip. 4:7, and 'joy unspeakable and glorious,' 1 Pet. 1:8, &c., so when God awakens our consciences, those gripes and pangs and terrors of soul, which follow after sin committed, are unutterable and inconceivable. I beseech you therefore, whenever you are solicited to sin, for profit or pleasure, &c., set before your eyes the fading and perishing condition of these things, and the everlastingness of that judgment which attends upon them. Oh that we were wise this way!

Obs. 3. I come now to the third particular; Those that obey not the gospel, wherein we have—

1. A description of the thing.
2. And then of the persons.

The thing is the gospel of God; the persons are wicked men. God is the author of the gospel. It comes out of his breast, sealed with authority. Whence learn this, by the way, that in refusing the blessed gospel, we have to deal with God himself. It is God's word and gospel. Therefore when you reject it, you reject God; in receiving it, you receive God. You deal with God himself, when you deal with the ministers of his word. Therefore whenever you partake of the ordinances, say, with good Cornelius, 'We are now in the presence of God, to hear what he will say,' Acts 10:33.

Quest. But, what is it to obey the gospel?

Ans. To obey the gospel is to entertain the offers of it; for indeed though the gospel command us to believe in the Son of God, yet withal it offers the very command unto us; to believe in Christ, being in effect a command to receive him, which supposeth an act of giving and tendering something to us. Now when we do not receive and entertain with our whole heart Christ and his benefits, freely offered, we disobey the gospel, and so procure danger to ourselves.

But more particularly, he obeys the gospel that is sensible of his own miserable and sinful condition, and from a sense thereof hungereth after the grace and favour offered in Jesus Christ to pardon sin, which when he hath once obtained, [he] walks answerable to that great mercy received. He that receives whole Christ to justify him, and sanctify him too; that receives Christ as a king to rule him as well as a priest to save him, such a one receives the gospel. But those that are not sensible of their misery, or if they be, will not go to Christ, but, as desperate persons, fling away the potion that should cure them, these are far from obeying the gospel of God. Such likewise as pretend, Oh, Christ is welcome with the pardon of sin, but yet live in gross wickedness, against knowledge and conscience, and suffer him not to bear sway in their hearts, as if Christ came by blood alone, and not by water; whereas indeed he came as well by water to sanctify us, as by blood to die for us.

Many there are that think they obey the gospel, who are indeed very rebels and enemies unto it. They welcome the gospel, and they hate popery, &c., but notwithstanding they will be their own rulers, and live as they list; they will not deny themselves in their beloved sins; they are full of revenge, notwithstanding the gospel saith, 'This is my commandment, that you love one another,' John 15:12. That 'bids them deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly,' Titus 2:12; yet they will riot, and follow their base courses still. The gospel teacheth a man to acknowledge God in all his ways, to deal with God in all things he goes about. Now, when a man lives

without God in the world, saying, God is merciful, and Christ is a Saviour, and yet persists in those ways which seem good in his own eyes, never looking to God to guide him, or his law to rule him, how can such a one be said to obey the gospel?

That works have no place in the act of justification. But some others there are amongst us, that regard not Christ and his satisfaction alone, but join faith and works together in justification; they will have other priests, and other intercessors than Christ. Alas! beloved, how are these men fallen from Christ to another gospel, as if Christ were not an all-sufficient Saviour, and able to deliver to the uttermost! What is the gospel but salvation and redemption by Christ alone? Gal. 2:16.

Therefore Rome's church is an apostate church, and may well be styled an adulteress and a whore, because she is fallen from her husband Christ Jesus.

And what may we think of those that would bring light and darkness, Christ and antichrist, the ark and Dagon together; that would reconcile us, as if it were no such great matter! Beloved, they that join works with Christ in matter of justification, err in the foundation. The very life and soul of religion consists in this. What was the reason the Jews stumbled at this stumblingblock, and were never benefited by Christ? Why? They set up a righteousness of their own, which could not stand, but soon failed them. So when a man sets up a righteousness of his own, neglecting the righteousness of Christ, it is impossible he should ever be saved, living and dying in that error, Philip. 3:10.

Why disobedience against the gospel is so great a sin. Therefore, I beseech you, take heed of disobeying the gospel of Jesus Christ in any kind whatsoever, for of all sins this is the greatest, as shall appear by these reasons.

Reason 1. First, because sins against the gospel are sins against those attributes, wherein God will glorify himself most, as his grace, mercy, loving-kindness, &c. Therefore the gospel is called grace, because it publisheth, offers, and applies grace. Now sins against mercy are greater than sins against justice; for God hath made all things for the glory of his mercy. Even among men, are not sins against favours the greatest sins? To wrong a man whether he deserves well or ill is an offence. But what man will have his courtesies rejected, though never so mean? Love deserves love; favour deserves respect again. But now when we obey not the gospel, we neglect and despise the goodness and mercy of God. Oh what excellent blessings doth the gospel reveal, if we had hearts to value them! Doth not the gospel bring salvation! Is it not the word of grace, the word of life, the word of the kingdom? Beloved, I beseech you, lay these things to heart, for whensoever you refuse the gospel of Christ, you refuse with it the word of grace, of the kingdom of heaven, and eternal life, and all. Therefore the sins of the gospel must needs be the greatest sins.

Reason 2. Again, sins against the greatest light are most sinful. What makes sin out of measure sinful, but this, when it is committed against a great measure of light? What makes a man fall foul? It is not when he falls in a mist, or in a dark night, every one will pity him then; alas, he wanted light; but when he falls at noon-day. Beloved, had we lived in former times, when the light was not poured forth so abundantly as now it is, our sin had been the less; but now in this clear sunshine of the gospel, for us to live in sins condemned by so great a light, either in our judgment or practice, it must needs make our sin the greater. 'If I had not come and spoken to them,' saith our Saviour, 'they had had some pretence for their sins,' John 15:22; but when Christ had once poken, all excuse was taken away; they could not then say they knew not the will of God; and this is the reason of that speech of the apostle, 'Now you are in the light, walk as children of light,' Eph. 5:8. 'And this is the condemnation, that men hate light (not that men for want of light stumble, but), that men love darkness more than light,' John 3:19. It

is not the sin itself, but the love and liking of sin which aggravates men's wickedness, whenas the malice and poison of their hearts rebel against the discovery of God's good pleasure in Christ

Negative infidelity is a lesser sin than disobedience to the gospel. No people out of the church are capable of this sin; for how can they sin by infidelity and unthankfulness for the gospel that never had it? And therefore negative infidelity is, as it were, no sin in comparison, 'If I had not come among them, they had had no sin,' saith Christ, John 15:22. Negative I call that, whenas men believe not, having no means, as infidels and heathens, &c. And therefore as they sin without the gospel, so they shall be damned without the gospel. The rule of their damnation shall be the law of nature written in their hearts; for this is an undoubted truth, no man ever lived answerable to his rule; and therefore God hath just ground of damnation to any man, even from this, that he hath not lived answerable to the rule of his own conscience. So that we need not fly to reprobation, &c.

Reason 3. Again, another aggravation of sins against the gospel is, that they sin against the better covenant. The first covenant was, Do this and live, against which we all sinned, and were under the curse. But now we are under a more gracious covenant, a covenant of mercy, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and we shall be saved.' Therefore sin now must needs be more heinous; for if we sin against the gospel, either by presumption or despair, or else by profaneness, professing the gospel but denying the power of it, &c., 2 Tim. 3:5, there is no remedy left for us. If a man sin against the law, against moral honesty and civil righteousness, there is a remedy in the gospel for him; but when a man sins against the sweet love and goodness of God, in rejecting the gospel of his dear Son, mercy itself shall not save such an one. That must needs be a strange sin that makes a man worse than a Sodomite, yet we read it 'shall be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day,' Mat. 10:15, than for those that hear the gospel, the blessed allurements and invitations to believe, and to lead an holy life answerable to our

faith and calling, and yet live in sins against conscience, despising the precious blood of Christ.

Herod was a wretched man, yet notwithstanding it was said, he added this to all, 'he put John in prison, a preacher of the gospel,' Luke 2:20. Sins against the gospel in a loose malignant professor, are many times worse than all the rest. Oh therefore take heed of sinning against the favour and goodness of God; for this will confound us at the day of judgment, when we shall think, What! was so great mercy offered me, and did I slight it in this manner? Have I lost the favour of God, eternal life, and the glorious company of the saints in heaven, for a base pleasure of sin for a season? to gratify a brutish lust? Have I lost Christ and all the good by him for ever, only to satisfy my sinful disposition? to please a carnal friend? &c. Oh, how will this lie heavy upon the soul another day! We shall not need accusers. Our own hearts shall justify the sentence of God against us, be it never so sharp, that we have refused mercy, so often tendered to us in the blood of Christ. Mark what St Paul saith, 'The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance upon those that know not God, and obey not his glorious gospel,' 2 Thess. 1:7, 8. He saith not only on those that are swearers and profane persons, but ignorant sots, that care not to know God, though they be not open sinners. He saith, not, those that persecute the gospel or oppose it, shall be punished with eternal destruction from the presence of God, which is true; but those that sin in a less degree, 'such as obey not the gospel, 2 Thess. 1:8; that, value not this inestimable jewel; that sell not all to buy this pearl, Mat. 13:46; unto whom all the world is not dross and dung, Philip. 3:8, in respect of the glorious gospel of Christ Jesus. How shall they escape 'which neglect so great salvation?' Heb. 2:3.

Oh, say some, this concerns not me, I thank God there is mercy in Christ, and I hope for pardon, &c. Beloved, here is the bane of men's souls, they will be their own carvers, and take of the gospel what they list. Oh, so much of Christ as concerns their own good they will have; so much as concerns their pleasure and profit; so much as

they may have, and be proud too, and be devilish and evil in their life and conversation too. This they allow of. And it is pity he should live that regards not Christ in justification. But so much as concerns mortification and self-denial, as crosses them in their sinful courses, this they are strangers to. But, we must know, the gospel doth not only bring salvation, but it teacheth a man 'to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,' Titus 2:12; to put off himself, his whole self, that he might have no judgment, nor no affection contrary to God.

To make this more plainly appear, take these few instances.

Instance 1. The very first lesson which the gospel enjoineth, is to 'cut of our right hand, and pull out our right eye,' that is, to deny ourselves in those sins which are most useful and gainful to us. Now when this is pressed in particular, to some that live in their secret beloved sins, presently they begin to hate this blessed truth, and the ministry thereof. They know so much as will damn them, but so much, as without the which they cannot be saved, that they oppose. Contenting themselves with a bare form and outside of religion, they come to church, and take their books, and read, and hear, and receive the sacrament, &c., and in these outward performances they rest. Alas, beloved, what are these? I tell you, all the privileges of the gospel do but aggravate thy damnation, if thou are not better by them; for as they are in themselves invaluable privileges, and even ravish the heart of a true child of God; so when they are not entertained to purpose, they make our sin the more heinous. Every man is willing to accept of Christ, but it must be upon their own terms; and what are those? So they may enjoy their worldly delights; so they may increase their estates by such unlawful means, and not be crossed. So long they are content that Christ and the gospel shall be theirs; but otherwise, if they cannot enjoy Christ upon their own terms, that is, if they cannot go to heaven and to hell too, they will rather regard their own profits and pleasures, than regard Christ. Oh, how do these poor wretches delude their own souls! Beloved, the embracing and obeying the

gospel is a spiritual marriage betwixt Christ and the believer. Now, you know in marriage the will is given up to the husband; the wife is no more her own, but at his disposing. So when once we are truly united unto Christ, we take him for better for worse. We must suffer with him, yea, live and die with him, and esteem him above all; we must take Christ upon his own terms, or else he will not be had. If we love not 'him above father and mother (yea and life itself), we are not worthy of him,' Mat. 10:37; and therefore all that do not thus obey the gospel are rebels, and shall have the reward of rebels if they repent not in time. Were it not a comely thing, think you, for a company of traitors that had this condition propounded to them, if you will come in and live as good subjects you shall have a pardon, for them to go on presumptuously in their rebellion still, and think to have favour when they please? Would not a sharp execution be the just desert of such persons?

Instance 2. Again, Christ propounds pardon and forgiveness of sins upon this condition, that we will come in and live as wives* and as obedient subjects to his blessed Spirit, and not in swearing, filthiness, and other abominable courses, of which the Scripture saith, 'such shall never inherit the kingdom of heaven,' 1 Cor. 6:9; and yet notwithstanding, Satan hath so bewitched many poor wretches, that they think their case is good, and it shall go well with them, be their lives never so loose and opposite to the ways of God. They bless themselves when God doth not bless them, but rather curse them to their faces. The devil himself is likely to be saved as soon as such graceless persons as these, without repentance. No, no; if ever they expect a pardon, they must live as subjects; if they frame not themselves to be guided by Christ, and come under his government, to be ruled according to his will, they have nothing to do with mercy and salvation: 'those mine enemies, that will not have me rule over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me,' &c., Luke 19:27. We mock Christ if we will not suffer him to rule us.

Obj. But I cannot obey the gospel of myself.

Ans. It is true we cannot, no more than we can obey the law; nay, it is harder to obey the gospel than to obey the law in a man's own strength; for there are the seeds of the law in our nature, but there are none of the gospel. That is merely[†] supernatural. The promises are above nature to apprehend them; therefore a supernatural strength is required to plant the excellent grace of faith in our hearts. But though we be as unable to believe and obey the gospel as the law, yet here is the difference; together with the unfolding of our miseries by the gospel, the Spirit of God goes along to sustain us. The law finds us dead, and gives us no strength, but leaves a man cursed still; the gospel likewise finds us dead, but it leaves us not so, and therefore it is called 'the ministry of the Spirit,' Gal. 3:5. 'Received you the Spirit by the law, or by the gospel?' Gal. 3:2. God's blessed Spirit goes together with the sweet message of salvation and eternal life, and this Spirit doth not only open our understandings, but incline and bend our wills and affections to embrace the truth that is offered. Seeing, therefore, the Spirit which accompanieth the gospel is mighty and powerful in operation, let none pretend impossibility. For though they find not the sweet blaze of the Spirit at the first or second hearing, yet let them still attend upon grace, 'waiting at wisdom's gate,' Prov. 8:34, and the angel will come at length and stir the waters. God will make the means effectual first or last, to those that in truth of heart seek unto him; for the gospel is the chariot of the Spirit, and the golden conduit through which the Spirit runs, and is conveyed to us. Therefore if thou wouldst not disobey the gospel, withstand not the Spirit of God working by the same.

How the Spirit works with the gospel. Now the Spirit works with the gospel by degrees. 1. It bringeth some to be willing to hear the gospel, who yet presently neglect and disregard the same. 2. Others are more obedient for a time, 'as the stony ground,' Mat. 13:5, but because they opened not their hearts to the working of the Spirit only, but will be ruled partly by carnal wisdom, and partly by the Spirit, it leaves them at last altogether. 3. But some there are who give up themselves wholly to the government of Christ, to be ruled

in all things by his blessed Spirit, highly esteeming the treasures of heaven, and comforts of a better life, above all the fading outward felicities which this world can afford; who would not gain any earthly thing, hurt their consciences, or once defile themselves with unfruitful works of darkness; fearing lest they should in anything dishonour Christ, or grieve his good Spirit; and to such only hath the gospel come in power.

Therefore, I beseech you, seriously consider of this truth. If you would not disobey the gospel, disobey not the Spirit accompanying the same; deal faithfully with your own souls. Which of you all hath not some time or other had his heart warmed with the sweet motions of God's Spirit? Oh, do not resist these holy stirrings within you; give way to the motions of the blessed Spirit of God; second them with holy resolutions to practise the same; let them sink deep into your hearts, root them there, and never give over the holy meditation of them, till you make them your own, till you come to see grace and the state of Christianity, to be the most amiable and excellent thing in the world, and sin and carnal courses to be the most accursed thing in the world, worse than any misery, than any beggary, torment, or disgrace whatsoever. Beloved, till we have our spirits wrought upon to this high esteem of good things, and to a base undervaluing of all things else, we shall rebel against Christ first or last; for until such time as the heart of man is overpowered with grace, he cannot but disobey the gospel, either by shutting it out altogether, or by making an evil use of what he knoweth, thereby turning the 'grace of God into wantonness,' Jude 4, or else by revolting from the truth received altogether. When times of temptation come, unsound Christians will do one of these three, either despise, refuse, or revolt from the truth. Therefore I beseech you, let your hearts be cast into the mould and fashion of the gospel of Christ, let it be soundly bottomed and engrafted in you, that so you may grow more and more obedient to the truth revealed, and so your end shall not be theirs here, which obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Quest. But how may I come to obey the gospel?

Ans. Beg earnestly of God, in the use of the means (else prayer is but a tempting of God), that thy soul may be convinced what evil is in thee, and what evil is towards thee, unless thou repent. Labour for sound conviction; for you shall not need to stir up a man that is condemned to seek out for a pardon, or a man that feels the smart of his wound to get balm to cure it. Oh, no; when our hearts are once truly humbled and pierced with a sight of our sins, then Christ will be Christ indeed unto us. Now mercy is sweet at such a time; anything for a Saviour then, and not before. Therefore labour every day to see more and more into the venomous and filthy nature of sin; make it as odious to thy soul as possibly thou canst; hearken to the voice of conscience; give it full scope to speak what it can, that so thou mayest fly to Christ. Consider how God plagueth us in this world for sin; how it fills us with fears and horrors, causing our consciences to torment us, and fly in our faces; consider what threatenings are denounced against sin and sinners, for the time to come; consider the fearful judgments of God upon others for sin, how it cast Adam out of paradise, the angels out of heaven, being so offensive to God, that it could no otherwise be expiated than by the death and bloodshedding of the Lord Jesus. I beseech you, let your hearts dwell upon these things, and consider with yourselves how bitter you have found it to offend God, though now it be a time of mercy.

2. Secondly, consider how the gospel lays open Christ unto us; 'This is his commandment, that we believe in the Lord Jesus,' 1 John 3:23. He that commands us to do no murder, not to steal, &c., commands us likewise to believe in Christ. He commands us to love our own souls so much, as to take the remedy which may cure them; so that now it is our duty to be good to our poor souls; and we offend God if we be not merciful to our own souls. Oh! what a favour is this, that God should lay a charge upon me not to reject my own mercy, as it is in Jonah, 'They who follow lying vanities forsake their own mercies,' Jonah 2:8. if I do not love my own soul,

and accept of mercy offered, 'I make God a liar,' 1 John 5:10, and offend his majesty.

3. Again, consider how God allures those that might except against mercy. Alas, I am laden with sin, will some poor soul say! Why! 'Come unto me, all you that are heavy laden, and I will ease you,' Mat. 11:28. But I have offended God, I have broken my peace, &c., yet 'I beseech you, be reconciled to God,' 2 Cor. 5:20; though you have offended, yet there is hope. Do but consider how ready God is to help you, how continual his mercies are, and how he stretcheth out his hands to receive us.

4. Consider further, what a sweet regiment* it is to be under Christ, as a king, and as an husband. Will he not provide for his own family, for his own subjects? Beloved, it is not mere dominion that Christ stands upon; he aims at a fatherly and husband-like sovereignty, for the good of his children and spouse. It is their welfare he looks after. Therefore, I beseech you, be in love with the government of Jesus Christ, his blessed Spirit. Oh! it is a sweet regiment!* For the Spirit of God leads us quietly, enlightening our understandings upon judicious grounds what to do, by strength of reason; altering our natures, and bettering us every way, both in our inward and outward man. It never leaves teaching and guiding of us till it hath brought us to heaven and happiness.

To conclude, mark what the apostle saith here, 'What shall be the end of those that obey not the gospel?' He cares not what they know. Many say, we have heard the word, and we have received the sacrament, &c. It is no matter for that, how stands the bent of your souls? what hath your obedience been? This is that God looks after. Every man can talk of religion, but where is the practice? A little obedience is worth all the discourse and contemplation in the world; for that serves but to justify God's damning of us, if we live not answerably. Value not yourselves, therefore, by your outward profession, neither judge of your estate in grace, by the knowledge

of good things. Nothing but the power of godliness, expressed in our lives, will yield real comfort in the day of trial.

Our obedience must be free. And we should labour that our obedience be 'free and cheerful,' Ps. 110:3; always upon the wing, as we say, for that is evangelical obedience. God's people under the gospel are a voluntary, ready people, 'zealous of good works,' Tit. 2:14. Oh! beloved, did we but consider what God hath done for us here, and what he means to do for us in another world, how would our hearts be enlarged in duty to his majesty! Did we but consider of his inestimable love in the Lord Christ, pardoning such wretches as we are, and not only so, but accepting our service and us to life everlasting; taking us from the lowest misery to the highest happiness; from the lowest hell to the highest heaven; of traitors to be sons; of slaves to be heirs of the kingdom, &c. Oh! did we but seriously consider and believe these things, how would they warm our hearts, and make us pliable and constant to every good work and way!

The apostle having tasted the sweet favour of God in Christ, might well use it as a motive to quicken others. 'I beseech you by the tender mercies of Christ,' &c., Rom. 12:1. He knew this was a powerful argument, and if that wrought not upon men's hearts, nothing would.

Let our obedience, therefore, be cheerful; for now we are not in the oldness of the letter. We have not a legal covenant since Christ's coming, but we serve God 'in the newness of the Spirit,' Rom. 7:6; that is, considering that the Spirit is given in more plenty since his ascension, we should be more spiritual and heavenly in our service of God. Considering that our Head is already entered into that high and holy place, and we, ere long, shall be present with him, having but a spot of time to pass here below, how ready and zealous should we be in obedience to God's will! and not suffer a heavy lumpishness and deadness of spirit to seize upon us in holy performances. But I hasten to the second amplification.

THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION

SERMON III

If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and ungodly appear?—1 PET. 4:18.

What is meant here by righteousness, to wit, a man endued with evangelical righteousness. By 'righteous' here, is meant that evangelical righteousness which we have in the state of the gospel, namely, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; for Christ himself being ours, his obedience and all that he hath becomes ours also; and whosoever partaketh of this righteousness which is by faith, hath also a righteousness of sanctification accompanying the same, wrought in his soul by the Spirit of God, whereby his sinful nature is changed and made holy; for 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,' 2 Cor. 5:17. The same Spirit that assures us of our interest in Christ, purifies and cleanseth our hearts, and worketh a new life in us, opposite to our life in the first Adam; from whence flows new works of holiness and obedience throughout our whole conversation. There must be an inward inherent righteousness, before there can be any works of righteousness. An instrument must be set in tune before it will make music; so the Spirit of God must first work a holy frame and disposition of heart in us, before we can bring forth any fruits of holiness in our lives. For we commend not the works of grace as we do the works of art, but refer them to the worker. All that flows from the Spirit of righteousness are works of righteousness. When the soul submits itself to the spirit, and the body to the soul, then things come off kindly. Take a man that is righteous by the Spirit of God: he is righteous in all relations; he gives every one his due; he gives God his due; spiritual worship is set up in his heart above all; he gives Christ his due by affiance in him; he gives the holy angels their due, by considering he is always in their presence, that their eye is upon him in every

action he doth, and every duty he performs; the poor have their due from him; those that are in authority have their due. If he be under any, he gives them reverence and obedience, &c.; 'he will owe nothing to any man but love,' Rom. 13:8; he is righteous in all his conversation; he is a vessel prepared for every good work. I deny not but he may err in some particular; that is nothing to the purpose. I speak of a man as he is in the disposition and bent of his heart to God and goodness, and so there is a thread of a righteous course, that runs along through his whole conversation. The constant tenure of his life is righteous. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and labours to be more and more righteous still, every way, both in justification, that he may have a clearer evidence of that, as also in sanctification, that he may have more of the 'new creature' formed in him, that so he may serve God better and better all his days. Now, if this man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the sinner and ungodly appear? Where you have two branches.

1. The righteous shall scarcely be saved.
2. The terrible end of sinners and ungodly, where shall they appear? &c.

Now in that the righteous man thus described by me shall scarcely be saved, consider two things.

1. That the righteous shall be saved.
2. That they shall scarcely be saved.

The righteous are saved. What do I say? the righteous shall be saved? He is saved already. 'This day is salvation come to thine house,' saith Christ to Zaccheus, Luke 19:9. 'We are saved by faith, and are now set in heavenly places together with him,' Eph. 2:6. We have a title and interest to happiness already. There remains only a passage to the crown by good works. We do not, as the papists do, work to merit that we have not, but we do that we do in thankfulness for what we have. Because we know we are in the state

of salvation; therefore we will shew our thankfulness to God in the course of our lives.

How can we miss of salvation when we are saved already? Christ our head being in heaven, will draw his body after him. What should hinder us? The world? Alas!* we have that faith in us,' which overcometh the world,' 1 John 5:4. As for the flesh, you know what the apostle saith, 'We are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. 6:14. The spirit in us always lusteth against the flesh, and subdues it by little and little; neither can Satan nor the gates of hell prevail against us; for the grace we have is stronger than all enemies against us.

God the Father is our Father in Christ, and his love and gifts are without repentance, Rom. 11:29. When once we are in the state of salvation, 'he will preserve us by faith to salvation,' 1 Pet. 1:5; and we are knit to God the Son, who will lose none of his members. The marriage with Christ is an everlasting union; whom he loves, 'he loves to the end,' John 13:1. As for God the Holy Ghost, saith Christ, 'I will send the Comforter, and he shall be with you to the end,' John 6:14, 16. The blessed Spirit of God never departs where he once takes up his lodging. There is no question, therefore, of the salvation of the righteous; they are, as it were, saved already.

Use. Let this teach us thus much, that in all the changes and alterations which the faith of man is subject unto, he is sure of one thing: all the troubles, and all the enemies of the world shall not hinder his salvation. 'If it be possible the elect should be deceived,' Mat. 24:24; but it is not possible. O what a comfort is this, that in the midst of all the oppositions and plottings of men and devils, yet notwithstanding, somewhat we have, that is not in the power of any enemy to take from us, nor in our own power to lose, namely, our salvation. Set this against any evil whatsoever, and it swallows up all. Put case a man were subject to an hundred deaths, one after another, what are all these to salvation? Put case a man were in such grief, that he wept tears of blood; alas! in the day of salvation

all tears shall be wiped from his eyes. Set this, I shall be saved, against any misery you can imagine, and it will unspeakably comfort and revive the soul beyond all.

Obj. But it is here said, he shall scarcely be saved.

Ans. This is not a word of doubt, but of difficulty. It is not a word of doubt of the event, whether he shall be saved or no—there is no doubt at all of that—but it is a word of difficulty in regard of the way and passage thither. So it is here taken, which leads me to a second point, that the way to come to salvation is full of difficulties.

1. Because there is much ado to get Lot out of Sodom, to get Israel out of Egypt. It is no easy matter to get a man out of the state of corruption. O the sweetness of sin to an unregenerate man! O how it cuts his very heart to think what pleasures and what profits, and what friends, and what esteem amongst men he must part withal! What ado is there to pull him out of the kingdom of Satan, wherein the strong man, Luke 11:21, held him before!

2. Again, it is hard in regard of the sin that continually cleaves to them in this world, which doth, as it were, shackle them, and compass them about in all their performances. 'They would do well, but sin is at hand,' Rom. 7:21, ready to hinder and stop them in good courses; so that they cannot serve God with such cheerfulness and readiness as they desire to do. Every good work they do, it is, as it were, pulled out of the fire; they cannot pray, but the flesh resists; they cannot suffer, but the flesh draws back. In all their doing and suffering they carry an enemy in their own bosoms that hinders them. Beloved, this [is] no small affliction to God's people. How did this humble Paul, when no other affliction lay upon him! 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?' Rom. 7:24. It was more troublesome to him than all his irons and pressures whatsoever.

3. Besides, it is a hard matter in regard of Satan; for he is a great enemy to the peace of God's children. When they are once pulled out of his kingdom, he sends floods of reproaches and persecutions after them, and presently sends hue and cry, as Pharaoh after the Israelites. Oh, how it spites him! What! shall a piece of dust and clay be so near God, when I am tumbled out of heaven myself! Though I cannot hinder him from salvation, I will hinder his peace and joy; he shall not have heaven upon earth.* I will make him walk as uncomfortably as I can. Thus the devil, as he is a malignant creature, full of envy against God's poor saints, so he is a bitter enemy of the peace and comfort which they enjoy; and therefore troubles them with many temptations from himself and his instruments, to interrupt their peace, and make the hearts of God's people sad all he can.

4. Then, by reason of great discouragements and ill-usage which they find in the world from wicked men, who are the devil's pipes, led with his spirit to vex and trouble the meek of the earth; for, though they think not of it, Satan is in their devilish natures; he joins and goes along with their spirits in hating and opposing the saints of God; for, indeed, what hurt could they do but by his instigation? How are good men despised in the world! How are they made the only butt[†] to shoot at! Alas! beloved, we should rather encourage men in the ways of holiness. We see the number of such as truly fear God is but small, soon reckoned up. They are but as grapes after the vintage, or a few berries after the shaking; one of a city, two of a tribe, Micah 7:1, Jer. 3:14. They have little encouragements from any, but discouragements on all sides.

5. Besides this, scandal makes it a hard matter to be saved; to see evil courses and evil persons flourish and countenanced in the world. Oh, it goes to the heart of God's people, and makes them stagger at God's providence. It is a bitter temptation, and shakes the faith of holy men, as we see, Ps. 73, Jer. 12:1, 2. Again, it makes the heart of a good Christian bleed within him, to see scandals arise from professors of the gospel, when they are not so watchful as they

should be, but bring a reproach upon religion by their licentious lives.

Yea, God's children suffer much for their friends, whose wicked courses are laid to their charge, and sometimes even by their friends; for whilst they live here, the best of all are subject to some weakness or other, which causeth even those that are our encouragers, through jealousy or corruption, one way or another, to dishearten and trouble us in the way to heaven.

6. This, likewise, makes the way difficult; we are too apt to offend God daily, giving him just cause to withdraw his Spirit of comfort from us, which makes us go mourning all the day long; wanting those sweet refreshments of spiritual joy and peace we had before. The more comfort God's child hath in communion with God, the more he is grieved when he wants it. When Christ wanted the sweet solace of his Father upon the cross, how did it trouble him! 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mat. 27:46. How did he sweat water and blood in the garden, Luke 22:44, when he felt but a little while his Father's displeasure for sin! Thus is it with all God's children; they are of Christ's mind in their spiritual desertions.

And when they have gotten a little grace, how difficult is it to keep it! to keep ourselves in the sense of God's love! to manage our Christian state aright! to walk worthy of the gospel, that God may still do us good, and delight to be present with us! What a great difficulty is it to be always striving against the stream, and when we are cast back to get forward still, and not be discouraged till we come to the haven! None comes to heaven but they know how they come there.

Why God will have the righteous with such difficulty saved. Now, God will have it thus to sweeten heaven unto us. After a conflicting life peace is welcome; heaven is heaven indeed after trouble. We can relish it then. Because God will discard hypocrites in this life, who take up so much of religion as stands with their ease and credit in

the world, avoiding every difficulty which accompanies godliness, but, so they may swim two ways at once, go on in their lusts still and be religious withal. This they approve of. Therefore, God will have it a hard matter to be saved, to frustrate the vain hopes of such wretches. Alas! it is an easy matter to be an hypocrite, but not to live godly.

Use. If the righteous be saved with much ado, then never enter upon the profession of religion with vain hopes of ease and pleasure, that it shall be thus and thus with thee, &c. Herein thou dost but delude thy own soul, for it will prove otherwise. Forecast, therefore, what will fall, and get provision of grace beforehand to sustain thee. As, if a man were to go a dangerous journey, he provides himself of weapons and cordials, and all the encouragements he can, lest he should faint in the way; whereas he that walks for his pleasure provides nothing. He cares not for his weapon or his cloak, because if a storm comes he can run under shelter or into a house, &c. He that makes religion a recreation can walk a turn or two for his pleasure, and when any difficulty arises can retire and draw in his horns again. An hypocrite hath his reservations and politic ends, and therefore what needs he any great provision to support him, when he knows how to wind out of trouble well enough, rather than to stand courageously to anything thing. But a true Christian, that makes it the main work of his life to please God, arms himself for the worst that can befall him, and will be saved through thick or thin, smooth or rough, whatsoever comes on it. So God will save his soul, he cares not, but rejoiceth, with Paul, if by any means he can attain the resurrection of the dead, Phil. 3:11, by any means, it is no matter what. Let fire and fagot meet with him, yet he is resolved not to retire for any trouble or persecution whatsoever that stands between him and happiness. He is purposely armed to break through every opposition to the best things, and whatever may separate his soul from the favour of God. I beseech you, beloved, think of these things, and let it be your wisdom to make the way to heaven as easy as you can. To this end,

1. Beg the Spirit of Christ. You know the Holy Spirit is full of life and strength; it is a Spirit of light and comfort and whatsoever is good. The Spirit of God is like the wind; as it is subtle in operation and invisible, so it is strong and mighty, it bears all before it. Oh! therefore, get this blessed Spirit to enlighten thee, to quicken thee, to support thee, &c., and it will carry thy soul courageously along, above all oppositions and discouragements whatsoever in the way to happiness.

2. Get likewise the particular graces of the Spirit, which will much cheer thee in thy Christian course. Above all, labour for a spirit of humility. An humble man is fit to do or suffer anything. A proud man is like a gouty hand, or a swelled arm, unfit for any Christian performance; he is not in a state to do good; but an humble man is thankful that God will honour him so far as to let him suffer for the cause of Christ. He is wondrous empty and vile in his own eyes, and admires* why God should reserve such infinite matters for so base a worm as he is.

When Christ would have us take his yoke upon us, he advises us 'to learn of him to be meek and lowly,' &c., Mat. 11:29. Some might say, This yoke is heavy, it will pinch me and gall me. No, saith our Saviour, it shall be very light and easy. But how shall I get it to be so? Why! get but an humble and meek spirit, and that will bring rest to your souls.

3. Again, labour for a spirit of love. 'Love is strong as death,' Cant. 8:6; it will carry us through all. The love of Christ in the martyrs, when the fire was kindled about them, made them despise all torments whatsoever. This will warm our hearts and make us go cheerfully to work. Let but a spirit of love be kindled in God's child, and it is no matter what he suffers; cast him into the fire, cast him into the dungeon, into prison, whatsoever it be, he hath that kindled in his heart, which will make him digest anything. We see the disciples, when they had the Spirit of Christ within them to warm their hearts, what cared they for whipping, or stocks, &c.? You see

even base, carnal love will make a man endure poverty, disgrace, what not! and shall not this fire that comes from heaven, when it is once kindled in our hearts, prevail much more? What will make our passage to heaven sweet if this will not? Nothing is grievous to a person that loves.

4. Exercise your hope likewise. Set before your eyes the crown and kingdom of heaven; those admirable things contained in the word of God, which no tongue can express. Let hope feed upon these delicacies; cast anchor in heaven, and see if it will not make thee go on cheerfully in a Christian course.

Faith will overcome the world; all the snares of prosperity that would hinder us on the right hand. Faith, it presents things of a higher nature to the soul; better than they. Faith likewise overcomes temptations on the left hand; all terrors and discomforts whatsoever. It considers these are nothing to 'the terror of the Lord,' 2 Cor. 5:11. Therefore 'faith is called the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1, because it presents things that are absent as present to the soul. If life and happiness be once truly presented to our hearts, what can all the world do to hinder our passage thither?

5. Lastly, we should much endeavour the mortification of our lusts; for what is it that makes the way to heaven irksome unto us? Is it not this corrupt and proud flesh of ours, which will endure nothing, no, not the weight of a straw, but is all for ease and quiet, &c.? It is not duty which makes our way difficult, 'for it was meat and drink to Christ, to do the will of his Father,' John 4:34.

Quest. Why is it not so with us?

Ans. Because he was born without sin. When Satan came he found nothing of his own in him; but when he solicits us, he finds a correspondency betwixt our corrupt hearts and himself, whereby having intelligence what we haunt, and what we love, he will be sure to molest us. The less we have of the works of Satan in us, the less

will be our trouble; and the more we do the will of God, and strive against our corruptions, the more will be our comfort. This will make holy duties delightful to us; but if we favour and cherish corruption, it will make religion harsh. For the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasure in themselves, and to the regenerate, &c. I come now to the second clause.

'Where shall the sinner and ungodly appear?'

What he means by sinner. By sinner he means him that makes a trade of sin. As we say, a man is of such a trade, because he is daily at work of it, and lives by it, so a man is a trader in sin, that lives in corrupt courses. For it is not one act that denominates a sinner, but the constant practice of his life.

Now this question, Where shall the ungodly appear? implies a strong denial, He shall be able to appear nowhere; especially in these three times.

1. In the day of public calamity, when God's judgments are abroad in the world. The wicked are as chaff before the wind, as wax before the sun, as stubble before the fire. When God comes to deal with a company of graceless wretches, how will he consume and scatter them, and sweep them away as dung from the face of the earth! he will universally make a riddance of them at once. Where shall a Nabal stand when judgment comes upon him? 1 Sam. 25:37. Alas! his heart is become a stone. Where shall Belshazzar appear when he sees the handwriting upon the wall? Dan. 5. Oh how the wicked tremble and quake when God comes to judge them in this world, though they were a terror to others before!

2. But where shall they stand in the hour of death? when the world can hold them no longer; when friends shall forsake them; when God will not receive them; when hell is ready to devour them, &c.

3. And lastly, where shall the sinner appear at the day of judgment, that great and terrible day of account, when they shall see all the

world in a combustion round about them, and the Lord Jesus coming in flaming fire, 'with his mighty angels, to take vengeance on such as obey not the gospel?' 2 Thess. 1:8. How will they then call for 'the mountains to cover them, and the hills to fall upon them, to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,' &c., Rev. 6:16. Beloved, I beseech you, let the meditation of these things sink deep into your hearts, dwell upon them, remember that they are matters which nearly concern your soul, and no vain words, touching you and your welfare.

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY.*

SERMON IV

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. 4:19.

THOUGH divinity be clear in other differences from carnal or natural reasons, yet it hath homogeneal reasons and grounds of its own, whence come inferences as natural as for the tree to bear fruit, or the sun to shine; so upon the former divine grounds (for it is a matter of suffering wherein we must have pure divinity to support our souls), the apostle comes to bring a spiritual inference suitable to the same in the words read unto you. Wherefore, concluding all to be true that was said before, let them that suffer, &c. Wherein consider, 1. That the state and condition of God's children is to suffer. 2. The dispensation of that suffering, they suffer not at all adventures, but according to the will of God. 3. Their duty in this estate, namely, to commit the keeping of their souls to God.

In the duty we have these particulars comprehended:—1. An action, to commit. 2. An object, what we must commit, the soul. 3. The person to whom, to God. 4. The manner, in well-doing. Lastly. The reason which should move us hereunto, implied in these words, as unto a faithful Creator. Whatsoever may support the doubting of a godly man in any trouble, and enforce upon him this duty of committing his soul to God, is briefly comprised in this, that God stands in that near relation of a Creator, yea, of a faithful Creator, to us. This is the scope of the words.

Obs. 1. That the state of God's children is to suffer, yea, to suffer of God; for sometimes he seems to be an enemy to his dearest servants, as unto Job. But chiefly they are in a militant estate and condition here.

1. Why God's children must suffer here. Because they live among those that they cannot but suffer from, wheresoever they live. Suppose they live among Christians, yet there are many Christians in name that are not so in deed. There hath been secret underminers in all ages; and what else may they look for but suffering from these? All that ever truly feared God and made conscience of their ways have found afflictions among false brethren. It was never heard of that a sheep should pursue a wolf.

2. They must suffer also in regard of themselves; for the truth is, the best of us all have many lusts to be subdued, and a great deal of corruption to be purged out, before we can come to heaven, that pure and holy place into which no unclean thing can enter, Rev. 21:27. Though a garden be never so fruitful, yet after a shower it will need weeding. So, after long peace, the church of God gathers soil, and needs cleansing.

Obj. But some carnal wretch will say, I thank God I never suffered in my life, but have enjoyed peace and prosperity, and my heart's content in everything.

Ans. In the best estate there will be suffering one way or other. Then, suspect thyself to be in a bad estate, for every true Christian suffers in one kind or other, either from without or within. Sometimes God's children are troubled more with corruption than with affliction; at other times their peace is troubled both with corruption within and with affliction without; at the best, they have sufferings of sympathy. Shall the members of Christ suffer in other countries, and we profess ourselves to be living members, and yet not sympathise with them? We must be conformable to our Head before we can come to heaven. But the dispensation of our suffering is according to the will of God, where note two things.

1. That it is God's will we should suffer.
2. When we suffer we suffer according to his will.

To pass briefly over these, as not being the thing I aim at,

God's will concerning our suffering is permissive in respect of those that do us harm; but in regard of our patient enduring injuries, it is his approving and commanding will. We are enjoined to suffer, and they are permitted to wrong us.

Obj. It seems, then, there is some excuse for those that persecute the saints. They do but according to God's will: and if it be so, who dares speak against them?

Ans. It is not God's commanding will, but his suffering will. He useth their malice for his own ends. God lets the rein loose upon their necks. As a man is said to set a dog upon another when he unlooseth his chain, so God is said to command them when he lets them loose to do mischief. They are full of malice themselves, which God useth as physicians do their poison to cure poison. God and they go two contrary ways, as a man in a ship walks one way, but is carried another. In the death of Christ the will of Judas and the rest went one way, and God's will another. So, in all our sufferings, when God useth wicked men, their will is destructive

and hostile, but God's will is clean otherwise, aiming at the good of his people in all this. Nebuchadnezzar did the will of God in carrying the people captive. However, he thought not so, Isa. 10:7. Every sinful wretch that offers violence to the poor saints, imagine they do God good service in it, whenas, indeed, they do but execute the malice and venom of their own hearts. In the highest heavens, as they say in philosophy, the first thing moved is by a violent motion. The sun is carried about the heavens violently against its own proper motion, which inclines to a clean contrary course. So God dealeth with wicked men; he carries them they know not whither. They are set to do mischief, and God useth their sinful dispositions for his own ends, which plainly shews that God is without all fault, and they without all excuse.

Obs. But observe further, that we never suffer but when God will. And, beloved, his will is not that we should always suffer, though generally our estate be so in one kind or other. God is not always chiding, Ps. 103:9, but hath times of breathing and intermission, which he vouchsafes his children for their good. He knows if we had not some respite, some refreshment, we should soon be consumed and brought to nothing. 'The Lord knows whereof we are made, and considers we are but dust,' Ps. 103:14. Therefore he saith, 'Though for a season you are in heaviness, yet rejoice,' &c., 1 Pet. 1:6.

And this the Lord doth out of mercy to his poor creatures, that they might not sink before him, but gather strength of grace, and be the better fitted to bear further crosses afterwards. You know, Acts 9:31, after Saul's conversion, when he was become a Paul, then the church had rest, and increased in the comforts of the Holy Ghost. God gives his people pausing times, some *lucida intervalla* (a). Our time of going into trouble is in God's hands; our time of abiding trouble is in God's hands; our time of coming out is in God's hands. As in our callings he preserves our going out and our coming in, so in every trouble that befalls us we come in and tarry there, and go out of the same when he pleaseth. He brings us to the fire as the goldsmith puts his metals and holds them there, till he hath refined

them and purged out the dross, and then brings them out again. 'Our times,' as David saith excellently, 'are in thy hands, O Lord,' Ps. 31:15. Beloved, if our times were in our enemies' hands we should never come out. If they were in our own hands we should never stay in trouble, but come out as soon as we come in; nay, we would not come into trouble at all if we could choose. Beloved, everything of a Christian is dear unto God; his health is precious, his blood is precious; especially precious to the Lord is the death of his saints, Ps. 116:15. Do you think, therefore, he will let them suffer without his will? No; he will have a valuable consideration of all those that are malignant persecutors of his people at last. And it is for matters better than life that God lets his children suffer here; for, alas! this life is but a shadow, as it were, nothing. God regards us not as we are in this present world, but as strangers; therefore, he suffers us to sacrifice this life upon better terms than life, or else he would never let us suffer for his truth, and seal it with our dearest blood, as many of the saints have done.

Use. I beseech you, therefore, considering all our sufferings are by the appointment and will of God, let us bring our souls to an holy resignation unto his Majesty, not looking so much to the grievance we are under as to the hand that sent it. We should with one eye consider the thing, with another eye the will of God in the same. When a man considers, I suffer now, but it is by the will of God; he puts me upon it, how cheerfully will such an one commit his soul to the Lord! It is as hard a matter to suffer God's will as to do his will. Passive obedience is as hard as active. In the active we labour that what we do may please God; in the passive we must endeavour that what he doth may please us. Our hearts are as untoward to the one as to the other. Therefore, let us beg of God to bring our wills to the obedience of his blessed will in everything. Would you have a pattern of this? Look upon our blessed Saviour, to whom we must be conformable in obedience if ever we will be conformable in glory. 'Lo, I come,' saith he; 'I am ready to do thy will, O Lord,' Heb. 10:9. What was the whole life of Christ but a doing and a suffering of God's will? 'Behold, it is written in the volume of thy book that I

should do thy will,' ver. 7, and here I am ready pressed for it. It should be, therefore, the disposition of all those that are led by the Spirit of Christ, as all must be that hope to reign with him, to be willing to suffer with Christ here, and say with him, Lord, I am here ready to do and suffer whatsoever thou requirest! When once we are brought to this, all the quarrel is ended between God and us.

I come now to that which I chiefly intend, which is the Christian's duty.

Let him commit his soul to God in well-doing. Wherein observe,

1. The manner how he must commit, in well-doing.
2. What, his soul.
3. To whom, to God.
4. The reasons moving, implied in these words, as unto a faithful Creator.

Now this well-doing must be distinguished into two times.

1. Before our suffering. When a son of Belial shall offer violence to a poor saint of God, what a comfort is this, that he suffers in well-doing! Oh, beloved, we should so carry ourselves that none might speak evil justly against us, that none, unless it were wrongfully, might do us hurt. We should be in an estate of well-doing continually in our general and particular callings. We must not go out of our sphere, but serve God in our standings, that if trouble comes it may find us in a way of well-pleasing, either doing works of charity or else the works of our particular calling wherein God hath set us. In all that befalls thee look to this, that thou suffer not as an evil doer, 1 Pet. 4:15.
2. So likewise in suffering, we must commit our souls to God in well-doing in a double regard.

1. We must carry ourselves generally well in all our sufferings.
2. In particular, we must do well to them that do us wrong.

First, I say, in affliction our carriage must be generally good in respect of God, by a meek behaviour under his hand, without murmuring against him.

2. In regard of the cause of God, that we betray it not through fear or cowardice, through base aims and intentions, &c., but endeavour to carry it with a good conscience in all things. When we make it clear by managing anything, that we are led with the cause and conscience of our duty, it works mightily upon them that wrong us. (1.) It wins those that are indifferent; and (2.) confounds the obstinate, and stops their mouths. Therefore, let us carry ourselves well, not only before, but in suffering. We may not fight against them with their own weapons, that is, be malicious as they are malicious, and rail as they rail. Beloved, this is as if a man should see another drink poison, and he will drink, too, for company; he is poisoned with malice, and thou, to revenge thyself, wilt be poisoned too. What a preposterous course is this! Ought we not rather to behave ourselves as befits the cause of Christ, as becomes our Christian profession, and as befits him whose children we are?

We should have an eye to God, and an eye to ourselves, and an eye to others, and an eye to the cause in hand; so we shall do well. We must not commit our souls to God in idleness, doing nothing at all, nor yet in evil doing, but in well doing. We must have a care, if we would suffer with comfort, not to study how to avoid suffering by tricks, so to hurt the cause of Christ. This is to avoid suffering, by sin, to leap out of one danger into another. Is not the least evil of sin worse than the greatest evil of punishment? What doth a man get by pleasing men, to displease God? Perhaps a little ease for the present. Alas! what is this to that inexpressible horror and despair which will one day seize upon thy soul eternally for betraying the blessed cause and truth of Christ? How can we expect God should

own us another day, when we will not own him in his cause, and his members, to stand for them now? Think on that speech of our Saviour, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father,' Mark 8:38.

Therefore, avoid not any suffering by sin. See how blessed St Paul carried himself in this case. 'The Lord,' saith he, 'hath delivered me, and will deliver me,' 2 Tim. 4:18. From what? from death? No; from every evil work. What! will God keep him from evil sufferings? No; for immediately after he was put to death. What then? Why! he will preserve me from every evil work, that is, from every sinful act, which may hurt the cause of Christ, or blemish my profession. This was it Paul chiefly regarded; not whether he will preserve me from death or trouble, I leave that to him; but this I hope and trust to, that he will preserve me from every evil work to his heavenly kingdom. Thus should it be with every Christian in the cause of religion, or in a cause of justice, &c.; for there is not any good cause but it is worth our lives to stand in, if we be called to it. It is necessary we should be just; it is not so necessary we should live (b). A Christian's main care is how to do well; and if he can go on in that course, he is a happy man.

Obj. But I cannot do well, but I shall suffer ill.

Ans. Labour, therefore, to carry thyself well in suffering evil, not only in the general, but even in particular, towards those persons that do thee wrong; endeavour to requite their evil with good. There is a great measure of self-denial required to be a Christian, especially in matter of revenge, 'to pray for them that curse us, to do good to them that persecute us,' &c., and so 'heap coals of fire upon our enemies' heads,' Prov. 25:22, Rom. 12:20. How is that? There are—

1. Coals of conversion.

2. Coals of confusion.

How in suffering we heap coals of fire. You know coals do either melt or consume. If they belong to God, we shall heap coals of fire to convert them, and make them better by our holy carriage in suffering. If they be wicked, graceless wretches, we shall heap coals of fire to consume them; for it will aggravate their just damnation when they do ill to those that deserve well of them.

Obj. Some will say, Christianity is a strange condition, that enforceth such things upon men, that are so contrary to nature.

Ans. It is so, indeed, for we must be new-moulded before ever we can come to heaven. We must put off our whole self; and he is gone a great way in religion, that hath brought his heart to this pass. None ever overcame himself in these matters out of religious respects, but he found a good issue at last. It is a sweet evidence of the state of grace, none better, when a man can love his very enemies, and those that have done him most wrong; it is an argument that such a man hath something above nature in him. What is above nature, if this be not, for a man to overcome himself in this sweet appetite of revenge? Revenge is most natural to a man; it is as sugar, as the heathen saith; and for a man to overcome himself in that, it argues the power of grace and godliness in such a one.

As Christianity is an excellent estate, an admirable advancing of a man to a higher condition, so it must not seem strange for those that are Christians to be raised to a higher pitch of soul than other men. See how our Saviour dealt in this particular, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do,' Luke 23:34; and so likewise Stephen, being led by the same Spirit of Christ, desired God 'not to lay this sin to their charge,' Acts 7:60; and so all the martyrs in the first state of the church, when the blood of Christ was warm, and the remembrance of Christ was fresh, were wont to pray for their enemies, committing their souls to God in well doing.

The excellent victory of suffering. I beseech you let us labour by all means possible to bring our hearts hereunto. If anything overcome, this will do it, to suffer well. The church of God is a company of men that gain and overcome by suffering in doing good. Thus the dove overcomes the eagle, the sheep overcomes the wolf, the lamb overcomes the lion, &c. It hath been so from the beginning of the world. Meek Christians, by suffering quietly, have at length overcome those that are malicious, and have gained even their very enemies to the love of the truth. What shall we think, then, of the greatest part of the world, who never think of suffering, which is the first lesson in Christianity, but study their ease and contentment, accounting the blessed martyrs too prodigal of their blood, &c.?

Others there are, who, if once they come to suffer, presently fall to shifting and plotting, how to get forth again by unlawful means; oftentimes making shipwreck of a good conscience, and dishonouring the gospel of God. I beseech you consider these things. Every man would have Christ, and be religious, so long as they may enjoy peace and quietness; but if once trouble or persecution arises, then farewell religion; they cast off their profession then. I wish this were not the case of many seeming Christians in these our days.

But suppose a man carry himself ill in suffering?

There is not the least promise of comfort in Scripture to such a man, unless he return, and seek the Lord by timely repentance; for all encouragement is to well-doing. Oh, what a pitiful thing is it for the soul to be in such a state, as that it dares not commit itself to God! A man in evil doing cannot go home to his own conscience for comfort, nor have any inward peace in the least action he performs, so long as he doth it with false aims, and carnal affections, &c. Who would deprive himself of the comfort of suffering in a good cause for want of integrity? I beseech you, therefore, carry yourselves well in anything you either do or suffer, otherwise no blessing can be expected; for we tempt the Lord, and make him accessory to us,

when we commit our souls to him in ill-doing: even as your pirates and other miscreants in the world, that will rob and steal, and do wickedly, and yet pray to God to bless them in their base courses (c); what is this but to make God like themselves, as if he approved their theft and horrible blasphemy?

But what must we commit to God in well-doing? The keeping of our souls. The soul is the more excellent part, witness he that purchased the same with his dearest blood. 'What will it profit a man,' saith our Saviour, 'to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Mark 8:36. Who could know the price of a soul better than he that gave his life for redemption of it? Yea, if the whole world were laid in one balance and the soul in another, the soul were better than all. Therefore, whatsoever estate thou art in, let thy first care be for thy soul, that it may go well with that. You know in any danger or combustion, suppose the firing of an house, that which a man chiefly looks after is his jewels and precious things, 'I have some wealth in such a place, if I could but have that I care for no more, let the rest go;' so it is with a Christian, whatsoever becomes of him in this world, he looks to his precious soul, that that may be laid up safely in the hands of God. Suppose a man were robbed by the highway, and had some special jewel about him, though every thing else were taken away from him, yet so long as that is left he thinks himself a happy man, and saith, they have taken away some luggage, but they have left me that which I prize more than all: so it is with a Christian, let him be stripped of all he hath, so his soul be not hurt, but all safe and well there, he cares not much.

Quest. But what should we desire our souls to be kept from in this world?

Ans. From sin and the evil consequences thereof. Beloved, we have great need our souls should be kept by God; for alas! what sin is there but we shall fall into it, unless God preserve us in peace and comfort, and assurance of a better estate. What would become of our poor souls if we had them in our own keeping? Ahithophel had

the keeping of his own soul, and what became of him? First, he did run into the sins of treason, and afterwards, being a wicked politician, and an atheist, having no delight in God, was the executioner of himself (d). We shall be ready, as Job saith, to tear our own souls if God hath not the keeping of them; we shall tear them with desperate thoughts, as Judas, who never committed his soul to God, but kept it himself, and we see what became of him. The apostle bids us go to God in prayer, and committing our souls to him, to keep from sin, despair, distrust, and all spiritual evil whatsoever, 'and then the peace of God which passeth all understanding,' as the word in the original is, 'shall guard* our souls in Christ,' Phil. 4:7. Our souls have need of guarding, and we of ourselves are not sufficient to do it; therefore we should commit them unto God, for except he preserve us we shall soon perish.

Wicked men think that they have no souls. I am ashamed to speak of it, and yet notwithstanding the courses of men are such, that they enforce a man to speak that which he is ashamed of. What do I speak of committing your souls to God, when many thousands in the world live as if they had no souls at all? I am persuaded that your common swearers, and profane wretches, who wrong their souls to pleasure their bodies, and prostitute both body and soul, and all to their base lusts, think for the time that they have no souls; they think not that there is such an excellent immortal substance breathed into them by God, which must live for ever in eternal happiness or endless misery. Did they believe this they would not wound and stain their precious souls as they do; they would not obey every base lust out of the abundance of profaneness in their hearts, even for nothing, as many notorious loose persons do. Oh could we but get this principle into people, that they have immortal souls, which must live for ever, they would soon be better than they are; but the devil hath most men in such bondage that their lives speak that they believe they have no souls, by their ill usage of them.

Obj. But must we not commit our bodies and our estates to God, as well as our souls?

Ans. Yes, all we have; for that is only well kept which God keeps; but yet in time of suffering we must be at a point[†] with these things. If God will have our liberty, if he will have our life and all, we must hate all for Christ's sake; but we must not be at such a point with our souls, we must keep them close to God, and desire him to keep them in well-doing.

Obj. Suppose it come to an exigent, that we must either sin and hurt our souls, or else lose all our outward good things?

Ans. Our chief care must be over our souls. We must desire God to preserve our souls, whatsoever becomes of these; our principal care must be that that be not blemished in the least kind; for, alas! other things must be parted with first or last. This body of ours, or whatsoever is dear in the world, must be stripped from us, and laid in the dust ere long. But here is our comfort, though our body be dead, yet our souls are themselves still; dead St Paul is Paul still. Our body is but the case or tabernacle wherein our soul dwells; especially a man's self is his soul; keep that and keep all. I beseech you, therefore, as things are in worth and excellency in God's account, let our esteem be answerable. You have many compliments in the world, how doth your body, &c., mere compliments indeed, but how few will inquire how our souls do? alas! that is in poor case. The body perhaps is well looked unto, that is clothed, and care taken that nothing be wanting to it, but the poor soul is ragged and wounded, and naked. Oh that men were sensible of that miserable condition their poor souls are in.

Beloved, the soul is the better part of a man, and if that miscarries, all miscarries. If the soul be not well, the body will not continue long in a good estate. Bernard saith sweetly, 'Oh, body, thou hast a noble guest dwelling in thee, a soul of such inestimable worth that it makes thee truly noble.' Whatsoever goodness and excellency is in

the body, is communicated from the soul; when that once departs, the body is an unlovely thing, without life or sense. The very sight of it cannot be endured of the dearest friends. What an incredible baseness is it therefore, that so precious a thing as the soul is, should serve these vile bodies of ours! Let the body stay its leisure; the time of the resurrection is the time of the body. In this life it should be serviceable to our souls in suffering and doing whatsoever God calls us unto. Let our bodies serve our souls now, and then body and soul shall for ever after be happy; whereas, if we, to gratify our bodies, do betray our souls, both are undone.

Beloved, the devil and devilish-minded men, acted with his spirit, have a special spite to the soul. Alas! what do they aim at in all their wrongs and injuries to God's children? Do they care to hurt the body? indeed, they will do this rather than nothing at all; they will rather play at small game than sit out. The devil will enter into the swine rather than stand out altogether. Some mischief he will do, however; but his main spite is at the soul, to vex and disquiet that, and taint it with sin all he can. Considering therefore that it is Satan's aim to unloose our hold from God, by defiling our souls with sin, so to put a divorce betwixt his blessed majesty and us, oh! let it be our chief care to see to that which Satan strikes at most! He did not so much care, in Job's trouble, for his goods, or for his house, or children, &c. Alas! he aimed at a further mischief than this! his plot was how to make him blaspheme and wound his soul, that so there might be a difference betwixt God and him. He first tempts us to commit sin, and afterwards to despair for sin.

Quest. But to whom must the soul be committed?

Ans. Our souls must be committed to God. Commit the keeping of your souls to God. Indeed, he only can keep our souls. We cannot keep them ourselves; neither can anything else in the world do it. Some when they are sick will commit themselves to the physician, and put all their trust in him. When they are in trouble they will commit themselves to some great friend; when they have any bad,

naughty cause to manage, they will commit themselves to their purse, and think that shall bear them out in anything. One thinks his wit and policy shall secure him, another that his shifts may shelter him, &c.; and indeed the heart of man is so full of atheism, that it can never light upon the right object, to trust God alone, until it sees everything else fail, as being insufficient to support the soul, or to yield any solid comfort in times of extremity and distress.

Quest. But why must we commit our souls to God?

Ans. Because he is a faithful Creator. Whence observe,

Obs. That the soul of man being an understanding essence, will not be satisfied and settled without sound reasons. Comfort is nothing else but reasons stronger than the evil which doth afflict us; when the reasons are more forcible to ease the mind than the grievance is to trouble it. It is no difficult matter to commit our souls to God when we are once persuaded that he is a faithful Creator. A man commits himself to another man, and hath no other reason for it, but only he is persuaded of his ability and credit in the world; that he is a man of estate and power to do him good. So it is in this business of religion. Our souls are carried to anything strongly when they are carried by strong reasons, as in this particular of trusting God with our souls. When we see sufficient reasons inducing thereto, we easily resign them into his hands. This shews that popery is an uncomfortable religion, which brings men to despair. They have no reason for what they maintain. What reason can they give for their doctrine of doubting, transubstantiation, perfect obedience to the law, &c.? These are unreasonable things. The soul cannot yield to such absurdities. It must have strong reasons to stablish it, as here, to consider God as a faithful Creator, &c. There is something in God to answer all the doubts and fears of the soul, and to satisfy it in any condition whatsoever. This is the very foundation of religion; not that any worth can accrue to the Creator from the creature, but that there is an all-sufficiency in the Creator to relieve the poor creature. If a man consider in what order

God created him, it will make him trust God. Paradise and all in it were ready for him, so soon as he came into the world. God created us after his own image, that as he was Lord of all things, so we should be lord of the creatures. They were all at his service, that he might serve God. Therefore after everything else was created, he was made, that so God might bring him as it were to a table ready furnished.

And not only in nature, but in holiness, having an immortal and invisible soul resembling God. We must take God here as a Creator of our whole man, body and soul, and of the new creature in us. God made man at the first, but that was not so much as for God to be made man, to make us new creatures. God created our bodies out of the dust, but our souls come immediately from himself. He breathes them into us, and in this respect he is a higher Creator than in the other; for when we had marred our first making, and became more like beasts than men, for indeed every one that is not like God sympathiseth with beasts or devils one way or other, God in Christ made us new again. Yea, God became man to enrich us with all grace and goodness, to free us from the hands of Satan, and bring us to an eternal state of communion with himself in heaven. For all the old heaven and the old earth shall pass away, and the old condition of creatures, and a new life shall be given them. God that made the new heaven and the new earth, hath made us for them. Considering therefore that God gave us our first being, and when we were worse than naught, gave us a second being in regard to our new creation, how should it stir us up to commit our souls unto him! especially if we consider that in him we 'live and move and have our being,' Acts 17:28; that there is not the least thought and affection to goodness in us but it comes from God; we are what we are by his grace.

Quest. What is the reason that love descends so much?

Ans. Because a man looks upon that which is his own and loves it. Now God looks upon us as upon those into whom he hath infused

mercy and goodness, and he loves his own work upon us; and therefore having begun a good work, will perfect the same. Do not men delight to polish their own work? As in the first creation God never took off his hand till he had finished his work, so in the second creation of our souls he will never remove his hand from the blessed work of grace till he hath perfected the same; therefore we may well commit our souls to him.

Obj. But suppose a man be in a desperate estate, and hath no way of escaping?

Ans. Remember that God is the same still; he hath not forgot his old art of creating, but is as able to help now as ever, and can create comforts for thee in thy greatest troubles. As in the first creation he made light out of darkness, order out of confusion, so still he is able out of thy confused and perplexed estate to create peace and comfort. Thou knowest not what to do perhaps, thy mind is so troubled and disquieted; why, commit thy soul to God; he can raise an excellent frame out of the chaos of thy thoughts. Therefore be not dismayed; consider thou hast God in covenant with thee, and hast to deal with an almighty Creator, who can send present help in time of need. Dost thou want any grace? dost thou want spiritual life? Go to this Creator, he will put a new life into thee; he that made all things of nothing can raise light out of thy dark mind, and can make fleshy thy stony heart, though it be as hard as a rock. Therefore never despair, but frequent the means of grace, and still think of God under this relation of a Creator; and when he hath begun any good work of grace in thee, go confidently to His Majesty, and desire him to promote and increase the same in thy heart and life. Lord, I am thy poor creature, thou hast in mercy begun a blessed work in me, and where thou hast begun thou hast said thou wilt make an end. When thou createdst the world, thou didst not leave it till all was done; and when thou createdst man thou madest an end. Now, I beseech thee, perfect the new creature in my soul. As thou hast begun to enlighten mine understanding and to direct my

affections to the best things, so I commit my soul unto thee for further guidance and direction to full happiness.

THE SAINT'S HIDING-PLACE IN THE EVIL DAY, PART II

SERMON V

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls to him in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.—1 PET. 4:19.

I AM now to treat of that other attribute of God, which should move us to trust in him, namely, as he is a faithful Creator. Now God is faithful, 1. In his nature. He is I AM, always like himself, immutable and unchangeable. 2. In his word. He expresseth himself as he is. The word that comes from God is an expression of the faithfulness of his nature. 3. In his works. 'Thou art good, and dost good,' as the psalmist saith, Ps. 119:68. God being faithful in himself, all must needs be so that proceeds from him. Whatsoever relation God takes upon him, he is faithful therein. As he is a Creator, so he preserves and maintains his own work. As he is a Father, he is faithful in discharging that duty to the full, for his children's good. As he is our Friend, he likewise performs all the duties of that relation, &c. And why doth God stoop so low to take these relations upon him, but only to shew that he will certainly accomplish the same to the utmost? Whence is it that men are faithful in their relations one towards another, that the father is faithful to his child? Is it not from God, the chief Father? That a friend should be faithful to his friend, is it not from God, the great Friend?

All his ways are mercy and truth, Ps. 35:10. They are not only merciful and good and gracious, but mercy and truth itself. If he shew himself to be a Father, he is a true father, a true friend, a true creator and protector. As one saith, 'Shall I cause others to fear, and be a tyrant myself?' † All other faithfulness is but a beam of that which is in God. Shall not he be most faithful that makes other things faithful?

Now, this faithfulness of God is here a ground of this duty of committing ourselves to him; and we may well trust him whose word hath been seven times tried in the fire, Ps. 12:6. There is no dross in it. Every word of God is a sure word; his truth is a shield and buckler; we may well trust in it. Therefore, when you read of any singular promise in the New Testament, it is said, 'This is a faithful saying,' &c., 1 Tim. 1:15; that is, this is such a speech as we may trust to; it is the speech of a faithful Creator.

Considering, therefore, that God is so faithful every way in his promises and in his deeds, let us make especial use of it. Treasure up all the promises we can of the forgiveness of sins, of protection and preservation; that he will never leave us, but be our God to death, &c., and then consider withal that he is faithful in performing the same. When we are affrighted by his majesty and his justice, and other attributes, then think of his mercy and truth. He hath clothed himself with faithfulness, as the psalmist saith. In all the unfaithfulness of men whom thou trustest, depend upon this, that God is still the same, and will not deceive thee.

When we have man's word, we have his sufficiency in mind, for men's words are as themselves are. What will not the word of a king do? If a man be mighty and great, his word is answerable. This is the reason why we should make so much of the word of God, because it is the word of Jehovah, a mighty Creator, who gives a being to all things, and can only be Lord and Master of his word. We know God's meaning no otherwise than by his word. Till we come to the

knowledge of vision in heaven, we must be content with the knowledge of revelation in the word.

And in every promise, single out that which best suiteth with thy present condition. If thou art in any great distress, think upon the almighty power of God. Lord, thou hast made me of nothing, and canst deliver me out of this estate. Behold, I fly unto thee for succour, &c. If thou art in perplexity for want of direction, and knowest not what to do, single out the attribute of God's wisdom, and desire him to teach thee the way that thou shouldst go. If thou art wronged, fly to his justice, and say, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, hear and help thy servant. If thou be surprised with distrust and staggering, then go to his truth and faithfulness. Thou shalt always find in God something to support thy soul in the greatest extremity that can befall thee; for if there were not in God a fulness to supply every exigent* that we are in, he were not to be worshipped, he were not to be trusted.

Man is lighter than vanity in the balance. Every man is a liar, that is, he is false. We may be so, and yet be men too, but God is essentially true. He cannot deceive and be God too. Therefore ever, when thou art disappointed with men, retire to God and to his promises, and build upon this, that the Lord will not be wanting in anything may do thee good. With men there is breach of covenant, nation with nation, and man with man. There is little trust to be had in any; but in all confusions here is comfort. A religious person may cast himself boldly into the arms of the Almighty, and go to him in any distress, as to a faithful Creator that will not forsake him.

Use. Oh, let us be ashamed that we should dishonour him who is ready to pawn his faithfulness and truth for us. If we confess our sins, 'God is faithful to forgive them,' 1 John 1:9. He will not suffer us to be tempted 'above that which we are able,' 1 Cor. 10:13. When we perplex ourselves with doubts and fears whether he will make good his promise or not, we disable His Majesty. Do we not think God stands upon his truth and faithfulness? Undoubtedly he doth,

and we cannot dishonour him more than to distrust him, especially in his evangelical promises. We make him a liar, and rob him of that which he most glories in, his mercy and faithfulness, if we rest not securely upon him.

See the baseness of man's nature. God hath made all other things faithful that are so, and we can trust them; but are ever and anon questioning the truth of his promise. We may justly take up Salvian's complaint in his time, 'Who hath made the earth faithful to bring forth fruit,' saith he, 'but God? Yet we can trust the ground with sowing our seed. Who makes man faithful, who is by nature the most slippery and unconstant creature of all other, but God only? Yet we can trust a vain man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and look for great matters at his hands, before an all-sufficient God, that changeth not. Who makes the seas and the winds faithful, that they do not hurt us, but God? And yet we are apt to trust the wind and weather sooner than God, as we see many seamen that will thrust forth their goods into the wide ocean in a small bark, to shift any way, rather than trust God with them.'

Yea, let Satan, by his wicked instruments, draw a man to some cursed politic reasons, for the devil doth not immediately converse with the world, but in his instruments, and he will sooner trust him than God himself. So prone are our hearts to distrust the Almighty, to call his truth in question, and to trust the lies of our own hearts and other men's, before him. Let us, therefore, lament our infidelity, that having such an omnipotent and faithful creator to rely upon, yet we cannot bring our hearts to trust in him. There are two main pillars of a Christian's faith:—

1. The power of God.
2. The goodness of God.

These two, like Aaron and Hur, hold up the arms of our prayers. Let our estate be never so desperate, yet God is a Creator still. Let our

sins and infirmities be never so great, yet he hath power to heal them. Oh, how should this cheer up our souls, and support our drooping spirits in all our strivings and conflicts with sin and Satan, that we yield not to the least temptation, having such an almighty God to fly unto for succour.

We must not trust the creature. 'Cursed is that man which makes flesh his arm,' Jer. 17:5. He that we trust in, must be no less than a Creator. 'Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,' saith God, he is a poor creature as thyself is; raised of nothing, and shall come to dust again. If we would be trusting, as we needs must, for we are dependent persons, and want many things whilst we are here, let us go to the fountain, and not to broken cisterns for comfort.

It is no small privilege for a Christian to have this free access to God in times of extremity. Be we what we can be, take us at our worst in regard of sin or misery, yet we are his creatures still. I am the clay, thou art the potter; I am a sinful wretch, yet I am the workmanship of thy hands. O Lord, thou hast framed me and fashioned me, &c. No wicked person in the world can, upon good ground, plead in this manner, though they may say to God, I am thy creature, yet they have not the grace in their troubles to plead this unto him. Why, Lord, though I be a rebellious son, and am not worthy to be called thy servant, yet I am thy creature, though a sinful one. Surely, had we faith, we would take hold by a little. The soul of man is like the vine, it winds about and fastens upon every little help. Faith will see day at a little hole; and where it sees anything it will catch at it, as the woman of Canaan. Christ calls her dog. Why, be it so, Lord, I am a dog, yet I am one of the family though I be a dog; therefore have mercy on me.

Oh, it is a sweet reasoning thus to cling about God, and gather upon him; it is a special art of faith. Though a carnal man may reason thus, as having a ground from the truth of the thing, yet he hath not grace to reason out of an affection thereunto. Though he should say, Lord, I am thy creature; yet his heart tells him thus, if he would

hearken to it, I am thy creature, Lord, but I have made all my members that I have received from thee, instruments to sin against thee, and I purpose not to reform; my tongue is an instrument of swearing, lying, and profane speeches; my hands are instruments of bribery and violence, continually working mischief in thy sight; my feet carry me to such and such filthy places, and abominable courses; mine own heart tells me that I fight against thee, my Creator, with those very limbs and weapons which thou hast given me. Beloved, the conscience of this so stifles the voice of a wilful sinner, that notwithstanding he acknowledgeth himself to be God's creature, yet he cannot with any comfort plead for mercy at his hand in times of distress.

But to a right godly man this is an argument of special use and consequence; in the midst of troubles he may allege this, and it binds God to help him. We see great ones when they raise any, though perhaps there is little merit in them, yet they call them their creatures; and this is a moving argument with such to polish their own work still, and not to desert them. Will it not be a prevailing argument with God then, for a Christian to plead with him? Lord, thou hast raised me out of nothing, yea, out of a state worse than nothing; I am thy poor creature, forsake not the work of thine own hands. We may see what a fearful thing sin is in God's eye, that the works of our hands should make God depart from the work of his hands, as he will certainly do at the day of judgment: 'Depart, you cursed,' &c., Mat. 25:41. Though we be his creatures, yet because we have not used those gifts and abilities which he hath given us to serve His Majesty, he will not endure the sight of us in that day.

But that you may the better practise this duty of committing your souls to God, take these directions.

1. Directions how to commit our souls to God. First, see that thou be thy own man. It is an act of persons free to covenant. Our souls must be ours before we can commit them to God. Naturally we are all slaves to Satan; the strong man hath possession of us, and

therefore our first care must be to get out of his bondage, to which purpose we should much eye the sweet promises and invitations of the gospel, alluring us to accept of mercy and deliverance from sin and death, as—'Come unto me, all you that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., Mat. 11:28, and so cast the guilt of our souls upon God to pardon first, and then to sanctify and cleanse, that we may no more return to folly, but lead an unspotted life before him for the time to come.

It is therefore a silly course and dangerous, which poor worldly wretches take, who think Lord, have mercy upon them, will serve their turn, and that God will certainly save their souls; whenas they were never yet in the state of grace or reconciliation with him, nor never had any divorce made between them and their sins, and consequently never any league between God and their souls to this day.

Beloved, when once a man hath alienated his soul from God by sin, he hath then no more command of it; for the present it is quite out of his power. Now, when we would commit our souls to God aright, we must first commit them to him to pardon the guilt of sin in them. When this is done, God will give us our souls again, and then they may truly be said to be our own, and not before. It is the happiness of a Christian that he is not his own, but that whether he live or die, he is the Lord's.

Direction 2. In the second place, we must labour to find ourselves in covenant with God; that is, to find him making good his promises to us, and ourselves making good our promises to him. For a man cannot commit himself to God, unless he find a disposition in his heart to be faithful to him.

There is a passive fidelity, and an active. 1. Passive faithfulness is in the things that we give trust unto, as, such a one is a sure, trusty man, therefore I will rely upon him. 2. Active faithfulness in the soul is, when we cast ourselves upon a man that is trusty, and

depend upon him. The more a man knows another to be faithful, the more faithful he will be in trusting of him; and thus we must trust God, if ever we expect any good at his hands; and our dependence on him binds him to be the more faithful to us. He is counted a wicked man indeed, that will deceive the trust committed to him. Trust begets fidelity; it makes a good man the more faithful, when he knows he is trusted.

Learn therefore to know thyself to be in covenant with God, and to trust him with all thou hast; train up thyself in a continual dependence upon him. He that trusts God with his soul, will trust him every day in everything he hath or doth. He knows well, that whatsoever he enjoys is not his own, but God's; and this stirs him to commit all his ways and doings to his protection, esteeming nothing safe but what the Lord keeps. He sees 'it is not in sinful man to direct his own steps,' Jer. 10:23; and therefore resigns up his estate, his calling, his family, whatsoever is near and dear unto him, to the blessed guidance and direction of the Almighty. Oh, thinks he, that I were in covenant with God, that he would own me for his, and take the care of me, how happy should my condition then be!

He will likewise commit the church and state wherein he lives to God; and strengthens his faith daily by observing God's faithful dealing with his people in every kind.

How behoveful it is for Christians thus to inure themselves to be acquainted with God by little and little, first trusting him with smaller matters, and then with greater. How can a man trust God with his soul, that distrusts him for the petty things of this life? 'They that give to the poor are said to lend unto the Lord,' Prov. 19:17; and 'if we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall find it again,' Eccles. 11:1. Beloved, he that parts with anything to relieve a poor saint, and will not trust God with his promise to recompense it again, but thinks all is gone, and he shall never see it more, &c., exceedingly derogates from the truth and goodness of the Almighty, who hath promised to return with advantage whatsoever we give

that way. He hath secret ways of his own to do us good, that we know not of. A man is never the poorer for that which he discreetly gives. It is hard to believe this; but it is much harder for a man to commit his soul to God when he dies, with assurance that he shall partake of mercy, and be saved at the last day.

Direction 3. Again, take heed of these evil and cursed dispositions that hinder us from the performance of this duty; as namely, carnal wit and policy, and carnal will and affection, &c. There is a great deal of self-denial to be learned, before we can go out of ourselves and commit all to God; ere we can cast ourselves into his arms, and lay ourselves at his feet. Therefore take heed that we be not ruled, either by our own carnal policy or others', to knit ourselves to that; for I beseech you, do but think, what is true in all stories, not only in the Scripture, but elsewhere, the most unfortunate men that ever were, otherwise wise enough, were always too confident of themselves. The greatest swimmers, you know, are often drowned, because relying overmuch on their own skill, they cast themselves into danger, and are swallowed up of the deep. Even confidence in wit is usually unfortunate, though it be great. Let Solomon be an example. You see how he strengthened himself by carnal supports; but what became of all? Alas, it soon vanished and came to nothing. The Jews would run to the reed of Egypt, and that ran into their hands; instead of helping, it hurt them. God takes delight to overthrow the ripeness of all the carnal policy of man, that advanceth itself against his word and gospel. Take heed of confidence in prosperity, in wit, in strength; take heed of whatsoever hinders the committing of our souls to God; and always remember, that honesty is the best policy; and that God reconciled in Christ is the best sanctuary to flee unto. 'The name of God is a strong tower,' saith Solomon; 'the righteous flee thereto, and are safe,' Prov. 18:10.

That carnal policy hinders our safety. Let Christians therefore have nothing to do with carnal shifts, and politic ends; for they have a strong rock, and a sure hold to go to; the Almighty is their shield.

Beloved, God will be honoured by our trusting of him, and those that will be wiser than God, and have other courses distinct and contrary to him, must look for confusion in all their plots. A Christian should thus think with himself, let God be wise for me; his wisdom shall be my direction; his will shall be the rule of my life; he shall guide me and support me; I will adventure upon no course that I dare not commit my soul with comfort to God in.

Oh beloved, if we tender our own welfare, let us shun all unwarrantable courses, and adventure upon no action whatsoever, wherein we cannot upon good grounds desire the Lord's protection. It is a fearful estate for a man to undertake such courses, as that he cannot if he were surprised by judgment, suddenly commit himself to God in. The throne of iniquity shall not abide with God; he will not take a wicked man by the hand, nor own him in a distressful time.

Study therefore, I beseech you, to be always in such a blessed condition, as that you may, without tempting of God, in a holy boldness of faith, resign up your souls to him. A guilty conscience cannot seek the Lord; naturally it runs away from him. Peace is not easily gotten, nor the gap soon made up; therefore preserve conscience clear and unspotted, if thou wouldst have God thy refuge in time of need. Adam when he had sinned ran from God; Peter, when our Saviour discovered more than an ordinary majesty in his miracles, said, 'Lord, depart from me, I am a sinful man,' Luke 5:8. It is the work of flesh and blood to depart from God, but when a man goes to God, it is a sign he hath more than flesh and blood in him; for this cannot be done without a supernatural work of faith; which alone will make a sinful conscience fly to God, and look to him as a father in Christ, and desire him by his almighty power, whereby he created heaven and earth, to create faith in the soul. And when thou hast cast thy soul into the arms of the Almighty, labour to settle it there, and to quiet thyself in the discharge of thy duty; say thus, now I have done that which belongs to me, let God do that which belongs to him; I will not trouble myself about God's

work, but in well-doing commit my soul to him, and let him alone with the rest.

Christians should not outrun God's providence, and say, what shall become of me? this trouble will overwhelm me! &c. but serve his providence in the use of the means, and then leave all to his disposal. Especially this duty is needful in the hour of death, or when some imminent danger approacheth; but then it will be an hard work, except it be practised aforehand.

Direction 4. Labour therefore for assurance of God's love betimes, get infallible evidences of thy estate in grace, that thou art a renewed person, and that there is a thorough change wrought in thy heart; that God hath set a stamp upon thee for his own, and that thou hast something above nature in thee; then mayest thou cheerfully say, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; I am thine, Lord, save me, &c.,' Luke 23:46, otherwise having no interest in God, how canst thou expect any favour from him? Oh the sweet tranquillity and heaven upon earth which those enjoy who have God to be their friend!

This lays a heavy prejudice upon antichristian religion, which maintains a doctrine of doubting, affirming that we ought not to labour for assurance of God's favour. Oh beloved, what deprives a poor Christian soul of comfort more than this? Alas! how can a man at the hour of death commit his soul into the hands of Almighty God, that staggers whether he be his child or no? and knows not whether he shall go to heaven or hell? Therefore it should be our daily endeavour, as we would have comfort in the time of resigning and giving up our souls to God, to gather evidences of a good estate; that we are in covenant with him; that he is our Father; and that we are his children in Christ Jesus.

For will a man trust his jewels with an enemy, or with a doubtful friend? How can the swearer commit his soul to God? How can loose livers and your filthy, unclean wretches, that live in continual

enmity against the Lord, commit themselves with any comfort unto him? They pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' Mat. 6:13, and yet run daily into temptations, into vile houses and places of wickedness, wherein they feed their corruptions, and nothing else. They say, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and yet use unwarrantable courses, seeking to thrive by unlawful means.

Beloved, a man can commit his soul with no more comfort to God than he hath care to please him. If a man knows such a one hath his evidences and leases, and may hurt him when he list, how careful will he be of provoking or giving offence to such a man? Suppose we knew a man that had the keeping of a lion, or some cruel beast, and could let it loose upon us at his pleasure, would we not speak such a one fair, and give him as little cause of discontent as may be? Beloved, God hath devils and wicked men in a chain, and can, if we offend him, set loose all the powers of darkness upon us; he can make conscience fly in our faces, and cause us to despair and sink. All our evidences and assurances of salvation are in God's hands; he can bring us into a state full of discomfort and misery, and make us in a manner to feel the very flashes and scorchings of hell itself. Oh who would offend this God, much less live in the practice of any sin, and yet think of committing their souls to him!

Direction 5. To encourage you the more to trust in God, observe the constant course of his dealing towards you. 'Lord, thou hast been my God from my youth,' saith David; 'upon thee have I hung ever since I was took out of my mother's womb; forsake me not in my gray hairs, when my strength faileth me,' &c., Ps. 71:6, 9, 17:18. We should gather upon God, as it were, from former experience of his goodness, and trust him for the time to come, having formerly found him true. Beloved, it is good to lay up all the experiments of God's love we can, that we may trust him at the hour of death; for all our strength then will be little enough to uphold our faith. When many troubles shall meet in one, as it were in a centre, then a world of fears and distractions will seize upon our souls, the guilt of sin past, thoughts of judgment to come, forsaking of our former lusts

and delights, trouble of mind, pain of body, &c. We have need of much acquaintance with God, and assurance of his love at such a time. Therefore let us learn daily to observe the experience of his goodness towards us, how when we have committed ourselves to him in youth, he hath been a God from time to time in such and such dangers to us. Ancient Christians should be the best Christians, because they are enriched with most experiences. It is a shame for ancient Christians to stagger, when they yield up their souls to God, as if they had not been acquainted with him heretofore. You see how David pleads to God, 'Thou hast redeemed me,' Ps. 31:5; he goes to former experience of his mercy; therefore now into thy hands I commend my spirit in this extremity. This psalm is a practice of this precept; here is the precept, 'Commit your souls to God, as a faithful Creator;' here is the practice of David, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth,' &c. Therefore, I beseech you, let us treasure up experience of God's goodness, that so when extremities shall come, we may go boldly to him, upon former acquaintance with his majesty; and being strengthened with former experience. I beseech you, let us labour to practise these and the like rules prescribed, to encourage us in the performance of so necessary a duty.

Obj. But will not God keep us without we commit ourselves unto him?

Ans. We must commit our souls to God if we would be preserved. I answer, God having endued us with understanding and grace, will do us good in the exercise of those powers and graces that he hath given us; he will preserve us, but we must pray for it. Christ himself must ask before he can have: 'Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,' Ps. 2:8, &c. We should therefore make it a continued act, every day of our lives, to commit all we have to the Lord's disposal; and to that end observe how he dischargeth the trust committed to him upon all occasions; how faithful he is in delivering his poor church in greatest extremities, and ourselves also even in our worst times. 'Thou never failest those

that trust in thee,' saith David, and 'How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God, therefore the children of men shall trust under the shadow of thy wings,' Ps. 36:7. Daily experience of God's lovingkindness will make us daily to trust under the shadow of his wings. It should therefore be our continual course to observe the goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and other attributes of God, and often to support our souls with them.

Think, I beseech you, how he numbers the very bones of men; they are all written in his book of providence; he knows every joint, every part which he hath made; he knows his own workmanship; therefore we may well commit our souls to him. Doth God number our superfluities, and not our natural and essential parts? Even our very hairs are numbered; our tears are taken notice of, and put into his bottle; our steps are told; our desires are known; our groans are not hid. We shall not lose a sigh for sin, so particular is God's providence. He watcheth continually over us. There is not any of our members but they are all written in his book, so that he will not suffer 'a bone to be broken,' Ps. 34:20. We should therefore daily resign up our souls to his merciful tuition,* and bind ourselves to lead unblameable lives before him, resolving against every sinful course, wherein we would be afraid to look his Majesty in the face. What a comfortable life were the life of Christians, if they would exercise themselves to walk as in the presence of the Almighty! This is that which the Scripture speaks of Enoch, Gen. 5:24, and the rest, who are said to have walked with God; that is, to have committed themselves and their souls to him, as to a faithful Creator.

Obj. Of wicked men's preserving, who do not commit their souls to God. It may be objected, here is a great deal of labour and striving against corruptions indeed; may not a man walk with God without all this ado? We see wicked men, that never commit their souls to God, grow fat and lusty, and have as good success in the world as the strictest men that are.

Ans. 1. I answer, God many times preserves such wretches; but, alas! that preservation is rather a reservation for a worse evil to come upon them. 'There is a pit a-digging for the wicked,' Ps. 37:13, 38. He flourisheth and bears out all impudently, under hope of success; but his grave is a-making, and his present prosperity will but aggravate his future misery.

2. Sometimes God preserves wicked men for other ends. It may be he hath some to come of their loins, who of wicked shall be made good.

3. Again, God will be in no man's debt. Those that are civilly good shall have civil prosperity, as the Romans had. They had a commonwealth well governed, and they prospered many years together. As Chaucer observes, God preserves wicked men from many calamities; he gives them civil wisdom, good carriage, &c.; and answerable to those common gifts, he gives them preservation and protection, &c.; but then there is vengeance on their souls the while. Those that commit not themselves carefully and watchfully to God, have dead, secure souls, without any life of grace or power of godliness in them. I speak this to waking Christians, that would know in what case they should live; walking in the sense and assurance of God's love; they, I say, ought to practise this duty of committing the keeping of their souls to God in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.

What it is to commit our souls to God. Neither is it so easy a matter to commit our souls to God as many fondly imagine. It is not the mumbling over a few prayers, saying, Lord, receive my soul, &c., will serve the turn. These are good words indeed, and soon learned; but, alas! who cannot do this? Our study, therefore, should be to know the depth and meaning of the same; how that we are not only to commit the essence of our souls to God, that he would take them into heaven when we die; but also to commit the affections of our souls to him, that he might own us and govern us whilst we live; for how are our souls known, but by those active expressions in our

affections, which immediately issue from them, when we commit all our thoughts, desires, and affections to him, setting him highest in our souls, and making him our hope, our trust, our joy, our fear, &c.?

Thus I have spoken of the duty, and of the thing to be committed, our souls; and to whom, to God; and the manner, in well-doing; and why? because he is a faithful Creator.

Now, I beseech you, consider how nearly it concerns us all to be thoroughly acquainted with the practice of this duty. God knows what extremities we may fall into. Certainly in what condition soever we be, either public or private, whether in contagion and infection, or war and desolation, happy are we if we have a God to go to. If we have him to retire to in heaven, and a good conscience to retire to in ourselves, we may rest secure. 'Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea,' Ps. 46:2, 4, yet we shall be safe; that is, though the order of nature were confounded, yet there is a river shall refresh the house of God. There are chambers of divine protection, that the Christian enters into, as the prophet saith, 'Enter into thy chambers,' Isa. 26:20; and God is his habitation still. If a Christian had no shelter in the world, yet he hath an abiding place in God continually; as God dwells in him, so he dwells in God. Satan and all other the enemies of man must break through God before they can come to us, when once we commit ourselves to him, as to a tower and habitation, and enter into him as into an hiding place. The enemies must wrong him before they can hurt us, so blessed an estate it is to be in God, having commended our souls to him, as unto a faithful Creator.

Obj. But we see many of God's dear children, that commit themselves to his care and protection, miscarry, and go by the worst in the world.

Ans. 1. Beloved, it is not so, for when they commit themselves to God, they are under safety; and if he keep them not out of trouble,

yet he will preserve them in trouble. 'I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water,' saith God, Isa. 40. He saith not, I will keep you out of the fire, and out of the water, for he brought many holy martyrs into it; some were drowned, some burned, &c. Though God will not keep us out of trouble, yet he will preserve our spirits in trouble; nay, God many times by a small trouble preserves us from a greater. Even the sufferings of the godly are oft preservations to them. Was not Jonah preserved by the whale? What had become of him if that had not swallowed him up? A whale that one would have thought should be a means to destroy him, was a means to carry him to the coast, and bring him safely to land.

Again, God seems for a time indeed to neglect his children when they commit themselves unto him, but mark the issue; 'all the works of God are beautiful in their season,' Eccl. 3:11. He suffers them it may be, a long time to be in danger and trouble, till he hath perfected the work of mortification in their hearts, and crucified their confidence in earthly things, till he hath made them more sensible of the evil of sin, and watchful against it; but wait a while, and you shall see 'that the end of the righteous man is peace,' Ps. 37:37.

God's presence and assistance to support his children in trouble is invincible; they have gladness and comfort that we wot not of; they commit the safety of their souls to God, and he seems to neglect them, if we look to their outward man, but they have a paradise in their conscience. God preserves their souls from sin, and their consciences from despair. They have an invisible protection. There was a fence about Job that the devils saw, and a guard of angels that Elias saw, and that his servant saw afterwards, 2 Kings 6:14, 15. Wicked men see not the guard of spirits that is about the children of God; as Christ saith, 'they have meat the world knows not of,' John 4:32; they feed on hidden comforts.

As for carnal men, they do not commit themselves to God; they have no preservation, but rather a reservation to further evil.

Pharaoh was kept from the ten plagues, but was drowned in the sea at last; and Sodom was kept by Abraham; he fought for them, but yet it was destroyed with fire and brimstone afterwards.

Let us then try our trust in God. Those that intend to embark themselves and their estates in a ship, will be sure to try it first. This committing of our souls to God, must be our ship to carry us through the waves of this troublesome world to the heavenly Canaan of rest and peace. We should therefore search and prove the same, whether it be indeed safe and sound, able to support our souls in the evil day, and not leak and prove insufficient for us.

How to know when we trust God aright. Trial 1. Those that commit themselves to God aright, are far from tempting his majesty. God will be trusted, but not tempted. What though things fall not out according to thy expectation; yet wait thou, and think God hath further ends than thou knowest of. God will do things in the order of his providence, therefore if we neglect that, it is our own fault if he do not help us. If Christ had committed his health to God, and had cast himself down from the pinnacle, what an act had this been! but he would not so tempt the Almighty. Neither should we unadvisedly run into dangers, but serve his providence upon all occasions. God useth our endeavour to this very end. He saves us not always immediately, but by putting wisdom into our hearts to use lawful means, and using those means he will save us in them. A Christian therefore should be in a continual dependence upon God, and say, I will use these means, God may bless them; if not, I will trust him; he is not tied to the use of means, though I be.

Trial 2. Again, those that commit their souls, or anything to God, find themselves quieted therein. Is it not so amongst men? If a man commit a jewel to a trusty friend, is he not secure presently? Have we not God's word and faithfulness engaged, that he will not leave us nor forsake us, but continue our all-sufficient God and portion to our lives' end? Why then are we disquieted? Those that are full of cares and fears may talk their pleasure, but they never yet had any

true confidence in God: for faith is a quieting grace, it stills the soul; 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. 5:1. Those that are hurried in their life with false doubts and perplexities, 'What shall become of me? What shall I eat, and what shall I drink?' &c., though they use lawful means, yet commit not themselves to God as they should; for where there is a dependence upon God in the use of means, there is an holy silence in the party. All stubborn and tumultuous thoughts are hushed in him. 'My soul, keep silence to the Lord,' saith David, 'and trust in God; why art thou so vexed within me?' Ps 42:11. Still there is a quieting of the soul where there is trust. Can that man put confidence in God that prowls for himself, and thinks he hath no Father in heaven to provide for him? Doth that child trust his father, that, besides going to school, thinks what he shall put on? how he shall be provided for, and what inheritance he shall have hereafter? Alas: this is the father's care, and belongs not to him. Wheresoever these distractions are, there can be no yielding up of the soul to God in truth.

There be two affections which mightily disturb the peace of Christians. 1. Sinful cares; and 2. sinful fears. To both which we have remedies prescribed in the Scripture. 1. 'Fear not, little flock,' saith Christ, 'for it is your Father's will to give you a kingdom,' Luke 12:32; as if he had said, Will not he that gives you heaven, give you other things? In nothing be careful, saith the apostle, that is, in a distracting manner, but do your duty, and then 'let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God shall keep you,' Phil. 4:7; and therefore were we redeemed from the hands of our enemies, that we might 'serve him without fear all our days,' Luke 1:74.

A Christian should keep an inward sabbath in his soul, and go quietly on in doing all the good he can. What a fearful thing is it to see men lie grovelling in the earth, and live without God in the world, troubling and turmoiling themselves how to compass this thing and that thing, as if they had no God to seek unto, nor no promise to rely upon.

Trial 3. Again, where this committing of a man's self and his soul to God is, there will be a looking to God only, in all a man doth, not fearing any danger or opposition that may befall him from without. As the three young men said to Nebuchadnezzar, 'Our God can keep us if he will,' Dan. 3. But what if he will not? 'Yet know, O king, that we will not worship nor fall down before thy image.' So it is with a Christian; foreseeing some danger, disgrace, or displeasure of this or that man which may befall him, he resolveth notwithstanding, in despite of all, to commit himself to God in doing his duty, come what will. Whether God will save him or no, he will not break the peace of his conscience, or do the least evil. He is no fool, but foresees what may befall him for well-doing. This inconvenience may come, and that trouble, yet he sets light by these. He hath an eye to heaven, and sees more good to himself in the Creator that gave him his being of nothing, and more good for the time to come, that will make him a blessed saint in heaven, than there can be ill in the creature. Therefore, come what can come, his heart is fixed to trust the Lord, and rather than he will displease him, desert his honour and his cause, or do any unworthy action, he will commit himself to God in the greatest dangers.

Reason of trusting in God. The ground hereof is this: a Christian is the wisest man in the world, and he understands well enough that God is all-sufficient. He sees there is a greater good in God than he can have in the creature, and counts it madness to offend God to please the creature; because there is a greater evil to be expected from God than from the creature, though it were the greatest monarch in the world. Considering, therefore, that he hath his best good in his union with God, and in keeping his peace with him, he will not break with him for any creature. And thus he doth wisely, for he knows if he lose his life he shall have a better life of God than he hath in his body; for God is his life, God is his soul and his comfort, and he hath his being from God. He is his Creator, and he hath a better being in God when he dies than he had when he lived; for our being in God makes us happy, and therefore Christ saith, He that loves his life, before God and a good cause, hates it, and he that

hates his life when Christ calls for it, loves it, John 12:25, for he hath a better life in him. We give nothing to God, but he returns it a thousand times better than we gave it. Let us yield our lives to him. We shall have them in heaven if they be taken away on earth. He will give us our goods a thousandfold. We shall have more favour in God than in any creature, and therefore a Christian, out of this ground, commits himself to God, though he foresee never so much danger like to fall upon him.

Trial 4. Again, if we do in deed and not in pretence commit ourselves to God, as to a faithful Creator, we will not limit his majesty, as many carnal hearts do. Oh, if God will do so and so for them, then they would trust him. If they had but so much to live on a year, and such comings in, &c., then they would depend upon God. But they must have a pawn and so much in hand first. What a shame is it that we should trust the vilest man in the world as far as we see him, and yet, unless we have somewhat to lean on, we will not trust God! Beloved, when a man limits God in anything, such a one may talk, but he trusts him not at all. Indeed, we should indent with God, and tie him to look to the salvation of our souls; but for other things leave them to his own wisdom, both for the time, for the manner and measure, do what he will with us. Suppose it come to the cross, hath he not done greater matters for us? Why then should we distrust him in lesser? If times come that religion flourish or goes downward, yet rely on him still. Hath he not given his Son to us, and will he not give heaven also? Why do we limit the Holy One of Israel, and not cast ourselves upon him, except he will covenant to deal thus and thus with us?

A true Christian hath his eye always heavenward, and thinks nothing too good for God. O Lord, saith he, of thee I have received this life, this estate, this credit and reputation in the world. I have what I have, and am what I am of thee, and therefore I yield all to thee back again. If thou wilt serve thyself of my wealth, of myself, of my strength, thou shalt have it. If thou wilt serve thyself of my credit and reputation, I will adventure it for thee. If thou wilt have

my life, of thee I had it, to thee I will restore it, I will not limit thy majesty; come of it what will, I leave it to thy wisdom; use me and mine as thou wilt; only be gracious to my soul, that it may go well with that, and I care not. Thus we should wholly resign ourselves to the Lord's disposal, and thereby we shall exceedingly honour his majesty, and cause him to honour us, and to shew his presence to us for our good, which he will assuredly do if we absolutely yield up ourselves to him. But if a man will have two strings to his bow, and trust him so far but not so far, so he may be kept from this danger or that trouble, &c., this is not to deal with God as an omnipotent Creator; for he that doth a thing truly in obedience to God, will do it generally to all his commands. So far as the reason of his obedience reaches, his trust extends. He that commits anything to God will commit all to him. He chooseth not his objects. But upon the same ground that he commits his soul to God when he dies, he commits his estate, liberty, and all he hath while he lives. He can never rely on God for greater matters, that distrusts him in lesser.

Trial 5. Again, a man that truly trusts God will commit all his ways unto him; he will take no course but what he is guided in by the Lord. He looks for wisdom from above, and saith, Lord, though it is not in me to guide my own way; as thy word shall lead me, and the good counsel of thy Spirit in others direct me, so I will follow thee. He that commits not his ways to God, will not commit his comforts to him. God must be our counsellor as well as our comforter. Therefore the wise man bids us 'acknowledge God in all our ways, and lean not to our own wisdom,' Prov. 3:5. Most men look how safe their counsels are, not how holy and agreeable to God. Is this to trust in him? Will God save us at last, and yet suffer us to live as we list now? Deceive not yourselves; he that will have his soul saved must commit it to God beforehand to be sanctified.

Trial 6. Again, those that commit themselves aright to God will commit their posterity to him, their wives and children, &c.

Obj. Why! do not men make their wills and commit their goods to them?

Solution. Oh! but how do they resign them? How covetous and full of distrust are they! I must leave such a child so much and so much; and why, I pray you? Because God cannot bless him else? O fearful! is God tied to means? cannot he bless with a little as well as with a great deal? Is not 'the earth the Lord's, and the fulness thereof?' Ps. 24:1. Why must God have so much in hand, or else he cannot enrich and raise up thy children? Oh! consider, he hath declared himself to be the father of the fatherless, and looks to the widow in a special manner; he doubles his providence there; he provides for all, but takes special notice of them; therefore quiet thyself, they are in covenant with God, and God is thy God, and the God of thy seed also; therefore if thou wilt commit thy soul, why not thy wife, children, goods? &c.

Look into the course of God's people in all times. Those that have left but little with honest dealing, God hath blessed the same exceedingly; whereas those that have left great matters ill gotten, instead of a blessing have often left a curse and a snare behind them. Why then should men take indirect courses, and wound their consciences for worldly pelf?

Consid. 1. Consider, 1, thy children are God's and not thine; he gave them to thee at first, and he can provide hereafter when thou art gone. Thou art the father of their body, but he is the father of their soul.

2. He provided for them before they were born. Doth not he provide care and affection in the mother's heart? Doth he not provide suck in the mother's breasts? and will he not care for them now they are born as well as he did before they came into the world? It is atheism to think such a thought. Those that commit themselves to God in one thing will do so in all things, otherwise they deceive their own souls; for it is a universal act that runs through their whole life.

Committing is an action of trust, and there is a kind of intercourse of trust between God and a Christian continually.

Trial 7. Lastly, those that commit themselves to God will be faithful stewards in whatsoever he hath trusted them withal. Thou committest thyself and thy health and estate to God, and at length thou wilt commit thy soul when thou diest unto him. Very well; but what doth God trust thee withal? Hath he not trusted thee with a body and a soul, with a portion of goods, with place, time, strength, and abilities to do good? Hast thou not all thou hast from God as a steward, to improve for thy Master's advantage? If ever thou expectest the performance of what thou hast put in him, be faithful in that trust which he hath committed to thee. Those that have misused their bodies and wounded their souls in their lives, how can they commit them to God at their deaths? How dares the soul look up to him, when the life hath been nothing else but a perpetual offending of his majesty?

I beseech you, let us learn this wholesome lesson! Great is our benefit thereby. 'He that trusts in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, that cannot be moved.' We may be shaken, but shall never be removed. The earth is shaken with earthquakes, but the earth keeps its own centre still. Our best peace is in God, and our chiefest safety in his protection. 'I laid me down to rest, because thou, Lord, watchest over me,' Ps. 3:5, saith the prophet; and, 'Return, O my soul, to thy rest, for the Lord hath been very beneficial to thee,' Ps. 116:7. Is it not a good thing to have a sweet security of soul that whether I sleep or wake, whether I be at home or abroad, live or die, I have a providence watching over me better than mine own? When I yield myself up to God, his wisdom is mine, his strength is mine; whatsoever he hath it is for me, because I am his. What a heaven upon earth is this, that a Christian, out of a holy familiarity with God, can resign up his soul to him upon all occasions! Set heaven and salvation aside, what greater happiness can be desired? How sweet is a man's rest at night after he hath yielded himself to God by faithful prayer?

Use. Exhortation. I beseech you, let us be acquainted with the practice of this duty, and labour to be in such a state as God may own us, and receive our poor souls to himself. Let us keep them pure and undefiled, and labour to improve our talents, that when we give anything to God, we may say, Lord, according to the grace I have received I have kept it, and therefore now return it to thee again.

Beloved, when trouble of conscience comes, when sickness and death comes, what will become of a man that hath not this sweet acquaintance with God? He was a stranger to God in the time of prosperity, and God is now a stranger to him in adversity. Saul was a profane-spirited man; he did not acquaint himself with God in the time of his happiness, and therefore in time of distress he goes first to the witch, and then to the sword-point. So fareth it with all wicked wretches in their great extremities. No sooner doth any evil betide them, or the least danger approach them, let conscience never so little fly in their faces, &c., but presently they go to cursed means, and run upon desperate conclusions.

Therefore, as we desire to die even in God's arms, and yield up ourselves into the very hands of the Almighty with comfort, let us daily inure ourselves to this blessed course of committing ourselves and all our ways to him in doing good.

'Come and see,' saith the Scripture, John 1:46. Beloved, if you will not believe me, make trial of this course a while. Did you once taste the sweetness of it, how would your drooping spirits be cheered up!

Let a man continually keep a good conscience, and he shall be satisfied with peace at last. Suppose he meets with danger and opposition in the world, this may seem harsh at the first. Oh, but he shall know afterwards what it is to part with anything for Christ's sake, to commit his cause, or whatsoever he hath, unto God, as to a faithful Creator! Then we taste of God to the purpose when we put him to it, for God will not be indebted to us. We never find such

sweet immediate comfort from him as when we deny ourselves comfort of the creature for his sake.

Little do we know what times may befall us. There is much danger abroad, and we have cause to fear, not far from us. It may be the clouds even now hang over our heads. On, if we would be hid in the day of the Lord's wrath, and have no evil come nigh our dwellings, let us, above all things in the world, make sure our interest in Christ, and title to the promise. We should seek to know God more, and then we would trust him more. 'They that know thy name will trust in thee,' saith David, Ps. 9:10. Oh, the blessed estate of a Christian, that now he may be acquainted with God; that through Christ there is a throne of grace to fly unto! I beseech you, improve this happy privilege; and then, come what will, come famine, come danger of war or pestilence, &c., God will be a sanctuary and an abiding place to you. A Christian carries his rock and sure defence about him. 'I will be unto them a little sanctuary in all places,' saith God. What a comfort is it to have a 'wall of fire' still compassing us about, a shield that our enemies must break through before they can come at us! He that trusts in God shall be recompensed with mercy on every side. It is no matter what dangers compass him. Though he be in the midst of death and hell, or any trouble whatsoever, if he commits himself to God in obedience, out of good grounds of faith in his word, he shall be safe in the evil day.*

MONERGISM BOOKS

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