

ROBERT TRAILL

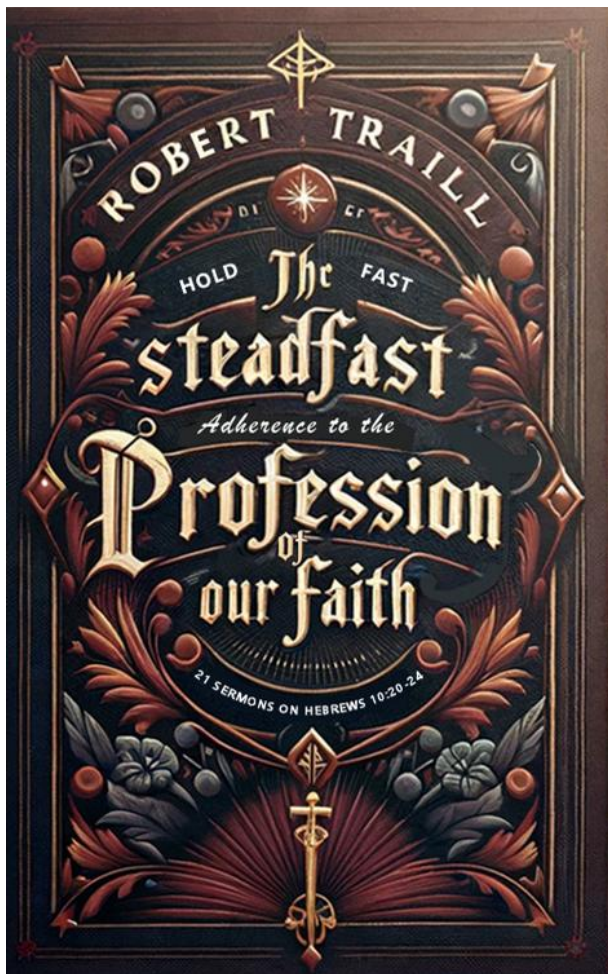
HOLD The FAST

steadfast

Adherence to the

Profession
of
our faith

21 SERMONS ON HEBREWS 10:20-24



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The Steadfast Adherence to the Profession of our Faith,

Recommended in Twenty-one Sermons on Hebrews 10: 20, 21, 23,
24.

by Robert Trail

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SERMON I

HEBREWS 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, &c.

HAVING insisted at so great length upon the first exhortation of the apostle, concerning drawing near to God, which is built upon the foundations of the Christian's privileges, that the apostle named, and that we have spoke of, from the 19th, 20th, and 21st verses; those exhortations that remain are deduced from the same foundation: wherefore I thought fit not to let them pass. The former exhortation was unto a duty with respect to God, drawing near to him, which the apostle requires to be performed in such a manner, that all Christians, and the best of them, must be learning to answer every day in their life, that they may come up more and more thereunto.

The other two exhortations are with respect to ourselves and others. The first is in the 23d verse, with respect to our own profession; the other, in the 24th verse, is with respect to our brethren and fellow Christians.

The first of these exhortations, which is contained in this 23d verse, plainly divides itself into the duty exhorted to, and the argument to enforce it. The duty is, Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. The argument to this duty is a strong and a proper one, He is faithful that hath promised. Our faith should always be built on God's promise; it is not the right faith if it be not so; and our faith on the promise should answer the faithfulness of the promiser; the strength of our believing the promise, should bear some proportion to the great faithfulness of the maker of it. Now, it is evident, that the apostle's argument is both pertinent and strong; Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for God the promiser does not waver in what he has said.

I shall begin with the first of these at this time, The duty he exhorts to. And you may see here, as I observed from the former exhortations, that the apostle, the penman of this blessed portion of

scripture, puts in himself in this exhortation: Let us, says he, draw near, &c. And let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.

In this duty exhorted to, there are three things to be considered.

1. What that is which is, as it were, the subject-matter of this duty; and that is, the profession of our faith; so we translate it. The words in the Greek, in the original, are certainly the confession of our hope. What reason there hath been in the learned translators for altering it, I do not know. However, it is no great matter; for profession and confession, faith and hope, are closely knit together; they are but several Words expressing the same thing. Confession and profession are frequently named one for another, and faith and hope are frequently named one for another, in the word of God.

2. The second thing is the act, that the apostle craves about this profession, and we read it, Let us hold it fast. As if the apostle had said, The profession of your faith is very precious, keep it well; it will be attempted upon by your spiritual enemies, and they will be endeavouring to pluck it from you; hold it fast, keep it firm.

3. There is the manner of this duty the apostle craves about your profession: Hold it fast, says he, without wavering, without declining, without turning it to the one hand or to the other, but holding it steady and even. These are the heads that I would discourse upon from this text.

And to begin with the first of these, that are in the duty itself exhorted to, the profession of our faith, the apostle, you see here, plainly signifies, that it was made already, it was that they had; they had profession formerly. Now, says the apostle, let us hold fast this profession of our faith. This is the subject-matter of the exhortation,

the profession of faith. And to make the way yet plainer, unto what I would observe and discourse from it, I would speak a little to the opening of these two.

I. What is in this faith, that is the matter of this profession.

II. What is in the profession of our faith, or of this hope, which is as the form of it.

I. What is in this faith or hope. There is none can understand what it is to hold fast faith and hope, till they know what faith and hope is.

First, For faith and hope, for I would still take them in both together, and shew, as we go along, the very small difference that is betwixt them; we find faith, in the word of God, taken for the doctrine of faith, for the truth of God, that is to be received, taken up, and embraced by faith: Do we make void the law through faith? says the apostle. God forbid, yea, we establish the law, Rom. 3:31 where the meaning plainly is, Do we make void the law by this doctrine of faith? No; by no means, God forbid. Divine truth is necessarily supposed to be the ground of all divine faith; if there were not such a thing going before, as Thus saith the Lord, no amen of faith could ever follow.

Secondly, In the considering of that faith that we make the profession of, we must consider that God that is to be believed on. Faith natively, faith ultimately, terminates on. God: That your faith and hope might be in God, 1 Pet. 1:21 where he joins them both together. There can be no believing where God is unknown, there is no believing in an unknown God. God cannot be known as the object of faith, but only as in Christ Jesus. It is impossible that God can be grasped, may I so speak, by the faith of a poor sinner, but only as this God reveals himself to us in Christ Jesus. There is no approaching to

God by believing immediately: but by him we believe in God, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God. There is divine faithfulness for the ground of our faith; there is God himself in Christ Jesus for the object of our faith.

Thirdly, In faith there is always an outgoing of the soul in desire and expectation of some good from him. This is believing, this is hoping. Now, this is inseparable from the former. Wherever divine truth is divinely believed to be true, and God in Christ is embraced by the faith of a poor creature, this is unavoidable; immediately there springs some expectation and hope of getting good from him, and that is believing. All the difference betwixt faith and hope is this, that faith goes first unto God in Christ, on the ground of the promise, for good; and hope goes forth to the same God, upon the same ground, in the expectation of that good that is believed. This is not so distinctly owned by every believer; for there are some that have true faith in them, who, through the weakness of their faith, and manifold temptations, nip the expectations of faith from budding. But this is a violence done thereto. Wherever a poor sinner hath taken the warrant of God's promise, and has sealed it with the poor weak amen of his faith, that this is true, and he is faithful that hath spoken it; how can he forbear to add, And therefore there will be a fulfilment, when the good word that is spoken will be accomplished, when the good thing spoken of will be given? The apostle Paul speaking of his own faith, gives it two special words, Phil. 1:20. According to my earnest expectation and my hope, (he made no doubt, but all things would do well with him), that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. The word there earnest expectation, is the same word in the original and our translation, with that which is used of the expectation of the whole creation

towards the day of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It is an expression borrowed from an intent looking out as it were, and stretching forth of the neck, in looking to see a friend coming, that will be very welcome when he comes. This is faith, divine truth known, God in Christ received, grasped laid hold of by faith; expectations raised thereupon, that the good will come unto us. Though many poor believers do not own their expectations, yet such expectations are there, and do discover themselves sufficiently.

II. The second thing is, What is this profession of faith? Certainly, profession and confession is a declaring of this expectation I have been speaking of; it is a public declaring it one way or other. The apostle speaks of such kind of confession and profession, Heb. 11:13. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; they made an open public profession of it. Profession of faith is made two ways; it is made either by word, or by deed.

First, Profession is made with words. This the apostle does expressly limit to the tongue, Rom. 10:9, 10. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth (the same word with profession here in my text) the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Confession or profession by word is made several ways.

1. It is made unto God in prayer. All our prayers, and all our callings on the name of the Lord, are a confession; all that we say to him is a profession of our faith. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God. What great matter is that? Yes, it was a great word, that David's soul could say to the Lord, Thou art my God. There is a duty lying upon Christians to profess their faith unto the Lord, to avow it before him. Our Lord will have a poor man do so. Dost thou

believe on the Son of God? Why, was Christ ignorant whether he believed or no? No; he that was the Son of God knew whether the blind man had faith or no; but our Lord will have it out of his own mouth; he will have him profess it, and avow it: as accordingly he did, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

2. Profession is made by the tongue. In that special case of confession, when gospel-truth is opposed, when it is made the state of suffering, then it is that confession is specially called for. It is with respect to this that our Lord's severe word is, Matth. 10:32, 33. Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Secondly, The profession of our faith is made by deed. A man that cannot speak may make a profession of his faith. He cannot make it by words, but he may make it otherwise; I acknowledge not so easy, for the tongue is man's glory.

1. The outward attending on the means of grace is a profession of faith. Whoever they be that give but their bodily presence unto prayer and preaching of the word of God, and other institutions of Christ's appointment, they profess their faith of the gospel. A great many are liars in so saying; for they profess what they have not, and God will judge them accordingly. There is more need to be afraid, than people commonly are aware of. It is the most dangerous employment that an unbeliever can be taken up in, to make a secure attendance on the means of faith, when the man knows in his own heart, that he neither hath faith, nor would have it.

2. People may and should make a profession of their faith in their conversations in their families. This is one part of Christian

profession, that every one that has a family, that he is master or she is mistress of, are obliged to make profession of their faith there. The Christian conduct of a family is a very honourable way of professing faith. I will behave myself wisely, says David, in a perfect way: O when will thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect hearty, Psal. 101:2. Several good words he speaks there of his purpose of owning of God, and declaring his respect to him, by his conduct in his family.

3. People make a profession of their faith by joining to and embodying themselves with the church of Christ. If there were no more but twenty believers in a city, I am persuaded that within a little time these twenty believers would quickly scrape up acquaintance one with another, and would unite themselves in the profession of their faith. Shall we receive faith, this great gift, and the honour of so near a relation to God and Christ Jesus as faith brings us to, and shall we not own it? It is remarkable the apostle takes notice of this, 2 Cor. 9:13. They glorify God, says he, for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ. The word in the Greek is more emphatical; it is for the subjection or stooping of your profession to the gospel of Christ, and your acknowledgment of it. Pray what great subjection is there here? Is it so low a stooping for a man to make profession of his faith, that it must be called a stooping? Is it any wonder that the apostle called it stooping to be subject to the gospel, when he says, Rom. 10:3 that the proud self-justiciary will not submit to the righteousness of God? And it is the same word with subjection in the other place.

4. People make a profession of their faith by an holy conversation. A walk as it becometh the gospel, is a profession of our faith, an outward confession of it. All manner of godly conversation, and the adorning of the gospel of God our Saviour in all things, is what is

required even of servants, Titus 2:10. But, say you, what will the gospel be adorned, is there an ornament added as it were to the gospel, by the faithfulness and obedience of a poor mean servant? Yes, says the Spirit of God, you are to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. We find it instructed in several very like things. There is the giving of charity to the relief of the saints: That is, says the apostle, by the experiment of this ministration, they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ: and you prove your subjection by your liberal distribution to your poor brethren. Nay, to bring the matter yet lower, and I cannot bring it much lower, and that is even in womens apparel: says the apostle, 1 Tim. 2:9. Likewise let women adorn themselves, not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the ornament of a Christian that seeks to adorn the gospel be good works, rather than the vanities of this world, that are utterly unbecoming the gospel; that the gospel never taught, and that it frequently rebukes; for these vanities always bring reproach upon it, and upon mens profession too.

5. The last profession of our faith is the last thing we can do; that is, dying in faith. After profession, and adorning our profession all manner of ways, as long as we live; in due time, when God calls us, we are to make profession of our faith in dying. There is a dying faith, as the apostle says of the Old Testament saints, Heb. 11:13. These all died in faith. They confessed themselves, all their life long, to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and in the same faith that they professed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, in the same faith they died, and went to heaven. This is the noblest of all; and if it be not only dying in faith, but dying for the faith, it is so much the more amiable. The time of my departure is at hand, says the apostle, 2 Tim. 4:6, 7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished

my course, I have kept the faith. Well, had he no more to do with faith? No, but one bit. Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, &c. I will die in the expectation of the crown, I will have no more to do with faith. So Stephen, the first confessor, the first professor of faith by his blood, Acts 7:59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. "I have confessed thy name before these enemies, and they are driving this soul of mine out of my body; now, Lord, receive it; I have believed on thee, I suffer for thy sake, I commit this expelled soul unto thy care and conduct; Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

So much now for the explaining the matter of faith and profession. The truth that I would speak a little to, is this:

DOCT. That whoever they be that have Christian faith and hope in them, should make a Christian confession or profession of it.

It is implied in my text, that a profession of their faith, or a confession of their hope, was made, and the apostle exhorts them about the keeping of it. It is not, Let us, therefore make profession, we have done that already; but, Let us hold it fast. When we first gave our name to the Lord, when we first left the Jewish religion, or Paganish idolatry, and turned to the true and living God and his Son Christ Jesus, we then made profession; now let us hold it fast.

He lies to God and to the world, that makes profession of faith, when he hath it not; he dissembles with God and the world, that has it, and does not profess it. We find much spoken of this profession in the word: Heb. 4:14. Let us hold fast our profession; a word much to the same purpose with this. This I thought to have confirmed in a few things, and so have made some application. I shall only give a few at this time of the grounds upon which this truth stands, That all that have Christian faith should make a Christian profession of it.

First, The honour of Christ calls for it, Christ's glory and honour. The truth of grace does most immediately tend unto the salvation of a sinner; but the profession of grace tends most immediately to the praise of Christ Jesus. Now remember what severe words I named already: Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, says our Lord, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels, Mark 8:38. The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is promoted by our professing of him. Do you think that Jesus Christ, and his saving truth, and his gracious work upon the heart, are matters to be ashamed of? Is it not a great sin whenever this is committed?

Secondly, The good of others calls for this. The truth of faith is profitable to us; the profession of faith is profitable to others. Were it possible that all the godly could keep in all their grace, that none in the world could see it but God and themselves, none in all the world would be a whit the better for it. It is the displaying of grace and of the faith that God has given, that is the great means of promoting the reputation of the gospel, and convincing of the world: Therefore, says our Lord, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven, Mat. 5:16. In the very next chapter our Lord severely inveighs against the Pharisees, that managed their religious worship with a design only to be seen of men: that was all they craved, and their hypocrisy was discovered thereby. But our Lord himself craves this of his people, that their light should not only so shine as to direct their own ways, but so shine that others might see it, and be provoked thereby to glorify their Father which is in heaven. The apostle Peter speaks of a case, I am afraid the mean is seldom tried, and therefore it is no wonder that the effect is seldom found. The mean is a Christian conversation, the effect is conversion. It is the conversation of the

wife for the gaining of the husband. Now, the apostle craves this, and hints a promise for it. You would think it strange, that the Christian and sober deportment of a poor woman at home may accomplish that work, that by the ordinary means of grace had been in vain attempted: That if, says the apostle, any obey not the word, &c. that is, it is possible sometimes that the Spirit and power of God may attend a gospel-like conversation, and make it do that which the gospel and ministerial dispensations have not done; they may without the word be won; not that there is any conversion without the word, but that there may be such measures of light and conviction, given by other means that God may bring in otherwise.

Thirdly, We find by this, that our Lord Jesus Christ has a great concern about our profession. Christ Jesus himself was the great professor: He was so great a professor of faith, that his wicked enemies reproached him for it when he was upon the cross, Matth. 27:42. He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him, Psal. 22:8. The apostle calls him the high-priest of our profession. He made a profession of his own, 1 Tim. 6:13. I give thee charge in the sight of God, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession. He told them he was a King, and that he came into the world to set up his kingdom; but they greatly mistook it. Christ might reign in this world, and all the kings of the world might sit where they are. Christ is troublesome to none, but them that trouble him, and he will be too hard for them. We find our Lord frequently upon this in exacting profession, and none needed it less than he. When people came to him for healing, What would you, says he, that I should do unto you? They tell him; and then he adds, Believe ye that I am able? Now, any man might say, If thou be able, thou mayst cure whether I believe or no; but our Lord will have it out of their own mouths. He comes to one man after he had wrought a cure; our Lord finds him out; but the man had confessed Christ honestly, he

was a sound believer, and he was cast out of the wicked church of the Jews, John 9. Christ found him when they had cast him out, and says to him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? says he. And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. Lord, I believe, says he, And he worshipped him. When Peter is to be restored, our Lord will have it by a confession: he had given one great confession to Christ, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, which our Lord praises him greatly for, but he had fallen foully when called to confess Christ in the high-priest's hall. There was no excuse for a man to deny that ever he had seen Christ Jesus, or been in his company. Poor wretched creature! if Christ had left him, if Christ had said, I do not know Peter, as Peter said he is not my master; if Christ had said, he is none of my disciples, what had become of him? Now our Lord is restoring him again, John 21 our Lord asks him one question, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me; and Lovest thou me? &c. What wonder is it, that the man is grieved that he should come thrice upon him? Ay, but, says our Lord, I will have thee say, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. This is nothing but a profession of his faith and love.

Lastly, Faith itself will work a profession in a manner, whether men will or no. It is impossible to keep the fire of faith without the smoke of profession, and it is impossible to smother this lamp. If God hath kindled this heavenly fire of faith, and of the hope of the gospel, in any of your hearts, it will break forth one way or other. They with whom you live will know it; your faith will break out sometimes in your tongue; and it will appear, for as modest, and secret, and bashful as the person is, that there is something of heavenly fire working in him. This now is the constant practice of all nations and all people; and the Christian is not to be exempted from this common necessity; every sort of people in the world make a profession of what

their faith and hope is: All people, says the prophet, will walk every one in the name of his god, though they be false gods, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever, Micah 4:5. Shall a worshipper of Baal be more bold and confident in professing of an idol god, than Jehovah's worshippers? We will walk in the name of the Lord our God; we will go up and down, professing and declaring, in all prudent and fit ways, our respects to him. We have an observable word of Jephthah; and truly he was such an odd sort of man, that unless it were for Hebrews 11 and one or two good words in Judges 11 we should hardly own him a believer. One of the words is in verse 11. He uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh; that looks something like. He was called extraordinarily to be the head of Israel for their recovery out of a distressed state, and before he attempts the work, he acquaints God. The words that I speak of, and bring to this purpose, are these, verse 24 it is in his message to the Ammonites, Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. Now, here was a great profession of the man's faith: "You poor blinded idolaters, that call upon your idols, and if you have success in your way, will praise your idols, and keep that which they give you to possess: Shall not we keep that which the Lord our God giveth us to possess?" And, says he, "Be it known to you we will." Try all the world over, I say, wherever there is a, form of religion, true or false, a profession of it is always required. As far sunk as the Antichristian state is, yet when they admit infidels, and, according to their wickedness, when they drive Protestants to their communion, they crave something of profession of faith. But all these professions are rather professions of opinion. A great many, ask them what religion they are of, they can tell you; ask them the principles of religion, they can tell you them; there is one question still that a great many of our professors are puzzled with; "Pray, what is your faith?" these truths are the truths of God, but

what truth is there in your faith of them? The apostle requires to be ready always to give an answer to them that shall ask a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. How many of our professors, (and we have a great multitude more than the gospel is honoured by), how many of them are not able to give an account of the hope that is in them? Unless this religion be well founded in thy heart, it is none of thy religion; it is the religion only of those that believe. But unless the divine truths revealed in the word, be ingrafted in thy heart by a true and lively faith in them and on them, they are not thy religion, they are only thy opinion. Take heed; this matter of profession, and profession of faith, is not so slight and easy a matter as people imagine. There is a very great danger in folks professing to have faith, when they have it not. We think there was great severity in dealing with those two poor people, Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5. There was a custom then, and special reason for it, that several rich folks, in the prospect of the expected difficulties that were coming upon the church, sold their land; two people, man and wife, agreed to sell their land, and keep part of the price in case of necessity for their own relief. Here was but bare lying in this case. It is true, the apostle aggravates it, as it was lying to the Holy Ghost; and it may be, there was something of a design to try the apostles. But this was an innocent thing to what it is for a poor creature to make a profession of faith, when he knows he has it not. To make a profession of that he has not, is to boast of a vain gift. The Lord is strict in observing mens profession; a little thing will go in God's sight for a profession: and accordingly he will deal with men that are not sincere therein; but there is no true profession but that which is sound. A profession that is of truth, is not only, that a man professes to believe truth, but that he does truly believe that which he professes: therefore in the creed, commonly called the apostles creed, the first word in it, and which is the greatest mystery in it, is, "I believe in God," I believe that there is a God; "and I believe in," &c.

Ay, but the main thing in thy creed is the first word, "I believe this." What conviction hath the Spirit of God made upon thy conscience of divine truth to enforce this belief? For saving faith is nothing else but the mark which a divine impression of divine truth hath made upon a man's heart.

SERMON II

HEBREWS 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, &c.

I SHALL now proceed to make some practical improvement of what has been delivered in the former discourse.

APPLICATION. First, then, we see what a Christian profession is; it is a profession of faith. This is the name given to it in my text. In Heb. 4:14 it is only called our profession; sometimes without profession, it is called our faith, our confidence, ver. 35. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, &c. To a Christian profession of faith, there are two things required: 1. That it be true. 2. That it be visible. 1. That it be true; that is, that not only it be a profession of divine truth, but that it be a profession of a true faith that men have in the truth. If people profess error instead of truth, they take God's name in vain; if they profess they have faith when they have not, they lie against God and themselves too. Profession must be sound and

true; a man must profess what he hath, and no more. 2. Christian profession must be visible. Profession is mainly for others, as faith in the reality of it is mainly for ourselves: the apostle therefore, when he is speaking of the great profession of the faith of the patriarchs, saith, Heb. 11:13, 14. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. And they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country, &c. All who had known Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who saw their way of living, who beheld their way of not mixing with the rest of the nations, who beheld their faith and hope; these might have seen plainly, these were men for another world than this. There can be no profession unless it be visible. This is so general and well known a thing, that a visible credible profession of Christianity is that only that deserves this name.

Secondly, We see hence, what reason and ground ministers and churches have to call for and require a confession of mens faith and hope. The apostle speaks of it here, as a thing that had passed all these believing Hebrews. He reckons that all of them who had faith, had one way or other made a profession of it. Ministers themselves are or should be eminent professors. Indeed their profession is very public; every time they preach, they profess. The apostle takes notice of this, 1 Tim. 6:12. Thou hast professed a good profession before many witnesses; and every time Timothy preached faith, and called others to the hope of eternal life, he did thereby witness to his own faith in so doing. Churches are societies appointed by Jesus Christ, wherein his name is to be held forth in the world; and there is high reason, that all who desire to join with them in partaking of gospel-privileges, should make to them a profession of their Faith. Notwithstanding all the corruption that is this day in the world, (for I chuse rather to call it the world than the church), yet there is something of this remaining in all that pretend to the name of a church; only, that they account their profession is most wofully

mistaken. There are a great many who reckon it profession enough, if people be born in a land where Christianity is the common and established profession. Thus it is in the Antichristian kingdom generally. Some reckon, that their outward attendance on ordinances, and outward attendance upon the established religion, is enough to get men the name of professors; it may do so, but this is still short of a profession of faith. Sometimes there is assent required to be expressed unto points of truth or doctrine that a particular church espouses; and if men pass that test, this is thought to be a profession by a great many. In the mean time, the thing in my text is still omitted, and that is, the profession of a man's faith. It is not only the profession of the truth of the point of doctrine he assents to, but of his assent in it, that is necessary. 1. It is greatly for the honour of Jesus Christ, that men should knit themselves visibly under his standard and banner. Our Lord Jesus Christ is no such master, that people should be ashamed to wear his livery, and give themselves to him. Again, it is greatly for the advantage of people too. You know there are two great plagues the church of Christ has been distressed by, and it will never be quite free from them; a multitude of hypocrites in a fair day, and a multitude of apostates in a foul day. When summer-weather is, hypocrites increase to a multitude; when a storm comes, they are blown away as chaff by the wind. What is likely to be the only way that can prevent the abounding of these dreadful scandals? If there were strictness in calling for the truth of peoples faith, for the making of them give a true profession of it, if they had it, truly they would be found to adhere to the Lord, far more closely in a day of trial. It is thought to be an outward glory to the gospel and Jesus Christ, to have a great multitude of professors of his name; but the scandal that their conversation gives, and the grievous offences that their apostacy makes, countervail it wofully. Pray, what sort of advantage is it to a poor sinner, to be admitted and entertained in the fellowship of saints, who himself hath no faith at

all? People are apt to think that the minister or church are very strict, or severe, that will not admit them to the Lord's table. Sirs, there is a great deal of love in this. What have you to do there, if you have not faith? It is but as it were tendering you poison; for so the special ordinances of the gospel are unto them that have not faith. Therefore,

Thirdly, You see hence what your duty is; to make a profession of faith. Do not look upon it as a matter indifferent, whether you profess it or no. Say you, If I have faith, that will Save me; what matter is it, whether the world know it or no? Commonly they that have most of it, make the least noise of it; but it is a duty lying upon believers, to make profession of their faith. I will give you a few things for this. 1. Let us see the Old Testament precepts, that were typical of New Testament practices. There is a notable one in Deut. 26:3, 5, 6, 7. I will read it to you, because it hath something worth special regard: ver. 3. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. They would have all the country know that they are there, and that all the kingdoms round about them might know that they are there; nay, but says the Lord, I will enjoin this upon you, that when you bring the first-fruits of the earth, you make this profession before God. And there is more of their profession, in ver. 5. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. Poor Jacob went down to Egypt for want of bread to eat, where God made him a great kingdom. Now, how easy is the spiritual application of this? A Christian is to profess before the Lord his God, that a Syrian ready to perish was his father, nay, not only ready to perish, but that had perished already, and was condemned by the

righteous law of God, and yet the Lord had mercy, and gave his grace to him. 2. We find the Old Testament promises of the New Testament practices. Several of them speak forth this profession very peremptorily: Isa. 44:3, 5. I will pour (says the Lord) water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. And what shall come on it? One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel. How explicit are these words, One shall say, I am the Lord's! It is not, that they shall only be the Lord's, but they shall say so. There is subscribing with the hand, there is changing of the name: He shall subscribe with the hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel. What can this be? Why, he will account himself of, he will enter by his own act and deed into the family of Israel. It is not, that he will compare himself with so great a man as Jacob, so mighty a prince and wrestler with God; nevertheless, to all the privileges he desires to lay claim, and to have the same God to be his God. There is only one word now that is commonly repeated, and as commonly ill understood, as any words we know in the mouths of people; it is the word in the creed as we call it. "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints." "I believe in the holy catholic church," is, I believe that Jesus Christ hath a holy church scattered up and down the earth. This "communion of saints" is of another consideration, as it were one of the privileges of this great church. If there were no saints upon earth to have communion one with another, there would be no church on earth; the church would expire. Blessed be God, that can never be till the Judge come, when the communion of saints ceaseth, and endeth only. Now, here is a grievous fault amongst many people that make some kind of profession. First, some enter into a profession; they slip into it they do not know how; a great many years they have borne the name of professors. What said you?

what did you? Do you think the bare Crowding to assemblies, where the word of God and prayer is used, will make any think with themselves, This is a man that makes profession of faith? He should do so, and the very outward appearance should never be but with this design: but it is not enough to convey the conviction: for it is certain, that is done many times by them that are quite void of faith. Some again make a profession of their faith once, and they think that is enough for as long as they live; whereas, all our life long, we should be declaring the faith that is lodged in our heart. The whole course of our conversation is but going on in profession; yet many make a profession, and contradict it daily by their conversation. Now, it is a principle that the world will never beat out of wise mens minds, that always deeds will be regarded before words; we will prove mens minds rather by what they do, than by what they say. If a man have a profession of faith in his mouth, and have his conversation quite contrary, no man regards what he says, Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? says our Lord, Luke 6:46. They profess, says the apostle, that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate, Titus 1:16. But so much now shall serve for this, the subject-matter of the apostle's exhortation, the profession of our faith.

The second thing in the exhortation, is, the duty itself about this profession that he enjoins; that is, Holding it fast without wavering: I take them both together. The thing that I am to speak to is this,

That Christians should be stedfast in their profession. Whatever faith or hope they make by word or deed, they should be stedfast in it, they should hold it fast: Let us hold fast our profession, says the apostle, Heb. 4:14.

In speaking to this, I would shew, what is to be held fast; why it is; and how: what is the matter of the duty; what the enforcements to it; and what the manner of it.

I. What it is that is to be held fast, when we are commanded to hold fast the profession of our faith.

1. Hold fast the truths professed. Whatever truths of God we have known and made profession of, we must be careful to hold them fast. This the apostle Paul enjoins to Timothy, 2 Epist. 1:13. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Departing from the faith professed is a grievous transgression; and the apostle here, in this chapter, in these dreadful words that have been so frightful unto many a poor weak conscience, has his eye upon this crime that I am warning you against: If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin. A word, I say, that has been grievously mistaken by many a poor exercised creature; a scripture the devil has made use of to disquiet many an honest heart. It is not, if we sin wilfully, if we sin against light and knowledge, that there remains no more sacrifice for sin; that were one of the most dreadful things that can be thought of. The apostle's meaning certainly is this, If we sin wilfully by abandoning the faith of Jesus Christ, who is the only propitiation for our sins, we shall find that there is no other sacrifice for sin: if we resist the only true One, the blood of the covenant, and the Spirit of grace working therewith, as he explained in the 29th verse, there is then no more sacrifice for sin, for the sinner then throws away the only sacrifice, there is none else to be had. Apostasy from the Lord, and letting our profession slip, hath begun many a time at some points of truth, which a great many Christians, it may be, thought of no great importance. With what severity does the apostle thunder against the Galatians for their error

in point of justification; and that was this, that they would mix the works of the law with the righteousness of Christ in the gospel, chap. 1:6, 7. I marvel, (says he) that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

2. In the holding fast our profession, we should hold fast the communion of saints. Whoever they be that leave the communion of saints for the conversation of the wicked, that person does certainly forego his profession. It is impossible, unless through a strong temptation, that a true Christian can savour that delight to his heart in the conversation of the wicked, as in communion with the godly. Thereupon we find, that the apostle, in the 25th verse, does in a manner explain what he means by holding fast our profession: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, &c. As if the apostle had said, "If you forsake your Christian assemblies, your meetings together, your edifying and helping one another, if you forsake these, so far you forsake your profession."

3. In holding fast the profession of our faith, this is required, that we hold fast the exercise of the grace of faith and hope. If this be not minded, you will quickly find that all things else in a profession do wither and waste away. When you are called to hold fast your profession, you are called to hold on in believing, in the exercise of it.

II. The second thing is, Wherefore is it that Christians should be so careful to be stedfast in the profession of their faith?

1. Because there are a great many devices of Satan and the world to drive people from it. Holding fast does imply that there are endeavours to take things from us. That which none will pluck away, none needs to hold. There is resistance that is made from without,

and great are those that are made by Satan and the world. 1st, From Satan. The devil is a cruel, malicious, and envious enemy. We all have some sort of notion of these woful wickednesses in the spiritual adversaries. But there is one thing concerning the devil we do not duly consider; the devil is the most desperate sinner of all God's creatures. I mean not only desperate in wickedness, but destitute of all relief under it; and therefore the profession of faith and hope in a sinner, is the most grievous thing that the devil can behold. He once had all believers his captives, and would fain bring them back again into his bondage. There is nothing grates the devil more, than a sinner professing his hope in that glory he is fallen from. The devil is a desperate sinner, and he would fain drive all sinners into the same state with himself, and if it were not his cunning, that he knows the danger of awaking men. If the devil had his will, he would rather be glad that all sinners were despairing than flattering themselves with vain hopes; but because their security renders their state more desperate in the issue, therefore the devil befriends them, and keeps all in peace. 2dly, From the world. You know what enmity the world has testified against the people of God; and all this enmity arises from profession. Let a man have never so much faith, if this faith never discovers itself, neither by word nor deed, the world would never have any sort of disturbance thereby, and would not be angry at men. It is the testimony of the witnesses that torments men that are upon the earth. What, think you, is the reason of all the persecution that you read of in the word, and the bloody persecution that hath been in this land, and several other places? The true reason is the profession of faith of the people of God. If believers would part with their profession, the world would part with their quarrels.

2. Christians should be very careful of their profession, to hold it fast; for the honour of God and his Son Jesus Christ is greatly concerned in it. It is all we can do for his glory. The highest glory that is given to

Christ in this world, is by the stedfast maintaining of the profession of our faith. The greatest affront that can be done, is by people's abandoning the profession of that faith they once made. It is a horrible thing; a thing the Lord calls the heavens to be astonished at: My people have forsaken me, and have forsaken me upon some alledged fault also: What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me? &c. Jer. 2:5, 12.

3. Lastly, Christians should be careful to maintain their profession, to hold it fast; for their peace and their salvation stands mightily on it. It is remarkable how the apostle divides believing and confession: Rom. 10:9, 10. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Pray observe, if a man believe with the heart, he is not only possessed of righteousness, and stands clothed with it before God; but salvation is secured to him, by virtue of that righteousness too. Yet you see, that the apostle carefully shuns the dividing these two, faith and confession, righteousness in the one, salvation in the other: Confession is made, says he, unto salvation. After we are once possessed of the righteousness of Christ by faith, we only want complete salvation, and we must go on confessing his name till we be possessed of it. It is observable, that of all the hells upon earth that ever a true believer fell into, most of them have been upon this account, when the violence of temptation hath prevailed upon the people of God, in a day of trial, to abandon their profession. What sad instances have we of some of the most eminent saints and servants of God, that have been left of God in a day of trial, that have left their profession, and have been tortured in their souls till they have returned to it again, though with the peril of their lives? A stout and free adhering to the profession of their faith, was commonly attended with joy and peace in believing: and denying thereof, and complying with the course of this world, what sad smart did it raise in their consciences.

III. The third and last thing is, How this is to be done? I shall not now insist upon all things I thought of, with respect to this, how a Christian is to hold fast his profession. I shall only direct the exhortation these three ways:—

1. Hold fast the profession of your faith before God. If you ever have called God your God and Father, never eat in these words again. How sorry and pitiful, but common a matter is it, that a believer will call God his God confidently in the morning, and may be in the dark evening call him by another name? Thou shalt call me, My God, and shalt not depart from me: it is a promise the Lord makes; the Lord fulfil it to us.

2. We must learn to hold fast the profession of our faith before the devil. Whenever Satan and we come together, he begins to assault; then be sure to keep the profession of your faith; hold it fast. Above all, says the apostle Paul, take the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, Eph. 6:16. So also says the apostle Peter, I Epist. 5:9. Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

3. We should be careful to hold fast the profession of our faith before the world. The world has a sharp sight into the infirmities of the saints, but is quite blind as to their virtues: They cannot see these: they cannot see the beauty of the inward man; but they can see the spots in the conversation of the people of God, and they will be careful to take notice of them, and to make more of them than they are. The more captious the world be, the more careful saints should be in their conversations: Be blameless and harmless, says the apostle, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked, and perverse nation, holding forth the word of life, &c. Phil. 2:15, 16.

I would only, before leaving this head, name a few things that make this holding fast of our profession very hard, and should make us the more diligent in the exercise of faith, that we may get strength from the author of our faith to maintain the profession of it.

1st, It is very hard to keep the profession of our faith without wavering, when sin is in the conscience. The law of God enters there, and a man sees his own iniquity. Peter perhaps had made no profession of his faith before; but if he had, he renounced it when he spoke those ungodly words, Depart from me. What! a Christian pray Christ to leave him; is that spoke like a believer? But the sense of sin was raised in him, upon the appearance of divine power in that great work of Christ.

2dly, It is very hard to keep the profession of our faith without wavering, when we see a rod in an angry God's hand, and feel the smart of it upon our own backs. To think the same thing of God, to have the same kind thoughts of Christ, and lively hopes of heaven, in this case as formerly, is hard indeed. Job was a man that held fast the profession of his faith, without wavering, at a mighty rate, when he said, Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him. Job 13:15, 16. As if he had said, "I defy all hypocrites in the world to say so." Is there any but a believer, and a stedfast one, who is able to say, A God slaying me shall be my God.

3dly, It is hard to keep the profession of our faith without wavering, when there is a furnace of mens wrath for our profession, and when there are great hazards a man is exposed to for his profession. This has tried many a man's profession. There are signal instances of this in the 3d and 6th chapters of Daniel. The furious king and the fiery

furnace was just before the three children: "Now," says Nebuchadnezzar, "will you fall down, and worship my golden image, or no? Will you profess still your faith in God?" "Yes," say they, "whether he deliver us, or no, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Daniel would not forbear his praying in usual times and places, and usual circumstances, for all the danger of death thereby. This was the confession of his faith.

4thly, It is hard to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, in the sight and feeling of unbelief. When a poor creature finds unbelief in him, yet, notwithstanding, to adhere to, and hold fast the profession of his faith, is no easy matter. He was a young believer for time, but an old skilful believer for stedfastness, that gave that answer to our Lord, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief; "I own faith in the face of unbelief, in the feeling of it." Thereupon it is that that word turns; I suppose a good part of the meaning of it is this that I drive at, 2 Tim. 2:12, 13. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself. Pray observe, If we believe not, if we have not the faith, that strength of faith that the case calls for; yet his faithfulness will take care of securing a gracious issue: for the meaning cannot be, if you have no faith at all; but if your faith be weak, and be not in that high measure the case calls for, the Lord will take care to support it; and he has done so many times to many of his people, and they have been only obliged to God's faithfulness in keeping his word.

Lastly, It is hard to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, in the sight of death and judgment. That is the great trial of a man's profession of his faith: this is the great wind, and storm, and rain, that beats upon the house, and tries how well it is built. It is an easy matter to make a profession in a fair day, and keep to it; but

when this storm comes, it is a great matter to hold it fast. How many sad instances are there? Many, nay most Christians unconcernedly sit down, and think sometimes that they have faith enough for their daily work; but they do not know what provision they have for this great trial, the very foresight of death and judgment. Death looks near, when it enters, as it were, deeply into the meditation and thought of the heart of a poor sinner. Canst thou maintain the hope thou professedst the other day? canst thou look on death and judgment as near at hand, and say, "I retain the same confidence and hope of eternal life, that I had when I thought these things were afar off?" The apostle therefore did express his faith extraordinarily, and professed it highly, when he sang, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15:55, 56, 57. He reckons himself, by faith, as sure of the victory, as if already possessed of it. The believer can, by a strong faith, sing the praise of victory, before the battle be half ended: for the apostle Paul had not yet known what death and the grave were; he knew them only by faith, and knew who had overcome death, and knew that he had an interest in him that had overcome both.

SERMON III

HEBREWS 10:23

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that hath promised.

I HAVE spoke unto the exhortation to the duty that is in the first part of the verse, Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. The apostle, ye see, joins himself in the exhortation; and, as it were, exhorts himself, whilst he exhorts them. That great apostle, who had so much faith, who had made so noble a profession of it, joins himself with the rest of believers, Let us hold fast, &c. Paul's faith was greater than that of the Hebrews; his profession and confidence higher; his stock richer; he joins himself equally with them: let us all mind this. Upon this I have spoken unto these two things:—

1. That which is the matter that this exhortation is conversant about, and that is the profession of faith, or the confession of our hope; and of that I spoke under this note, That whoever they be that have Christian faith and hope, they should make a Christian profession or confession of it.

2. The second thing in the words is the duty he calls to, with respect to this profession; and that is, holding it fast Without wavering; and of that I spake last day, that Christians should be stedfast in their profession, not moved away from the hope of the gospel, Col. 1:23. This first part of the verse I shall dismiss with two things, and proceed to his argument.

The first is this, That it is a mighty hard thing to make a true profession of faith. Secondly, It is a mighty hard thing to keep it when it is made.

First, It is a mighty hard thing to make a true profession of faith. I do not mean it is hard for folks to say they believe, that is as easily said

as another word is; but to make a true profession of faith, is a matter of great difficulty. No man can make a true profession of faith, but he that hath true faith. This is certain and evident in itself; for if a man make profession of what he hath not really, it is but a lie, and a lie of a gross sort. No man can make a true profession of faith, but the man who hath not only true faith, but hath some sort of knowledge that he hath it; for the profession of faith is something besides the acting of faith. The acting of faith is, that it be wrought in the heart; the profession of faith is, a confident owning of that act before God, and men, and devils. They are witnesses of mens profession, but the Lord only is the witness of the truth and sincerity of faith; but when faith is come to profession, it is known to more than God. Now, that I may illustrate this in a few things, That it is a hard thing to make a true profession of faith, I would speak a little to both the words, that in our translation, and that in the original. We call it profession of faith; the original is, the confession of our hope.

1st, To take it for profession of faith: I believe, the first word in the apostle's creed, applied to divine things, is in some the greatest lie in the world. Most persons are guilty of lying in saying, I believe; for God and their own consciences may tell them, that though their tongues speak the words, their souls are strangers to the power and truth of this believing. I will name some few of the heads that people commonly profess faith on; and when they are seriously considered, it will be found that the faith of them is Very rare.

1. To begin with that which the apostle calls the first thing that a man must believe, that God is, Heb. 11:6. He that cometh unto God, must believe that he is. How uncharitably would people think themselves to be dealt with, if they were charged with want of faith as to God's being? How confident are people that they are sincere, at least in this, "I believe that there is a God?" Pray consider what there is in

this believing. He dwelleth in light that no man can approach to; whom no man hath seen, nor can see. Whenever his glory shines in any manner before the eyes of a creature, it is enough to confound him. Do men believe that there is a God, that live plainly as if there were none? Do men believe that there is a God, in whose presence they are continually, and in the mean time have no awful thoughts of him? the true faith of the being of a God would make the world a most miserable world, unless Christ were known, and God in Christ. There is nothing more terrible to a man, as a man, and as a sinner, than any displays of the glory of God, unless there be some discovery of this glory, as shining in grace towards men. There is more spiritual sense, I believe, than commonly is conceived, in that Old Testament word, I shall die, for I have seen God. Jacob wondered at the matter, and called the name of the place Peniel: for, says he, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved, Gen. 32:30.

2. A future state, and the soul's immortality. How commonly do men pretend to believe that they know God in Christ, that they believe the truth of Christ, and the mystery of God manifest in the flesh? He that can believe this well, may believe any thing. Let people be firm in the spiritual belief of it, they are fit to believe any thing; that God became man, Luke 1:35, Gal. 4:4.; that this man is God over all, blessed for ever; that this man came in the fulness of time, and laid down his life a ransom for many. There is nothing about Christ Jesus, or about the whole mystery of the gospel, but is incredible to a natural man, and to natural reason. When Paul spake about one point, the resurrection of the dead, O king Agrippa, says he, why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Acts 26:8. Here are matters far more incredible: That God should become man; that this man should be still God over all, blessed for ever; that this man is made the great ark for the salvation of all the elect of God. Do not run away easily with an imagination, that it is a common and

ordinary thing to believe the truth of gospel-doctrine. People will say, it is very easy to believe what is written in the Bible; it is a hard matter to believe, they may say, their own salvation; and that the one is a great deal easier than the other. If there be a firm assent begotten by the Spirit of God upon the heart, as to the foundation-truth of the gospel, the particular application of that to thy soul for thy salvation will be found an easy thing. Pray now, wherefore is it said so often in the word, that faith is the gift of God; that faith is of the operation of God; that Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of faith? It certainly points forth this to you, That believing is a mighty hard thing; that divine power is needful to beget it, and bring it forward, and act it, and maintain it.

Again, take the matter as to our hope, there is great difficulty to avow the hope of eternal life. It is a hope of the greatest blessing that can be conceived, it is a hope bottomed only upon the pure word of God. When you examine your hearts, you find some hopes of being saved; and that, in the day of the Lord, you shall stand with peace and confidence before your judge; why so? wherefore do you hope for this? Is it not because God hath said it? is it not because the God that cannot lie hath spoken it? If you expect to be saved upon any other ground, but because God hath said it, ye must change your minds ere ever you be saved; for ye are off the rock, ye are off the sure foundation that all God's Israel must rest upon. This hope is a hard thing to have and to maintain, because it is a hope that is assaulted; there is no natural probability for it, and a great many difficulties lying in its way. What is there now that can befriend the matter in the eye of sense and reason? There is a poor creature under all the frailties of body and mind, that are either natural to us as men, or that grow and creep upon us by age, and that are in us because of sin; our hope is, that we shall be perfect in soul and body in the enjoyment of God. Now we are encumbered with imperfections every

day, and nothing so common and sensible as distance from him, and there is no probability of coming nearer. It is a probable thing that a young child may live and grow to be a man or woman, it is probable that a young plant may grow to be a tree; these are the common works of God in his providence, in guiding of this world; but what is there of probability, by philosophy, by reason, or sense, unto a poor Christian's attaining the possession of his hope? There is none for it, but a great many, on the contrary, against it. There is the law, conscience, sin, Satan, and the world, all combating our hope every day. So that from this you may see it is a mighty difficult matter to make a true profession of faith; a man must have that faith or hope, before he can truly profess them; these things are hard to come by, and hard to keep.

Secondly, It is as hard to hold fast the profession of faith, after we have made it. When a believer hath made a true profession of his faith, and a true confession of his hope, and made it often, it is very hard to hold it fast. The greatest believers have failed here. I do not say failed quite, but they have stumbled shamefully. Who was a greater believer and confessor of his hope than Abraham? yet he stumbled by unbelief grievously, again and again; Isaac did so, Jacob did so. David, that great believer and confessor of his faith, says, All men are liars; nay, it were well if his unbelief spake no worse; it was, in effect, God is a liar. Samuel, and Gad, and Nathan, and the other prophets, spake to him in the name of the Lord: And yet, says he, I said in my haste, All men are liars; and said, I shall one day fall by the hands of Saul; for all the promises God had made, and for all the faith David had avowed. But above all poor Peter, who is commended above all men for his confession, Matth. 16 how does he fall from it? Thou art Christ, says he to our Lord, the Son of the living God, ver. 16. Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. This great

confessor, what a strange confession does he make to the maid! Art thou one of his disciples? says she. I know not the man, says he. It is impossible, that a believer can keep the profession of his faith stedfast, unless he keep the exercise of his faith constant; if faith decay in its exercise within, the beauty and stedfastness of profession will be marred abroad.

I come now to the second thing in the words, and that is, the apostle's argument by which he enforceth this exhortation: For he is faithful that hath promised; so we read it. Three things I would take notice of, in the consideration of the reading of the words as they lie here, before I take them up in themselves; three things I note in general.

1. The apostle names no person promising, only speaks in general of one that promises.
2. He speaks of no sort of promise, but only, that there is a promise.
3. This I note also, that the word which we have rendered, He hath promised, in the original is in the present time, He is faithful that is promising. The promise here is not spoken of as an act past and gone, but of that which was present.

(1.) We find here the apostle does not speak of any person that promises, but only says, He is faithful that hath promised. Who then is the promiser? You may be persuaded that it is a divine person; and it is no great matter which of the three we confine it to; for I know it is generally applied to Christ's promising. But we find, 1st, That the promises that are the ground of the Christian's faith, are the promises of the Father, as the author, as the grand contriver and original fountain of the covenant. So the apostle calls him, Titus 1:1. In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before

the world began. 2dly, We find the promises ascribed unto Jesus Christ, and he is the promiser. So when he left his people and went out of this world, he left them with the opening of his heart to them in abundance of promises. And in his last prayer, that is as good as any promise in the word; Christ's prayer is as good as any promise in the Bible. The promises are also given by the Holy Ghost: He is called the Spirit of promise; both because he is promised, and because he is a promiser and performer too; for promising and performing are ascribed still to the same person, Heb. 10:15.

(2.) The apostle doth not tell us what is promised, but only says, He is faithful that hath promised. What then must we understand to be the meaning of this dark expression, when a promise is spoken of, and no particular blessing specified? It is easily gathered from the scope: for the apostle is bidding Christians hold fast the profession of their faith; the confession of their hope; for, says he, He is faithful that promises; he plainly implies, that what he means by the promise is as large and broad, as all the foundation of the faith and hope that a Christian has. God's promises and our faith are to be commensurate; we are to make our faith as large and wide as the promise; it is to be shapen as the promise.

(3.) The third thing that I note in general is, That the apostle's word in the original is, He is faithful that is promising, that is, in the act of promising; so it is in the original; he is faithful that is now, and presently promising; the same word, as in Heb. 11:11. The promises of God are not, as people imagine, things that are over and past, as soon as the word is out of his mouth; but they are continued, constant current streams that will carry on his people that are in them still, till they be accomplished fully. A promise never ends till there be performance; a promise is in act and motion still, till it be accomplished. The like word the apostle hath, 1 Thess. 5:24 and 2:12.

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it, as we translate it: there had been as good reason to translate it, Faithful is he that is now calling you: he called you at first, by the effectual working of his grace with the gospel; and that calling continues still, and it will never leave you, till it bring you to heaven. Just so it is with the promise. There are five places to God's promise, and we must have our eye distinctly upon them. 1st, God's promise, is in God's heart; and there it is, but a purpose unknown and unsearchable to all creatures whatsoever. This is called a promise; for it is said, He promised before the world began, Titus 1:2. 2dly, A promise is next considered, as it is in the word. There it is recorded, it is entered, and will never be repealed. 3dly, The promise of God is in Christ; that is another place for the promise: All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, 2 Cor. 1:20. The covenant is confirmed of God in Christ, Gal. 3:17. There is no change here; a promise in God's heart will surely have effect from the word; performance of a promise in Christ's hand can never miscarry. 4thly, A promise comes to be in the hand of a believer's faith; and this is a shaking, trembling hand. As it is in God's hands, Christ's hands, or in the word, heaven, and earth, and hell cannot shake it; but as it is in a believer's hand, the least blast from either will shake it. A poor believer grasps the promise of God frequently very weakly; yet if he take it, it is well, if he lay hold on it any manner of way. There would none of us ever come to heaven, if the promise of God did not keep us better by its grace and power, than we can keep it by our faith; for this is the order of God, his promise is a mean that catches a believer, and a believer catches the promise by faith. Our hold of the promise many times fails, but the promise to us never fails. If the promise of Christ's grace come and take hold of your hearts, it will hook you, and pull you, and keep you, and draw you certainly to glory; but our faith is off and on. Lastly, Believers sometimes have the promise of God in their hand; not only in the hand of faith, but, if I may so speak, in the hand of

performance; then they think it is well. If I may use the expression, there was never a good man that had a more blessed armful and heartful than old Simeon; he had all the promises of the Old Testament, and all the blessings of the New Testament, and all grace on earth, and all the glory in heaven, at one time in his arms. When he took the child Jesus in his arms, Lord, says he, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Luke 2:29, 30. He had the covenant in his hand, he had all the blessings in possession. He might have said as Hannah, 1 Sam. 1:27. For this child I prayed: and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Something like this believers sometimes have; the promise of God brings forth, and they have the birth in their arms; but this is not that we must live by.

The apostle says here, that God is promising: Faithful is he that is promising. I would warn believers of this common fault and failing, they look upon the promise of God as that which is past and over; they are many times saying, I had once a promise of God, I do not know what is become of it now. What, is it out of God's heart? out of the Bible? out of thy faith's hand? The Lord is still promising the promise of eternal life that thou didst lay hold upon in thy first venturing thy soul upon Christ Jesus. God is making that promise every day to you, and you should be believing it every day. We live by faith, and God keeps us in life by promising. His promise runs down through all states and conditions, and so should our faith do. So much now for the general things from the words.

There are several doctrines from it, that I intend, if the Lord will, to speak from.

1. The first note that I raise from the words, is, (understand it well and wisely, it may be you will think it an odd observation), The

Christian's God is a promising God. The apostle describes him by this: "What is the God that I Paul depend upon? He that promises; I will and can have nothing to do with any God, but he that is promising."

2. God is faithful in all his promises.

3. The faith of his people in a promising God, should some way answer the faithfulness of God in his promises.

4. A bold avowing of our faith, is not bragging of ourselves, but a magnifying the faithfulness of the speaker. This is plainly the scope of, Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; for he is a faithful God you lean upon.

Of the first of these a little at this time, The Christian's God is a promising God; a God made known to us by promises, who comes to us in the mask, and under the veil of promises. Let us see a little how this comes about, and how the world is changed to our great advantage, and his great praise. This promising God was from eternity blessed in himself, and in the mutual communication of love and delight, and converse betwixt the blessed Three. He is also called a purposing God, Eph. 3:11, 2 Tim. 1:9. In the fulness of time he makes a world. He makes himself known in this world three ways. 1. He makes, known himself to some creatures by their creation. There are some creatures that God made on purpose that they might know him. He made the greatest part of creatures in a manner only that God might be known by others, not by themselves. The heavens and earth, and all the host of them; this world, and all the creatures that are therein, save one sort, are all incapable of knowing God; but God is made known by them. The only creatures we know that are made capable of knowing God, are angels and men. The one sort, the glorious spirits, were made the first day of the creation; the other is

man, half spirit, and half flesh, that was made on the last day of the creation. Now, as soon as these rational creatures start out of nothing, by the commanding word of their Maker; as soon as ever they come into being, immediately the Lord's glory, as a Creator, is staring them in the face. Adam is no sooner a man, than he is a knower of God, as his God Creator. 2. We find God making himself known to man (for it is about man we will keep ourselves confined) as a Lord Commander; and as he has made this creature, he will dispose of him as he sees good. He determines the place of his living; he determines his employment; he lays him under law, and gives him a just and righteous command. He made himself known to man as a threatener too: In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. Ay, but, say you, was there no promise in the first covenant? Truly the word does not say there was any: but if people will needs have it that there was a promise, it is not worthy the name of a promise, in regard of what we have in the New Testament. That promise laboured under woful disadvantages, that we are now relieved from. 1st, That promise was a promise of continuance in that happy state he was made in, but no promise of a better. There was no promise of eternal life to the first Adam, as far as we can find in the terms of it. There was no more spoken of, but a continuance in that state: and this is implied in the threatening, In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die, which implies, Until the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt live. But we have a promise in the new covenant of a far better state than that we are in. 2dly, If there was any promise, it was a conditional one, a promise upon the condition of perfect obedience. There was no promise but upon this condition, Do this, and live. Life was promised upon the condition of doing but no promise of grace to enable a man to do it. But now we are brought under a promise, blessed be he that promiseth. Whatever is required to be done by the man that would have the blessing promised, grace to do that is promised by the promiser. Hath the required faith? He

hath promised faith, and he works faith. Hath he required repentance? He promises, and gives it. Our Lord is a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins to the house of Israel. Are we required to be holy in all manner of conversation? Hath he not promised to sanctify and make us holy? Hath he not prayed for this, that we may be sanctified? I told you but just now, Christ's prayer is as good as a promise. The best promises we have in the Bible are the promises made by the Father to the Son; and next to them, are those promises that we draw out of the Son's prayer to the Father. So that, upon these accounts, whatever there was in the first covenant, it is not to be called a promise. 3dly, There was no mediator in the first covenant; and therefore it cannot be called a covenant of promise, like that we are now brought under. The mediator of a covenant is to see the terms kept on both parts, and to see the ground secure and safe, that the bargain may not go back on either side. This is our Lord's undertaking, and his work. Now you see, that as soon as sin came in, grace comes in with a promise. God made himself known to Adam as his creator, commander, and threatener of just punishment to him for his disobedience. As soon as he disobeyed, so soon is he convicted of guilt in his own conscience. As soon as ever he is arraigned before God, the womb of the promise is open; then the sluice of the promise was drawn up, and it hath been flowing to this day. It began with a promise. Adam and Eve were to know God now under no other name, but the God that said, The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. So it went on through all the Old Testament; that still went along by promise. The Christian's God, I say, is a promising God,

1. God cannot be known but as a promising God. There is no saving knowledge of him, but as he reveals himself in the promise of life through Christ Jesus.
2. There is no worshipping of him but in this way. The apostle joins them altogether, Rom. 10:13–17. How can

they call on him of whom they have not heard? How can they believe on him? They cannot pray, they cannot believe, they cannot know him, unless it comes by the word of God. Faith, says he, cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; that is, the word of promise: Faith never comes by the word of command; but it comes by the word of promise. God commands faith; but God never works faith by the commanding of faith as any duty, but by the promise of faith as it is heard. The giving of faith, is the performance of the grand promise of faith. 3. There is no believing on God, but as a promising God; there is no loving God, but as a promising God. If you suffer your hearts to take a view of God out of a promise, you wander in a maze and wilderness: he is a consuming fire, except in a promise. The Lord hath framed us in that manner, that it is impossible that God can be loved, but by a person that takes up this God as a promising God. All mankind have either to do with God as promising, or threatening. The threatening God threatens the most dreadfully: the promising God promises the greatest good. It is impossible that there can be true and strong love fixed on that person from whom we do dread the greatest evil: therefore the Lord hath framed the matter so in the dispensing of his grace, in the call of the gospel, that he still tenders himself to his people, and at all times hath done since sin came into the world, under some gracious discovery of himself. I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, saith the Lord to Moses. Even when the man is afraid to look upon God, saith the Lord, Do not be afraid, I am the God of Abraham, &c. "I am the God of thy fathers, I appeared to them, I spake my good mind to them, and they lived and died in the promise; and thou, Moses, art one that art concerned therein," Exod. 3:3, 4.

Two things I shall conclude with at this time.

1. It is a marvellous condescension in God, that he hath come to us as a promising God. He might have stood upon his state, and throne, and dignity; he might have kept upon the throne of his glories: but in wonderful grace he comes down, if I may so speak, as an equal; and he comes into covenant with us, and plights his troth. Is not this wonderful? Solomon wondered: Will God indeed dwell with men. No wonder if God will command men; no wonder if God will threaten sinners; these things become God, and are like him, and are suited to his nature; but will God promise to man: Will he make a covenant with man. Job 41:3, 4. So Ezek. 16:6–9.

2. As it is a great condescension in God to reveal himself to us as a promising God, so it is a great duty upon his people to keep that name of God continually in their eye. Pray, what do you do in the word? in prayer? What is the God you deal with? Do you betake yourselves to the word, to hear the word of God as a commander? Ay, but where is the strength for obedience? That is uncomfortable work then. Ay, but, saith the believer, God's promising for all that he hath done for his people before, and all that they have done in their actings of faith towards him, encourages me. Would it not put another sort of edge upon our prayers, were we to eye God as a promising God? What do we do in prayer; think you, what is the business of prayer? The main thing in prayer is to put God in mind of the promise. The great work of Christians is to turn promises into prayer, and God will turn both into performance. Every believer, you know, is to ask according to God's will. The asking according to God's will, is to ask in faith, James 1:5, 6. And not only to ask what God bids us ask, but to ask what God has commanded us to hope; and we know what to hope for, by what God has promised. If we stretch our hope beyond the promise, we are out of the way: but his promises are so large, that a believer needs not to fear but he hath room enough for his faith to work in, nay to run in. The faith of a believer hath

room enough to treat with God in. Labour for this. All the disquiets that are in the minds of believers, all the changes that are in their thoughts about the God they have to deal with, all proceed from this. In the day of his love, in the day of their peace, he hath been made known to them as a promising God. Ay, but now there is a cloud comes upon their faith, and may be a veil upon his face; and he comes to them and appears as if he were threatening or commanding God. No dealing with him in this case. Learn to mind God's true name, He is a promising God. The Lord teach you this.

SERMON IV

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised

YOU heard that these words contain the argument by which the apostle presseth the preceding exhortation to Christians, Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and the argument is very proper, and very strong, Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, for God holds fast his promises sufficiently. Yea, our faith is built upon his promises. It is time enough for faith to stagger when God fails, but never till then. If God could fail, then a believer's faith should fail, and never till then. With regard to this argument of the apostle's, I did first take a general view of it, with respect to something contained in the manner of speaking. 1. He speaks of a promiser, and names no person, only he that promises. He knew well enough, that Christians knew whom he meant, that it was God's

promise; faith looks to that only. 2. The apostle doth not tell what he promises; but only he hath promised. And here now it is needful that we gather the extent of the promise, and the nature of the faith and hope that the apostle is exhorting them to maintain the profession of God's promises, and the believer's faith and hope are justly and equally commensurate; all that we need to desire and hope for, God's promises secure 3. I noted, that the word here in the original is, Faithful is he that promises: or, that is the promiser; or, that is as it were in the act of promising. The promises of God are not past things; they may seem so to us; but they are always current, and present, and acting, and working perpetually, till performance comes.

From the words themselves, I did propose several truths to be handled. The first that I began upon, was this: That the Christian's God is a promising God. The name that the apostle here by the Spirit gives him, is, He that promises. Besides what was spoken last day, I shall now further speak upon this truth, in handling these two things:—

I. I will shew you what is a promising God, and what is to be considered therein.

II. What need we have of a promising God; that there is no other God can save us but a promising God.

Lastly, I shall make application of the point.

I. What is a promising God? It is the true God manifesting his grace and mercy to us, and securing that by his faithful word, that is a promising God; he is the true God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Consider, in this matter, the high and eternal rise of all promises; and that is the infinite, unaccountable love of God unto the chosen. The promise of God is but the birth of the purpose of God. The purpose of God springs from nothing, the promise of God springs from somewhat. There had never been a word of good-will to the children of men spoken by God, if there had not been thoughts of good-will framed in his heart from eternity. This we find sometimes called the promise: God that cannot lie, promised before the world began, Titus 1:2. The meaning is, he purposed it before the world began, and as soon as the world began he revealed it. This is carefully to be taken notice of, That all the promises of God spring from this purpose of God, and are designed by our Lord in their true application to answer the purpose; that as the purpose of his grace is a sure and limited one, determined, and distinct; so the promise is of the same design. Who hath saved us, saith the apostle, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. 1:9, 10.

2. About this promising God and his promises, we are to consider the channel wherein they run; and this is all in and through Jesus Christ. That man looks with a bad eye upon any of the promises of God, that does not see Christ in them; and they do not See Christ rightly, unless they see all the promises in him. We see the covenant in him, and him in the covenant; all the promises of God are in him; he was promised himself, and all the blessings that are promised, are purchased by him, and left to his people as a legacy in his last will, confirmed by his own death.

3. The promises in this promising God, come to be considered as they lie before us in the word. There they are indited by the Holy

Ghost, and written by holy men of God, that were acted by the Spirit of God; and, if I may so speak, there we have them in black and white.

4. We would consider the promise as the father of believers, or the mother in a figurative phrase. Every believer is a child of promise: Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise, Gal. 4:28. Not only are we heirs of the promise, for that relates to the estate, Gal. 3:29, Heb. 6:17 and 11:7, 9.; but children of the promise, begotten again to a lively hope through the promise. When a poor creature is converted, it is the promise of God that does it. The efficacy of the promise of God, in its begun performance, does change and renew the heart, Jam. 1:18, 1 Pet. 1:23. The apostle, concerning his own conversion, says, It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal. 1:15. It was a kind of strange separation. The poor young man was left of God as eminently as any youth in all Judea; at his best he was a superstitious blinded Jew, and at his worst a bitter enemy to the name of Jesus Christ. Who would think now this man was separated from his mother's womb for God? he seemed to be separated from God, and separated to the vengeance of God. For all this, grace seized his heart, and he is called in due time. These things we are to conceive when we speak and think of a promising God: the rise of them, in the purpose of God's heart; the channel of all the promises, in and through the heart's blood of our Lord Jesus; recorded to us in the word, and in God's good time applied to the heart, to call in the heirs of promise, and to bring them home to possess their estate.

II. The second thing is, What need we have of a promising God? This must be a name peculiarly applied unto the God we call upon and believe in. Since sin hath come into the world, there is an absolute necessity of our having to do with a promising God, and of God's

dealing with us as a promising God, otherwise there can be nothing but ruin on our part.

1. Because God cannot be savingly known but as a promising God. The promise of God is both a veil, and a glass that we perceive God in. It is a veil upon his inconceivable, unapproachable glory: it is a glass wherein we may perceive, and may get near to him. We cannot possibly take up any comfortable, saving, right apprehensions of God, but as he is clothed and veiled to us in a promise. His own glory is unapproachable; his justice, his majesty, these great attributes of his, are all amazing and confounding to poor creatures. But when God comes near to us, and promises great and good things to us, then we come to know him. It is remarkable how Moses dealt with God, and God dealt with Moses, Exod. 33 from ver. 13 to the end. The man is there praying for Israel under their great sin, and under God's great wrath for it: Shew me now thy ways, says he, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight. At last he arises, Shew me thy glory, ver. 18. Whether Moses was led or left unto any unbecoming desire, to his desiring more than his present state could permit, we cannot peremptorily say. He was in a high degree of communion with God, as any mere man in this world ever was. The Lord answered him most graciously, and fitly to our purpose. Moses prays that he may behold God's glory. What! had he not seen enough already? He saw, with all the people, the glory of God in the giving of the law; he saw a great deal more in his more near approaches to God; he saw it yet more in his staying with God forty days in the mount; he saw the pattern of the temple in the mount. Moses yet, for all this, cries, I beseech thee shew me thy glory, as if he had never before seen any thing of the glory of the Lord. Says the Lord, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee, (my greatness would confound thee), and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy

on whom I will shew mercy. Accordingly the Lord proclaimed it, chap, 34:6, 7. Will you take in now this that I drive at from this quotation, that a clear perceiving by faith of the sovereign grace and goodness of God in his promises of grace and compassion to poor sinners, is the most beneficial and highest discovery of divine glory that sinners can arrive at, and that believers should desire in this world. When we pray that God would shew us his glory, the Lord will understand it thus, and answer it thus: I will cause all my goodness to pass before thee. The more we see of his goodness, the more, we see of his glory.

2. God cannot be worshipped acceptably, but as a promising God. Says the apostle, It is required that every man that comes to God to worship, must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, Heb. 11:6.; that he is a gracious God, not only great in his being, but good, and bountiful, and kind, and gracious to them that seek him.

3. God cannot be trusted in, unless he be known as a promising God. Trust in God, faith in him, is a special point of worship; it is not a duty of worship so much as it is a grace that should accompany every duty. Now, whence can faith in God arise unless God speak some good to us? Faith arising from any other spring, is a dream and vain imagination of our own minds, not bottomed upon the single, sole word of God. They that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee, Psalm 9:10. In Jacob's pleading, Gen. 32:9, 13 see how exactly he stands upon God's word. He not only calls God, the God of his father Abraham, and the God of his father Isaac, that was a promising God; but the God that said unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee, ver. 9. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, ver. 12. See how Jacob's wrestling stood, how, if I may so speak, the

man behaved himself in his mighty wrestling with God, all with the force of his word; upon that word of his; saith he to the Lord, "Lord, thou bidst me, I am in the way thou bidst me go in; and thou saidst, I will surely do thee good."

4. God cannot be loved but as a promising God. Love to God is promised, and love to God arises from the discoveries of God's goodness to us: and the clearer these discoveries be, love still increases.

5. All the enjoyment we have of God in this life, is enjoying of him as a promising God. Pray now which way is it that there is that intercourse, and that familiarity, that mutual dealing between God and us, that is called by those blessed names in the word; fellowship with him, enjoyment of him, finding of him? All stands in this; we approach to God by the warrant of his promise, he draws near to us according to his promise, and in the fulfilment of it. The promise is as it were Jacob's ladder, by which God comes down to us, and we rise up to him again. The communion which believers have on earth is with God as a promising God; and the communion the glorified have with him above, is with God as a performing God; and, if I may so speak, until God has performed all he has promised, he must never lose the name of a promising God to a believer.

Lastly, In the great wisdom of God, this name of God is appointed to be the great name wherein he will be glorified. The greatest glory that is given to God, is given under the name of a promising God. What is the reason that Abraham is especially said to give glory to God? He was strong in faith, giving glory to God, Rom. 4:20. Believing is but thinking, it is no more; but it is a rare thing, it is a great thought; and a great many things seem far bigger than believing. Doing seems to be a great deal greater than believing.

Abraham's offering his son Isaac was a great act; ay, but the excellency of it lay in the faith he did it by. The reason why believing is specially said to give glory to God, is, because the Lord hath a special mind and design to have himself glorified in the soul, under the name of a promising God: and all good things shall come to his people, to make them happy by virtue of the promise. But the maker of the promise, and the keeper of the promise, and the performer of the promise, must have all the glory. All that is in the promise is ours, but all the praise of making it is his; it is made by grace, kept by grace, performed by grace; all this glory is to be given to him.

APPLICATION. The first use is this. That the Christian's God is a promising God. I therefore call you to enquire and determine, before God and your consciences, whether you do know God under this name. Do you know God as a promising God? A great many Christians there are that know no such thing; they are called, but are not really so. The acquaintance that most Christians have with God, (poor it is), is with him as a commanding God. But if this does not settle and fix ordinarily in your thoughts, and in all your dealings with God, I have now to do with a promising God, all you do is worth nothing.

1. If you have not to do with a promising God, you do not know God's mind. There is a great difference, you know, betwixt knowing a man's face, and shape of his body, his estate, and garb, and house, &c. and knowing his heart and thoughts, and how he stands affected towards us. All other speculations about God are tolerable pieces of philosophy to them that have no better; but the grand inquiry that should possess our hearts is, What does this God think of me? What does he intend to do with me? This cannot be known but by the promise. Unless I have some good word from this God to show his good-will towards me, what do I know more than the devils do? for

the devils know God better than any men in this world, saving that they know God's wrath is against them to eternity. But this name, a promising God, they know nothing of. A great mercy it is that ever God should be known as a promising God to sinful men. God was never revealed as a promising God to fallen angels, but he was so to fallen man.

2. Unless you know God as a promising God, you cannot know God in Christ; and you do not know the true God, unless you do know God in Christ; unless your determinate knowledge of God, be of that God that shines in his glory to us in the face of Jesus Christ. We must look upon no God out of this face; for there is no eye that can perceive God, but as he shines this way, 1 John 5:20 says the apostle, We know, that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life, 1 John 5:20.

3. If you do not know God as a promising God, you know nothing of the marrow and substance of the Bible. Take away God's promises out of the Bible, and there is nothing left in it, but bones, and stones, and poison, and darts for poor man. If you do not see God as promising, you do not know the marrow of the scripture; for the heart and marrow of the will of God lies there.

Lastly, If you do not know God as a promising God, you cannot deal with God about salvation. Pray now, which way is it that men deal with God about their salvation? I do acknowledge, that there are some people that make a fashion of dealing with God about their salvation, who do not understand the way of God's dealing with them about salvation. Such kind of dealers spend their time to no purpose. All right dealing with God about our salvation, is in answering of

God's dealing with us in that matter. Now, all the Lord's way of dealing with us about salvation is by his promises; he promises eternal life, he sends this promise to us in the gospel; we must lay hold on this, or we cannot deal with God, as he deals with us, Psalm 27:8, Eph. 4:32, Rom. 4:13, Hos. 2:23.

Secondly, I would add an exhortation or two unto Christians. Is the Christian's God a promising God? Keep always this name of God in your heart and eye. You will find no great ease in this work; it is a hard work to keep God as a promising God still in the eye, but it is very needful.

1st, Do not you find God began with you this way, and you began this way with God? You that are true Christians, that have been born again, that have been transplanted out of the old stock into the new, do not you know something of this, that as long as God was known to you only as a commanding God, and as a threatening God, there was nothing but death, and ruin, and damnation in your eye? but when he was revealed as a promising God, then light, and life, and hope, and liberty began to arise. Was there ever a distressed conscience in the world truly pacified without a promise? if it were without a promise from God, the devil was the doctor, and the disease is worse than ever it was. If ever thou hast been afraid of the wrath of God for thy sin, if thy mind has been quiet without a promise of God through Christ Jesus, you are but dreaming still; such a cure is worse than the disease. The apostle tells how it was with him: When the commandment came, says he, sin revived, and I died, Rom. 7:8, 9. There was woful work when the commandment came. When God is only known to you as a commanding God, sins grow greater, and appear exceeding sinful: but when grace comes, when the promise comes, the matter is altered, the prisoner is rescued. Before faith came, says he, we were kept under the law, Gal. 3:21–24. We were

prisoners till Christ came, and the promise came, and faith came; for they are all three come together. Christ comes by the promises, and the promises are received by faith, and the prisoner is made whole by faith.

2dly, You must mind this constantly, for all believers must live by faith; and if so be we are called to live by faith, surely we must remember that God is a promising God; this is necessarily implied. To live by faith, implies these four things. (1.) That a poor believer in himself is a poor empty creature; he hath nothing at home to live by in his house, Isa. 3:7. And since there is no bread within, he must live abroad. (2.) It implies, that the stock that a believer is to live upon is elsewhere; it is without him, it is with God in Christ, Col. 3:3. (3.) It implies, that there are ways, issues, vents, by which he may go out for it, or it may come in to him; passages by which communication of this fulness in Christ comes in to the actual possession of the believer. There were no living by faith, unless the stock that is in Christ had ways of venting itself, of being brought down unto the hand, unto the use and benefit of the poor believer; and this is by the promise. And therefore it follows, (4.) That the daily and constant work of a believer, is to be pleading these promises for his supply. I live, saith the apostle, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me, Gal. 2:20. Lastly, He finds the good of it, Psal. 27:3 and 28:7.

Lastly, Mind this frequently, that God is a promising God; for as you must live by faith on a promising God, so you must die and go before him under this name. The great appearance must be ventured upon under this name. There are few folks, Sirs, that are so happy, as to make their approaches to God by faith, with that dread, and reverence, and awe, that the last approach requires: we should then

act firm faith frequently; we must die in this, with this God in our eye, as a promising God. We have a remarkable instance of this in those two good men, the father and the son, good Jacob 147 years old, and good Joseph 110 years old: Behold, saith Jacob to Joseph, I die, but God shall be with you, Gen. 48:21 and 49:25 with Luke 2:30 and as if Joseph had learned it of his father, he tells his brethren that survived him, when he came to die, Gen. 50:24. I die, says he, and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he swore to Abraham, &c. As if these two holy patriarchs had said, "Now we die, but our promising God lives still, and the promise lives, and will have its accomplishment in due time." It is upon this, that David amongst his last words spake that great word, 2 Sam. 23:5. Although my house be not so with God: yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. An ill-ordered house, but a well-ordered covenant; many things amiss in the one, but nothing amiss in the other, said the believer. So must you die, breathing out, 1. Your soul, Psalm 31:5. 2. Leaving your body in the dust, Psalm 16:9. 3. Your present enjoyments, 2 Sam. 23:5. 4. All your sinful infirmities.

The second exhortation is this, Make use of this name of God as a promising God, carefully and wisely. How you should use this name of God, I would instruct you in a few things.

1. In all your extremities mind this name only.

2. In all your walk, or ordinary cases, mind it mainly.

1. In all your extremities mind this name of God only; there is no other name then to be minded. There are two sorts of extremities that Christians feel; and it is their great wisdom, when in them, to use this name. 1st, There are extremities of conscience. 2dly, Extremities of distress and dispensations. In extremities of

conscience, people must be very careful to remember no name of God, but the name of the promising God; all is terrifying but only this. I hinted but just now, that the promise of the gospel is the only plaister for a wounded conscience, and when God lays it on and blesses it, it is marvellous what a sudden cure it will do. Health and peace quickly will follow this application. In extremities of distress, it is to be only minded, when people are borne down quite, and know not what to do. Saith Jehoshaphat, If when evil cometh upon us, we cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help, 2 Chron. 20:9. Good Hezekiah was a follower of him in this practice, Isa. 38:14. O Lord, says he, I am oppressed, undertake for me. I may allude to the meaning of the word; undertaking there is undertaking as a surety; I may compare it with the same his great-grandfather David useth, Psalm 119:122. Be surety for thy servant. O what a prayer is that! The good man is in deep distress; as if he should say, "My word signifies nothing before God, nor men, nor devils; it will not pacify God, nor quiet conscience, nor stop the devil's mouth; Lord, be surety for thy servant, speak a good word for me, thou art a promising God." It is great boldness of faith for a believer to come to God to pass his word for him, to be surety for him.

2. In ordinary cases, we must mind this mainly. There are several other names of God by which he is known to us in the word; and in his dealings with us, we must give them their due room; but this must be the main still. As for instance, God is known to us as a commanding Lord and God, that reveals his will about our work and duty, hath proclaimed his mind, and calls for our obedienae. Your duty with respect to this is, 1st, Take the commands of God out of the hand of a promising God: This is not a bare commanding God, but it is a promising God that does command me. And unless you look thus on God's law, you may quickly over-stress yourselves in your endeavours after obedience, and yet do nothing to any purpose. See

how observable this is in the giving of the law. God's glory was displayed, Israel and Moses trembling, Heb. 12:15, &c. yet I am your God. I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; thou shalt do so and so. Observe now the preface to the commandments, (see Deut. 26:16–19.) It is not, Thou shalt do so and so, and then I will be thy God; the Lord does not first reveal himself to them as a commanding God, and promise that, upon their obedience, he will become a promising God; but he reveals himself as a promising God, and upon that requires their obedience to him as a commanding God: Because I was thy God, I brought thee out of the land of Egypt; and after I have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, I tell thee my mind about thy duty. Oh that some Christians (if I may so speak) could find as much gospel in the preaching of the gospel, as is plainly here in the preface of the law; but some will make gospel-promises come in after obedience to gospel-precepts. There is no obedience that ever was performed by man rightly, nor graciously accepted by God, but that obedience that was performed to the commands of God, as a promising God Again, we are not only to take a command out of his hand, as a promising God, but we are to turn the commands back again, for grace to perform them, Psal. 119:6, 7, 8. As soon as ever God reveals his mind to us about our duty by a command, we are immediately to turn the command upon him in prayer: Lord, perform thy words; write them in my heart, that I may keep them, for that is the promise; Psal. 143:10. What a great word is that, Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God! It is not, to know or love thy will, though that is needed and begged, Psal. 119; it is not, Teach me to do thy will, that thou mayst be my God; but, Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Faith in God animates his prayer for grace to yield obedience to it. God reveals himself sometimes to us as a threatening God. Threatenings and promises seem to be very cross to one another. It is the promising God that does threaten, and the Lord knows very well

how to make his promises and his threatenings agree together, if we were wise to make them agree together in our faith. If his children forsake my law, &c. I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, &c. Psal. 89:30–34. It were well for us, if we were as able to believe the standing of promises, and the love in his heart, notwithstanding the threatenings and the strokes of his hand; if we could in some measure do that, as well as he can make all his ways towards us to be mercy and truth. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant, and his testimonies, Psal. 25:10. We cannot easily see it, but God can easily do it. Sometimes God is manifesting himself to his people as a hiding God; that is a sad discovery, if it should be properly such; but it is a name of God oft known: Verily, saith the church, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour, Isa. 45:15. I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him, Isa. 8:17, Job 23:3–13. The sum of all this now is, that this name of God, the promising God, is the leading name that should mainly be minded by Christians in all his appearances. We take his commands, threatenings, rods, and corrections, we must use them all, as remembering that all these are from a promising God. If the commands were alone without a promise, who could perform them? If the threatenings were alone without a promise to sweeten them, and take away the poison of them, who could endure them? But all this is consistent with his love, and therefore should not shake the faith of a believer.

SERMON V

HEBREWS 10:23

—He is faithful that promised.

YOU have heard again and again, that these words are the argument by which the apostle presseth the exhortation unto the duty of Christians holding fast their profession of faith without wavering. The argument is strong in itself, and pertinent to the apostle's scope, and is an argument that has a great deal of good truth in it, with respect to its contents. I have shewn what is in these words, He is faithful that promises. I first spake last day to this truth, That a Christian's God is a promising God. The name the apostle here gives him is, He that promiseth. He promiseth like himself, like a God. He is known by his promises.

The second thing that I am now to speak to is this, That this promising God is faithful in his promises: He is faithful that promises. This is a name of God frequently given to him in the word, both in the Old and New Testament. The prophet hath a great word about it, Lam. 3:23. Great is thy faithfulness. His mercies are renewed towards us every morning. His compassions fail not. In the New Testament it is frequently used also: 1 Cor. 1:9. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Thess. 5:24. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. 2 Thess. 3:3. But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil. And I name these rather in the New Testament, because in all these three places that I have named, the word in the Greek is the same with that in my text. This is a name of God that all believers know, and all that would be believers must

study. There is never a believer in the world but knows that God is faithful; and if they knew it better, they would be better believers: and no man can be a believer, till he knows that his God is faithful. There is no trust given to him, till his trustiness be known.

I shall therefore, in handling this name of the Lord our God, A faithful God that promises, give you, First, The meaning of it; Secondly, The grounds of it: the meaning, that you may understand it; and the grounds of it, that you may believe it the better.

I. The meaning of this word, this name of God, that he is faithful, contains these things:

1. He promiseth who purposeth, neither rashly nor hastily. All his promises are from eternity.

2. God speaks as he thinks. It is one of the greatest and worst pieces of dishonesty in promising, when people promise what they think never to do; that is, lying. There is lying in promising, when people do not intend to perform: as well as in asserting that to be true, when they know it to be false. The wise man takes notice that there are such kind of folks in the world, Prov. 23:7. But when God promises, he speaks as he thinks.

3. God is faithful in this sense, that he remembers always what he says. There are some rash folks that promise a great deal more than they perform, because they forget a great deal of what they promised. Our Lord never forgets a word of his promise. Whenever he has made a promise to a believer, it is fixed perpetually in his heart. Forgetfulness is not to be ascribed to God. I know believers sometimes, in fits of unbelief, have charged God this way: Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Will the promise fail for evermore? So in the Hebrew, Psal. 77:7. But that is the infirmity of the speaker. We

find sometimes also, the people of God putting God in mind of his promises; yea the Lord calling them so to do: Put me in remembrance, Isa. 43:26. But this putting God in remembrance is required of us, and to be performed by us, not to help God's memory, but to exercise our faith: Keep not silence, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Isa. 62:6. Remember, says the Psalmist, the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope, Psal. 119:49. The Spirit of God tells us of the exactness of God's remembrance many times. His mercy towards his people is expressed this way. This is one of his names, He remembers his mercy to them that fear him, He is mindful of his covenant, Psal. 111:5. Nay, as to his people, it is spoken also, Mal. 3:16 that there was a book of remembrance written before the Lord, for them that feared the Lord, and thought on his name. I argue from that, that if so be the Lord keeps so exact an account of the poor slender thoughts that his poor people have of him, how much more will he keep a good remembrance of all his own precious thoughts concerning them, and of all the good words he passeth to them: Psal. 40:5 and 139:17.

4. God is faithful in this sense, that he never changeth his mind. Poor frail men may sometimes promise with an honest mind, and they may see good reason for the changing of it. Sometimes it is lawful to change in some cases, sometimes not. There may be sin in giving a rash promise, that may be greater than the breaking of it. The Lord never changes his mind. Balaam is called a false prophet by Peter; but the meaning is, he was not a false prophet in his prophesying, but a false prophet that prophesied, The Spirit of God spake by him, but never touched the graceless man's heart: God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Numb. 23:19, Job 23:13. God never changeth his mind, never comes to be in another mind, than that wherein he made his

promise unto his poor children. Whatever changes there be in his dispensations, there is no change in his mind, If his children forsake my law, &c. I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Here is a great change in God's dispensations; instead of heaping loving-kindness upon them, he is visiting them with rods and stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail, &c. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David, Psalm 89:30–35.

Lastly, God is faithful in promising, because he always performs what he promises; he always does as he says, speaks as he thinks, remembers what he says, never changes his mind, and always performs his word. What the testimony was, that Joshua exacted of the consciences of the Israelites, when he possessed the land of Canaan, our true Joshua, Jesus, will exact and get of all the true Israel, when they come to the true Canaan: Joshua 23:14. And ye know, says he, in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. This is briefly the meaning of this great name of the Lord our God, a faithful God, faithful in his promises.

II. The second thing is, to give you some grounds for our faith concerning this: for it is no small matter to have a firm faith of God's faithfulness. All faith is bottomed upon the promises, and all faith in the promises is founded upon the faithfulness of the maker of them. Though the promise be never so good, yet if the maker of the promise be not faithful, it is no security to the man that gets it.

I am to shew what grounds there are that we may use, and are given us in the word of God, for the clearing our understanding, and fixing

our faith on this name of God: That this promiser is faithful.

1. The first I shall name is taken from the nature of God. Faithfulness is inseparable from his nature, as inseparable as any other name that can be given him. Omnipotency is of the nature of God; a weak God is no God, but an idol. Truth and faithfulness are in the nature of a God; a false god is an idol. Therefore, when the apostle would aggravate unbelief, gospel unbelief, he aggravates it by this; He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son, 1 John 5:10. What is it to make God a liar? It is impossible for a creature to do so; but they account him so, that is the meaning of it. When we do not take God's promise, it is to make God a liar, it is to make God a devil; for the devil is a liar, and the father of it, John 8:44. See what rank wickedness there is in unbelief, Jer. 15:18, Psal. 77:7–10.

2. We find this, the unchangeableness of God is another ground of his faithfulness: With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, James 1:17. Changing is always a creature infirmity; it is impossible for a creature but to be changeable. Unchangeableness is a divine property, and cannot be communicated to any creature. Changing is twofold, 1st, From worse to better. 2dly, From better to worse. Neither of which can be in him. Whatever there is of fixedness in the state of believers, it is not unchangeableness; but it is a communicated security by the grace of God, the giver of it. All questioning of the promises of God always charges him with being changeable. He is the same that he was, whatever the unbeliever, or the unbelieving, doubtful believer may think. He is so as to established angels, and saints in glory now, and to eternity.

3. The great room that grace hath in the promises, is one good ground for our faith, as to the faithfulness of God in the making of

them. And this is twofold. 1st, Grace is the spring of all the promises. 2dly, The glory of grace is the design of all the making of promises, and performance of all the promises: Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, Rom. 4:16. It is by promise; this promise is by grace, that it may be sure to all the seed. If the promise were given upon any other account, and did flow from any other Spring but the grace of God, it might grow dry. If God promised to us upon the account of any condition that might be wrought by us, the promise might not be sure; but this springing from the goodwill and grace of God himself, as long as that remains they must stand. The design of all the performance of promises is the glory of grace. Our Lord speaks many good words to us in the scripture, he makes these warm sometimes upon the heart of his people in their faith, and at last, when all these good words shall come to good deeds, and shall shine forth in their glory, what a wonderful sight will that be, to see every poor believer have in his face, his heart, his soul, and body, all the promises of God fulfilled to him! Then the question will be, Why hath God done all this? why hath he rescued, and scraped, as it were, a company of vile sinners out of the bottom of hell, to fill them with so much glory, and that to eternity; all to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein we are accepted in the Beloved! Therefore are we adopted, therefore are we elected, therefore are we justified, therefore are we sanctified, and therefore are we glorified, that it might be to the glory of his grace, Eph. 1:4–14 and 2:7.

4. The great room Jesus Christ hath in the promises is one ground of our faith, that God is faithful in them, and that they shall be fulfilled. Christ's room in the covenant is so great, that in effect he is it, and he is called the covenant, Isa. 49:8 and 42:6. He is also called the promise, when the Father sent him into the world: He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, says Zacharias, Luke 1:69. Christ's

interest in the covenant and in the promise is great: they are said by the apostle to be all in him yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us, 2 Cor. 1:20. God's glory wants sinners to work upon. If there were not lost sinners in this world, promises of grace could have none to work upon. If we were all perfectly holy, what hath the promise of forgiveness to do in this world. Says the apostle, They are all in him yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us. We in our sins, infirmities, weaknesses, are the field wherein the glory of God's promises is displayed and advanced, and all this in Christ Jesus. Christ's interest in the promise is threefold. 1st, Christ hath bought all the blessings in the promise, and all the heirs of the promise; he hath bought us for the promise, and the blessings for us. His interest then must be very great. There is never a blessing that a poor believer partakes of, but Christ's blood went for it; it went for your daily bread, and for more grace and glory. He is blessed that believes, that, his outward mercies and afflictions, &c. are all by promise. Whatever we have is by promise and purpose, Phil. 1:29. And never man received a promise, but he that Christ bought to be the heir of it. We are heirs of promise, because in Christ Jesus. We are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and if children, then heirs, Rom. 8:17, Gal. 3:29. 2dly, Our Lord Jesus Christ hath this interest in the promises, that his blood went for the confirming of the whole covenant. The whole book of the promises, Christ's blood sealed it all; therefore it is called the blood of the everlasting covenant. The testament of the covenant is made sure by the blood of the testator; no man must add any thing to it. There is a curse unto them that shall add or pare any thing from the whole canon of scripture, Rev. 22:18, 19. How much more unsufferable to add or pare from our Lord's testament? The covenant was confirmed before of God in Christ, Gal. 3:17. By his mediation at last, as mediator of the covenant, he confirmed it by his blood. 3dly, A third interest that Christ hath in the covenant is, that he is the surety of it. He is to see

the bargain kept on both sides, that God may not cast us off for our iniquities, and that we may not leave God by our unbelief. Christ is engaged on both; and, if I may so speak, he has a hard task of it, to keep devouring justice from consuming stubble fully dry. It is a task only fit for him, and he only fit for it; a task he cheerfully undertook and perfectly fulfilled, and is now fulfilling.

5. The high engagements of divine truth in the promises, are great confirmations for our faith in God's faithfulness. Promises are made by the Lord so deliberately; he goes so high in them, that we must believe he is faithful, and will perform them. See how the apostle discourses to the Hebrew, chap. 6 when he is exhorting believers to be followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises: as if the apostle had said, "Be not slothful, take pains, follow on; all those that have tried this course of faith and patience, have inherited the promises. And so will you:" why so? because when God made the promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself; saying, Surely, blessing, I will bless thee, &c. There are several things of great consideration in that scripture, 1st, That there is double security, word, and oath. The least hint of good-will from so great a God, as our God is, should engage all the dependance of his children; nay, if it came but to only a may-be, God's may-be is enough for our reverend waiting on him. God not only speaks, but he swears. Now observe, how the apostle speaks, Because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself; as if the apostle had said, "If it had been possible for God to have gone higher, he would have gone higher." How does God swear by himself? As I live; he swears by his life; he swears by his being; he swears by his Godhead. As true as I am God, I will bless thee, says he to Abraham. What is all this to us now? God testifies a singular respect unto an eminent man, upon a singular testimony of the man's respect to him; one of the most eminent acts of faith, and of obedience that ever was

performed by a mere man, to offer up freely to God his only son now grown a man. Here was a noble act of obedience; but the Lord testifies a special regard to this man, and gives him this oath. What is that to you and me? Now, says the apostle, this concerns you and me, that have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us; he leads us to this, that every poor creature that has a mind for salvation through Jesus Christ, should say in himself, As sure as God said and swore to Abraham, so surely hath God said and sworn to me, that I shall be blessed with eternal salvation in flying for refuge to his own Son. So the apostle applies it, That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who hath fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. Observe the vast difference. Abraham yields a grand act of obedience, and lifts up his knife to cut the throat of his own son at God's command: A poor sinner what does he? A sinner chased by the torments of his own conscience, and the threatenings of the law; he runs to Christ for salvation: he is a self-seeker, if I may so speak; he is seeking the salvation of his own soul: nay, says the apostle, he that does so, shall get that same security for his salvation that Abraham got. It is a great point, and only fit for Paul's divinity, to spell so great a matter out of that extraordinary testimony that God gave to Abraham. Though the service that God craved of Abraham be not craved of us, yet the privilege is allowed to every believer; so that if you fly to Christ Jesus, there is not a poor believer, that hath laid hold on the horns of God's altar, but that poor creature shall be as sure of God's eternal blessing as great Abraham was, when he heard God swearing to him. This is what the apostle teaches; the Lord help us to practise it.

6. There is divine foresight of all possible and future impediments of performance, which is a great argument of God's faithfulness. That proves to us, that God is faithful in his promises. An honest man may

make a promise upon his best understanding, but the providence of God may render it quite impossible to perform it. Now, there is no such thing can befall the Lord our God. Here is a great argument for your faith in God's faithfulness: he foresaw all things that shall come, or can come to pass, that look like impediments. All your sinning, all your fainting, all your unbelief, all your murmurings, all your turnings and temptings of the Lord, poor believer, they were all foreseen by God, yet he made the promise, and therefore he will keep it. I believe we are such poor believers, that if we had the foresight of all that comes in the way to hinder, we would never believe. A poor believer, if in the day that he gives the hand unto the Lord, in the day that he marries his soul unto Christ Jesus, in the day that he engages to expect life, and righteousness, and salvation in this holy One of Israel; I say, if this man, could foresee all the sin, and all the miscarriages and weaknesses that will be found in him for but seven years to come, he would draw back his hand, and be ashamed to say, I believe. The reason why I say so is this, because when a few of these come in our way, they shake our faith. The children of God have one advantage in their weakness, that our future things are hid from us; things that shall come to pass we do not know, but the Lord sees them all, and in sight of them all he makes the promise, and therefore, notwithstanding them all, he keeps the promise, Isa. 48:18, 19 and Psal. 69:5.

7. The mighty power of God is that which we should ground our faith of his faithfulness upon. Omnipotency must be engaged to fulfil the promises, and omnipotency must be acted upon in believing the promise: 2 Tim. 1:12. I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Abraham offered up his son Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead. He had a promise, That in Isaac his seed should be called; God bid Abraham cut his

throat, and burn (not bury) his body: says Abraham, "That I will do," accounting that he was able to raise him up from the dead. How frequently do we find faith fixed this way upon divine power? Rom. 11:23. As to the Jews, they shall be grafted in; why so? God is able to graft them in: as to a weak believer, it is far more easy, Rom. 14:4. He shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. Sirs, your faith will never behave well, till you have a view of omnipotency. That faith is never soundly tried, till it is brought into that distress that nothing but omnipotency can relieve out of; and that faith is not cleanly acted, that does not act purely upon omnipotency. Wherefore do I believe the promise? Because he is the Lord of hosts, for whom nothing is too hard, that promises; it is with this the Lord chides Sarah's unbelief, Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Gen. 18:4, Jer. 32:17, 27.

Lastly, There is something in the very nature of the promises that speaks forth the certainty of their fulfilment. Ye may know by the nature of the promises, that he is a faithful God that made them. One is the absoluteness of the main promise. That I call an absolute promise, wherein the whole of the care and charge is God's. When God says, I will, they shall; I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and if I will be your God, no man shall say he shall not be my God; and if thou say, We shall be thy people, none shall say, We shall not be thy people. There is again the wisdom of the order of the promises, that there is some begun performance of the promises; the performance of the promise of grace is in a good way to the performance of the promise of glory.

APPLICATION. 1. Learn to magnify this name. God hath magnified it himself, and so should we; Psal. 138:2. I will praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness, and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. Magnifying of God's faithfulness stands

principally in praising for it. Praise him for all the promises he hath made, and praise him for all the performance he hath given, and praise him for all the performance that shall be given.

2. As you must praise him for it, so you must count God faithful. This is a great matter. May I speak it in more plain homely words: Every one of you must count God honest, an honest, faithful, true God; that never deceived any that trusted in him, that is never worse than his word; always a great deal better. It is remarked concerning Sarah, Heb. 11:11 that she judged him faithful who had promised. She is one of the women that are named there in that short catalogue of believers; and it is well for her she was named there, for indeed the account we have of her in Genesis is not so much to her honour; when the promise is made in Genesis, it is said, Sarah laughed, Gen. 18:12 and 17:17.

When do ye think Sarah believed? I really think she believed when she was reproved for her unbelief, What is her believing called? Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, because she judged him faithful who had promised. She accounted the promiser faithful, that is faith; to account the promises faithful, that is believing. Is it not a reasonable thing to crave this of you? You must account him faithful or unfaithful, there is no medium: if you do not give him the positive testimony of faithfulness, you reflect upon him the blasphemy of unfaithfulness. Now this would bring me to the third thing, viz. That the faith of believers should in some measure answer the faithfulness of God. See that your believing answer the promise, as your believing is bottomed upon the promise. See Acts 16:15. Lydia's charge to Paul.

This accounting him faithful craves two things; 1st, That you must learn, in the main matter of salvation, to take his word alone. We

reckon always, that that person is jealous of another, that is not willing to take his word. It is true, that, on earth, men may pretend prudence for their distrust; but in dealing with God, it is an abomination, a prudence that comes from hell, James 3:15. If we account him faithful that promises, we should seek no more, and should crave no more. Believers that have their multiplied props from sense for their faith, labour under the disadvantage of a secret charge of unfaithfulness in God. Will you offer to bring any creature to confirm God's testimony. 2dly, Account him faithful that exacts this of us, that as soon as ever we get the promise, we should rejoice in hope of performance. God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice, says David; "I have got God's word, that is enough of joy to me;" Psal. 60:6.

SERMON VI

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

FROM the last words of this verse, which is the apostle's argument to press Christians to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, I have spoke already unto two notes that I observed therefrom; as, 1. It is a name here given to God, he that promises; and from this I shewed, that the Christian's God is a promising God, and he that knows not God by this name of a promising God, does

not know the true God; no man can take up God aright, but in the veil of a promise; no man can draw near, to God aright, but in and by the encouragement of a promise.

2. The second note was this, That this promising God is faithful in his promises, this promiser is faithful. To this I spoke last day, and shall add but a little to it, and proceed to the third thing.

I know that there are a great many professors that bear the name of Christians, (God knows how little they deserve it, to him they stand or fall), who wonder, why there should be so much in the word spoken of faith; and that some ministers, in their doctrine should insist so much upon believing: Why not, say they, upon doing? Is not believing doing? The greatest doing that ever was done by a sinner is believing, and all the right doing of obedience flows from believing. Whoever they be that know what it is to be a Christian, know that their life is a life of faith; they live by faith, even as we live our natural life by breathing. It is as impossible, that a Christian can preserve his spiritual life, without repeated acts of believing, as it is for us to preserve our natural life, without putting forth and sucking in the air we breathe in. Therefore it is, that such as know what the life of faith is, that is, the Christian's life, never can think enough, they never can hear enough, because they can never do enough about believing. For this end, I have spoke unto this great name of the Lord our God, That he is faithful in his promises. I did, last day, 1. Shew you that the meaning of this is, what our thoughts of God's faithfulness do contain by the warrant of the word, and I gave you four particulars. Next, I shewed you the grounds, rather of your faith on God's faithfulness, than the grounds of his faithfulness. The Psalmist leads us to this, Psal. 138:2. Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. God makes all his name some way serviceable for the advancement of the glory of his word, and his faithfulness in his

word is a main part of the glory of it. Several of the names of God that are useful for the strengthening of our faith, as to his faithfulness, I mentioned last day; and shall add two or three more, and go forward.

The first is his holiness. His holiness is a great ground of faith as to his faithfulness: God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice, says the Psalmist, Psal. 60:6. Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David, Psalm 89:35. Holiness is a name of God hateful to all sinners, and very awful to believers. When the purity, the spotlessness of his holiness is seen, what sad reflections usually does it occasion? But thou art holy: But I am a worm, says the Psalmist, and no man, Psal. 22:3, and 6. When God's holiness was proclaimed before Isaiah, Wo is me, says he, for, I am undone, chap. 6:5. Can there be any encouragement for faith from God's holiness? A great many Christians main fear arises from his holiness. Now I am to show you, that the name of his holiness is a great consideration for strengthening faith. Faithfulness, if I may so call it, is a piece of holiness; faithfulness is a branch of holiness, so that as God cannot do any thing that is evil, so he cannot break his word. Then he swears by his holiness; as if he would say, "Take me for no holy God, if ever I fall short of my word of promise."

2. The second name of God is his wisdom. He makes promises in wisdom; he makes promises about blessings that he means to give, and knows, and hath appointed when and how to perform. We, that are poor creatures, that live in time, think a little time a long while, viz. from the beginning of the promise in Gen. 3:15 unto the end of time, and that is a great while after the end of the Revelation. You think it a long while betwixt God's first promise, and his last performance; but it is nothing with him, in the point of promise. Saith the apostle, One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a

thousand years as one day, 2 Pet. 3:8 and Isa. 54:8. There are a great many ten thousand days in a thousand years; there is a great inequality betwixt these, but both alike to God. We measure time, as it were, by our own duration; but he that inhabiteth eternity does not so. The wise God, I say, hath made all his promises in wisdom. In his eye, betwixt the making of them and the performance of them, there is no kind of distance at all.

3. Lastly, The name of his love is a great encouragement to faith in his faithfulness. Love made the promises, and love will see to the fulfilling of them; therefore the Psalmist says, I will praise thy name, for thy loving-kindness, and for thy truth, Psal. 138:2. The more love there be in making the promise, the more certainty there is of the fulfilment of it. Surely promises of love, free love, rich and eternal love, are made in love, Jer. 31:3 and will be fulfilled.

III. The third thing now that I would speak upon, and that I observed from these words, He is faithful that promises, is, That the believer's faith should answer God's faithfulness. The stedfastness of our believing should answer the faithfulness of God in promising; for this is the apostle's argument, Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, or the confession of our hope, without wavering; for he is faithful that promised. Your hope is fixed upon his promises: hold fast your faith therefore, for he will hold fast his word: He is faithful that promises. Be you stedfast in believing; the promise is a strong promise; it is the promise of a strong God; that faith that should be given to it, should be a strong faith. This is the glory of believing. Abraham gave glory to God. What way? He was strong in faith; and he was fully persuaded that the promise would hold good, for God was able to perform it, Rom. 4:20. From this truth I would speak a little to these two things. 1. Why our faith must answer God's faithfulness. 2. How it can do it.

First, Why the believer's faith must answer God's faithfulness.

1. The first reason is, because faith and God's faithfulness are relatives; they are necessarily related one to another. There were no use for divine faithfulness declared, no promise in time had been made, unless for some that should believe, John 17:20; there were no use in this world for faith, if there were not some appearance of divine faithfulness for faith to act upon. God's faithfulness is revealed on purpose that it may be believed. Faith is given on purpose, that divine faithfulness may be trusted in, and rested on, and applied. They relate one to another as necessarily as the eye and light do, and these are mighty like. If God had created creatures with eyes, and colours, or any other visible things, and no light to see by, it might be said, Wherefore gave he them eyes? The case is just so here: All the breakings forth of divine faithfulness are for faith's sake, that it may work upon it; and all the giving of faith is for faithfulness sake, that it may act upon it.

2. Divine faithfulness is the ground of faith, and the only ground of faith, therefore faith must answer it. All the expectations of good from God, all the warm applications made to God are all bottomed upon, Thus saith the Lord. If God's faithfulness be the ground of faith, surely then faith should answer the ground. If so be a person could believe as firmly, and build as strongly as the ground will bear him, he might do great things.

3. God's faithfulness is the author of Faith; it is not only the ground of faith, that lays us under an obligation to believe when he speaks, but the very author and worker of faith. I do not mean only that God grants and works faith in his faithfulness; but my meaning is more strict, that all faith is wrought in the soul by some discovery of divine faithfulness at first, and in all the after-actings of it. We see that

there are great multitudes that have the word of God alike, they have the same Bible, and the same ministers, and the same sermons; some believe, and some do not believe; some obtain grace to believe, and others not. Whence comes it? Wherefore is it, that ever at any time a poor self-condemned sinner trusts Christ Jesus with his salvation upon the warrant of the gospel-promise? When is it he does so? Always then, and never till then, that he gets a discovery of the faithfulness of God in the contrivance of the gospel. When God stamps his own faithfulness and truth upon the gospel, then the man believes it, and trusts it: This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief, 1 Tim. 1:15. What is the reason there is so great difference amongst believers at one time and another, that the same promise of God at one time is strong under them like a pillar of brass; at another time it is weak, or they think it weak as a broken reed? The true reason is this: At all times they have the word of the promise; but it is not at all times they see the glory and faithfulness of the speaker. When the promise appears in the glory of the truth of the speaker, it is impossible but it must be believed. When God takes his own word in his own hand, and stamps it down as the word of God upon the heart, then that mark is faith. Believing is another sort of business than a great many pretended professors of it know, or take it to be. The faithfulness of God is the cause of believing, 1 Thess. 2:13.

4. Lastly, Faith is God's appointed way for the performance of his promise. He will have glory by his people's believing, before he give them that satisfaction that they expect, and desire in his performance. That rebuke our Lord gave to Martha, John 11:40 is of lasting use in the church of Christ, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God? "Did not I tell thee before, that if thou wouldst but trust in me, and wait quietly to

see the issue, thou shouldst see the glory of God, for all the appearance to the contrary?"

The second thing is, How ought our faith to answer God's faithfulness? Here some things must be premised for caution, that we do not carry the matter farther than the balance of the sanctuary will admit.

1. You must not imagine, that any man's faith can answer God's faithfulness fully: that is impossible. God's faithfulness is an infinite perfection in itself; our faith is a finite grace, given to a poor shallow creature. Our faith can answer his faithfulness no more, than our holiness can answer his holiness, though we are commanded to be holy, as he is holy. We are to take the pattern of our holiness from his holiness; and we are to study conformity to his holiness: but perfect conformity is impossible; and even sinlessness, which is impossible here, would not bring us to perfect conformity to God's holiness. We must not think to answer God's faithfulness with our faith in a perfect equality.

2. Neither doth a believer answer God's faithfulness with faith as he ought. We do not pay all the faith that we owe to the truth of God. It is as impossible for a believer to perform the obedience of faith required in the gospel perfectly, as it is for an unbeliever to perform obedience to the law perfectly. Indeed an unbeliever can obey nothing. Even the obedience of faith, the obeying of the gospel, by believing of it, needs gospel-grace for the forgiveness of the sin of believing, or the sin in believing. There is never a believer that believed at first, but there was sin in that believing: there are none that do rely upon the word of God so firmly, as that noble sure foundation deserveth.

3. There is no believer believes so firmly as he would: he does not answer God's faithfulness by his faith so well as he would. Whoever they be that think they believe as they desire to believe, I dare say they never believed, and never will learn to believe as long as they are of that mind. That poor man spoke as if he understood faith well, Mark 9:24. Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. Believers are called to answer God's faithfulness by their faith, but they must not think that they shall ever attain to so much as they would: they must still go on growing in believing, as well as in any other grace. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, Rom. 1:17. We must go on believing daily.

4. Faith in all believers does not equally answer God's faithfulness. True faith is built upon it, but every one's faith does no; alike equally answer it. There are some strong in faith, and some weak in faith. These are words in the scripture. Abraham is called strong in faith, young believers are called weak in faith, Rom. 14:1. Nay, the same man is not alike strong in faith, or weak in faith, at all times; sometimes the strong may grow weak, and the weak may grow strong, though they have both true faith, and that built upon God's faithfulness.

These things I premise, for the preventing any mistake in the resolving this question, what way our faith is to answer God's faithfulness? Our trust in believing, is to answer God's trustiness in promising.

1st, It is to answer it by a sudden taking of God's word of promise, and resting on it. There is no delay for this. There is no time, no moment of time wherein a man is allowed to toss this question, Is God to be trusted, or no? This is an abomination to conceive that the Lord will ever suffer a man to spend one moment in making this

question, Shall I take God's word, or no? Does he deserve to be trusted? This is wickedness to think of, or to put it to the question. Sudden receiving of God's word is the glory we owe to the faithfulness of it. Our Lord found fault with the disciples, that they were fools, and slow in heart to believe: they would take time to consider, before they would believe. This is sin. The apostle commends the Colossians for their faith, for their hope laid up in heaven. When began it? Since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth, Col. 1:6. "That very day ye heard the word with power, the grace of God came along with it." Our Lord takes notice of this, in John 1:50, 51. So runs the promise, Psal. 18:44.

2dly, By taking the least hint of God's word for our encouragement. This is to give glory by our faith to his faithfulness. The least appearance of his faithful word should be enough to engage our hearts. The great faith our Lord commends so highly, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel, is exemplified by this, Matth. 8:8. Lord, says the centurion, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. As if the good man would say, "Lord, I know that thou dost use to go to some mens houses, and visit the sick, and heal them; but I am a poor man, unworthy of this favour." But is he unwilling to receive Christ's grace: No; he was far from thinking so; the poor man had a mind to Christ's grace; Lord, speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. This faith is commended in the nobleman, John 4:50. Go thy way, saith our Lord, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. You may be sure he went believing all the way, till he came near home, till his servants came and told him, Thy son liveth: then he believed over again, and believed better. There is a great failing in the faith of the people of God in this point, That they offer sometimes, in the vanity and pride of their hearts and unbelief, to tell

God which way he should engage his faithfulness. The least hint of Christ's faithfulness should serve, if you have a mind to glorify the faithfulness of God.

3dly, Faith is to answer God's faithfulness in the full extent of it; that is, in believing in length and breadth, according to the largeness and wideness of the promise. Now, here is a great duty that we are very dark and ignorant about. When a believer believes rightly, he is to believe every thing God says. A great many things we believe, we do not know what they are; we are to believe them notwithstanding. When thou dost believe eternal salvation through Christ Jesus, dost thou know what weight there is in the crown of glory? what entertainment is with them that behold the face of God, and of the Lamb? what is done? what is fed on? and what is enjoyed? what is said within the veil? We know none of these things; but we must believe them notwithstanding. We are to believe the full extent of the promise; that there shall be a performance, though we do not know yet what it shall be. Now we are the sons of God, but it does not yet appear what we shall be. But does that shake their faith? No, says the apostle; we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. And with the apostle's leave, for as great a divine as he was, what seeing him as he is, and what being like him as he is in heaven, the good divine John did not know on earth, and tells us that he did not know; only in these general words he tells us, in Christ's words, That he should be with him, and behold him:and his faith goes forth accordingly.

4thly, Answering God's faithfulness' by our faith, is to lay all our weight upon the promise of God, and upon it only, every thing that concerns us for our souls and eternal salvation, for our outward concerns, for Zion, for the church and people of God; it is to glorify divine faithfulness, to lay all these burthens upon the back of the

promises, not doubting but it shall hear them; laying it upon the promise alone. It is a great matter for a believer to think God's faithfulness security alone, that there needs nothing to prop it and hold it up. We many times sinfully crave props of sense to support our faith; but the matter indeed is to support the promise; therefore we would fain that God should give something to support us; all this, like Naaman, 2 Kings 5 is unbelief. We must lay all our weights and burthens upon the faithfulness of God: so says dying David, 2 Sam. 23:5. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire. As if David, in his last words, had left this his legacy to all believers in after ages, that now when a dying man, "I have," says he, "seen a great deal of sin and wickedness in my family, in my heart and life, and in the land of Israel: in the cases of Uriah, Absalom, Amnon, Tamar, Adonijah; but I now die satisfied with this only, He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, &c. Here is all my salvation, and all my desire."

5thly, The answering God's faithfulness by our faith, is in the avowing our faith to God and men. God avows his promise publicly, Isa. 45:19. It is not enough that we believe, but we must not be ashamed to own it. How frequently do we find the saints owning it to God.? Psal. 57:1, 2, 3. Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up; Selah, God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. Oh, what a blessed song is this! He prays for mercy, because he trusts in it: and he adds this, God shall send forth his mercy and his truth. If I may so speak, these two messengers, mercy and truth, are enough to pluck a man out of the jaws of death and hell itself; if God send them, they come; and if they come, they save one, that is certain. The psalmist

complains most grievously of their reflecting upon his God; it was as a sword in his bones, while they reproached him for trusting in his God. Psal. 11 he is so confident he will reproach them for it, ver. 1. In the Lord put I my trust t how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? "Are ye not ashamed," would David say, "to look upon me as a forlorn person, and tell me to flee to the mountains for help, when I have a refuge in my God?"

Lastly, God's faithfulness should be answered by our faith, in our constant keeping upon this foundation. Faith and patience is required in order to the inheriting of the promise. Performance comes not immediately as the promise is made, nor as soon as it is believed, Acts 7:17, Psal. 31:15. Believing must be drawn forth God's full time, till performance ripen the ground. Why we should believe God's faithfulness, is, because God's faithfulness is a constant thing itself. If the Lord's faithfulness did change, a believer's faith might change lawfully; if there were any shaking in the word of God, it were no sin for a believer to doubt in that word. The aggravation of unbelief is, because we change in our faith, when God is unchangeable in his faithfulness.

APPLICATION. If believers faith should answer God's faithfulness,

1. Then, what can the unbeliever do that has no faith? God's faithfulness is before him, the faithfulness of God is seen in his threatenings and promises: the faithfulness of God is seen in the law, and in the gospel; the unbeliever hath faith for neither. When God threatens the unbeliever with everlasting destruction for his sin in the law, every secure sinner says, God is a liar. Fearlessness of wrath, when a man is under the lash of God's threatening, is a certain proof that he believes not what he speaks. There is no word of threatening shall come short of its fulfilment, no more than a word of promise.

The unbeliever hath no entertainment to give to the promise of the gospel, because he hath not faith; what then must the issue of it be? A man that hath no faith, is under these two things; one at present, and the other a coming, if God prevent it not. First, Every man that is an unbeliever must blaspheme God now, whatever he does when he goes to hell. There is no greater blasphemy against God, than to say he lies. A poor lying man, through the custom and fashion of this world, looks upon it as one of the greatest provocations that can be given in words, to say in his face, he lies. Every poor sinner that hears the law and the gospel, and neither trembles at threatenings, nor rejoices at promises, says every day to God, he lies. He that receives not his testimony, has made God a liar, 1 John 5:10. And he that receives his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true, John 3:33. People that have not faith, have great need to cry for faith, to beg that God would give it. I have nothing to entertain God's faithfulness with, I have no hand to take a word from God, if I have not faith.

2. How justly chargeable are believers themselves, if their faith should not answer God's faithfulness? How guilty are most believers in this matter? An unbelieving believer is a monster, not for the rarity of it, but for the ugliness of it; for there is nothing more common amongst believers, than to be acting unbelief. There are few believers, but do act more unbelief than faith; they unbelieve, if I may so speak, ten times for their believing once. Now, the great aggravation of this their sin is, that not only God's faithfulness is engaged for their faith to act on, but God hath wrought faith in them: therefore the guilt of believers is very great upon this account. Shall a man that is in this case be still acting unbelief? Too frequently they do so, but I will name a few things, and conclude at this time.

1st, How many believers act their unbelief, and are convicted from this point, in their fearing to believe, when they are called to lay hold on the hope set before them, and to lay the stress of their eternal salvation upon the faithful promise of God? They are afraid they shall sin to believe. I pray now is this a mannerly question, Shall I sin in trusting God? Is not this a fearful thing? Is there any danger of sinning in my taking God's word? I am sure, the greatest sin is in refusing it, and there can be none in taking of it. It is nothing but the power and strength of unbelief that makes so much fear in believers. In putting forth the hand of faith, they seem to put forth their hand to God, as he is a consuming fire, Heb. 12:29 and not as he is in his Son reconciling us to himself.

2dly, Not only are they very fearful to believe, but very weak in believing. A great many believers (if I may use such a homely similitude) walk upon the promise at God's call in the way to heaven, even as a child upon weak ice, which they are afraid will crack under them, and leave them in the depth. What can there be but unbelief in the weak trust we have in the promise of God? Art thou sure, that thou hast trusted thy soul upon the word of God? Do not reply, there is no more betwixt thee and eternal ruin, but a bare word of God; for can that word fail? is it possible, that it can miscarry? Why then should we not believe more firmly? There is a silly practice amongst us, I shall not speak my mind about it, I only speak of it now with respect to my present purpose: A great many believers do even venture in their believing upon the word of God, as too many idle people do upon their lotteries, they will try; but they do not know whether they shall get a blank or a benefit. Is this believing and giving glory to the faithfulness of God?

3dly, There is doubting after believing. When a poor believer hath once cast his burden upon the word of God, a cloud comes on, and he

begins to question, whether he did well in trusting God or no; this is the English of it, Did I well to trust God? We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, Luke 24:21 but was it well done, thus to repent of their trust?

4thly, Believers are many times in danger, by using sinful shifts to obtain the thing promised, as in Gen. 16:2. David would not do go, as you may see, 2 Sam. 1.

Lastly, Believers are guilty of great unbelief, in pleading the cause of their unbelief; they not only doubt, but they will argue for their doubting. Now, all objections of unbelief are arguments against faith; they are all great reflections on God's faithfulness, and are only to be answered by God's faithfulness: and we must take this as an universal answer to them all. All the pleas that the carnal unbelieving heart of a Christian can frame for the fencing himself in unbelief, are all to be broken upon the rock of God's unchangeable faithfulness. I will name some of their objections.

1. I do not know, if the promise be to me; if I were sure that the promise were to me, I would believe it better than I do. I answer, is the law to thee? is the command to thee? Does the law of God threaten thee in the first Adam? and is not the gospel to thee also in the second Adam? Is not the promise thine, if it be believed? What is the meaning of the preaching of the gospel? but only this, Preach the gospel to every creature, and tell them, He that believes, shall be saved. Whoever, they be that will venture their salvation upon the man slain at Jerusalem, and expect God's favour, and eternal life for his sake tendered to them, believe it that will, if they take it, it is theirs.

2. A second objection is, I am a vile, filthy, guilty creature, how dare I believe? Satan and unbelief will multiply things here, and make a

hideous appearance to a poor creature; as indeed, if the devil get leave to draw a person's own picture, and to set it before his eyes, or to write the history of his life, this will be a very dreadful thing; some have seen it, and felt the terror of it. But what is this to the faithfulness of God? Is God unfaithful in his promise, because I am a great sinner? No such thing; nay, Let God be true, and every man a liar. Is this an argument, Because I am very sick, therefore Jesus Christ the Physician will take no care of me: I dare not employ him, because I am very sick? Assure yourselves of this, Wherever sin is a man's disease, there Jesus Christ has been already the Physician, and will certainly cure it. I do not say, where sin is a man's delight, wherever sin is a man's truce; but wherever sin is a poor creature's sickness, and when they are groaning towards Christ, the Physician, our Lord Jesus, hath begun to cure them, and will perfect it infallibly.

3. Another objection that unbelieving believers make, is, I am a backsliding creature, I have been mighty unfaithful to God. What then? It may be God will deal with you, as he did with the backsliders of old. See how he calls them, Return, ye backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings: Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God, Jer. 3:22. The name the Lord gives them is, backsliding children; the promise he makes them is, he will heal their backslidings. Both these are entertained by an assent of faith, Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God, that only canst heal us. Sometimes they will plead, God is very angry, and hides himself. What then? He is not unfaithful for all that, the promise stands sure. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour, Isa. 45:15; see also Psal. 119:75. I can assure you, Christians, that that faith is very weak, and that believer will lead but a poor sorry life, that hath not learned to believe in the dark, as well as in the light of his countenance. We must not believe by day-light only, we must learn to believe in the dark. The greatest part

of the way to heaven lies in the dark; if we have not this light of faith, we are but in a bad case. Some may say, they see no appearance of performance; they have tried the promise of God, and it is as unlikely as it was at first; the complete salvation of their soul is far off; the growth of their corruptions appears daily; their consciences sometimes making as dreadful an alarm as in the days of their former darkness. This is a very common and ordinary exercise, and the cure of it is very easy; the remedy is near at hand. We are not to judge of the certainty of the fulfilment of the word of promise, by the appearances that are in providence towards us, but we are to build all upon the faithfulness of the speaker. Though clouds and darkness be round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne, Psal. 97:2. The word stands firmly, whatever darkness there be in his works; wait a while, and but a little while, (Heb. 10:37.), give him time, and give him trust, and none that believe in him, shall ever be ashamed.

SERMON VII

HEBREWS 10:23

—He is faithful that promised.

THE apostle tells us in Rom. 10:17 that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Faith both comes by hearing, and grows by hearing. There is no part of divine truth that is more profitable for the growing in faith, than the doctrine of faith; it is therefore a great pity, and a great miscarriage, that when people hear much of faith, they do not practise much. Every thing that is spoken of faith, is

spoken of it, that ye should be always doing; that as the ear takes in the report of the doctrine of faith, the heart may be exercised in the acting of it. With respect unto this, I have several times spoke already, upon this latter part of this verse, which is the apostle's argument, by which he enforceth the exhortation he gave in the preceding part; and from this argument I have observed three things.

1. That the Christian's God is a promising God. He is called here by the apostle, He that promises; and the apostle knew well God's names, and which it is that is fittest to be used on every occasion.

2. That this promising God is faithful in all his promises, which he hath promised from the beginning of the world to this day. There have been some in all ages, and a great many in some ages, that have trusted God upon his promises; but there hath not been one that could ever justly charge God with failing.

3. The third thing that I spoke to was, That the Christian's faith should answer God's faithfulness; that as our faith is fixed on God's promises, faith should some way be as firm as the promises. A Christian is called faithful, because he is a believer; God is called faithful, because he is a fulfiller; he keeps his word by doing it, believers are faithful in trusting it. Upon this note I shewed, (1.) Why the Christian's faith should answer God's faithfulness. (2.) How it may and ought so to do. Some ways it cannot, some ways it must.

1. I concluded with a double reflection; one upon the sinful miserable state of unbelievers. They have nothing to answer God's faithfulness; they must perish, because they have not faith; they dishonour God highly, because of their unbelief. The true state of the matter is this: Our first father and mother, Adam and Eve, if I may so speak, by their sin leapt over-board, they cast themselves under the wrath and curse of God. In this state all we their posterity are born; the Lord, in

great mercy through Christ Jesus, casts forth the rope of his promise; now, what is an unbeliever, but like a poor drowning man? there is a rope cast out that may save him, the poor man has no hands to catch at it, therefore must perish; and to perish in the view of a promise, is a sad case; but to the believer, the Lord will stretch out his hand to help him.

2. I made a little reflection upon the unbelief of believers. Believers themselves are wofully guilty sometimes in this matter, and their faith is far from answering the faithfulness of God. Compare his faithfulness with their faith, and you would think they do not relate to one another at all. Strong ground, strong foundation, but sorry building upon it! I named four of their common failings, which I shall have occasion to insist more upon on the other head. Sometimes they fear to believe, as if there were any sin in trusting God; when distrust is the greatest sin; they believe fearfully and weakly, as if the ground would not bear them: they believe and doubt, and recal their believing: they plead sometimes the cause of their unbelief in many of their ungodly objections against faith.

That which I would now do in the prosecuting this point, and with respect to all the three, shall be to give you, first, Some doctrinal inferences from this point; then, if the Lord will, we may come to make some practical exhortations unto duty therefrom.

As to these inferences I shall speak to a few of them at this time.

First, Hence we see, what the strict and true nature of faith is. The doctrine is, That believers faith should answer God's faithfulness. We hence infer the strict and true nature of saving faith; which is certainly this: It is a trusting of God's word for his own faithfulness in speaking it, a trusting God's promise for the faithfulness of the speaker; that is strictly the nature of faith. It is a pity, but a pity that

you will have occasion to exercise as long as you live in the world, that faith is so mightily mistaken by so many people. People can talk of faith, can dispute of faith, and in the mean time they are in a cloud, in a maze about the thing itself, and know not what believing is.

1st, Believing is not doing, but trusting. It is opposed to doing and working, Rom. 4:5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. John 6:26–29. The just lives by faith, but the law is not of faith: the law requires doing, Gal. 3:10, 11, 12. Faith is God's commandment, that is certain. The first precept in the decalogue is for faith, Thou shalt have no other gods but me; the positive part of it is, Thou shalt take me by faith to be the Lord thy God. Faith is never put forth as obedience; the strict nature of faith is trusting the speaker. The apostle speaks in Heb. 6:18 of faith under a blessed similitude, as flying for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. Now pray consider what the state of the man that fled for refuge was. There was no other appointment of God left for him, but only the next city of refuge. The man that had shed innocent blood casually, for that was the case under the law, there was nothing else required in order to his safety, but running with speed to the next city of refuge. The man must not go to the temple, or altar, and pray, or offer sacrifice there for his life, he must not go home to his house, and mind his business and affairs; there was only one thing required of him, if he would be safe from the avenger of blood; to the city of refuge he must fly. A man must not go to save his life by doing some great act of valour for his country, against the enemies of it. Flying was the only shift, if I may so speak, that God fixed, and he must make use of. Believing is commanded, but it is always acted in trust.

2dly, Faith is not a notional assent to a divine truth, but it is an assent with the heart to the good-will of God. Pray take heed to this; true faith gives an assent unto all that God says, unto all that God reveals; but if you come to the strict nature of saving faith, it is only a trusting of a promising God, it is only a hearty affiance in God, in, and under, and by virtue of his promises. To believe, is not only to say, God has said this, and therefore it is true; but it is to believe that what God says, he says to me. What good-will hath God declared in the word concerning me? A believing of that is this faith that we are speaking of. Thus, I say, you are to take up the strict nature of faith; the proper nature of it is trusting God's promises, for God's faithfulness that speaks it. And thus we have these advantages by this strict notion of faith, and these confirmations of its being right.

(1.) Thus it is distinguished from all false faith. There is a great deal of faith in this world that is little worth; there is a great deal more in the next world that is less worth. In this world a great many of the ungodly have a kind of faith, such as it is; they know divine truth, they give an assent to it; this assent may be so strong sometimes, that it may work some alteration in their conversations, they may escape the corruptions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, when, in the mean time, they have no faith for all that; they are dogs and swine still, as the apostle calls them, 2 Pet. 2:20, 21, 22. The great difference that is betwixt all the unsound faith of hypocrites, and the true faith of a believer, is to be determined from the proper nature of believing. There is no unbeliever that ever takes God's word for his security, barely as it is God's word; there is never an unbeliever that trusts God's promise, because God makes it; the promise is never seen by such a one as it is in the hand of the faithful promiser; and therefore the man never believes with the heart, and therefore never believes truly. Again, there is a great deal of faith in the other world. The devil hath faith, all the damned in hell

have faith, but a woful faith it is; God save us from ever knowing what it means. The devil knows the mind of God in the word better than any minister this day in the world; he knows God, and he knows Christ wofully: What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? Mark 5:7. The devil knows the gospel; Acts 16:17. These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. What better can be said of the gospel than this, to call it the way of salvation; and to call the servants that preach it, the servants of the most high God, that have it for their employment, to shew men the way of salvation? All the damned in hell are great believers, but woful ones. They know certainly that there is a God, for they feel his displeasure; they know certainly he is a just God, for they lie under the lashes of his justice for ever; they believe firmly the day of judgment, for they tremble in the fears and approaches of it: but there is no sound faith there; why? Because there is no promise there. If there was a promise let down to them that are in hell, faith might be there; if the same God would give the promise and work faith, it might be acted there; but there is no promise there, and therefore there is no faith there, there is no deliverance from that prison, Luke 12:59.

(2.) This is a fit description of the strict nature of faith, because it answers the first expression of faith, that is in all the word of God. I do not say, that Abraham was the first believer; but this you may find, that he is the first man that is spoken of as a believer. It is true, in the next chapter of this epistle, there are some believers named before him; Abel was a believer, Enoch and Noah were believers; but the first faith spoken of in the word expressly is Abraham's; and you know how much use is made of Abraham's faith, and practice, and example, in the New Testament, Gen. 15:4, 5, 6. The word of the Lord came to Abraham, and said to him, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him,

so shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness. What was this believing in the Lord, but the believing with the heart, the truth of what God spoke? And he know, by Paul's help, what a great deal of gospel there was in this word, So shall thy seed be.

(3.) It answers the frequent name that is given to the revelation of God's will, that is, the way of our salvation. It is called the gospel, that is, good tidings; and what are good tidings, unless they be believed? It is called a promise; and what signifies a promise unless trusted? It is called a covenant; and what signifies a covenant, unless subscribed unto, unless a man enter into it? The entering into it is by believing him that promises.

(4.) This is a right notion of faith, because it answers all faith, all sorts of faith whatsoever. It answers the faith of the strongest, and the faith of the weakest; it answers Abraham's faith, and it answers them of little faith. What is the reason of this distinction, that there are some strong in the faith, but because they put a strong trust in God's strong faithfulness? What is the reason some are called weak in the faith, but because they give a weak, wavering, staggering trust to the faithfulness of God? It answers all sorts of faith; faith for justification; faith for sanctification; faith for our comfortable support in our pilgrimage; faith for our Safe landing at heaven. All these consist in our trusting God's promise for his sake who gave the promise: as I shall shew more at large, when I come to lay before you your duty of believing. Only this shall serve for the first inference, that we may hence see, what the strict nature of believing is, it is trusting God upon his promise, it is taking God upon his word.

Secondly, We see hence what the reasonableness of believing is; of strong believing; why? Because it is trusting God's faithfulness. What

can be more reasonable than this? I know that sense and carnal reason are the greatest enemies of true believing; but there is nothing unreasonable in believing; nay, pure spiritual reason is highly for it. Can there be any thing more reasonable than this, to trust one that cannot lie? to take an immutable foundation to build our confidence upon? So the apostle Paul expresses it, when pleading his cause before Agrippa, and Festus, and Bernice, (a great many great folks were there): Acts 26:8. He has this expression to king Agrippa, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? The apostle's scope there, is not to discourse that head of divinity about the resurrection of the dead, that was not his principal design; but here lay the grand matter, that Paul laboured to pinch their consciences by, that our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, that died for our sins, was risen again for our justification; the unbelieving world that saw him before he died, and saw him die, did not see him after he was risen again; now, says Paul, why should it seem a thing incredible, &c.? The words before, and those following, shew they had a promise for it, and that all the people of Israel had hope in the promise that God had made; thereupon, in ver. 27 he drives the matter most closely upon the conscience of that great man, King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest; as if Paul would say, "Thou assentest to this, that the prophets spake the mind of God by inspiration: dost thou believe that I preach nothing else but what the prophets foretold, and what I know is fulfilled; that God hath raised his Son Christ Jesus?" Almost, saith Agrippa, thou persuadest me to be a Christian. The highest reason for the believing any thing is, Thus saith the Lord; the most certain reason that a future thing shall be, is, that the Lord, hath said it shall be. Therefore now we should tread down carnal reason, and yield to this main grand reason, Thus saith the Lord; God hath spoken, and it must be true, because he saith it; and I will trust it, because it is true. Consider an instance of Abraham's faith with

respect of issue from Sarah, Rom. 4:18, 19. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations.— He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Pray observe, Abraham in this case must believe against sense, against reason, and against all experience; though it is likely that, before the flood, women were fruitful, when they were a great deal older than Sarah was; but a little while after the flood, men and womens lives and vigour were contracted to much the same bounds as at this day. Abraham considered not that Sarah was ninety years old: "Nay," would the man say, "if she were ninescore, or nine hundred years old, God hath said it, and I believe it." Now, the grand matter was not barely and simply, that Abraham should be a father of a son, that he should be a father of many nations: but in this great promise of issue from God Christ was comprehended, who was to be the eternal salvation of the whole church of God. He was to spring from Sarah's womb, and Abraham had the promise of it, and against all sense, reason, and experience, he will believe it. Now observe what use the apostle makes of it: It was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification, ver. 23, 24, 25. Pray, observe what I drive at is this, That the apostle brings in every believer on Jesus Christ for salvation, in the same list of enjoying the blessing with great Abraham, that believed so strange a thing about Sarah. And the truth is, that the salvation of a sinner, dead in sins and trespasses, by Christ Jesus, is a greater wonder and miracle, than Sarah's dead womb bringing forth a living child: that, in a manner, was a work of wonder, wrought by the God of nature

according to his word; and this is a work of wonderful grace against the course of sinful nature, for the overthrowing of it.

Thirdly, Hence we see why faith is said to give glory to God: the reason is, because faith answer's God's faithfulness. Great faith is said to give glory to God; one of the special commendations of Abraham's faith is, He was strong in faith, giving glory to God, Rom. 4:20. God magnifies his name of Faithfulness above all his names; the believer magnifies his faithfulness by his believing, therefore he gives glory to God. There are three honourable services that some men get put into their hands, and which are denied to angels. There is preaching of Christ, suffering for Christ, and believing in him: these are three honourable pieces of service, that only poor mortal men are intrusted with. The apostle reckons he had got a great grace, when he had got that of preaching Christ, and that too the unsearchable riches of Christ. When an angel was sent to Cornelius, he was not sent to preach the gospel to him, but to tell him where a gospel-preacher was, Acts 10. Suffering for Christ is a great honour; angels are not capable of it, it does not stand with their blessed state. The apostle seems to call this a higher matter, than the honour of believing, Phil. 1:29. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. Let us pass these, and consider wherein there is an honouring of God by believing; for it is a point very rarely believed. Who is there of believers that think, that by bare believing they give God more glory, than any other way they can do?

1st, Faith gives glory to God, because it brings nothing to him, but poverty, want, and emptiness. All graces bring something to God, but faith brings nothing. Love brings a flaming, burning heart to God; repentance brings a bleeding, broken heart to God; obedience brings a working hand to God; patience brings, as it were, a broad back to

God, let him lay on what he will; poor faith brings just nothing, but the poor man's bare hand and empty dish. The poorer man comes to God, the more glory to God. It is remarkable, that in those cases, wherein we bring something to God, we are very apt to carry away something of the glory that belongs to him: faith brings nothing at all to God; it brings no more than broken bones, and sores to the great Physician. As a condemned prisoner, it brings his chains and fetters to the great Redeemer, but nothing to commend him to God, nor carries away any thing from God.

2dly, Faith glorifies God; for it seeks all in him, and from him; as it brings nothing to him, so it expects every thing from him, whatever its wants be. The language of faith is, "All my wants be upon thee, O Lord;" there is no other way of bearing them; it expects all from him, and from the single warrant of his word.

3dly, Faith always glorifies God, for it ventures its all upon his word. The believer is still in this frame, in the exercise of faith: "Now here I have God's faithful promise; and if it should fail me, I should certainly sink for ever. My soul, body, reputation, privileges of the gospel, all my concerns whatsoever, are all laid upon the faithfulness of God; they are all put in that bottom of the ship: if I miscarry, I am gone for ever." Who is there of believers that believes this, that a bare adventuring of thy eternal salvation upon the Son of God, by virtue of the promise of God, brings more glory to God, than all things else can do?

Lastly, Faith glorifies God, because all other acts of glorifying God are only so as faith is in them, and as they spring from faith. When the apostle is commending the great exploits of believers, Heb. 11 he saith, they all obtained a good report through faith. If their works had been done without faith, there is never a good word to be said of

them, whatever they did. All our duties, obedience, sufferings, the great things that are done for God, only tend to the glory of God, as they are spirited and enlivened by faith. Take away faith from your prayers and God gets no glory, and you no comfort, by your praying, James 1:5, 6, 7. Let faith be separated from the word, and God gets no glory by your hearing. Whatever you do, there is no glorifying God, unless in the doing of the thing you do believe: Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin, Rom. 14:23, Heb. 11:6.

Fourthly, Hence we see how faith is said to have the soul, because it answers God's faithfulness. Such is approaching to the saving God, and its nearest abode with him. It is running to, and abiding with him. It is going in the nearest way to heaven: Heb. 10:39. We are not of them, says the apostle, who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul. The poor jailor asks a question, What shall I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, says Paul. Pray now, what is the meaning of this? "There is a man, Jesus Christ, whose servant I am," would Paul say; "and thou hast persecuted me for his sake, and for preaching of him; now believe on him, venture thy soul on him, take his word for thy salvation, his righteousness for thy cloathing, his Spirit for thy sanctification, and thou shalt certainly be saved as well as I, or any others." I need not insist upon the frequent connections that are in the gospel, betwixt believing and salvation; this only is that which I drive at, to shew you, how faith comes to be saving to the soul; it is an echoing to God's faithfulness. Take the matter in these four plain principles, to begin at the top. 1st, My eternal salvation stands in the enjoyment of God. 2dly, This God comes down to me in Christ Jesus, for otherwise he is not to be known, not to be enjoyed. 3dly, This Christ Jesus comes to me in the promise of the gospel, otherwise he is not to be known, he is not to be received. 4thly, This promise, in the day of God's power, is joined with my faith, and my faith with it.

It came to me, and I received it. See for this, Gal. 3:23, 25. Hence the believer rises up again, and says, God has wrought faith in me: Therefore (1.) The promise is mine. (2.) Christ inseparable from the promise is mine, and then God inseparable from Christ is mine, and I must be saved for ever. So that wherever the believer begins, at the top, at God; or at the bottom, at the dependence of his soul on God, the reason backward or forward holds perpetually: now, there is no parting of any of these; God never revealed himself a faithful God to any, but in Christ; Christ never revealed himself as a Saviour to any, but in the promise; the promise does no good to any, but a believer. It is true, God in his great wisdom makes use of the promise, as the means of faith, as well as the ground of faith. The reason why faith saves the soul, is not because of any mighty thing in faith, for faith is a poor weak thing; but it is fixed to the faithfulness of God, and the faithfulness of God through Christ is in it, and God is in it. You may take faithfulness from God the Father, as soon as take salvation from a believer in Christ Jesus. Hence comes it, I say, that, faith is saving. The rope of salvation is in the promise; the poor believer hath but a trembling hand in catching hold of it; but, if I may so speak, the higher end of the rope is in heaven, at the right hand of God, and it catches hold of the believer; unless it break, saved he must be; break it cannot, and therefore saved he must be. See Phil. 3:12.

Fifthly, I might add, Hence we may see something of the easiness of believing. I do not say, it is an easy thing for a man to believe; this a deceiving flattery of wicked, ungodly men. I intend, if the Lord will, to prove the contrary, that there is great difficulty in the working of faith. All my meaning is, that it is an easy thing to act faith, where God hath wrought it already. In this case, it is but the soul's echo to the faithfulness of God, it is only the soul's saying amen when God promises. I hear the word of him that cannot lie, amen, so be it; that if I may compare this ordinary instance with an extraordinary one,

Luke 1:38. The angel of the Lord that brought the virgin Mary the tidings of the conception of our blessed Saviour, he sent her the news; she staggers at it at first, through unbelief, at last, by the power of God, faith is begotten in her: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word; that, if I may so speak, was the very consent of faith, that the miraculous conception of the Son of God began with. So may it be with us, if the Lord will put that life, and power, and stamp on the promise of the gospel, that here is life, and salvation, and righteousness, and all good, both of grace and glory, tendered to faith through Christ Jesus. Trust him, trust God's word, and it shall be done. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word. Though there be nothing more incredible, though there is nothing that is more impossible, than that such a vile creature as I am should be saved; yet God hath said it, God hath bid me believe it, and believe it I must, or call the speaker a liar. Believing is hard only to the unbeliever: but let the Spirit of faith (as the apostle calls it) be stirring, and a believer cannot forbear to believe. Let the word of God be heard as the word of God, and this is by the preaching it as his word, 1 Thess. 1:5 and the assent of true faith will be given to it, 1 Thess. 2:13. And thus will its fruit be both unknown to the unbeliever, and to the non-feeling believer.

Lastly, Hence we see why so much is spoken of faith in our Saviour, John 3:36. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.

SERMON VIII

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

THE faithfulness of God is one of his great and glorious names. Whenever he makes it appear before the eyes of a poor sinner, when he proclaims this name, then they believe, but never till then. It is a sad thing to consider, that when there is so much of faith spoken of in the word, there should be so little of it in the exercise of Christians. The New Testament name that is given to the godly, is that of believers. A man is not called a believer, because he hath faith, or because he once acted faith; as long as he lives, he should be still believing.

1. We find the gospel is called the word of faith. The apostle speaks of it expressly in distinction from the law, Rom. 10:8. The word of faith which we preach, Gal. 3:2 it is called the hearing of faith; that is, the doctrine of faith. The gospel is called the word of faith, as it is the only ground of faith. All the hope that is raised in the heart of man, as to good in time, or as to eternity, is all founded upon the bare word of God. We can believe nothing but his word; and we believe it, because it is his word. Again, it is called the word of faith, because it is the means of faith, and begets faith. What think you is faith? but only the impression, the stamp, that the word of the gospel, when brought home with power, leaves upon the soul. It is the heart's echo to the voice of salvation by Christ in the gospel; and when the Lord proclaims it, as he can, and always does to the chosen, this echo will still follow. Again, it is the word of faith, because it is the food of faith, that which we are to desire, that we may grow thereby, 1 Peter

2:2. The whole gospel is the word of faith; people get no good by the gospel unless they get faith; they cannot profit by the gospel but by faith, and by the increase of that faith.

2. We find Christ gets a name from faith, Heb. 12:2. He is the author and finisher of our faith. When we think of the many names and offices of our Lord, some of which have a great deal of visible glory in them, how shall we conceive of this, that our Lord Jesus should be denominated the author and finisher of our faith! that Christ should get a name, as it were, in the word, from the begetting and cherishing, and preserving, and perfecting of faith in a poor creature!

3. We find the Holy Ghost called the Spirit of faith, 2 Cor. 4:13. We having the same Spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak. We find farther in the word a work of faith spoken of, a work of God's working, 2 Thess. 1:11. The work of faith with power. We find also a good fight of faith spoken of.

Now, from all these things you may plainly see, that people do not know what pertains to the gospel; they know not Jesus Christ, they know not the promise; they know not the Holy Spirit; they know nothing of a work of God upon their hearts, unless they know something of a work of faith. Alas! many poor creatures are woefully deceived about their souls. Some have had experience of this, and they think it a great experience, that whereas they were ungodly, and carnal, and secure, and walked loosely; strong convictions of sin came upon them, and some reformation from sin followed after; they immediately think they are good Christians, (many such good Christians are in hell), but in the mean time have no sense of this Spirit of faith. What have you found of the Spirit of God as a Spirit of faith, carrying on a work of faith in your souls, and drawing forth

your hearts, that are naturally unbelieving, unto a trusting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ?

We find farther a door of faith spoken of, Acts 14:27.—And how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. See Heb. 4:1, 2, 3, 11. A poor unbeliever is a prisoner under the law, a prisoner under the chain of God's curse, and he can do nothing but stay there; for remove he cannot, until the devil come to drag him out to hell. In this miserable state, the Lord opens a door of faith, that the poor prisoner may get out, and get into the open air, and come to partake of the glorious liberty of the sons of God: Gal. 3:23. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, and shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed; that is, we were prisoners till that faith came, then we had our liberty.

We find likewise the footsteps of faith spoken of. There are no true Christians, but must know something of this:—And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised, Rom. 4:12. He had the blessing of the covenant before he had the seal of it. Now, Abraham's footsteps were strong ones, steady ones, and, if I may so speak, they were wide steps that he took in the way of faith. It is a hard matter for you and me to follow him; ay, but though we cannot walk so fast, nor so strongly as he did, yet we must walk in the footsteps of the same faith. When our faith and his are compared, our steps and his compared, it is a shame to think what a great difference there is betwixt them; but this way we must walk in; a child may follow the footsteps of a strong man.

Lastly, There is an end of faith spoken of: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls, 1 Peter 1:9. The end of faith is that which faith aims at, that which faith attains, and that with which

faith hath no more to do, when it hath got it; for there is no proper believing in heaven; and there is no true believer, but he believes till then. There is also, (1.) The mystery of faith, 1 Tim. 3:9. (2.) The law of faith, Rom. 3:27. (3.) The work of faith, 1 Tim. 1:11. (4.) Household of faith, Gal. 6:10. (5.) Fight of faith, 1 Tim. 6:12.

So much now is said concerning faith in the word, and of its great influence on all things that pertain to this life, and that to come, that sure no true Christian can possibly be unconcerned about this affair.

In speaking to this word, as I have done several times, Faithful is he that promises, I have spoken, 1. To the promising God, as the name of our God. 2. Unto the faithfulness of this promising God. 3. That the faith of believers should answer the faithfulness of God, that as all our faith is built upon his promises, so our faith should be built firm, because the promise is firm. I did propose, in the application of these truths, some doctrinal inferences to be drawn therefrom, then an exhortation unto believing inferred from all.

Of the doctrinal inferences, I named four last day, and entered a little upon the fifth, which I would now speak farther to.

1. Hence we may see the true nature of faith, that it is an answering God's faithfulness. I shewed then, 2. The reasonableness of believing, that though corrupt reason be a great enemy to faith, yet there is nothing more reasonable, that a reasonable creature can do, than trust the infallible God. 3. I shewed you, that hence you may see how faith glorifies God. 4. How it is that it conduces so much to the saving of the soul; it is called therefore frequently by Christians saving faith; we are saved by faith, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; and believe to the saving of the soul.

5. The fifth thing was, to speak a little of the easiness of faith. If so be, that true faith be an answering of God's faithfulness, and trusting of God's word, it seems then to be a very easy act. I told you, that it is not easy to come by it, neither is it easy to act it, but it is easy in the acting. To prevent mistakes about this on either hand, I would give you but these few things:—

1st, Believing is hard and utterly impossible to every unrenewed, ungodly man: No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him, says our Lord, John 6:44. This word did break the necks of a great many of Christ's hearers: and in ver. 65 it is repeated, Therefore said I unto you, says he, when they began to murmur, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. A little now of this. Believing, as hath been said, is but a trusting God's faithfulness in a promise of salvation by Christ; it seems to be marvellous, that this should be impossible to a natural man; naturally men think it is very easy, all the ungodly think they can believe when they will. But how grossly are they mistaken about it! I would therefore shew a little whence it comes that it is impossible for a natural man to believe. That he cannot believe, is frequently spoken of in the scripture, John 5:44. How can ye believe? John 12:39. Therefore they could not believe; the same truth is held forth in both places, they could not believe.

(1.) All natural men are unconcerned about those great things, which trusting in God is concerned about. Trusting in God, that is, true faith, is trusting in him through Christ Jesus, for the great concernment of our eternal salvation, which is the pardoning of our guilty souls, and washing of them from all their defilements, with the subduing of all their corruptions. Now, do you not see plainly, that it is impossible, that a man should trust God for those things, when he has no heart-concern about them? The matters that faith is employed

about, and which trusting in God hath in its eye, are altogether remote from the thought and mind of a natural man; therefore they do but lie against God and themselves, that say they trust God with their eternal salvation upon his word, when their consciences tell them that their eternal salvation was never so weighty with them, as the concerns of this poor frail life; and that they never were in so much earnest in saying, What shall I do to be saved? as they are daily in saying, What shall I eat? and what shall I drink? and where-withal shall I be clothed?

(2.) The natural man is ignorant of God, and trusting in God is impossible to all that do not know him. There is no trusting of an unknown God. Poor Pagans may worship an unknown God, but it is unacceptable worship, Acts 17:23. Formal hypocrites perform several duties of worship to God, though unknown; they may obey a commanding God, though unknown; all these are but sinful practices: but trusting in an unknown God is impossible: They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee, says the Psalmist, Psal. 9:10. The reverse of it is very plain: They that know not thy name, will not put their trust in thee. When Paul gives an account of his faith, I know, says he, whom I have believed, 2 Tim. 1:12.

(3.) All natural men are possessed with that which is inconsistent with believing in God, with believing his word, or the truths contained in it. Hence is that great word of our Lord, John 5:44. How can ye believe, says he, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Pray observe, that there is a greater depth of spirituality in these words of our Lord, than ordinary readers do perceive. It hath but a very bare and harsh sound, for to make it to be this, How can you believe that seek honour and applause from men? The meaning principally of it is this, How can you believe as long as this is in your frame, that the honour

that comes from God to you, and the honour given to God by faith, is not more dear to you than any thing else? A natural man can never give God the honour due to the name of his truth, and he cannot set all his rest and confidence upon that honour and reputation that the free grace of God in the gospel brings to him. How can ye believe, then, says Christ, &c.? Nay, a natural man hath not only unbelief in him, but the nature of the natural man is unbelief. The apostle cautions all of this, Heb. 3:12. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. The apostle speaks of unbelief now, not only as a heart-sin, but as if the heart of the unbeliever were made up of unbelief, as if there were nothing in it but unbelief. In such there is no disposition to trust God upon his word; all the trust of the heart is lodged on creatures, it is lodged upon things of nought. This is the first thing, though I say believing is easy, you must not think that it is easy to a natural man, for to him it is impossible.

2dly, Neither is believing easy to a believer; otherwise what need is there of the fight of faith, as I named but just now? The fight of faith, and the warfare of faith, do not only stand in faith's fighting against all the impediments that are in its way, but in faith's fighting against the unbelief that is lodged in the same heart with it. The believer is not perfectly renewed; there are remnants of the heart of unbelief in him; and from these remnants it comes, that he neither can believe when he would, nor can he at any time believe as he would. I believe, says the good man, Lord, help my unbelief. He Speaks like a man that knew this point well: "I believe, and I have unbelief for all that; I will not deny my faith, because of my unbelief; I will not conceal my unbelief, because of my faith; I will acknowledge the one to thy praise, and the other to my own shame; Lord, help my unbelief," Mark 9:24. The thing then that I mean, when I say faith is easy, is,

that it is easy in the acting; there is no great difficulty in the acting of it, when once received. This I would shew you in two particulars.

1. Faith is sweetly drawn forth. 2. It sweetly acts when it is drawn forth.

(1.) Faith is sweetly drawn forth. The hand that works faith, deals gently with the soul. It is a drawing with loving-kindness, Jer. 31:3; it is a causing of a man to approach to God, Psalm 65:4; it is a drawing with such an arm of love and power, as there is no pain in it, but a great deal of pleasure; there is a heavenly pleasure in feeling, as it were, the hand of God drawing the soul sweetly and kindly to himself; it is a gentle motion. Now, here is the mystery of the wisdom of the grace of God: A natural heart is averse from faith; but when the Lord comes to work faith, he offers no violence unto the nature of the man; the way whereby he overcomes unbelief, is by an overpowering, gracious influence of his Spirit, whereby people are made willing. This day of power makes a man willing, as the promise is, which, blessed be God, hath been often fulfilled, Psal. 110:3. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.

(2.) It is kindly acted too: as the Lord works it kindly, so does the believer act it kindly. What is there in believing, that should not be very kindly and sweetly done? There is no other relief found for the distressed soul, but only in God through Christ Jesus. This relief is found to be a Very amiable and taking one. Is there any pain, think you; is there any trouble; is there any regret seizing upon the spirit of a poor creature, when he gives his consent to a blessed bargain? When the condemned prisoner takes his pardon, what pain is there? is it not an easy thing to accept of pardon? the captive is willing to have his chains loosed, and loosed by him that can take them off sweetly. Sirs, the thing that I drive at is only this, and in it I do appeal

unto all the consciences of them that hear me, that ever knew what believing is, That when God proclaims his name, and shines in his glory in the promise, and draws the heart sweetly towards himself, was there ever any thing you did in all your life more sweetly done than to trust God? It is one of the most cheerful acts that ever the soul put forth.

6. The sixth inference is about the sensibleness of faith. If so be that faith answers God's faithfulness, why, then, surely it seems faith may be a sensible thing; my meaning is, that a man may know it when he does it. I know there are a great many believers who are very doubtful of their faith, and I believe they will be doubtful as long as they live, if they go that way to work that commonly they do. They want a clearer discovery of the causes and grounds of their faith, they want a clearer discovery of the fruits of their faith, and truly both the one and the other are pretty hard to be obtained. May I now offer an advice, that may be shorter than this, and that is, Look to faith itself. The Spirit of God calls faith an evidence, Heb. 11:1; and is it so mystical, so involved, so intricate a thing, that people must go so far about, as it were, to find it out? Pray go to faith itself: It is the evidence of things not seen, says the apostle. Faith brings light to dark things, but dark things will not bring light to it. I know the Spirit of God can shine upon faith, and the grounds of faith, and can make the fruits of faith appear to the comfort of his people; but in the ordinary practice of believers, if they would mind the acting of their faith more, they would come better to understand, whether they have it or not. It is a great word the apostle hath, 1 John 5:10. He that believeth on the Son of God, says he, hath the witness in himself. The words in the original had been better translated, if it had been, He that believes, hath the testimony in himself; for witness sometimes signifies the person, and so people commonly mistake it; but the words are, He that believes, hath the testimony in himself; his faith

receives the testimony of God about the truth of the gospel, so that the man relies upon his faith, apprehends and has it. Now, to bring this matter unto conviction, that faith is a sensible thing, I would only ask you these two things, Do you know what you think? and do you know what you do? Surely, if people can know neither of these, they can pretend to know nothing. But if you do know what you think, and what you do, I must infer this, that you must know when you believe, if you do believe. 1st, What do you think? What think you of God, and of his faithful promise? Do you in your heart account him faithful? and do you account the promises sure in your heart and thought? So faith is described in the words, Sarah judged him faithful who had promised, Heb. 11:11. So that, in a manner, if Sarah had been to examine herself, Whether have I faith in God? the matter was to be determined thus, What dost thou think of God? He hath passed his word to thee, dost thou judge him faithful? David thought him so, 2 Sam. 23:5, Psal. 50:10. Paul thought him so, 2 Tim. 1:12. Cannot a man tell whether he judges God faithful in his great promises of salvation through Christ Jesus? 2dly, Cannot you tell what you do? In all other things people know what they do. A poor child can tell you plainly, as soon as it is able to speak, whom it trusts for its daily bread and raiment. It is careless and thoughtless about the things of this life; and the ground the child can give, is this; My parents take care of me. Shall a child, as soon as come to the use of reason, argue so plainly as this? and shall not a child of God be able to do so too? Cannot you tell where you have lodged your great salvation? where you have lodged your darling? It is marvellous if people cannot do this; but I know and shall speak farther of it. There are a great many Christians dare not deny, that there is in them the direct act of faith, who yet, for the want of other things they would fain have, complain that they have not the comfort of the truth of their faith.

7. Hence we may see the greatnest of the sin of unbelief, so much spoken of in the word. Faith answers God's faithfulness; unbelief will not stir, but reflects on God's faithfulness: He that believeth not God, says the apostle, 1 John 5:10 hath made him a liar; made God a liar! A hard word. If it had been, He that believes not, is afraid that God is a liar, that is bad enough; and, He that believes not, calls God a liar, that is yet worse; but this is a dreadful word. He that believes not, hath made God a liar. It is impossible he can make him so, it is impossible for God to lie; but the poor man does all he can to make him so, and shall be reckoned as if he had done the greatest wrong and hurt to God imaginable. Unbelief is aggravated by two things up and down the world. 1st, That it is the boldest and most provoking affront that a sinful creature can give to God, not to believe his word. To call God weak, is blasphemy; to call him foolish, is blasphemy; to deny him his eternal power and Godhead, all these is blasphemy: but to deny his truth, is something above these. See how it is among poor silly men. There is many a man will think it no great affront to be called poor; another will think it no great affront to be called weak and foolish, a man of small parts to be called shallow; but to call a man that hath any thing of a principle of honesty in him, a liar, this is not well to be endured. A man that hath a great many other infirmities, yet may be one that makes conscience of what he says, Rom. 3:4. Now, shall the pride of man rise so readily against reflections of lying cast upon him by his fellow-creatures, and yet shall he cast this unsufferable affront upon the God of truth? The grand transgression is to disbelieve God; and all that do not believe, do so. 2dly, Unbelief hath this in it, that it is the most certain, the most sure, and dreadful way of ruin to men; it brings destruction upon men with a special vengeance. If ye believe not that I am he, says our Lord, ye shall die in your sins, John 8:24. If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin, John 15:22. See also verse 24.

Now, of this inference, that is so native, concerning the greatness of the sin of unbelief, there are two things mightily to be regarded. (1.) As great as this sin is, and as surely damning as it is, yet it never disturbs the conscience of a natural ungodly man. He may be disturbed in his mind for sin, he may be disturbed in his conscience for his own lying, but is never disturbed in his conscience for calling God a liar; he may be disturbed in his conscience for his disobeying God's law, but never thinks it a sin to disbelieve God's promise; shaking off of God's authority and yoke of obedience, he may have some challenges for, but in despising God's grace and the offers of it in the gospel, he is never disquieted; therefore sometimes you may marvel, whence this comes. A great many people, may be, have a hell-storm raised in their consciences, but wait a little while, and you will find, in many cases, it comes to nothing, they are only sea-sick, it is the effect only of some sharp affliction or some temptation, or some alarm upon conscience: when they come to shore, and the weather grows fair, and the wind down, they are as quiet, and secure, and harder than ever they were. The reason is, because they never were convinced of the sin of unbelief; they never felt any thing in their exercise about this, that they have been great sinners before God; because this grace offered to them in Christ Jesus was not made precious to them. More hopeful a great deal is the state of that person who is bewailing the heart of unbelief, than of those that are bewailing a covetous, worldly, proud, and filthy heart; though these deserve their own bemoanings in their own places. (2.) As great as this sin is, and as much as there is of it in the godly, yet it is a sin that very rarely disquiets even godly mens consciences. This is sad, that Christians are seldom troubled about their unbelief. Our Lord speaks concerning it, John 16:9 that he will send the Comforter to convince the world of sin, because, says he, they believe not on me. Moses may convince men of sin, of murther, of adultery, of swearing falsely, of profaning the holy day of God; Moses may convince them of a great

many transgressions against the law; but the Spirit of God only can convince a believer of the sin of unbelief. Judge you now how rare this is, in all the professions, in all the humblings of believers, when they are alone. I pose your consciences about it; what Christian is there to be found? Not one among a thousand have their hearts broken, their consciences disquieting them, as broken bones within them, because of their unbelief, their jealousies of Christ's love, their doubting of the faithfulness of the promises: nay, of the same promises that they have believed formerly, and have given glory to God by believing, they take back again the glory by unbelieving. The most spiritual attainment of a Christian in the world, the most spiritual, evangelical mourning and repentance that can be acted by a Christian, is a mourning over his unbelief; that the word of the Lord is not more precious to him; that he cannot trust God's word barely without props; that he doubts of it so often, when darkness comes on; that he lets go his hold of this great rock, the faithfulness of God.

7. and lastly, The last inference is, That here we may see the wonderful wisdom of God, in twisting his glory with the eternal concerns of the children of men, and that both in the saving of the elect, and in the perdition of the unhappy remnant; for the elect are sometimes called the remnant, and the reprobates are sometimes also called by the same name. The remnant are blinded, says Paul, Rom. 11. In the same place, within two or three verses, the elect are called the remnant according to the election of grace, and the reprobates are called the rest that were blinded. The Lord, I say, hath herein linked his glory marvellously with the eternal concernments of men. Thus, as to the salvation of the elect, God gives Christ for them, according to the eternal promise of his heart: he gives the purpose to them; he gives them faith, to lay hold on the promise; and he glorifies himself, and saves them in the performance of the

promise: all these things are framed so together, that the glory of God shall be greatly advanced in saving of poor man. There is glory in electing love, there is glory in redeeming grace, there is glory in God's faithfulness in his word, this is glorified by the believing of the perishing sinner; and in and upon this believing, the performance of the promise, the applying of the redemption, the accomplishment of the purpose of his grace, is at last reached. On the other hand, a great many under the gospel perish. Christ was never given for them, but he is offered unto them. The promises were never meant for them, but they are offered to them. No man perishes, because Christ died not for him; no man misses of the performance of the promise, because the promise was not made to him, but he perishes because of his unbelief, because the testimony of God was not looked upon as sufficient ground to venture his soul upon, therefore he perishes. And thus the Lord gets the glory of his justice and faithfulness upon those wretches, that have denied to trust him. The apostle joins both, 2 Thess. 1:8, 9, 10. Our Lord is to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this, when he shall come, says he, to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, (because our testimony among you was believed), in that day. "You that have believed the testimony of God in the gospel," says the apostle, "our Lord will be admired in you, and glorified in that day." So much shall serve for the doctrinal inferences from this truth.

There is only one practical exhortation, but it is a large one, that I would deduce from it, and name it now; that is, Since believers should answer the faithfulness of God, I exhort you in the Lord's name, to come with your faith and answer this faithfulness; believe as he hath promised.

I shall not enter upon the particulars of it now, only conclude in general with these three:—

1. If you would answer the faithfulness of God by your faith, you must believe much, for God hath promised a great deal; our faith, I say, must be a great one, it must be a large one, we must believe a great many things, for God hath promised greatly; the covenant, if I may so speak, is a large charter, and our faith must seal every word in it; we must put the amen of our faith unto every true and faithful saying of God, Rev. 19:9, 21:5 and 22:6.

2. If you would answer the faithfulness of God by your faith, you must believe greatly; not only much, but strongly. The promises are strong in themselves, so should your faith be.

3. You must believe long. If your faith answers God's faithfulness as it ought, you must believe always, as long as promises are promises; and promises are promises still, till they be performed; and therefore faith should be faith still, and acted still, till the performance come. Ye have need of patience, says the apostle, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise, Heb. 10:36. God's promises are for a great while to come, as David's word is concerning the Lord's kindness to him, Thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house, for a great while to come, 2 Sam. 7:9. So that the answering of God's faithfulness by our faith, should bear proportion unto the greatness, largeness, freeness, and length of the promise. We should look to the promise, and say, Here is a great blessing, when is it to be? Here is a promise leads into eternity, I will believe till then, says the believer; till I launch into eternity; for there the grand expectation of the main fulfilments is to be.

SERMON IX

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

YOU have all great need to study your Bibles well. According to their diligence in using of the word of God, is the thriving of mens souls. There are these four things, that should still be minded in our using the Bible:—

1. To look on it all as the word of God. When this is impressed on the soul by faith upon opening the book. All this is the word of God, this is scripture inspired by the Holy Ghost, what a great savour does it leave upon the heart!
2. In using your Bibles, be sure to pick out the promises thereof. This is the main thing in the word, the testimonies of God's good-will to the children of men. People's spirits are discerned by this, what it is in that word they chiefly mind. Some folks read the Bible as they read another history, and the historical part they like very well; some like the wise precepts of the word for the conduct of their lives, of which the scripture is full. But if so be you be Christians indeed, the main thing you will spy out in the word, is, Where does God's good-will appear? What has God said for me? What good word has God passed that I may trust to, and be saved by?

3. When we have picked out the promises, we must then lay them to the heart; they never do good till they meet with the heart. What gracious changes hath God wrought, when he hath laid a warm promise to a cold heart! The fire of heaven kindles immediately. We cannot put life into the promise, that is God's gift; we cannot put life into our own hearts, that is God's gift too; but we should strive to bring the heart and God's promise as near as may be. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, says David, Psal. 119:11. God's people do as it were eat the word, Jer. 15:16.

4. Lastly, In using your Bibles, be sure to pray over the promises. I assure you, wherever faith hath got but a bit of the bread of life in the promise, it will immediately lift itself upwards in desires, and in breathings towards the Lord for performance. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house, therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. David was a great believer, and he argues like one, 2 Sam. 7:27. David needed those blessings that God promised, and in the sense of his need of them, he should, and did pray for them: but when God gives him a promise, he prays then better for performance; and it is more of the nature of faith to pray upon a promise, than to pray for the supply of a want. The desires of supplies of wants are somewhat of the voice of nature, but breathings for the performance of promises are the very breathings of faith itself.

Now, this text that I have spoken from to you so often, is indeed but a short one, but it is in a manner the key of the Bible, Faithful is he that promised. I have spoke at large unto the observations from these words, besides what was taken notice of in the words with respect to their scope; as,

1. That the Christian's God is a promising God; he is made known by promising; and he is never rightly known, but when known as a promising God.

2. That this promising God is faithful in all his promises.

3. That the faith of believers should answer the faithfulness of God; their faith should come up in some measure of correspondency with the faithfulness of the promiser. Of this last I have spoke several times in opening up the doctrine, and began to apply it first in doctrinal inferences.

My work now is to enter upon the exhortation unto this answering of divine faithfulness by your faith, and I would extend it to these three:

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1. Answer divine faithfulness in the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel. This is the beginning of faith, Heb. 3:14.

2. Answer divine faithfulness in all the promises of grace and glory made to believers. This is the course and race of faith, Heb. 12:1, 1 Cor. 9:24, 26.

3. Answer the faithfulness of God in the grand promise of eternal life, to be possessed upon our departure out of this body. This is the beginning, this is the life, and this is the end of believing, 1 Pet. 1:9.

For the first of these, the exhortation is this, (and it is an exhortation to every one of you, whether you be believers or unbelievers), Answer the faithfulness of God in the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel, answer it by faith. This is that which is the scope of all the gospel, this is the design of God in writing to us the gospel. But these are written, saith the apostle, that ye might believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name, John 20:30. This is what our Lord charges his apostles with: Go, saith he, and preach the gospel to every creature; and as the apostle saith, which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, Col. 1:23.: that is, Every man and woman that lives in this world, preach the gospel to them; what gospel? Tell them that there is life and salvation for them in Jesus Christ; if they will believe it, well and good; if not, they shall be damned, Mark 16:15, 16. Upon this now, because it is a matter of great concernment unto people to be well informed about it, to be well roused up unto the practice of it, I would shew,

1. The nature of this promise that is to be believed.
2. The nature of that faith which is to answer the faithfulness of God in the promise.

First, For the nature of the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel, which is the sum and substance of all the right preaching of the gospel, there are three mistakes very usual amongst people about it.

1. This promise is no declaring the eternal purpose of election. Though I know that the promise flows from the purpose, and is a proof that there is an election, yet the promise is no declaring of the particular purpose of election to any particular person. You are not commanded to believe the gospel because you are elected, but you are commanded to believe the gospel that you may know your election, and that of God. No man is cast into hell because not elected, (though all that are not so, shall be sent thither); but men under the gospel are damned, because they are unbelievers, and receive not the testimony of God.

2. Neither is this promise a declaration of the design of the redemption of Christ. A promise of the gospel does not declare nor determine whom Christ died for; it is not the nature of this promise, nor the design of it to do that. Christ hath laid down his life for his sheep; the promise is made to all, though none but his sheep will receive it: Ye believe not, says our Lord, because ye are not of my sheep, John 10:26.

3. Neither is the promise of the gospel, the declaring of the effectual working of the Spirit upon the heart. It is the means that God works by, but it is not that which does declare the work. It is a bad argument for one to say, I know I am elected, and redeemed by Christ, and sanctified and changed by the Holy Ghost, because I have the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel. Indeed, if you can say, I have received the promise by faith, you speak according to the word; then all the former are evident, the saving operation of the Spirit appears, thy interest in Christ's redemption appears; thy name is written in the book of life, and thou mayst read it.

What then is the promise, if it be not a declaring of any of these? The promise of the gospel is a declaration of God's good-will to save men by Christ Jesus, and to this declaration he requires their faith. This good-will of God is tendered to men by promise, for wise ends.

1. By this means God brings in all the elect; by the means of the declaring his good-will in a promise. 1st, The promise is the means of their faith, and therefore is a ground of their faith. When the Lord, in the day of his power, makes use of the word, and sends it home upon the heart, it begets faith; and as soon as faith is begotten, it acts upon the same word of promise from whence it sprang. Now, here is the great wisdom of God. His purposes are all kept hid with himself; he hath determined from eternity, in his own thoughts and decrees, the

eternal state of all men, and his counsel will stand; he hath his people whom he hath a mind to save, lying scattered up and down the world. There is no mark upon them that is visible to any creature; they are in the same mass, of the same lump, in the same state, children of wrath even as others, as ripe for hell as any man. The Lord, to accomplish the purpose of his grace, sends the gospel to them. The promise is no more to them in the dispensation of it, than it is to any body else. I know the promise in God's purpose is otherwise designed for them than others; but this promise is cast abroad as an equal ground of security for all that will lay hold of it; and the poor elect man, when he ventures upon the promise of God, hath nothing before his eye but only the promise: "It is a true and faithful saying, worthy of all acceptation, and therefore worthy of mine; I will give it due attention, and lay hold of it."

2. By this means God stops the mouths of the condemned remnant of gospel-despisers. Pray observe the word that is in the parable, Matth. 22:10, 11. Though parables, you know, are not to be so strictly urged, yet there are some things that are to be applied, and that is what serves the scope of them: When the King came to view his guests, he spied one without a wedding-garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Pray observe; we find in the same feast the invitation is given to all sorts, the invitation is to good and bad; so the word is; and it is made effectual upon the lame, and blind, and halt, and most miserable that could be found by the hedges and highway-side, as Luke hath it, chap. 14:16 where the same parable is. Now, what can be the meaning of this, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? Why, if the poor man had not a wedding-garment, whence should he get it? Should he not have sought it? All that makes us amiable and acceptable before God, is of the gift of his grace on us. That which is the perdition of the ungodly

unbelievers of the gospel, is, because they do not receive the testimony of God; they dare not, they are not able, they are not willing to trust their eternal salvation upon God's bare word. So much now for the nature of this promise. The promise is Christ's, and that which he casts forth in the dispensation of the gospel, and gathers in men thereby. Where the power of the promise reaches the heart, it draws in the chosen; where only a common power reaches carnal men, they are only drawn into a profession, and are cast away as lost, as our Lord speaks of the kingdom of heaven under the similitude of a net to catch fish, Matth. 13:47, 48.

The second thing to be spoke to is, What is that faith that is to answer the faithfulness of God in the promise, the general promise of salvation in the gospel?

1. It is to believe the gospel-report firmly concerning Jesus Christ, and God's great salvation in him and by him; that there is life enough in Christ for men, 1 John 5:11. It is to believe the report concerning Christ, according to the prophet Isaiah, chap. 53:1. Which words our Lord applies unto the gospel, more plainly to himself, John 12:40 where he applies the words of the same Isaiah unto the unbelievers that were in his own days. Some folks may possibly think there is no great difficulty in this matter; but it is because they are ignorant, and have never been tried. How hard a matter is it to believe the mystery of the gospel, that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world; that he came in the appointed time, that he did all his work, and obtained eternal redemption for us; that he bought all his sheep by the price of his blood, and by that blood entered into heaven to make intercession for us? and that because he is there, he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him? as in Heb. 7:25. Pray observe this, when a great many Christians doubtings are thoroughly sifted and convassed, it will be found that

the shaking of their faith, as to their interest in Christ, proceeds much from the weakness of their faith as to the gospel-report concerning him. If people did firmly believe all that is said in the Old and New Testament, concerning that righteousness and salvation wrought out by the Son of God, they would find it an easier matter to apply it to themselves, and say, Surely, (1.) I have no righteousness of my own. (2.) Nor can any creature procure it for me. (3.) Enough is in Christ. (4.) All is offered to me in the gospel. (5.) My soul likes the offer. (6.) I willingly accept him for my only Saviour. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength, Isa. 45:24.

2. It is to believe firmly the truth and the sincerity of God in the offer of this Saviour, and of all his salvation as offered to men. Pray observe, here we shall come to that which does pinch the consciences of many Christians. Ye are required by the Lord, and in his name, by them that preach the gospel, to believe the truth and the sincerity of the offer of Christ and all his salvation to thee in particular. You are to think thus within yourselves, Verily this Saviour, and all his great salvation is offered to me. Pray what conceptions have you of the gospel, if you do not admit this? For you to run away with an imagination, that Christ is offered unto the church, that he is offered unto his people, is wrong. I tell you, in the gospel he is offered to you in particular; and there are none that believe in him, until they take it up so. Says the poor jailor, What shall I do to be saved? Believe thou on the Lord Jesus, says Paul to him, and thou shall be saved. I am preaching Christy and I have got bonds for my reward; but if thou wouldst be saved, remember that I in prison offer this Saviour to thee: Believe thou on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved. Unless people do come this length of faith, firmly to believe, that God fairly and honestly, and with an upright meaning, makes free offer and tender of Christ and of all his salvation to them; they never will be believers, they never will believe the scriptures aright.

3. You are to believe that there is no impediment nor hinderance, neither on God's part nor thine, to hinder thee from partaking of Christ, if thou be willing. This is a part of that faith that answers the faithfulness of God in the promise of the gospel, and which a poor creature should believe firmly; that there is no impediment on God's part, nor on my part to hinder my partaking of Christ, according to God's offer, if I accept of him. The impediment on our part is sin, the impediments on God's part are the law and justice. The Lord hath declared these shall not stand. The law and justice stands in no man's way to hinder him from partaking of Christ, if he will accept thereof. Neither shall sin hinder him, for the offer is made to all men as sinners, whatsoever they have been, and whatsoever they are; but none will accept it but enlightened sinners.

4. You are required to venture your salvation on Jesus Christ, according to the warrant of this offer, and according to the truth of this promise. As you believe the doctrine of Christ, and believe the offer of God, and the sincerity, and freedom, and largeness of the offer, you are to accept thereof and to venture your all upon it. This is believing. God has given his promise of life in Christ Jesus, as the foundation of all our hope of salvation; we should answer his faithfulness by building all our hopes upon that bottom. Lay hold therefore on this cord of salvation, and ye cannot miscarry. No man can receive Christ out of a promise, no man can receive a promise of salvation out of Christ; no man can do both, no man can do any one of them without faith; for believing is receiving; and none who believe on him can perish, but shall have eternal life, John 3:14–20.

5. Lastly, You are to believe firmly, that if you be willing, the Lord is willing, and you shall be welcome; nay, you are now welcome at this present on believing. I say you are to believe firmly, that when your hearts are drawn forth to accept of him, the Lord will accept of you,

and to be confident of it too. Now, I shall offer for the clearing of this, as far as some ordinary transactions amongst men may help, some instances which the Spirit of God makes use of in the word to illustrate this affair, this first believing the promise of Jesus Christ, or a poor sinner's first believing. I know all similitudes that are used in the word, or can be contrived by us, are but like parables, they do not quadrate fully; but I shall use them no farther, than as shall serve the scope and drift of this doctrine.

The first is a common transaction of mankind, that of marriage. You all know how this matter is carried on. The transaction with God in Christ Jesus for our eternal salvation, is frequently expressed by this similitude: I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies,—and thou shalt know the Lord, Hosea 2:19, 20. I have espoused you, says the apostle, to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ, 2 Cor. 11:2. The expressions are manifold up and down the word, both in the Old and New Testament, about this similitude. Now, to bring it to my purpose, you know when a marriage is made up, especially of them that are vastly unequal, as it is here, the man declares his love, courts the party, affirms, that if she will give her consent to be his, he is heartily willing to be hers. The promise upon the man's side makes no marriage; but the promise duly declared by the man, and duly accepted by the woman, makes one. The promise of the gospel comes this way to you, sinners; it is the faithful promise of God in Christ Jesus; that if you will accept of him through Christ for your God and portion, he will be yours; give but your consent and the match is made. But if the party that is courted say or think, (1.) That either the bargain is not good; or, (2.) That the man that promises is not true; or, (3.) If her affections are set on another; or, (4.) If she be married to another, Rom. 7:6., or, (5.) If she hate him, Prov. 8:36.: in these

cases she will with-hold her consent. In like manner assure yourselves, that all gospel-hearers who do not give their hearty consent to be the Lord's, will be chargeable with some of these; for either they think, that the bargain is not good, or that he that promises is not true, or their affections are set on other objects, or they hate the ways of the Lord.

2dly, There is a transaction spoken of in the word under the notion of adoption. It is now out of use in the world, but it was customary of old, when a man did adopt another's child, and brought in that child to possess the inheritance, to bear his name, and to be his heir. There were usual formalities, as good reason there should be, where such matters are; the consent of the child was required; Are you willing to be such a man's? to be under his conduct? to be his heir? to be possessed of his estate? The very declaring of the consent is that which makes up the relation.

The third instance shall be that of the King's pardon given to a company of rebels. So the gospel is God's act of grace unto a company of sinners: it is proclaimed as publicly as may be; and the more sinners that hear it, the better, if they would believe. Now, suppose there be such a thing as proclamation of free pardon to a company of rebels, it is unavoidable, that their not accepting of it must be, either, 1. Because they think their cause is just, and themselves not to be rebels; or, 2. That they have strength enough to fight it out; and if they come in, they shall be hanged; if so, they will rather die in their arms, they will stand upon their sword, as the word of the prophet is, rather than accept of it. But if they have any hopes of pardon upon their submission, and believe the person who promises pardon on such terms, will stand to his word; they will accept of it, and embrace it. The case is just so here: Proclamation of God's free grace and pardon through Christ Jesus, is tendered to the

children of men; it is necessarily required to the accepting it, that you have a trust in the good-will of the proclaimer, as well as confidence, that the mercy is great that is tendered.

We shall consider this contract, 4thly, as in the case of surety and debtor, for it is so represented to us in the word. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great Surety; we are great debtors, not able to pay; Christ offers to pay our debts; there is no more required, when the law and justice condemn us to hell prison, but, Lord, take bail of thy own Son for me. But if men will pay part of the debt, and work out the rest, they despise the gospel; as too many do.

There is a fifth similitude common amongst us, and that is of buyer and seller, all managed by faith. In buying and selling, you know how frequently this is used amongst men. (1.) We will suppose we know this, that the man that sells, is willing to part with his goods at the price named, otherwise he is a deceitful man that offers things to sell, and will not part with them. (2.) We all know this, that if I come up to the price demanded, and pay it down, the goods are mine. Bring this matter to our purpose: The great goods are Christ and salvation, the price is nothing, the poor sinner is the buyer; now, this little price; this no price, this no money, is so great a matter, that proud poor man is very unwilling to lay it down. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, buy wine and milk without money, and without price, Isa. 55:1. I counsel thee to buy of me, &c. Rev. 3:18. Then if they be buyers, they had something to buy with; no, they had nothing; for our Lord tells them in the verse just before, that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Now, what can such folks have to buy with? Gospel-buying is nothing else but honest begging. But notwithstanding the gospel be so freely offered, many say to God, as Abraham said to the king of Sodom, I

will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abraham rich, Gen. 14:23.

Begging is a sixth similitude by which this matter is expressed; begging and receiving. God offers, we beg; God gives, we rake; and all begging of God is in faith. We have some kind of faith, that God hath these good things to give, and is willing to give, else wherefore do we ask them? When he gives them, we receive them. Have you received Christ Jesus the Lord? As ye have received him, so walk ye in him, says the apostle, Col. 2:6. From all these now you see, that the transactions amongst men, in all sorts of affairs almost, do discover the relation that is entered into, and that covenants are made amongst men by mutual trust; that we trust him that promises, and accept the bargain because we do so: So must there be here. Only there are two great differences in this great bargain of the gospel, which are beyond all that we can gather out of any similitude. (1.) That the consenting trust of the receiver, is the work of the offerer; this trust, this faith, this receiving that we have spoken of, is God's work. He that proposes a good bargain to another, hath no power over him to persuade him, infallibly to give his consent; but the Lord hath this power. (2.) The nature of God's proffer, and his promise, are the means by which he works the principle of acceptance. When the sinner is rebellious, (as all men by nature are, till grace tame them), the Lord can deliver the promise of salvation by Christ Jesus in that beauty and glory, and with that power and strength, that no man can resist it: Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, Psal. 110:3. If the Lord put forth this power, this willingness, this trust, that I am calling for, will infallibly be produced.

So much now for the explaining of these things, what the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel is, that we should glorify God's

faithfulness in, and what that faith is that we should meet this promise with.

APPLICATION. 1. Hence you may see the marvellous way of saving us by Christ Jesus. What wonderful grace and wisdom shines here! All this salvation was prepared in God's counsel before the foundation of the world was laid, we had nothing to do with it; all this salvation was wrought out in God's time, by the life, and death, and sufferings of our Lord Jesus; that which he had no hand in, and in which all our salvation stands; for all that, all this grace and mercy, and salvation comes streaming unto us in a bare promise of God; the Lord proclaims it; this is the call of the gospel, He that dares trust Christ with his soul, upon the warrant of the gospel, shall be saved for ever. The Lord tries people this way. We have no more to do but take pen in hand, and say, Amen, O Lord; it is a good bargain, and a true word, and I will trust my soul on it. This is believing.

2. See, Sirs, what you have been doing under the gospel all your days. I know that this assembly, as most weekly assemblies are, is made up of a sort of people that spend a great part of their time in hearing. For God's sake tell me, what you have been doing all this while. Have you put the main matter of your salvation out of the devil's reach? Have you made conscience of this, of giving glory to God's faithfulness in the grand promise of salvation by Christ? Have you learned to know Christ? Have you learned to talk of him? Have you learned to understand the gospel? to talk, to reason, to discourse of it? But is this all? Have you never been exercised about this, about putting your own seal to the gospel? He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true. God will be true, whether we set our seal to it or no; but God's truth will not be to our interest and advantage, unless we set to our seal. Take heed, there

are few folks, whose conscience falls under conviction of duty in this matter; that they are bound before God to believe on Christ Jesus for eternal life. People will not believe, that they should believe; and can there be any hope that ever they will believe, who are of this mind? How hard is it to persuade people that they should believe; that upon the preaching of the word, and the proclamation of God's salvation by Christ Jesus, they must venture upon it! Say some, "I know not whether the promise be to me." Is it not to you as much as ever it was to any? Is it not to you as much as ever it hath been to any sinner, the hour before he was converted? The promise will never be more to you, till it be believed, than it is now. Repent, says the apostle to the murderers of Christ, for the promise is unto you, Acts 2:38, 39. Ye killed the promiser just now, yet for all that you shall be saved, if you repent; one of the strangest repentance that ever was required in this world! The very exacting repentance from them was expressly exacting of faith; for it was impossible for any man to repent of killing Christ, but he that believed he was the Son of God; therefore, says the apostle, the promise is unto you, and to your children. Say you, "Natural men are without the promise, and strangers from the covenants of promise," Eph. 2:12. And what then? If they be, what will you infer from that? I am a poor natural creature, a stranger from that covenant of promise. But I pray, how shall this strangeness be removed? Just as if a poor man, standing without like to starve with hunger and cold, should say, Alas! I shall die in this place, without the house. Why, the door is open, in God's name enter. We enter by faith; the promise is God's door cast open, that poor men may enter in. Pray now consider that place, which I will speak a little to, as well as from the preceding and following words: Heb. 4:1. Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. The thing that the apostle deduceth his exhortation from, is a most awful instance; the instance of the people of Israel in the wilderness. Take notice of the passage,

and of the Spirit of God's using it. God had said to Moses, that, at the appointed time, he would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. He appeared with them, and for them, in ten great wonders and miracles, that they might know his calling to be of God, and his message from God. The people believe at last; they believe that God had a good mind towards them, and would bring them into the land of Canaan, according to his promise; but when they are a little way got through the Red-sea, difficulties meet them, unbelief arises, and they hardened their hearts, and tempted God; from whence we may observe, How long, says the Lord, refuse ye to keep my commandments, and my laws? That which they were bound to believe, was this, That God meant well and honestly with them in the promise of bringing them to the land of Canaan; and because they did not believe it, God sware, that not one of them from twenty years old should enter into it. Upon this instance the apostle makes his exhortation: Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should come short of it. Alas! the rest we are called to, is a far greater rest than the rest of Canaan, the promise is a promise more sure. Ay, but says the apostle, Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it, lest we should fall after the same example of unbelief, as he has it in ver. 11. The case then, as to us, is this, The Lord hath proclaimed to us in the gospel, his good-will in high and great promises, to save us by Jesus Christ. He proclaims it thus, that whosoever will trust him, and take his promise, shall certainly come to heaven. There are some of the children of men, whom God hath a mind to bring to heaven, and a great many others have the promise in their hand, as well as they, but have not faith in their hearts; they let the promise slip, and the promise lets them slip; and, if I may so speak, to hell they fall; but there is no fault in the promise, it is because they do not build upon it.

Some may say, "I am not qualified for the promise, I am not so good as I should be." Answer, Are you qualified for hell or no? No man shall be in heaven but he that sees himself fully qualified for hell, as a faggot that is bound up for eternal burnings, unless mercy pluck the brand out of the fire. Instead of these objections, I will tell you better,

1. What think you? Is Christ a fit Saviour for you? Christ is exactly shapen, as fit for a sinner as possibly he can be. God, in making and framing his Son for a Saviour, consulted to make him as fit to be a Saviour for sinners, as divine wisdom could make him,
2. Ask this question, whether there be no promise in the new covenant that looks towards you? Are there no streams in this great well of salvation? Yes, surely, the covenant streams out towards thee. Pray now can you find nothing in the promise of the new covenant that suits you exactly? I will pour clean water upon you: who needs this more than the filthy? From all their iniquities will I cleanse them. I will take away the heart of stone, &c. If you have a heart of stone, your cure is in the covenant. My meaning is, that you, feeling the heart of stone, may plead this promise. I know no body that hath a hard heart can plead this promise; they that have a truly hard heart, think nothing ails them.
3. The third question you should ask yourselves is this, Whether there is any trust in your heart working towards God? Shall all the promises of the gospel be proclaimed to men every day, and no thoughts of trusting in him arise? That he is a faithful speaker, is plain; therefore his message should be received. The mystery of saving particular persons by the application of divine grace, is greater than any can fathom, with respect to themselves, but more or less they can search it with respect to others. All the faith that ever was wrought in the hearts of believers, to make unbelievers believers, and make believers better believers, was evermore wrought by the appearance of divine faithfulness in the promise. The better you know the promise, the better believers you will be; therefore make conscience of this. Think that your eternal state depends upon

this, how the gospel hath been received by faith. Secure sinners find no difficulty in believing, but poor awakened sinners find it the greatest difficulty in the world. A natural man finds no difficulty in believing, because he is not concerned about salvation; a poor awakened sinner finds it a hard matter to believe, because he is deeply concerned about salvation. Nothing can save us but only the bare promise. This promise can save no man till it hath laid hold on him, and till it hath put forth its power upon him. It usually appears but a weak and slender thing for a man to trust his all upon. How slightly do unbelievers think of the promise of God? There is not an ungodly man in the world, but he reckons a rich man's promise to provide for him in this world, is a great deal better than all the promises, in the Bible. But this is a sign the poor creature hath no true faith in a faithful God, whatever false trust he may have in man, who is not only a liar, Rom. 3:4 but a lie, Psalm 62:9.

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SERMON X

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

LITTLE do many people know, that daily hear the gospel, what the gospel is, and what hearing of it should be. The gospel is a divine proclamation of God's good-will towards perishing sinners, delivered to us in many words in the scriptures. The sum of it is in this offer, That whosoever they be, and whatever they have been, that are content to take Christ for their guide, and his fulness and grace for their Stock, and God's faithful promise for their security, as sure as God lives they shall be saved for ever. This is the gospel which is preached in many forms of words, but the substance is the same. How many are they that do not know what they are doing when they hear? It is a proclamation that is either received to God's highest praise by faith, or is rejected to his greatest dishonour, and to mens most certain ruin. It is the Lord's great wisdom that the gospel should be preached, and that it should be preached by men, by sinful men that are believers themselves; and they should recommend the same way of salvation to the faith of others, that they have taken to themselves.

Upon these words you know that I have spoken several times concerning the promising God, his faithfulness in his promises, and the duty of his people to answer his faithfulness by their faith. The last day I proposed the application of this whole matter in three exhortations, and spake unto the first last day; I shall now add a little more, and proceed.

1. The first exhortation was to this duty, That you should all answer the faithfulness of God in the great promise of salvation by Jesus Christ in the gospel; for in a manner this is the promise that faith first meets with, and first fixes on; faith is begotten by it, and faith receives the new life in it, and by it.

2. The second exhortation is, That believers must answer the faithfulness of this promising God, in the expecting of all good by the way.

3. That believers should answer the faithfulness of God, in a firm expectation of the inheritance at last.

Of the first of these I spoke some time last day, and shewed you, (1.) What the nature of this promise of salvation is, that our faith first should take hold of. (2.) Wherein the answering of faith to the faithfulness of God does consist. 1st, In believing the truth of the gospel-record and report, that there is life in Christ for men. 2dly, It is a believing of the truth and sincerity of God in the offer of it. 3dly, A believing that there is now no impediment on God's part, or on ours, that shall hinder the partaking of the blessing promised, if we will be willing to trust. The last is, by venturing our eternal salvation upon it; that is believing, taking up, taking in the truth of the gospel-promise of salvation by Christ, that the heart is resolved here to settle, and here to adventure its all. Lord, to whom shall we go? says Peter; thou hast the words of eternal life: we will lodge our eternal life on thee, and upon thy word; no where else can we find them, and they are sufficiently with thee for our trust; for we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God, John 6:69. The only thing I would do, before I leave this first exhortation, shall be a little more fully to bring this matter near to your conscience, searching and trying of you, whether you have given this faithfulness

of God a meeting; the question is a question of the greatest importance. All things else, that you may be concerned about, and there are a great many other things that people may lawfully be concerned about under the gospel; all things else, I say, are either trifles in themselves in regard to this, or very unreasonably started, till this grand question be determined, Have I entertained God's offer and promise of eternal life by Christ Jesus with true faith or no? The importance is obvious, for our eternal salvation stands upon it. The question is not only important, but it seems easily resolved, it seems to be a great deal harder one way to conceive how a believer should be ignorant of his believing, than how it should be that he should know it: though I do acknowledge that many believers are ignorant that they are believers. The apostle's word puts it out of question, 1 John 5:13. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God; that is, that ye may believe better, that ye may know ye believed, and that ye may know what ye have in and by believing. The apostle seems to speak of it as a matter of wonder that people should not know it. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? Only now a few things concerning this matter, that will make it on a little inquiry appear at least to be easily resolved.

1. The greatness of the matter intrusted in this believing. The more considerable the matter of trust is, the better people usually know where they trust it, and when they trust it. If a man trust his wife and children, his estate, his house, and all his business, he knows very well when he trusts that which is so dear to him; but, alas! a great many never knew they had souls, the preciousness of their immortal souls was never felt by them; these folks can never trust, or know whom they trust.

2. The party trusted is one, one only. When our trust is scattered, as it were, people may forget where one part of it is lodged, and where another part; but where it is all unitedly centered in one hand, why should people not know where it is? I know, says the apostle, whom I have believed, 2 Tim. 1:12. O how blessedly these two words answer one another, Faithful is he that promised, and I know, &c. There is God's name, and there is the faith of the Christian concerning this God: It is he whom I have trusted, he that promises, is he whom I have believed; whereas a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, James 1:8.

3. The warrant of this trust is single; it is upheld by the word of promise, and that alone, that separate from all things else. All our hopes are founded barely upon the word of God; and the more we strive (as you have heard already) to add supports to the word, for the imaginary strengthening of our faith, the more we weaken our faith, and the more we dishonour the word. If God's word of promise cannot bear thee up, though all the shoulders of all the angels in heaven should prop thee up, thou wouldst sink under them.

4. The influence and power that is needful for the drawing forth this trust, makes it remarkable also. When God causes us to hope, as David speaks, Psalm 119:49 this makes the matter yet more remarkable. If faith and trust in God were a plant that could grow up in our hearts daily, it might spring up unobserved, as a great many other things do. There are a great many seeds of knowledge and understanding, that do naturally grow up in children, as they grow in years, from the stock of natural parts that God gave them in their first frame; but faith is none of these things. This trusting is never without a causing, a causing to approach to him; it is never without a drawing. Therefore believers are more sensible of the power that works faith, than of that faith working in themselves, they are more

sensible of the pains God hath been at to draw forth faith, than of the living acts of faith in themselves.

5. The fight of faith is to be taken notice of; as in Gen. 25:22, 23.

6. Lastly, The grand expectation of faith is of that nature, that we cannot tell how it can be acted, though it may be known after it hath been acted. What do we take Christ's word for, and set our seal to it, but for everlasting salvation, for a glory to be revealed at the appearing of Jesus Christ, beyond what our ear hath heard, or tongue can tell, or heart can conceive? And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee, Psalm 39:7. We are not of them who draw back into perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul, Heb. 10:39. We are looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life, Jude, ver. 21. Now, may not one know these things, think ye? Nay, there is a special weakness in faith, a special cunning of our adversary the devil, that makes this believing not more frequently known by believers, that we do not know that we trust, when we trust. The matter is so considerable, the acts so formally and deliberately put forth, that a man may believe, and yet not be sensible of it, but by the fruits and effects of believing, which are the ordinary ways by which we come to know it. Therefore, now, unto such of you as can with some confidence avow it before God, that the gospel-promise of salvation by Christ Jesus hath been so warm upon your hearts, that you have built your everlasting hopes upon it, only three words, and I proceed.

1st, Bless the Lord, the great promiser, for the work of faith, and that on his promises. Praise is due upon both accounts. His grace made the promises, and his grace works upon the heart, which is always needful to embrace the promise; and the heart that partakes of the blessing, should entertain a due sense of its great debt to God, and

pay it in praise: that is all the payment we can give, though praising is rather owning a debt than paying it.

2dly, You that have built your salvation and eternal hopes upon the promise of the gospel, rest yourselves on him. Whatever your state and condition in the world be, you are blessed by God, and should own it: Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance, Luke 1:45. How many blessednesses are ascribed unto believing and trusting in God? Blessed are all they that put their trust in him, Psalm 2:12. Here now is a fault that is very frequent with the godly; they are ready to be sensible of mercy, and to bless God for mercy; they are sensible of promises, they bless God for making of them; and when God makes a performance of a promise, they bless him for that too. This is the thing I find fault with, that few Christians are heartily thankful to God for trusting, for believing. A poor child of God can look upon the promise, and say, Here is a full promise, but no performance, no appearance in the world for performance; yet God be thanked, I can trust it, and believe his faithful word, and wait till his time comes.

Lastly, You that have built your salvation and eternal hopes upon the promise of the gospel, never recal that trust, but re-act it every day. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, and believers should go on believing the promise of salvation that we believed at first believing. We are to believe still more and more, growing in faith; for faith is a grace to be grown in as well as knowledge, and repentance, and holiness. How many believers are there that are sensible of the one, and insensible of the other? They are easily convinced that they can never be holy enough, but they are not easily convinced, that they cannot believe strongly enough, that there is something still lacking in their faith, that they should labour to build up and to advance in more and more. If I may so speak, faith

is something like a believer, believing is like a believer, a believer is never perfect till he is dead, and faith is never perfect till it is done. I mean, there is always some failing in our believing till believing is ended, and seeing comes in its room: As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving, Col. 2:6, 7. Wherein observe the variety of expressions concerning faith. 1. There is Receiving. 2. Walking. 3. Rooting. 4. Building. 5. Stablishing. 6. Abounding. To which is added, 7. Thanksgiving.

This leads me to the second exhortation, and that is, that we should answer the faithfulness of God by believing, that all promised good things shall be given unto you by the way. This is a needful answering the faithfulness of God, to believe all good by the way, and to believe nothing but good. This is believing, to expect all good by the way from God, and nothing but good. So his promise runs; and Oh! That our faith could fasten upon it, and kindle with that gracious promise a flame of love. If fire from heaven would fill the altar and kindle the sacrifice, to wit, our faith, what a blessed meeting would it be? And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me, Jer. 32:40. Pray observe, we are not only to expect all good from God, but are to expect from God that all good shall be with us; we are not only to believe he will do us always good, but we are to believe, we shall believe, we are to believe our faith shall never fail, for that is a part of the promise: I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. God's faithfulness is equally engaged in keeping his people from departing from him, as it is engaged in his not departing from them. He that says, I will not turn away from them to do them good, has also said, they shall not depart from me. Now, what

follows, ver. 41. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land (that is a part of the Old Testament type from the body of the new covenant), assuredly, with my whole heart, and with my whole soul. Were ever such words spoken by God, with my whole heart, and with my wholesoul? Now, who can understand what is in this? God's whole heart, God's whole soul is in this promising; and should not the believer's whole heart and whole soul be in the believing of it? Why, this is but reasonable, that we should give God a meeting. "This way has he promised to do me good, with his whole heart and his whole soul, and shall not I trust him with my whole heart and with my whole soul?" Psal. 119:58, Prov. 3:6 this is soon said, but is not so soon done.

I shall therefore upon this exhortation speak a little to these two particulars:—

1. The grounds of this faith that I am calling for.
2. The cases wherein this is especially to be acted.

First, As to the grounds of this faith that I am calling for, the answering God's faithfulness in the promise, in expecting good from him; they are two.

1st, From the state of the believer. 2dly, From the nature, and order, and condition of the covenant.

1st, From the state of the believer, what sort of a man is a believer? He is one that is brought within the chariot paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem, Cant 3:10. Every one that is brought to heaven, is carried in that chariot, love all over, bottom and top, and all the sides of it; every believer is a prisoner of love, he is guarded by love, till he come to heaven. Every believer is an heir of promise; the

promises are his, he may count them in his estate; all the charter we have, is the promise. God is our father, Christ is our redeemer, the Holy Ghost is our sanctifier, heaven is our inheritance, promises are our charter: Such a man as this, that is an heir of promise, surely he should expect the fulfilling of the promises, the estate his father has given him, and may expect to be dealt with accordingly.

2dly, The nature of the covenant calls for the answering of our faith unto God's faithfulness, as to all good by the way.

1. All good, and nothing but good is in the covenant; all blessings are in it; and every thing that is in it, is a blessing, because it is in it. If the rod be in the covenant, as it is, it is good, because it is there; and it will be found to be good when we meet it. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me, thou hast kept thy promise to me, Psalm 119:75 and ver. 65. Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.

2. There is this in the covenant, that trust is God's appointed way for the getting the performance. The Lord hath given many great promises to us in the covenant, and he expects to be trusted when he promises, if we would have the accomplishment of what we want. Besides all the great promises of the new covenant, observe those mentioned in Ezek. 36:25–37. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you, &c. After all which is added, Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. It was for Israel's sake that the promise was made, yet he will have Israel's faith and prayers called upon and brought forth, in order to the accomplishment of them. As the brazen serpent healed those that beheld it, Numb. 21:9 and as Jordan healed Naaman, after he had dipped himself seven times, 2 Kings 5:14 or as

Elisha's staff would not raise up the dead son, 2 Kings 4:31. So, unless we address ourselves to God by prayer for the performance of his promises, which cannot be done without trusting in him, we cannot expect to receive any real advantages by the promises: But if we do make our supplications unto him, we shall undoubtedly partake of the promised rewards.

3. There is this in the covenant, that the promiser and fulfiller is the same. God does not intrust the fulfilling of his promises to any body else; we are not to take God's promise as a bill, and call upon another man to pay it: no, we are to bring them all to himself, he is the fulfiller. What a blessed saying is that of good Hezekiah, Isa. 38:15. What shall I say? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it? I got the word from him, and I got the deed from him; the words were the words of his mouth, and the deeds were the work of his hands: He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it. Here is a remarkable emphasis, a spiritual eyeing that this godly man had of the eminent hand of God in fulfilling his gracious word to him.

Lastly, The great Mediator of this covenant obliges us to faith mightily. I defy a believer to take a look on Christ Jesus by faith, but in and by that look he will find ground for better believing. Look on him which way you will, so it will be found. I will name a few things concerning this, how our faith should be strengthened in the expecting of all good things, according to God's covenant, because of Christ's interests in it.

[1.] The promises are in the hand of Jesus Christ: this covenant is established in the hand of a Mediator, he gets the promises. You think this strange; the promise of the forgiveness of your sins, of the sanctifying of your nature, of the bringing you safe to the kingdom of

glory, are first Christ's promises; they are made to him for us, and he is first intrusted with them; but the covenant is confirmed before of God in Christ. The promise is made unto the same Christ personal and Christ mystical, the head of the body, as the apostle saith of it, Gal. 3:17, 18, 19.

[2.] Our Lord is not only the receiver of the promises, but he hath already fulfilled the grand condition of the covenant, the proper strict condition of the covenant, whereupon, without any more, an immediate access to all the blessings is given to every believer upon his pleading. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, that is the condition, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied, Isa. 53:10, 11. So that now when you are to believe the promises, you are to exercise your faith thus: "This promise hath a great blessing, that I stand greatly in need of; our Lord Jesus Christ hath fulfilled the grand condition of the promise, and all the blessings that are in the promise, are now made over to me in the last will and testament of our Lord Jesus Christ, confirmed by his blood; that as sure as Christ was dead and is alive, so surely is the New Testament and all the blessings of it confirmed and sealed already." Our charters for heaven are sealed by our Lord's blood, we have no seal to put to them, but the seal of our poor faith.

(3.) Our Lord is ministering in the sanctuary above. If Christ were not interceding in heaven, a poor Christian would have a comfortless work in believing on earth: but our poor believing and his grand intercession, when they chime, if I may so speak, make wonderful music above. He sends his Spirit to work in us those desires after covenant-blessings, that he is pleading for in the virtue of his blood, in the highest sanctuary. Let your faith then argue thus: "Jesus Christ

is at the Father's right hand: I am a poor pleader at the footstool, but there is a strong pleader at the King's elbow, if I may so speak, in the highest court, and it is his business to mind my affairs." How strongly would believers plead, how believingly would they send up their broken desires to heaven, if they did duly know, that all their petitions must be sent up to God through Christ, and be perfumed with another kind of incense than they can give! So much for this, on what ground believers should expect all good from God by the way.

Secondly, What are the cases wherein this believing and glorifying God's faithfulness is to be acted? The answer is, in every thing. I shall only name a few particulars, which as they are the great trying of faith, wherein believing is most difficult, so they are triumphs of faith, and believing is most noble, when in these cases.

1st, In case of great affliction from the hand of God. That is a case wherein believers are called to expect good from God, when things to sense and reason, and to common observation, seem to go against us; we say such an one is in affliction. They are called evil things sometimes by saints themselves: Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? says patient Job, chap. 2:10. But believers should learn to name things as God names them, and as the covenant names them; we are to learn to name God's works by his word, and not to name his word by his works. Afflictions are very common, and they are very many; the heads of them are many, the various sorts of them are innumerable: I will only name a few things concerning them, that are commonly most trying to faith, and name them to press believing the more earnestly.

(1.) There is the surprising unexpectedness of affliction, when it comes from a quarter that people did not expect it to come from. The apostle warns Christians as to this: Beloved, think it not strange

concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, 1 Pet. 4:12. It is very observable, that there is hardly a person that is soundly afflicted, that is smartly afflicted, but he apprehends there is something special in his case, which never was in any before. A man that hath a true sight of his sins, thinks they are the greatest that ever were; a man that rightly sees his own mercies, thinks those the most special mercies that ever were; a man that narrowly looks upon his own afflictions, sometimes thinks them so too. Surprising, unexpected, unaccountable afflictions, are commonly very trying; and usually this is in them, that the man thinks them greater than have befallen others. The infinite wisdom of God Can shape and frame afflictions; those which seem to be common, yet by some form, by some reason, by some circumstances of them, he shall make them as singular, as if they had never been felt by any; this is a part of the wisdom of God. Our Lord speaks of a man taking up his cross. What, does not God give a common cross to a great many? No; every one hath his own, and the Lord makes it, and shapes it, and fits that cross, which is fittest to be laid upon the back of his poor child.

(2.) There is an oppressing affliction, that is a great trial, that seems to threaten all things, and to cut down the very root of all. A poor creature expects that the tree will be cut down from the very root of it, and that it will be quite plucked up. Lopping off the branches is not so formidable: I am oppressed, says Hezekiah, Lord, undertake for me. Sometimes a dark and dumb affliction is a very great trial of faith, and a great many of the children of God meet with such. Says the poor creature, I have had such an affliction a long while upon me, and I have many times laid my ear to it, to hear what it says, and there is no voice, if I may so speak. If you cannot hear the rod's voice, pray hear God's voice in the word. Sometimes the rod cries aloud, and speaks God's mind in the word; sometimes we must bring the

word to the rod, and see if we can put the rod upon the rack, and make it speak what God means thereby. Now, in all these cases, in any sort of affliction, let it be surprising and strange, let it be oppressive, let it be dark, let it be dumb and speak nothing, believers must believe still.

(1.) Believe that whatever changes there are in God's way to you, there is none in his heart. The Lord hath changed his countenance, the Lord hath changed his hand, only his heart remains unchangeable, still that is to be firmly believed: As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. People commonly think, as soon as Christ begins to rebuke and chasten, he begins to cease to love; but our Lord says just the contrary, Rev. 3:19. See also Prov. 27:6, Psal. 119:75.

(2.) Believe this firmly, that God's wisdom is never puzzled or nonplussed, though you be. The Lord knows his matters, and he will not give you an account of them; but we are to believe he knows what he does, and he has a wise end before him. Christians do commonly imagine they are so wise, that if there were any possible good, that could be the fruit of such a dispensation, they could perceive it, but, after all their studying, they cannot find what good this can turn to. If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, saith the Lord, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? Zech. 8:6. A severe rebuke given to an unbelieving people. Quest. Do you think God's eyes are no better than yours?

(3.) In all the trials of your faith by affliction, believe this, that God's eye is on you, when you cannot see him: Behold, says Job, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him:

He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him, Job 23:8, 9. I take it, says he, when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold.

Lastly, In all your afflictions believe a safe issue, that you shall get well out of all: Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all, Psalm 34:19. These are they which come out of great tribulation, says the angel to John, Rev. 7:14. There is no affliction can enter heaven, but I believe the best talking of affliction that ever was, is in heaven. All the glorified in heaven understand better all God's way with them. They were, many of them, plagued every morning, and chastened every moment; their souls were filled with bitterness and sorrow all their life long; yet there is never a one there, but sees that every thing was well done, there was nothing that they could have been without; their guide guided them well, and there is nothing amiss, nothing crooked in all God's way. It is with respect to this, that the apostle calls to believers, to rejoice, though in the midst of manifold temptations; why so? knowing that the trial of your faith shall turn to praise, 1 Pet. 1:6, 7. Ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations, that is, as to the things of sense; but, says the apostle, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, as Christians; and wherefore rejoice in the midst of heaviness? Because your faith, though much exercised now, will make a glorious appearance at the last day. One of the greatest praises that can be given to the Lord by his people, is, that their faith glorified his faithfulness, whilst on earth, in the midst of their greatest distress.

2dly, People should act their faith on God's faithfulness in case of desertion, when our Lord hides himself. Our Lord Jesus went before us as a pattern in this, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? To put a my to a forsaking God, is brave believing. Our Lord's case, I know, is altogether singular, but many believers have had some measure of his Spirit in using that word in their own case. When a

man walks in darkness, and has no light, what shall he do then? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, Isa. 50:10. If a man forbear trusting in the Lord, till darkness be scattered, and light come, and if he says it is time enough for me to believe, when God lights the candle; no, says the Spirit of God, When he walks in darkness, and hath no light, let him then trust in the name of the Lord.

3dly, In the case of temptation, (I name these things which are so common, that, in truth believers lives are spent about them), temptations from Satan. Sirs, if Christians were wise, they would learn, if I may so speak, of the devil; the more the Lord loves us, the more the devil hates us; and the more the devil hates us, the more we should love the Lord. As soon as a Christian gets faith, the devil falls upon him; and when the devil falls upon him, he should believe the more. The time was, saith a believer, when he let me alone; what makes this great change, that he is turned to a roaring lion? It is because I left his camp, and turned to another master. Faith is especially to be acted in temptation, and victory over temptation is by faith. When our Lord said to Peter, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; our Lord adds, But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and if thy faith do not fail, the devil will get the worst of the bargain, Luke 22:32. The apostle puts a special mark upon this piece of the Christian armour: Above all, says he, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, Eph. 6:16. That above all does not only point forth the eminent use of faith, in the warfare of faith, but it seems to set forth the excellency of a Christian's armour in this matter. When Satan and a poor Christian engage together, the devil would first have the shield of faith laid down, and then he would be too hard for any of the children of God, for commonly one temptation comes not alone. Now thou art put

upon examining and trying whether thou hast any faith. Question all, doubt all, says the devil, and let us argue upon the point. But if you enter with the devil upon these terms, he will certainly be too hard for you; lay down the conclusion of faith firmly, and tell the devil, I have entrusted my soul with Christ Jesus, what hast thou to say to that? will he fail me or no? If thou speakest any evil of my Lord, thou speakest like the devil, and I do not regard thee; but if thou speak evil of me, I will believe thee, and can speak of it myself, and tell it to my Lord, Psal. 42:5, 6. The question that we are to propose in the warfare of faith with the devil, is, Is God true or no? If he be true in his promises, I will believe them, and believe none that contradict them, and in all my adversities will I take the shield of faith. See Eph. 6:18 and Psalm 91:4.

4thly, In the case of manifold delays and disappointments, as to the performance of pleaded promises; in this case, I say, you are still to believe. If though you have taken the promise, though you have believed it, though you have prayed upon it, though you have been looking out and waiting for the fulfilment of it, still delays come in the way, believe still. The Lord in his wisdom has reserved times and seasons for our mercies, and for his fulfilling his word, all to himself. He hath told his people what he will do for them, but he hath not told them when. Though he made a great promise to Abraham, yet he did not tell him when he would perform it; that great believer must wait twenty-five years from the promise, till the performance came, yet no doubt he believed the promise every day.

5thly, In cases of challenges of conscience for sin. Believers must learn to exercise their faith upon this faithfulness of God, in the view and in the face of challenges of conscience for sin. Iniquities prevail against me, says the psalmist, Psalm 65:3. What could a man say after this? What could you expect should be the next word? Must it

not be, And therefore wrath shall come upon me? No such thing: As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared, Psalm 130:3, 4. Our consciences are sometimes disturbed with challenges for old sins long since committed, which, according to a similitude that a holy saint of God gives us in his letters, like the ghost of a dead friend, continually haunt us. An old subdued, pardoned sin, may fright one terribly; we have great need, if I may so speak, of strong faith, to converse without fear with this ghost, the ghost of an old transgression. A sin that is twenty years old may appear as formidable as the devil himself; but if we do not learn to believe and maintain confidence of faith, notwithstanding challenges for sin, who can believe at all?

Lastly, In case of God's calling us unto any special piece of service, some special piece of hard, singular work, that we were never called to before; in this case faith is to be exercised, for help in time of need shall be given us; if the service be required of you, the assistance for it shall be given to you; really the faith of Christians is tried greatly with the change of work that God puts in their hands. They think they have some tolerable measure of faith for their daily and usual work; but if God call them to that they never acted before, to some new singular piece of work, then believing is specially called for, to help out in this time of need; as we are to crave help in all times of need, so we are to crave special help in times of special need; I named these six, as being those in which the life of Christians is mainly spent. Take away the Christian's afflictions and desertions, his temptations, challenges of conscience, delays in promises, and special turns of God's hand towards him, and pray what is left in a Christian's life, that is so difficult? And since our life is spent about these things, we must live by faith, we are to exercise faith in and

about all those things, that our life is mainly spent in; how blessed a thing is it for a believer to go on towards heaven, and in every step of the way to be able to say, Though God hath changed his way towards me many times, though he hath brought me into many by-paths, yet, blessed be his name, there was never a path I was in, but I believed in him, and if it were an evil one, I hoped to be delivered out of it; but if a good one, I believed it would advance me towards heaven, I believed and praised; and in every one I believed it would turn to my salvation. I knew they would bring me nearer to God; that they would at last bring me to heaven, where I hope eternally to bless him for them!

SERMON XI

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

FROM these words I have spoke unto three doctrines, and they having been again and again repeated unto you, you may easily remember them; 1. That the Christian's God is a promising God. 2. That this promising God is faithful in all his promises. And, 3. That the faith of believers should answer the faithfulness of God in the promises. I referred the main application of the whole doctrine unto this last head, in laying the duty before you that this truth does exact and crave of you. I named three things, wherein our faith should

answer the faithfulness of God, and have already spoke unto two of them.

The first was, That our faith should answer the faithfulness of God, in the grand general promise of salvation by Christ Jesus. This is that faith that the word calls so much for; it calls for it from unbelievers; and this call is God's appointed means for working the faith that it calls for; faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God; the word of God tells us what we should believe, and the word of God, in the name of God, commands us to believe what God says. This I did insist sometime upon. I know there are some who think it needless to press people to believe, and to put forth faith; at first a great many poor creatures think it an easy thing to believe, whereas it is a hard matter to awaken the conscience; but when the conscience is awakened, they think it an easy matter to believe, but they only think so that never knew what an awakened conscience was; let a poor sinner see nothing before him but hell, and nothing within him but what deserves hell, it is only the wonderful power of God that can make this sinner trust Christ upon a bare word for his eternal salvation. Believing and trusting the soul on Christ Jesus is found a mighty difficulty by all them that are concerned about their salvation. Some think this answering of God's promise in the gospel, improper to be laid before sinners at first; these people imagine, that there is something that sinners should be called to before believing. But as long as these two principles of truth remain, and remain they will, as long as the world lasts, this is always a vain objection: First, That no man can do any good, nor get any good, but in and from Christ Jesus. Secondly, That no man can do any good with Christ, nor get any good from him, but in the way of believing: and if so, will our Lord give his help to them that will not give trust to him?

The second thing I was last day exhorting you to, was this, To answer the faithfulness of God in believing for all covenant-blessings by the way. This is properly the life of faith, and a great work this is to believe, as large as the whole covenant: to believe as firmly, as the promises are firm; to believe as long as until the promises turn to performances, how much of divine power is needful for this work! Justly does the apostle Call the work of faith a work of faith with power, 2 Thess. 1:11.; in which not only power is put forth by the creature that acts it, but there is power put forth by God to draw it forth, and to keep it up. Of this I spake last day.

The third exhortation that remains to be handled, and that I shall insist on, if the Lord will, a little more, is, That believers should answer the faithfulness of God in the promise of eternal life, by believing the prize and hope of our calling, as the apostle calls it. The Spirit of God calls this eternal life, the promise, as if all were contained in it; 1 John 2:25. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. Faith in this case that I am to speak of, is faith which entereth into that within the veil, as the apostle saith of hope, Heb. 6:19. I am now to direct this exhortation unto them that have some confidence and good conscience towards God; that have, in some measure, regarded the former and performed it, and that desire more and more to be in it; such as have intrusted their souls by faith in Christ's hand, upon the warrant of the promise of the gospel; such as are exercised in living by faith upon the promises of the new covenant; it is upon them that I lay this burden, and a sweet one it is; that you should believe eternal life. The apostle John, chap. 5:13 speaks something to the same purpose: These things have I written unto you (says he) that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. The apostle's meaning certainly was not, to persuade them to believe that they were in heaven, for he and they

both knew the contrary sufficiently; but he calls them to believe that they had eternal life, that they had already a hold of it by faith; that they had it in the root by Christ's dwelling in their hearts by faith; that they had it in the foundation of it, by their believing the record that God gave of his Son; as is plain from the context.

In prosecuting of this exhortation, there are three things that I shall have some respect unto, and handle.

1. What is to be believed, or how it is that a Christian in the way of duty must answer the faithfulness of God, in the promise of eternal life.
2. What are the difficulties that lie in a Christian's way which makes this believing so rare and so hard.
3. What the grounds of this faith are, that believers should improve, and in the improving of them triumph over all the difficulties that are in the way.

First, What it is believers are to believe, when they are called to believe eternal life. I take it, as you may perceive, strictly, as contradistinguished from all the covenant-blessings that believers have a right to in this life, and have a begun possession of, that they should live by that faith, of which I spake in the former part. But I shall now respect only the prize of our high calling, the mark that God has set before us to run towards, to cheer ourselves with the faith of it before we come at it. And surely the speaking and hearing of heaven should be a pleasing subject unto all them that have any hope to be in it; the speaking of it is sometimes blessed by the Lord to make them mind it, that never thought of it before. The sum of it is in these four principles:

1. In the way of duty, in answering the faithfulness of God, believers should believe this, that as soon as the soul departs from the body, it is immediately received by Christ. A believer is to honour God's faithfulness in believing this, that as soon as the soul and body are parted by death, the soul is immediately with the Lord. This the Spirit of God, by Paul's pen, teaches us, in two places, very fully, 2 Cor. 5:1–8 and Phil. 1:23. In the former the apostle expressly asserts this doctrine: For we know, says he, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.—We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. By how many words does the apostle expressly teach us that the state of absence from the body to a believer, is immediately attended with a state of presence with the Lord! And in Phil. 1:23 he says, For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ. Departing and being with Christ, are joined together, as inseparable. As soon as Paul is gone out of this world, he is with Christ. Our Lord gave a very great promise to the believing thief, for he was then a great believer, though once as great a thief, Luke 23:42. To-day, says he, shalt thou be with me in paradise, "Thou art dying, thou art drawing near to thy end, as I am, but this day thou and I shall be together in a better state."

2. Believers must believe, and glorify God's faithfulness in believing, that the bodies they leave shall be raised up again glorious bodies, at the appearing of Christ. This is as plain as any thing can be expressed to be in the word, that the body the believer leaves, as it were, in the dust, which death hath dominion over, which rottenness and corruption triumph over, the same body shall live again, and be raised by his mighty power: Knowing that he which raised up the

Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you, 2 Cor. 4:14. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him, 1 Thess. 4:14. See also 1 Cor. 15:58. This faith Job also acted, and it is one of the singular expressions of a New Testament faith in the Old Testament times: For I know (says he, chap. 19:25, 26.) that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. A great part of the meaning of which is: Job had, by this loathsome disease that was sent upon him, in a manner death beginning to prey upon him; now, says the good man, though worms should go on, and after they have destroyed my skin, they should destroy my flesh also, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me, ver.27. The faith of the resurrection of the dead, though plainly revealed in the word, is not a matter so easily attained, there needs a great deal of faith to believe it firmly. How quietly, how patiently, how cheerfully would believers look upon death seizing them, and coming in upon them, either gradually by age and the infirmities of it, or more violently and speedily by sickness and diseases; how quietly would they look upon the tumbling down of this earthly tabernacle, if they believed this firmly? For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: what will he do when he comes? Here is one thing, says the apostle, he will do, he will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself, Phil. 3:20, 21. The faith of the resurrection of the dead can never stand, but upon the prop of Divine omnipotency. It is founded upon this, That he has said it that can do every thing. Thereupon when our Lord checks the Sadducees for their infidelity, he saith, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God,

Matth. 22:29. If you understood the scriptures spiritually, you would not have asked such a question in derision of the resurrection; if you knew the power of God, you would firmly believe that God can perform it. Our Lord tries Martha with this, John 11:25, 26. I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this? Our Lord, in the questioning of it, hints the difficulty that was in it, and some backwardness unto this believing that he perceived in the good woman. See also Luke 20:33, 36.

3. That the departed soul and the raised body shall be eternally united together. This is a part of that faith that we owe to the faithfulness of God in the promise of eternal life, that not only the body shall be raised, but that our spirit shall again, by the mighty power of God, take possession of these same bodies. It is the same body the apostle still speaks of, when he saith, It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body, &c. 1 Cor. 15:43, 44, &c.

4. That this united soul and body shall be unspeakably blessed in the highest heavens with that that is called the reward of eternal life. This, I say, is the sum of what We are called to believe, and is the duty of every believer to believe, in answering the faithfulness of God in the promise that he hath promised; that when he sees good we shall live here no longer, he will immediately receive our departing souls; Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; that when his, appointed time comes, when the morning comes, he will also in power and mercy visit our rottenness and dust in the grave, and raise up a glorious tabernacle, and unite the soul therewith, and bless both body and soul, the whole man, in the enjoyment of himself. These are the

common plain truths that are in this promise of eternal life; but this I would not leave thus; therefore we will take a little farther notice of this great blessing, according to what we gather of it from the word; for whoever they be that are called to the exercise of faith, they had need distinctly to know what it is they are to believe for, as well as what is the ground to believe upon. We find this great prize of our calling spoken of to us in the word three ways, and I would handle it a little in all these three respects.

1st, It is spoken of negatively, by removing all the known evils from that state, that we know to be evils in this state; this is a way, I say, whereby the Lord helps our weak shallow apprehensions about the prize of eternal life, that it is a state separate from, and altogether above all the miseries, calamities, and evils that are afflicting and disturbing in this present state. So we find in Rev. 21:4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Sorrow and cause of sorrow are so inseparable from the state we live in, that in a manner we do not know how to live without them, nor to think of our life, as separate from them; we all know how natural it is for people to frame apprehensions of a happy state, by removing of miseries from their thoughts and desires: Now, take all the heaps of miseries you know, and concerning these you may say, None of these things are there, there is no sin, there is no sorrow, there is no sickness, there is no disturbance without nor within, there is nothing at all of those things, that we are now daily exercised with, and bewail before God and men; now, this negative notion of it leads no further than, we can distinctly know. We know what an evil these things are, but we do not know what a great happiness it is to be quite rid of them all, we know what a trouble pain is, and what a blessing ease is, what a trouble there is in sickness, what a comfort in health, what trouble

there is in crosses, losses, disturbances, in this world, we know a little of the misery of them, and the happiness of being rid of them; but we cannot conceive a right notion of that state, wherein all things that are evil shall be quite removed; therefore you may find all along the believer's faith goes beyond his knowledge in the believing of eternal life. We believe what we cannot fully know, 1 Cor. 2:9. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. It is but a small portion thereof that we come to attain the knowledge of.

2dly, This prize of our calling is known comparatively, by comparing it with other things. We know it a little negatively, by removing all the evil from it we know. We know it comparatively, when we prefer it to all the good we know: now, there are three things which bear the name of good, and some of them underservedly, that it is to be compared with, and greatly preferred above.

(1.) The first is the portion of the men of this world. This eternal life that we believe and hope for, is a great deal bigger, higher, and better than that. Lord, deliver me, says the Psalmist, from the men of the world, which have their portion in this life. As for me, says he, I expect better things than this world can afford, Psal. 17:14, 15. The portion of the men of this world is such a prize, that the greatest part of the world run after it all their life long. What pain, what care, what thoughts are spent about these things? And when they have got them, what have they got? How poor and empty are they? The believer's portion even in this life is a great deal better than that of the wicked. Better is that little the righteous man hath, than many revenues of the wicked; how much more must the prize of the high calling be? We would not, as it were, disgrace our prize so much as to

compare it with the portion of the men of the world, and yet what a believer hath in time, is beyond what they have.

(2.) We compare this with the spiritual allowance of believers in this life. There is a gracious allowance of spiritual blessings given to believers in this life. We are to compare this with what remains, and to prefer our expectations to our possessions; there is something of the earnest of the inheritance given now, Eph. 1:14, 15. There is something of communion with Christ now that fills the heart with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, 1 Pet. 1:8. And what is that now to what remains? There have been believers that have had heaven upon earth in this world, but when they came to enjoy heaven in heaven, they doubtless found a vast difference. At that day, says our Lord, ye shall know, that I am in my Father, and you in me, and 1 in you, John 14:20. You shall know it in a better manner, than now you can imagine; all the enjoyments that God affords unto his people here, are all helps whereby believers may come to know and guess better what heaven is: they should not say, It is good to be here, because of these, but he is good that gives that good here, and there are better things prepared that we should desire the more fervently; all spiritual enjoyments that are given in time are for the sharpening the believers appetite, and raising their spirits in desire of heaven the more fervently.

(3.) We are to compare the prize of our calling, with the desire and longing of believers: our desires are larger than our possessions. There is never a believer but knows this in experience, that he can desire a great deal more than he can hold. The reward of eternal life goes beyond our desires. The Lord works in us, and does for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, Eph. 3:20. What use should a man make of this name of God? Think as much as you can, and ask as much as you can, and in the faith of that asking, and

in the faith joined to that thinking, expect some blessing that is beyond both, beyond both our asking, and our thinking. This is a second consideration, whereby we come to know what the prize of the high calling of God is, that we are called to believe, by comparing it either with the poor portion of the men of this world, or the spiritual allowance of believers, or the extended desire of Christians.

3dly, The word of God speaks positively of it, and we are to learn something of it this way. But as positive as the Spirit of God is in speaking of it, we are still very short of being able to apprehend it, there is a great deal more spoken of heaven in the word, than any saint out of heaven can ever understand; may I so speak, we shall understand the Bible a great deal better when we come to heaven, especially that part of it that speaks of heaven; the blessing of eternal life, the greatness, the sweetness, the vastness of it, is best known by enjoying of it. Of the positive account that we have in the word, concerning the state of believers in eternal life, I would give you some hints from the word of God, in these six or seven things:—

(1.) There is a glorious appearing and manifestation of Jesus Christ spoken of; from him grace begins, by him grace is carried on, with him glory begins, and continues for ever; it is called the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Tit. 2:13. The appearance, I say, of Jesus Christ in his highest glory. All the appearances that Christ hath made, have been some way under a vail, and under some eclipse, therefore is it that he is so despised. In the first appearance that Christ made in the flesh, what a thick vail of infirmity was upon it? The word was made flesh, says the Holy Ghost, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth, John 1:14. Every one could not do so. He was made flesh, this is called an appearance of Christ. He hath brought life and immortality

to light by this appearance of his, 2 Tim. 1:1. Christ makes an appearance unto his chosen, first in calling them, afterwards in visiting of them. When he first comes to call a poor creature, this appearance of Jesus Christ is under a veil; still it is Christ in the word, Christ under the veil of ordinances, Christ in the means; many times he is not known, when he does appear. Many poor sinners Christ hath appeared to in his working upon them, and he hath carried on his work a good while before they knew who it was that worked upon them; his appearing afterwards to his people in love-visits, is more sensible, but far short of this; I will manifest myself to him, John 14:21, 23. There are some appearances and manifestations of Christ unto the souls of his people, not wherein they see any thing with their bodily eyes, or hear any voice with their bodily ears; but in and under the form of prayer, the means of his appointment, there is a gracious display of all the glory that passes like a beam upon their souls, that they can say, This is the Lord, this is Christ, this is he I have waited for. The state of eternal life is incomparably beyond all this; there is a glorious appearance of Christ; the word speaks of it so, as if Christ had never appeared before; Col. 3:4. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory, 1 John 3:2. We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

(2.) The word speaks of this blessed state, that is the hope of our calling, under the notion of a full vision of him, or of seeing him; he not only appears in his glory, but that glory is seen by his people; thence springs their happiness. Our Lord Christ knew best what heaven was; it is best learning what it is by his speaking of it. See how he prays, John 17:24. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me. Observe, Christ there plainly shews us, what is his great design in desiring to have all his people with

him, and what way it is he intends to make them blessed, by beholding the glory the Father hath given him. Now when we are living in this body, and are compassed about with frailty without, and sin within, any singular appearance of his glory is disturbing and dreadful to us; may I speak such a word, and you understand it rightly, there is never a believer so comfortable, but Jesus Christ could render that person a very miserable creature, by a display of his glory; Saints may desire more now than they are able to take in. I beseech thee shew me thy glory, saith Moses; but the Lord answers him, Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me, and live. Exod. 33:18, 20. Observe, the vision that the Prophet Isaiah had, was a sight of Christ, and was a sight of his glory too, Isa. 6:1, 5 commented upon by the Holy Ghost, John 12:41. These things, said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Now, surely you would think, that when there is a discovery made of the glory of Christ unto such a man as Isaiah, so long before, that there should be a very great contentment therewith. Why, Abraham saw Christ's day afar off, and was glad; Abraham's heart was cheered by believing Christ's day, and seeing his glory afar off. But when this glory shone, if I may so speak, in those beams that mortal eyes were not able to receive, Isaiah saith, Wo is me, for I am undone,—for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Here is a sight not fit for a sinner to bear, the frailty, I say, of our flesh, with the, remaining corruption that is in our natures, makes the full visions of the glory of Christ are very unfit for us, and we for them; but this is the state promised to us in the gospel, When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. What, have we never seen Christ, as he is, before? No, ye only see him in the glass of the gospel; ye only see him under the vail, and in that shadow that is fitted for our present state. Hence it comes to pass, that it is said concerning believers in this day, That Christ shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe, 2 Thess. 1:10.

(3.) In this state there is full conformity to a seen Christ. Christ in his glory is fully seen by the glorified eye, and perfect conformity to him resulteth therefrom. For according to the measures of clearness with which we see Christ by faith, are the measures of our conformity to him now: 2 Cor. 3:18. But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Pray, observe the gradual progress of sanctification in a renewed man; it is carried on by the visions of Christ by faith now; the more clearly the eye of faith takes up Christ, the more strong and abiding impressions of likeness are upon the soul. But what perfect conformity to him is, we cannot yet conceive. If I may offer such a similitude, we are such dunghills, so dark, that when the Sun of righteousness shines upon us, there is but a little beam left, just enough to testify that the sun hath shone upon us; but the state of glory will render a believer, both in soul and body, like a crystal wall, that will reflect the image of the Sun of righteousness most purely and resplendently. The state of happiness and eternal life consists in being like Christ: We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; the conformity is carried on by that seeing: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness, Psal. 17:15.

(4.) There is a state of constant serving him spoken of, a state of unwearied delightful serving of Jesus Christ. Heaven would not be heaven to a heavenly mind, if there were no service to Christ in it. It is strange to see how the apostle values service to Christ on earth so highly, that he lays it in the balance with the enjoyment of Christ in heaven, and he cannot tell well which to chuse: I am in a strait betwixt two, (says he), having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh, is more needful for you. It is natural, I say, to a saint to love service. It is promised, that they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.—His servants shall serve him, Rev. 21:3, 4. See also chap.

4:10. Little we can do for Christ and his glory while we are here, and we should be deeply humbled that we can do so little. Christians, lay firm hold upon eternal life by strong faith. You shall bring more glory to Christ the first half-hour in heaven, than ever you did, if you lived fourscore years, in believing, and praying, and wrestling here on earth. There is pure sinless serving that is tendered with delight, and received accordingly.

(5.) There is inexpressible satisfaction and contentment in this blessed state. It is properly called happiness. Whatever there be of goodness, the relish of that goodness stands in the soul's contentment: John 16:22. And ye now therefore have sorrow, says our Lord, when about to depart, to his disciples: but I, says he, will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. Your heart shall rejoice. A heart full of joy is not to be expected by believers till this great day come; but then the heart shall be so full of joy, that there shall be no room for any thing else. I know there are some sudden floods of joy that the Lord gives even here, and such as there seems to be no room left for any thing else; but though this joy fill the whole heart, yet stay a little while, and the flood will dry, the flood will grow smaller and smaller, and the old darkness will enter again. This joy will be taken away, one way or other; but in the state above, our joy shall have no end.

Lastly, To complete all, there is eternity in this blessedness. Ever and ever are the main things in heaven and hell. Take eternity out of heaven, it would turn heaven into an hell: take eternity out of hell, and it would turn hell into a heaven. Eternity is the joy of heaven, and the torment of hell. Poor Peter was little time in heaven, as he thought: Lord, says he, it is good to be here. But all that are got up yonder may say rightly, It is good to be here, and good to be eternally here, to be ever with the Lord. The greater any blessedness be, it is

greatly enhanced by its lasting; the greater any misery be, it is greatly aggravated by its continuance. Where the greatest good comes to be enjoyed with the longest duration, even eternity, what inexpressible joy is there! But where the greatest misery is to be inflicted unto eternity, what vast heightening is it of the misery! So much now shall serve for the first thing, what it is that we are to believe, when we are called to glorify God's faithfulness in believing the prize of our calling, that after we have given glory to God, by believing for all the good things by the way, we may glorify him, by believing the good home he hath prepared for us.

APPLICATION. I ask you, in the first place, Do you believe that there is such a hope of this calling? Christianity is a despised thing. Christians are a despised people, because the prize is unknown to the despisers. Do you believe firmly, I say, that there is such a state, and that all that are departed in the Lord are blessed, because they are entered upon the enjoyment of it; and that all that believe on him, shall certainly enjoy it in his good time? I would reckon that that man were fairly setting out for heaven, who firmly believes that there is one, and hath his heart filled with a sense of it, as a great invaluable blessing above all that time can talk of.

2. Must not an interest in this prize of our calling be well worthy the having, and the knowledge of it well worthy the seeking? Are heaven and hell so small things, and these different states so like one another, that people should be unconcerned which of them be their lot? Indeed, the greatest part of people live as if they had laid down this conclusion, I care not whether I come to heaven or hell.

3. Should not Jesus Christ our Lord be very precious to us? Whenever we think of the prize of our calling, we must always remember Christ, and our debt to him; he bought this prize by his

blood; heaven is a fruit of the price of Christ's blood, heaven is a palace built upon the foundation of the blood of the Son of God; he hath bought it by his blood, and he offers it freely to us by his grace: Whoever accepts his offer, he takes them and leads them kindly by the hand; he brings many sons unto glory, Heb. 2:10 and at last, when he hath brought them through all, he himself puts the crown on with his own hands: Looking, says the apostle, for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life. Ye have got a deal of mercy from him before, but the grand gift of mercy will be, when the believer shall kneel at Christ's feet, and receive the crown of glory at his hands. It is impossible that a man can have right thoughts of heaven that has not right thoughts of Jesus Christ; and it is impossible that a man can have right thoughts of Jesus Christ, but his heart will be filled with heaven.

SERMON XII

HEBREWS 10:23

—For he is faithful that promised.

THOUGH you had heard these words but once, if you be true Christians, you would never forget them; how much more should they be well remembered when they have been so often repeated, and so long spoken to. That which remains now is a part of the application of the truths proposed from these words. I did propose

three exhortations in the conclusion of the application of this doctrine.

1. That you should answer the faithfulness of God, by believing the promise of salvation by Christ Jesus. This is the first act of faith that God craves of all them to whom the gospel is preached. Wherever the apostles came with the glad tidings of salvation by Christ Jesus, their application was to all, Believe; believe this doctrine with the heart, and ye shall be saved.

2. I was calling believers unto the answering of God's faithfulness, by trusting him for all covenant-blessings by the way. And,

3. By answering God's faithfulness by faith, as to the end, eternal life, the great hope of our calling; the hope of eternal life, as the apostle Paul calls it, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began, Titus 1:1, 2. In the handling this exhortation, there were three heads I proposed to speak to.

First, What is to be believed, when a believer is called to believe eternal life promised to him in the gospel; and this I spent the last time in discoursing to. Believers are called to believe, that as soon as the soul is dislodged from the body, it is present with the Lord. They are to believe, that the same body that is laid in the grave, and rots there, shall be raised again in glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ. They are to believe, that this departed soul, and this body raised again, shall be eternally united, never to part more. Lastly, That, in this state of perfection, we shall be eternally blessed in the enjoyment of God in Christ Jesus above. Of the particulars of which I discoursed the last day.

The second, that now remains to be spoke to, is about the difficulty of believing this. Shall I prove that it is difficult? Is there not proof

enough, that this faith is so very rare? It may be, you may think it an unreasonable surmise and jealousy, but let every one's conscience answer for themselves. It may be (I do not know that it is), that, in all this assembly, there is not one person that can tell when they spent a calm sweet hour in the hope of the glory of God, when they had a satisfying rejoicing in the hope of this great prize of our calling. If this be rare, surely the faith of it is rare; for it is impossible that the faith of the glory to come can be strong in the heart, but joy will spring up therefrom: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, Rom. 5:2. Christians know this well enough, that when they have tried their faith upon a great many promises of the word, sometimes upon the promise of God's hearing prayer, that their faith does pretty well there; sometimes upon the promises of pardon of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, and their faith answers: but bring them close to believing the prize and crown of glory, there frequently their faith fails them, they cannot draw it forth so confidently as they would. That it is difficult and rare, I take for granted, and shall not spend time to prove that which almost every exercised conscience in the company has a witness within to the truth of. My work then shall be to shew you, whence it comes that believing of eternal life is so very hard to be got, and is so rarely found with Christians.

1. Because this great thing, eternal life, is greatly unknown to us. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, says the apostle, 1 John 3:2.— Neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, 1 Cor. 2:9. Now, it is true the apostle says, that it is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel, 2 Tim. 1:10. Yet though it be made manifest, we are rather told that it is, than what it is. This glory to come is yet within the veil, as the apostle saith of it, Heb. 6:19

where Christ is, whither the forerunner is for us entered. There is an express allusion to the typical high-priest, who, when he had offered the blood of atonement upon the altar, carried that blood within the veil to the mercy-seat; then he was quite out of the sight of the people, for he must go in alone, and none else could look after him. Now, how easy is it to conceive this, that the darker the thing believed be to us, the harder believing is? Mercies that we cannot well tell how to conceive of, is it any wonder, we cannot tell how to believe them firmly? For believing has an expectation of a blessing, as well as it has in it a trusting in the truth of the promiser. Heaven to every believer is more strange, than Canaan was to Abraham, who by faith, when he was called of God, went into that place, and he went out, not knowing whither he went; he was called to go to a land which he never saw before; only the difference is great in this, that though it was a better spot of the earth, than that where he was born or dwelt, yet it was a spot of the same earth, but heaven is a quite different country, Heb. 11:8.

2. The vast greatness and goodness of this prize, makes some difficulty to the faith of the people of God. It is so great, so good, that they find it hard to believe the expressions thereof in the word, which are great and many. The hearts of believers are many times so taken with them, and that deservedly, when they have expatiated in their thoughts about the greatness of the hope of their calling, that they are ready sometimes to say, And will God give such a blessing to me? You know what is said of the disciples, and it is one of the oddest accounts that can be given of unbelief, that while they beheld him, they believed not for joy, Luke 24:41. They loved Christ so well, they sorrowed for his death so deeply, and were so overjoyed at the sight of him risen again, that they could not tell how to believe their own eyes, as we usually say; the news was, as they thought, too good to be true. People are sometimes slacker to believe that which they would

very faint have come to pass. Thus Jacob's heart fainted, when he was told that his son Joseph was yet alive, and more than that, was governor over all the land of Egypt, Gen. 45:26.

3. The awfulness of the passage to eternal life, makes the faith of it yet harder. If all believers were dealt with as Elijah was, that after they have accomplished their course of service and suffering upon the earth, they should be sent for, as it were in a chariot of fire, to be carried up to heaven; it would be an exit, if I may so speak, suitable to their expectations. But now for a poor believer, that hath been fed all his life long with the promises of eternal life in the gospel, and has been cheering his heart thereby, that this man should lie down in the dust, should walk through the vale and shadow of death, should leave his body a prey to worms and rottenness in the grave, this seemeth very hard. Will not every one say, Is this the way to eternal life? This is a strange way to heaven, that lies through death and the grave, and through the lowest and most abject state that a man can be in. Yet thus our Lord went into his glory, only bating the corruption of the grave, which he could not suffer; but through death, and sufferings, and groanings, and pain, he yielded up the ghost, was buried, and lay under the power of death, until the time appointed of the Father for his resurrection out of it. There is no Christian, but finds this to be true which I speak, that the dark black passage of death makes the difficulty great in believing eternal life. How far remote is it from all our reason, and from all our desires, that the last step in our journey to heaven, should be through so thick and deep a mire as death itself is?

4. The mystery of the title and right that a believer hath in eternal life, makes the believing of it the harder still. His title and right to it lies in another, and not in himself; it lies in the righteousness, and worth, and purchase, and merit of the Son of God; so that the faith of

eternal life cannot be kept clear in the heart of a believer, unless Christ, who is the hope of glory, be kept clear in our eye by faith.

5. There are many misgivings of heart that believers cannot well avoid; and if they cannot avoid them, they must meet them; and when they meet them, they must wrestle with them, and overcome them. The poor Israelites are not to be excused, but are much to be pitied; they were brought out of the land of Egypt with a high hand, God granted them a great deliverance through the Red-sea, they sung joyfully upon the other side in the view of the great discomfiture of all their enemies, and like enough they expected nothing, but very quickly they should come to the borders of the good land. But when God led them about and tried them, they sinned; when they sinned, he punished them; under their punishment they repine and rebel, they vex him, and a great deal of sorrow came thereupon. Believers are in great danger of something like this; many faintings and misgivings of heart seize upon believers as to the hope of their calling. (1.) Conscience of utter unworthiness. (2.) Sense of great unmeetness for it. 1. Conscience of utter unworthiness of this great prize, and every Christian hath this. No man will ever get to heaven that thinks he deserves it; for it is certain, whoever thinks he deserves heaven, may conclude from the word of God, there is a bar and bolt drawn upon heaven's gates against that proud sinner; for it is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. But this is not usually so hard; this temptation does not so frequently distress believers, as the other; they know the reward of eternal life is a reward of grace; they know that it was dearly bought, freely promised, and is graciously given unto the seed of Christ: but here comes in the second. A sense of great unmeetness for it, says the poor Christian; I know I am unworthy of it. And so was Paul; the last hour of Paul's life, he was unworthy of heaven. But, say you, here is the great discouragement, I am unmeet for it. But

consider, that God works meetness in his people for heaven: Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, Col. 1:12. Though I know that the word there in the original might be very well otherwise rendered, who hath graced us and privileged us with his favour, as it may also be rendered in 2 Cor. 3:6. But now this only I would have to be considered about meetness; it is certain that none are possessed of heaven, but they that are meet for it; it is as certain that all believers, when they come to lay their claim to eternal life, are all alike unmeet in their own apprehensions. There is a great difference between some and others, as to their meetness for heaven: an ordinary Christian must not pretend to be as meet for heaven as Paul was; but there is not a Christian but stands upon the same level with Paul, as to his pretensions and claim to eternal life. What would Paul be at? He would be found in him, not having his own righteousness; and so would every believer be. God works meetness for heaven in them, that he makes possessors of it in a deep mysterious way. The sense of this meetness is, that that is never to obstruct pure and mere faith. Suppose, and it is a case that I wish it were not a bare supposition, but were more frequent and with a good foundation; suppose, I say, that the grace of God seize a poor young creature, call him early, prevent him from wallowing in the puddle and mire of the world's wickedness; suppose still the same grace sanctify him, and this sanctified creature should grow up more and more unto the stature of a grown Christian for many years in the house of God: now, you will say, this man is meet for heaven; he is so, God hath made him so. Pray now let this man be examined about his meetness, and let his last plea, as it were, be heard, when he is knocking at heaven's gate for entry at last. It is only upon the account of the common foundation that every believer's faith is fixed upon; God will save none but those he sanctifies; but eternal life follows more

immediately upon justification; our title to eternal life comes from the same righteousness that the forgiveness of our sins flows from.

6. There is a special activity of Satan in tempting believers, that makes this work yet the harder. The devil's great work in this world is to increase bad works, and to hinder good works, to keep them that are bad, bad still, and make them worse; and to hinder them that are bad from being good, and the good from growing better, and the best from being perfect. Believers are the special mark of the devil's malice; and there are two times wherein, be sure, if the devil may have his will, and he hath a great deal lent him by our Lord; there are two times wherein a poor child of God may be sure to meet with the devil, if the devil be not bound by more than ordinary restraint. The first time is, when the poor elect child of God is stepping out of nature into grace; the other is, when he is stepping out of grace up to glory. If the devil can possibly have his will, and it is rarely denied him, he will shoot his fiery darts in these cases. When a poor sinner is leaving Satan's camp, and going over into Christ's kingdom, when he is just upon delivery from the power of darkness, and of being translated into the kingdom of his dear Son, then the devil bends his bow, and lets fly thick and apace. A great many poor creatures that never knew there was a devil in hell, or out of hell, till this time, as long as they were in nature and quiet, the devil was quiet too; but when Christ came to pull them, and draw them, and bring them home to himself, they then found they had been under the keeping of an enemy, that was loth to part with them. The last case is much the same: When a poor creature is going over to Christ, the devil is losing his right; when going to heaven, the devil is losing all opportunity against him. There are few of the people of God that, in walking through the vale of the shadow of death, do not feel this serpent bruising their heel; but if they once be well landed, the smart will quickly be gone.

Lastly, There is some wise deep contrivance of God in this matter. The Lord hath ordered the matter of our salvation so, that believing shall be hard, and the last believing still hardest; so he hath ordered our right to eternal life: all is lying in another, nothing in us; we have a right in and by Christ, our charter of eternal life lies in God's word. In the conducting of the people of God, the Lord guides them so, that pure believing is never put out of its office: whatever he give, whatever path he leads them in, this remains continually useful and needful to them, that they must still go out of themselves, and exercise dependence upon another, upon the Lord alone. The whole contrivance of the way of our salvation, I mean the way of God's working with us about salvation, is framed for this end, that believing shall be perpetually used; the contrivance of the way of salvation for us, is made on purpose for the glory of God's grace through Christ Jesus; it is contrived for this purpose, that all the way we should believe; whatever we receive, we must trust still, for the great hope of our calling. So much for this second thing, What the difficulties are of believing eternal life.

The third thing is, How these are to be overcome; where is the victory that believers must have over all these difficulties? And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, 1 John 5:4. The victory lies in this word, Faithful is he that promised. Let the difficulties that lie in the way of believing be never so great, we must hold up this as a shield against them all, Faithful is he that promised; and in order to guide you in the right way of using it, I would offer you four or five things.

1. Muse, think often, both on the promise, and on the promiser. They whose minds and thoughts are not much taken up about the faithful God, and the faithful promise of God, how can it be expected that they should believe well? Entertain, I say, a frequent savoury

remembrance both of the promise and promiser. Our Lord charges his disciples with this, And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe, John 14:29 and 16:4. Remember it then, that you may believe more. Can you imagine it possible, that faith should flourish in the heart, when the promise and promiser is out of the eye, and out of the mind? That is utterly impossible.

2. Pray to the promiser upon the promise. He that prays much, believes well; and no man that neglects prayer, can act faith. We pray upon the promise to the promiser: Remember the word unto thy servant, says David, upon which thou hast caused me to hope, Psalm 119:49. The promises are given for our faith, and our faith is to be acted in praying upon them; and when we pray upon the promises, we pray to him that made them, and he that made them can certainly perform them.

3. Build upon the promises, lay your weight on them. The apostle Jude requires us to build up ourselves in our most holy faith. Faith is on the promises; and our building ourselves upon our most holy faith, is building on the promises by faith. The promise of God can bear every thing, any thing, and we must lay all upon it; we must lay every thing whatsoever upon the promise of God, all our desires, all our cares, all our weights, all our burthens, but especially of eternal life, which, as you know, we cannot bear ourselves; let the promise of God bear them; and in this matter of our eternal salvation, we know we cannot bear it of ourselves. This burthen we must lay upon the promise, since it must be borne, or we are undone utterly. If this great affair of our eternal salvation be not laid upon a solid and good foundation, we are gone for ever; there is no foundation, but the foundation of God, that standeth sure, that of his faithful word.

4. You must learn to reason and argue upon the promises. A blessed way of exercising faith is to be reasoning by faith. There are faith's reasonings that have a great deal of excellency in them, a great deal of use. If I may so speak, it is a sort of pity that such good words should ever come out of so wicked a mouth as Balaam's; the man spoke words of faith, that he knew nothing of; Numb. 23:19. God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or he hath spoken, and shall he not make it good? With a better heart use these blessed words. The Spirit of God over-awed the man's tongue to speak them, and the Spirit of God guided Moses's pen to write them; therefore, though they are spoken by a false prophet, it is a part of precious scripture, it is of the arguings of faith: Hath God said, and shall he not do it? There is never a man nor all the devils in hell shall be able to say, Here is a word of God which he did not make good. See also, 1 Sam. 15:29. I would only help you to a few of these reasonings of faith, that you may think of and use at any time, as God inclines your hearts.

1st, God knew what he promised, when he promised. Though God promised me eternal life, I do not know what is in this eternal life, but God knows full well. We are puzzled, we are darkened in the studying the doctrine of grace, and the great prize of our calling; but God knows it well; he promises no blessing unknown to himself, though it be unknown to us.

2dly, He knew to whom he gave the promise, he knew what they were, he knew what they would be, he knew what they would prove. When God delivered to me, saith a poor believer, the promise of eternal life in the gospel, he knew what I was, in the day I laid hold of it, John 14:18, 16:31, 13:36, 38.

3dly, This is arguing of faith, when the promise and promiser hath engaged our trust and confidence in any case, we may argue upon that; he hath not only promised, but he hath begotten expectations in our hearts concerning the thing he hath spoken of, and will he fail in the word upon which he has caused us to hope? Hast thou added the power with the word, so as to make me hope in it, and wilt thou not perform it? Psal. 119:49, 2 Sam. 7:20, 27.

4thly, Has not God begun to perform his promises to us; and should we not argue by faith, that we should trust in them more and more? The promise of eternal life is begun to all believers: He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together in regeneration, and made us sit together in heavenly places in him as our head; and will not the rest come on then? Being confident, says the apostle, of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, Phil. 1:6, 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.

Lastly, This is an arguing of faith, God's design in making, keeping, and performing his promise, is the same with the believer's design in receiving and resting on the promise; the same thing that God designed in the making, and keeping, and fulfilling his word; the same thing the believer designs in his taking, and trusting, and waiting for the performance of the word. What is God's great design? God's great design is to glorify the exceeding riches of his kindness towards us in Jesus Christ, as the apostle tells us, Eph. 2:7. What does the believer design? He designs the same thing. God promises us eternal life to the praise of the glory of his grace in Christ Jesus; what more would the believer have? In the day that he lays hold on the promise by faith, he means nothing else but this; he seeks nothing else, but that he may have eternal life, to the praise of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Hath God designed, in making the promise, to

glorify his faithfulness? I, in believing the promise, design the same thing. Now, whenever God and a poor believer jump in the same design, it is impossible that it should miscarry. Indeed, if God designed one thing, and we another, God would reach his end, and we should lament our folly; but if we intend the same thing in all our faith in the promises, that God intends in making them, a disappointment is impossible. See Phil. 3:12, 1 Peter 5:10.

The last thing is, That you must take this truth of God, Faithful is he that promises, and keep it in the hand of your faith, in life and in death; hold it fast continually, keep it still as your anchor. When the body is decayed, when Satan is tempting, when the heart is misgiving, when pale death settles upon your eye-lids, when an awful judgment is staring you in the face, nothing but this, Faithful is he that promises, will support us. Weak is the believer, but faithful is the Promiser. So much for these three exhortations that I promised, and have now spoke to from these words.

There is one more, and that I would conclude with. I have been exhorting you to glorify God's faithfulness, by venturing on the promise of salvation by Christ in the gospel; to glorify God's faithfulness, by believing all covenant blessings by the way; and to glorify God's faithfulness, by believing eternal life in the end. Only one word more, and that is the greatest of all. Glorify God's faithfulness by believing the promises about Sion and Christ's kingdom, though, its state be ever so low. It was a good saying of a believer, in dark and dismal times, "Now it is time to believe." The great believer had a kind of joy in dark hours, because there was such a fair field for faith to act on God's faithfulness. I believe many of you do not know much of the state of the work of Christ abroad in the world, and a great many are little careful to know it that should; but, by all the little hints that we have any manner of way, it is exceeding

low at this day: let us believe, notwithstanding, it shall be well; this great faithful promiser hath promised great things about Christ's kingdom, and we must believe greatly about them; the strongest faith should be put forth here.

1. The promises that we are to believe on for Christ's kingdom, are Christ's promises, My meaning is, not only that they are by Christ, for all are so: but they are made to him; so, in some sense, all are too, but they are made to him primarily, they are made to him for his body's sake, the church. Shall we not believe firmly the promises of the Father to the Son? Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever; the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this, Isa. 9:7. Let the faith of believers believe it then.

2. These great promises we are to believe about Christ's kingdom, are most free to the church, but they are most dear to Christ Jesus, and he hath already paid the price for them; he hath bought the kingdom already, and all that glory that is given him; that name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. 2:10, 11.

3. These promises are greatly fulfilled already, and we should believe them the more firmly upon that account. Our Lord himself, the great heir of the promises, is, as well as we can wish him, and better than we can think, exalted at the Father's right hand above all his enemies. If there were a host of all Christ's enemies together, it may be, they would be as bold as ever; but if all the devils in hell, and all

wicked men on earth, were conjoined against him, yet a sight of his glory would chase them into hell, Eph. 3:20.

4. Believe these promises, for they are the largest and most comprehensive of all. The promises of Christ's kingdom, are the stock of all the faith of God's children in all ages. Pray, whence comes thy conversion, justification, calling, or being brought home to God? It came out of the womb of the promises of the Father made to his Son: He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. All the saving grace that we receive, comes from these promises that are made to Christ; and what we desire now, is but the fulfilling of them. What is there that we desire in all this world but this, that a great many ungodly people may be converted, and that all the godly may be eminent in grace, and at last ripe for glory? All these are contained in Christ's promises, these promises wherein the faithfulness of God is engaged: he hath promised this to David, that he will establish his seed for ever, and build up his throne to all generations, Psal. 89:4. You have ground sure enough for your faith, and you cannot be more happy than to have faith enough for your work. The Lord furnish you with it.

SERMON XIII

HEBREWS 10:24

—And let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works.

HAVING spoken so long upon the preceding verses, I thought fit, before I left this scripture, not to pass this that follows. The apostle, from these grounds that you have heard at great length, from the 19th, 20th, and 21st verses, draws three exhortations. The first is with respect to our duty, in the 22d verse, That we should draw near to him. The second exhortation is to a duty that respects ourselves, and our profession of faith, in the 23d verse, which I have stood long upon. The third exhortation is in the words read, and that is to a duty that respecteth others. This is indeed the right method, that conscience be made of what we owe to God, and care be taken of what concerneth ourselves, before we be in a case to discharge any Christian duty towards others.

This, scripture I mean to speak but a little to, and was something doubtful in speaking to it at all, not from any doubt of its pertinency, but from a mighty doubt of its fruit; for the duty called to in this verse is so neglected, that it is not readily to be hoped people will much mind it, when they hear of it, till at least they begin to know faith, the spring of it: but when I considered that these two things, love and good works, are so very scarce, and that Christian fellowship is so worn out of use amongst them that are called Christians, I thought something should be said of them, though I were never so afraid that little good would be done by it; and therefore for once I will speak a little to it.

In this verse therefore lying before us, there is an exhortation to a duty that is very remarkably expressed by the apostle. There is, 1. The matter of the duty in general, to consider one another. "Let us," would the apostle say, "that are brethren, and that know the way to

the holiest of all, who have some faith, a sprinkled conscience, and clean conversation, and have made profession of our faith, let us consider one another." The original imports a narrow locking one to another.

2. There is the end that this duty is enjoined for; and that is, to provoke us unto love, and to good works, so we read it; but the word in the original is far more significant than our translation carrieth it: Consider one another in order to a paroxysm, or high hot fit of love and good works, to stir up mightily thereto.

I would at this time speak a little to both these.

1. To the matter of the duty, Considering one another: then,

2. The end of it, provoking unto love, and to good works.

First, The duty, Considering one another. This implieth,

1. That there is a plurality of Christians. If so be there were but one Christian in one place, he would have nothing to do with such a place of scripture; he is only to walk wisely to them that are without, where the providence of God calls him; but this considering one another is no work for him.

2. It implies, that they are known one to another. When the apostle bids us consider one another, it necessarily implies, that we may know one another; and truly Christians are easily known one to another. I do not mean them that go with the herd, that call themselves Christians out of compliment, or fashion, or are Christians by reason the place where they were born professeth Christianity; if this be all, it is no easy matter to know them: but such as have the power of the grace of God at work on their heart; and

even here it is not so hard a matter for one Christian to know another.

3. Here is implied, and follows in the text, their meeting together; this is a part of their profession, Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. This considering, that implies these things, is spoken with respect to our Lord the head, with respect to ourselves, and with respect to our brethren. The same apostle bids us consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession Christ Jesus, chap. 3:1. That is a blessed consideration, with respect to patience in suffering: Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds, Heb. 12:3. As if the apostle would say, "If you would use to ponder how Christ was used in the world, and how many foul tongues were employed against him, ye would think little of all the contradictions you meet with." For one sinner to contradict another sinner, is no great matter; for a sinner to contradict a saint, no great matter neither: but for wicked sinners to contradict the Saviour, is the wonder. We are bid to consider ourselves, that if any see another overtaken in a fault, we might restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we be also tempted.

Now particularly what this considering of others is, will you hear of it, and mind it a little more, what that Christian duty of considering Christians aright is. You know, that considering is a serious employment of the mind; this employment is about other folks, and this employment must be about every thing in them and about them that we can discern. These I would reduce to three heads, their good, their bad, and what is indifferent, neither good nor bad in itself, but as it is guided.

1st, In considering of other Christians, ye should consider their good. I will not say, that always it is the wisest work for a man, in considering himself, to begin with considering his good; but I dare say, it is the wisest work in considering others, to do so. Our Lord, in the seven letters he wrote to the seven churches in Asia, begins always with their good, if there were any good in them, and commends them, before he takes notice of, and reproveth for their faults. A Christian is very ill considered, if all his good and the best things in him is forgot. Amongst those good things that are to be considered, in order to provoke unto love, and to good works,

(1.) We should consider the grace of God that is in them, when it becomes visible, and visible it will be, if of the right kind. Barnabas saw the grace of God among them at Antioch, Acts 11:23. The apostles saw the grace of God that was given to Paul, Gal. 2:8, 9. Sirs, communion of saints is one of the articles of our creed, as we call it; and there is so much spoken of it in the word, and it is so great a blessing, that it is a thing impossible, that grace in saints should not be knowable by saints. If no man could know the grace of God in any other but himself, that man indeed might have communion with God, but he could have no communion with the saints. The main thing that we are to regard and to consider in Christians, is the truth of the grace of God in them, their shining in the image of their heavenly Father, and their partaking of the Spirit of Jesus. Where ever these characters and signatures are, a spiritual eye can discern them.

(2.) We should consider the station they have in the body of Jesus Christ, and that also is discernible; I mean, what state, what place, what room, the Lord hath called them to, or placed them in; not with respect to their office in the church, that is a thing of another consideration; but with respect to honourable service. The Lord gives

his grace in various measures to his people, and in some it is a matter very remarkable, that quickly after the Lord hath begun to communicate of his grace to them, he intends to prove them in a higher sphere than ordinary; we must consider, what marks the Lord hath put on them that we know to be Christians of a more than ordinary stature, and usefulness, and service in the body of Christ, of which the apostle speaks so much, 1 Cor. 12 almost throughout.

2dly, We are to consider Christians in their bad things. Can there be any provoking unto love and good works, in seeing of their bad things? Yes, a great deal. Amongst the bad things in Christians, I reckon,

(1.) Their sins and their infirmities; these are to be tenderly regarded, and looked upon, their weakness, their stumbling; the apostle calls much for a spirit of meekness towards such; a great deal of tenderness must be used. Happy are they that can represent and express the tender heart of Jesus Christ towards sinners in a Christian-like tenderness, towards sinning and stumbling believers. See what tenderness the apostle requires as to this, 1 Cor. 8. There is a poor weak Christian, it may be, stumbled, when he saw people making use of what was ordinarily bought in the market; it may be a great deal of the meat that was sold there, had first been shown before their idols, and presented in their temples, and the poor weak Christian scrupled this, and thought it a sad thing for a Christian to make use of his liberty this way: says the apostle, Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ver. 11. For my part, says he, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend, ver. 13.

(2.) We should consider folks temptations and afflictions, We should look on them so as to provoke unto love, and to good works. The

more tempted and afflicted they are, the more need have they of pity from the Lord their head, and of compassion from all their brethren. The apostle Paul expressed this tenderness of spirit, and oh for some measure of it among us! 2 Cor. 11:29. Besides all his own sufferings, of which he names a great many, as perils by sea and land, and from his own countrymen, as well as heathens, nay, all sorts of distresses, besides all these things, he had the care of all the churches devolved upon him. What sort of care was this think you? Was this like the Pope's care that he pretends to have over the face of the earth, wherever the name of a Christian is? This was not thought of by the apostle; the care of all the churches was only a care of tenderness and sympathy, like the care of a mother to her children, when any of them are sick: Who is weak, says he, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? What a brave spirit is here! Did not a distress come upon any Christian, the apostle knew of, but his heart felt the smart of it?

3dly, There are some things that we are to consider in Christians, that are in themselves neither good nor bad, but are of an indifferent nature, yet are to be considered, and are of great use to provoke to love, and to good works.

(1.) There is a consideration to be had of a Christian's education, of the place of his conversation, and of the means and helps that he hath or wants. There is a great matter in this. I do not say, that always such Christians are of the best complexion, as to their inner man, that are born again under the greatest advantages of the gospel means; only this is that I drive at, that the truth of the grace of God may be planted in the heart of a poor creature, where the means of grace have been but small, and his helps and advantages but few. Now, a great deal of tenderness is to be exercised towards such a one. The apostle takes frequent notice of it, as to himself, though indeed

the grace of God to him was extraordinary, Acts 22. I do not mean, that the apostle does think to extenuate his sin before God by the mentioning it, but rather he mentions it to enhance the grace of God that took hold of him; that it was a sufficient ground for abating the severity of censure from other Christians, when they reflected upon his former conversation.

(2.) We should in things indifferent consider their natural temper. Tempers of mind vary as much as features of the face. We commonly observe it with great wonder, that there are not to be seen in a whole kingdom two faces so exactly alike, but that we discern some difference and there is as great a difference in the natural tempers of folks minds. Where the grace of God is grafted upon a good natural temper, it does set it off, I acknowledge, very beautifully, abundance of grace sown in them that have an equal temper of mind, makes a Christian appear very amiable: but the grace of God does not ordinarily fall there; the Lord commonly sows his grace in the worst soil. The heart of every man by nature is bad enough, but there are some worse than ordinary, and God plants his grace frequently there. Now, when the grace of God comes, it is appointed to change our natural state, as we are sinners, and to make us believers, of sinners to make us saints; but it was never appointed to change our natural temper. He that is born, as it were, with a hasty, hot, warm temper, the grace of God may guide that, and put it into a right channel; but rarely, if ever, does remove it. Now, it is to be observed, that a great many of the offences that Christians take one at another, are upon the account of the breakings out of their natural tempers; but we should give an allowance to these things. It is very likely, that our Lord, in calling his disciples, had regard unto this, and names them accordingly. Peter seems to be a forward, zealous, bold man; James and John seem to have been warm hot men; they are called sons of thunder; would our Lord say, "I will graft my grace upon these men,

and I will make use of their natural temper for the setting forth some piece of work, that such and such are fittest for." We see then the wonderful wisdom of God, in guiding the corruptions of his people; and should we wonder at this, that the same wisdom should guide the natural infirmities of his people, and make them serviceable so much the more in their time? We must consider, I say, one another's natural temper, and give some grains of allowance thereto.

(3.) Among the things indifferent, I reckon people's outward estate in the world: Not many wise after the flesh, not many noble, not many rich, and not many mighty are called; but now and then some be. And it is very observable, that through want of a due consideration of this, a Christian that is very high, and rich, and wise in this world, and a poor low weak Christian as to his condition and natural parts, are usually very bad company; they are very apt not duly to consider one another, with respect to this; the poor are apt to envy them that are above them, and they that are high, to despise them that are below them. The word of God warns against both.

(4.) People's age and standing in Christ's house, is to be considered by us. When we consider one another, we are not, we must not expect those experiences and attainments in a novice, and one that is newly come to the faith, that we may look for, and expect in them that are of long standing in the house of the Lord. The apostle takes notice of this, and he checks them that had this standing. For when for the time, says he, ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. See how the Spirit of God by Paul directs Timothy to his carriage, 1 Epist. 5:1. Rebuke not an elder, says he, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers, the

younger as sisters, with all purity. How distinctly does the apostle direct his discourse unto fathers, and young men, and children!

Lastly, Christians different light about smaller matters should be considered, in order to provoking unto love, and to good works. If people lay aside the duty of love, till they be all of one mind in all things, they may leave love till they come to heaven, and truly they look unlike them, that ever will be in heaven, that are strangers to love when they be on earth. How tenderly does the apostle apply himself unto this! Rom. 14:1–5 Rom. 15:1–4. Him that is weak in the faith, says he, receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. What were those doubtful disputations? These were not whether we are justified by Christ, or by good works, or by both together; they were about small little things; they were about food, some would eat nothing but herbs, and had no liberty to eat flesh; there were others that were strong, and they could eat freely any thing. But, says the apostle, Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not; that is his weakness; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth, for the man walks according to his light, and indeed according to truth. One observes a day, and another not; his non-observing is an act of worship to the Lord. How excellently does the apostle comment upon these things! The meaning was this, In the beginning of Christianity, there was some of the Christians, that had been Jews, and were not yet altogether so far reformed from what they had professed before, but that they Still retained, and were fond of their old ceremonies and customs; wherefore the apostle exhorts them to bear, with love and tenderness, with all such persons. The apostle therefore in some places did tolerate their weakness; yet, notwithstanding, when these small things are brought in upon an high account, how does he thunder against them! He speaks so tenderly to the Romans, to doubtful believers, yet to some that would observe days, and abstain from meats, he is as severe, Ye observe

days, and months, and times, and years, &c. Ye are men that are parting from Christ, says he; why so? Because they did place a piece of their worship therein, and thought they would render them acceptable to God, and therefore brought in these Jewish rites and ceremonies into the matter of justification before God. The Lord hath not given all his people the same light; we are to be fully persuaded in our own minds about our own light: Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, Rom. 14:5. But that is but an ill sort of being persuaded in our own mind, that brings this persuasion also, that they who are not of our mind, are not right before God. So much for the first thing, the matter of the duty, considering one another.

The second thing to be spoken to, is what the end of this is, To provoke unto love, and to good works.

1. The first thing I note in this end is, You find love and good works joined together. Good works, or holiness, will never thrive amongst Christians, where love is under a decay. Where envying and strife is, says the apostle James, there is confusion, and every evil work, chap. 3:16 not only there is an evil work, but there is every evil work. The edifying and building up of the church by their mutual communion, as well as by communications from the head, Eph. 4:16 is expressly determined to be in this, edifying of itself in love. From whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working, in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love: as if the apostle had expressly pointed forth, that the general spirit of love is as it were the cement, and nutriment of the whole body of Jesus Christ; grace from the head, and spiritual love of the members one to another, is as the spring to their growth.

2. We find that the increase of love and holiness, is the proper and right end of Christian communion. For this end churches are appointed by Jesus Christ, that they may be societies for building up a company that he calls out of the world in love to God and to one another in holiness, till he transplant them to the church above.

3. The making this the end, speaks forth this, that the best of Christians stand in need of being mightily stirred up unto love, and to good works, or why stood the Hebrews in need of being so stirred up? We have the same word in the original, in 2 Cor. 9:2. Your zeal hath provoked very many. The grace of God, and the Spirit of holiness is ingrafted in the hearts of every Christian; but notwithstanding, every one should make conscience to water this, to stir it up, to blow upon this little fire, and to increase it.

APPLICATION. The first word shall be a word of reproof or lamentation. How sadly is it to be bewailed, that love and good works are so rare, and the means for them so neglected? that there is so little considering one another, to provoke unto love, and to good works? If it were not for the name of churches that is amongst us, one would hardly understand, that there is such a company of Christians amongst us; that considering one another to provoke unto love, and to good works, the Lord knows how few mind. How many are there of our Christians, that are not a bit the better for their fellow Christians, since the day God gave grace to them? Is there no Christian of your acquaintance, that you can labour to do good to? I never expect that person is fit to get good from others, that is not ready to do good to others. The spirit of humility, that makes us ready to receive good from others, will work a spirit of love in readiness to do good to others. Now, that this matter is neglected, is not all we have to complain of; but the contrary thereto is that which

I would bewail and reprove, and the Lord make reproof light where it is most justly deserved.

1. There are a great many people, that consider one another's infirmities to blaze them abroad; instead of considering one another to provoke unto love, and to good works, they consider their infirmities to take notice of them, and to blow a trumpet upon their failings. I have often seen, and you may observe it, and may have found, that very often such professors as have been given much to the observing of the infirmities of saints, and then publishing of them, have been left of God to be apostates from the truth of the gospel themselves. It is a greater transgression than you are aware of, to observe the infirmities of saints, on purpose as it were to crow over the profession, because of the faults of them that make it. Let us always be tender of the name of Jesus Christ. If men that are not Christians are yet called so, and fall, let them get their just shame; the way of the Lord is not a whit the worse because a transgressor falls therein; the fault is not in the way, but in the walker. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein, Hosea 14:9.

2. Some consider one another's infirmities to imitate them, and to excuse themselves in the like practice. This is just contrary to what is in my text. Instead of considering one another to provoke unto love, and to good works, they consider others in their failings and infirmities, they take notice of a great many infirmities in the people of God; they think with themselves, Why may not I do so too? Such a minister or Christian has done so and so; why may not I? This is a most dangerous practice, for people to take notice of the infirmities and failings of saints, to imitate them, and never take notice of their virtues to imitate them: therefore the apostle warns them in this

manner, Whose faith follow, says he, considering the end of their conversation; regard their doctrine, regard their practice, imitate their faith. The wisest observing of one another, is to spy out one another's good, and labour to imitate it immediately. Wherever you see faith, and repentance, and believing, and holy walking with God, set about the imitating that. May I speak of the lowest, of the meanest, and of the most foolish practice amongst us, a practice that, I am afraid, is a great deal too common in this place? Instead of considering one another to provoke unto love, and to good works, many consider one another to provoke to vanity and to superfluity. Instead of taking notice of the virtue of believers, it may be people take notice of their way of living, of their garb; it is well if a great many be not hardened thereby: If one wear such a garb, why may not I? The righteous judgment of God will ever follow, where one Christian makes not conscience to observe and imitate the virtues of another, they shall be left of God, to observe and imitate the corruptions of one another. Let me therefore press it with these few, that you would mind well the plain words of the text, to consider one another, &c. all the Christians ye know, consider in such a manner, as that you may stir them up to love and holiness.

1st, Is not this commanded by God? There is none that can read the New Testament, and not find this commanded frequently, as Col. 3:16, 17, 1 Cor. 1:5, 6, 7 and a great many other places.

2dly, Hath not this been practised by the saints of God in all ages? There was never a generation of believers that lived in any time of the world, but if they could converse together, they would. There were a company of them long since in the Old Testament, that feared the Lord, and thought on his name, that talked often one to another. There were a company when Christ was born, and yet it was as dark a day as ever came upon the church, there was a company for all that,

Luke 2:30 that were waiting for the consolation of Israel; and Anna, the old prophetess, knew them and went to speak to all of them: like enough, she knew where to find them that waited for redemption in Jerusalem. This is a duty now to be practised, and there was never more need of it. What our Lord said as a prophecy, hath been plentifully fulfilled in our day: Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold, Matth. 24:12, 13. It is a duty the Lord hath always put a special remark upon, and hath taken great notice of, and for which a book of remembrance was written, Malachi 3:16. For those that had sighed and cried, because of all the abominations done in Jerusalem, these are men marked, set apart for special mercy. I shall leave this matter with three or four notes.

(1.) Never did the grace of God reach a poor creature's heart, but with it there came an instinct after converse with them of its own nature. Whenever one is made a new creature, they begin to look upon them that are new creatures in another manner, and a warmer way, than they did before.

(2.) Wherever the power of godliness is spreading, Christian communion always is. Never did the power of godliness flourish, where this was neglected. Therefore I look upon it as one of the sad signs that the power of Christianity and the efficacy of the gospel is greatly withdrawn from us, because Christian fellowship is so greatly neglected. I shall not tell you whence it comes particularly, and how it may be mended; much may be done to the mending of it. The Lord incline their hearts in whose hand it lies.

(3.) Where love and holiness is not, the single end of Christian fellowship, the fellowship of Christians, is a most dangerous snare. The communion of Christians one with another is the most dangerous company one can be in, if so be that this be not the grand

design, to promote love and holiness. There have been such meetings amongst us, among them that are called Christians, and it may be are truly so; many people of different persuasions have met together for disputation; a most vain sinful practice, that always flows from corruption, and always issues in destruction; so far from good works, that it was never found to fail to provoke to hatred and ill works. It were far better that Christians should soberly retain their particular sentiments.

Lastly, Where Christians are a plague to one another, it is a sad sign that God hath a mind to plague them all together. Where people neglect to do good to one another, where Christians are hindrances one to another in the righteous ways of God, it portends that God will plague them all together. That is a sad threatening, Ezek. 22:18. Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross; what shall I do to them? says the Lord, as they gather silver, and brass, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger, and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you, good and bad in the same furnace, the silver and brass, and tin and iron. It is a fatal signification, when the institutions of Christ's appointment are not only forgot, but when they are perverted to contrary ends, than he hath appointed them for; it is a sad signification what the issue may be.

SERMON XIV

HEBREWS 10:20

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh.

THE sum of Christianity is to know Christ, and to use him; to know him for use, is to use him as known; his name sounds daily in the ears of multitudes, whose hearts never did once make use of him in the thing, if I may so speak, that our Lord only is useful for them in, and that is, his great calling to salvation. The apostle in the context is upon both these; he is both upon the doctrine of Christ, and the improvement of it; in the doctrine of Christ, he does discover and reveal this great usefulness for us in the matters of salvation, that the entry to the holiest of all is through his blood, that the way to the holiest of all is through his flesh, that he himself is the great High Priest set over the house of God; these are in the 19th, 20th, and 21st verses. From this 20th verse, I take notice of three things to be spoken to.

First, Where lies the way to heaven? How may a man find it? When is it one may be sure he is in it? Says the apostle, it is through the vail of the flesh of Christ. They that know not Christ, whatever they may pretend to, as to the knowledge of God or heaven, know nothing of either; and this I was speaking to last day, That the way to heaven lies through the vail of the flesh of Christ. Our Lord, in his helpfulness to us in our getting to heaven, is many ways spoken of in the word. Sometimes this great usefulness is expressed of his person, he is the peace; sometimes it is expressed concerning his office, he is the Saviour; sometimes it is spoken of his life, and sometimes of his death; sometimes of his flesh, and sometimes of his blood. But whatever the words be that are used in the scripture, concerning our Lord in his calling as a Saviour, we are to take none of them apart,

but to take all together; for Christ is not divided. His flesh that is here spoken of, is his human nature offered in sacrifice unto God, for the sins and souls of his elect; and through this we must pass, if we have a mind to heaven. It was an old custom, it is likely its original was from an institution, but it is very visible that it was several times practised of old before the Levitical law, and that it was a ceremony in making of covenants, that some living creature should be divided into two, and that the covenanting persons passed through the parts thereof; which had a great secret imprecation in the oath, that so God might do to them as was done to the beast, if they did falsify their engagements; and this the Lord by the prophet charges severely upon the people of Israel, for breaking his covenant: Jer. 34:18. When they divided the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof. Our divided and our slain Lord Jesus is the great covenant-mean betwixt the Lord and us; and all that seek their peace with God and entrance to the heavenly kingdom, must pass, if I may so speak, through the parts of this divided and slain Son of God. Christ's flesh is called the vail, because it hides his glory; it is a vail, because the passage to heaven lies through it; though the vail of the temple covered the holiest of all from the eyes of all the people, yet through it a passage was for the High Priest at the appointed time. There are three things simply needful, not only needful to our salvation, but grand pieces of salvation. The saving knowledge of God; acceptable worshipping of God; and all enjoyment of him. In the saving knowledge of God, all graces are exercised, in acceptable worship all duties are performed, in the enjoyment of God all blessings and mercies are received. These three have all a mutual influence one upon another; the more there is of saving knowledge, the more there is of acceptable worship; and the more there is of both these, the more of communion with God. And thus it is both on earth and in heaven; only there is a wonderful difference in degree, for all these are low here, but are perfect above; our knowledge is dark, our

worship is faulty, our enjoyment scanty, small, and quickly passes away; our vessel is narrow, and cannot receive much; and leaking, and cannot hold much; what it is they know above, and what worship they perform, and what enjoyment of good they receive; is above our knowledge. Of their knowledge too the apostle speaks singularly, For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known, 1 Cor. 13:12. The words that the apostle hath there, are very hard to be understood; but we might know something of them by the former part of them; we know what it is to know in part, we know a little what it is to see through a glass darkly; but what face to face knowledge of God is, and what to know even as also we are known, we do not know. What is more common in the sense and thoughts of believers than this, even in their nearest approaches to God, even in their clearest views of him. It is but a little that I know of him, but he knows me perfectly? Will ever that day be, that Paul shall know Christ as well as Christ knew Paul? I shall know even as also I am known, as clearly, as satisfyingly, as far beyond what our present knowledge is, as any thing can be. We shall be like him, says the apostle John; for we shall see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. Beloved, says he, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Ay, but it will ever appear? Yes, says he, it will appear; when he shall appear, then we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The knowledge we have of God and of Christ Jesus now, is through the glass of the gospel, 2 Cor. 3:18. And the more that God shines Upon that glass, and the more that he enlightens the eyes of our minds in beholding it, the more we perceive it; but now what a wonderful knowledge of Christ must that be, that is gathered and learned out of his blessed face, when we shall see him as he is! Christ is a great deal better than the Bible; the Bible is a creature, the Bible, is a created manifestation of the will of God; all our knowledge now of God and Christ must be bounded with that, must be determined

by that, must be ought from it; but the apostle tells us, there is another sort of knowledge of Christ, to be hereafter, when we shall see him as he is. How they worship, we do not know, we know what worshipping in a temple is, but we do not know what worshipping is without it, where the Lord God almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof, Rev. 21:22. I only take notice of these things, because I was saying that these were the main parts of salvation, and that we come only to them through Christ Jesus. We cannot worship God acceptably but in Christ; we cannot enjoy God, but in Christ; never was there a gracious communication of God's love given unto men, but through Jesus. The application of this truth, that the way to heaven lies through the vail of Christ's flesh, I shall forbear until I have gone through the words of the text, upon the second thing, which is the properties of this way. The way is through his flesh, but what sort of a way is it? The apostle gives us here three properties of it, and I will take one of them to speak to at this time.

It is called a new way, it is called a living way, and it is called a consecrated way for us. We would have no need of Christ's flesh, or of its being made a vail, unless it had been the purpose of his grace to save a multitude of poor lost sinners in a way consecrated for us.

Of the first of these, it is a new way. The meaning of this, is what I would discourse a little to.

First, To avoid mistakes, I shall remove those things that this word may lead people to, and tell you what is not the meaning of the newness of this way, then positively what it is.

1. This is not a new way, as if it were of a new invention, a late contrivance and device of God; but is as old as eternity; and there can be nothing before nor after in eternity. Our Lord is the way to heaven; he is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and

that in a usual scripture-sense, as much as to say, from eternity, Rev. 13:8. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was, Prov. 8:24. His ways are from everlasting, Micah 5:2. The way of saving men by Christ Jesus is not a way of late invention: It is according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, Eph. 3:11, 2 Tim. 1:9.

2. Neither is it a new way, as if it were newly revealed, as if it were of late revelation; for this way of saving men by the Son of God, is as old as sin is, and was revealed immediately upon sinning, in that way that we shall further hear of. Adam knew this way, Abel knew this way, and Enoch; and Abraham saw Christ's day, and Christ was before him: Before Abraham was, I am, says our Lord, John 8:58.

3. Neither is it of late as to the use of it, for the benefit has been received by multitudes; all along by Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets that are in the kingdom of God. There is but one way to heaven, though this seems strange to us. Adam died some thousands of years before Christ came in to the world, before this vail was actually made; so did Abraham, so did the Old Testament church, according to the order of their generations, some a longer, and some a Shorter while before: But they had the way for substance revealed to them; there was a revelation of God's good will towards them in such ways as he thought good, whereby his pardoning grace and acceptance, through a mediator, was pointed out to them; they had the same hope that we have, and the same faith that we have; only with this difference, their faith was to look forward, and our faith is to look backward; their faith was in the Messiah to come, and our faith is in the Messiah which is come. Their faith was in the vail of that flesh that was to be reared up, and our faith is in the vail of his flesh that has been reared up, and is now gone up to heaven: the same faith we have, saith the apostle, the same spirit of faith, 2 Cor.

4:13. We find there is a great difference between David and Paul, as to their expressions of godliness, and as to the clearness of their knowledge: ay, but, Says the apostle, we have the same spirit of faith with David; David said, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; says the apostle Paul, The same spirit of faith is in us. These are the things that are to be removed, when Christ as to heaven is come to be a new way; not that it is newly devised, or newly revealed, nor newly used. It is called positively a new way.

1st, Because it comes after another, as the apostle teaches us to argue, Heb. 8:13. In that he saith, A new covenant, ha hath made the first old. So may we say, when Christ is said to be a new way, there hath been then some way before, that is now made void, and made void by it, as this was. There was a way by the first covenant, wherein sinless man might have been saved and happy. This was a way God never intended to bring one man to heaven by. Do not imagine, that God did ever design that which he never effected. When the Lord made the first covenant with Adam, he foresaw the event. If I may so speak, the first covenant was but a scaffold reared up a little while, that the glory of the new might be displayed. The first covenant was, (1.) A covenant without a mediator, God and man treated immediately together; sinless creatures made in so great perfection, as God made them, were in case, if I may so speak, of treating with God. (2.) This covenant was made upon condition, that is to say, the blessings of that covenant were suspended until the duty of that covenant was fulfilled. (3.) There were peremptory threatenings that did make all void, whenever it was incurred, In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die. Sin broke this quite to pieces, this covenant of works, this covenant without a mediator, this covenant upon conditions, this covenant that might be broken by sin, is altogether removed, and no man can ever get good by it. The bridge is quite broke down; but such is the folly of this blind world, that multitudes

will labour to build up this bridge again; whereas the day of the Lord, or a storm, will quickly discover how rotten it is.

2dly, It is called new, because of its great light in the revelation of it under the gospel, because it is newly revealed in greater light than it was before. There is a pregnant place to this purpose, Heb. 9:8. The apostle is speaking upon the same thing that I am, The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing. Pray observe it, it is a great scripture; the Holy Ghost by these things taught the church of the Jews; the holiest of all was a type of heaven, there was an entrance into this typical heaven for the high-priest, in the name of all Israel; the Holy Ghost signified to them, that there was greater light to come in the way to heaven, but that the first tabernacle must be removed before that light come. How much does the apostle speak, 2 Cor. 3:6 to the end, of the difference betwixt the Old Testament and New Testament dispensation? He depresseth the one, and raiseth and exalteth the other greatly, both in the power and glory of the one beyond the other. Let us now consider this matter a little more narrowly, because it is of considerable use for directing our path, in order to make us thankful for the blessing of our lot in the New Testament day. You heard there was a revelation of Christ, and the way to heaven; there were promises, there was worship, there was faith, and there was salvation under the Old Testament, but how vastly preferable is our state beyond theirs? (1.) As to the doctrine of Christ, see how the matter was discovered to Adam and Eve. He was to be the seed of the woman, that is all we find they knew, that was to break the head of the serpent; there was to be a child born into the world, that should defeat all that the devil had done in destroying mankind in the first brood. Our Lord Jesus was to Abraham the seed of the woman, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; to Jacob he was Shiloh, Gen. 49:10, 11. Binding

his foie into the vine, &c. and in Acts 7:37 he is a Prophet raised up like unto Moses, as Moses foretold in Deut. 18. If we go further, he was to David the son of David; if we go on to the Prophets, Isaiah speaks greatly of him, chap. 10:6. He was to be a child given to us, a Son born to us; his name was to be called Wonderful, &c. chap. 53. He was to be a man afflicted of God, he was to be slain, &c. And Micah 5:2. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel. These are several of the brightest dawnings of the light, and the knowledge of Christ in the Old Testament: but pray what are all these to one word that John Baptist speaks, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, John 1:29.? And therefore he is greater than all the Prophets, that is, all the Old Testament Prophets, until the testimony of the apostles: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our Hands have handled of the word of life, 1 John 1:1. Thereupon it was that our Lord said, Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them, Matth. 13:16, 17. Certainly there was, if I may so speak, a greater temptation unto the Old Testament saints, to desire to see Christ in the flesh than there is to New Testament saints, to long impatiently for his second coming. Surely the strong faith of Abraham, that saw Christ's day near two thousand years before he came, had great desires to have seen him in person, and the Lord was pleased to gratify him in some measure; for even the Son of God in all appearance did take on him the form of a man, in appearance, not really, not the nature of a man, but the form of a man, and did converse with the prophets of old. The happiest man that we find in the Old Testament, as to this point, was old Simeon;

he was both an Old Testament saint and a New, he had it revealed unto him, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. I only touch on these things, to shew that the doctrine of Christ is a great deal more clearly revealed to us than to them; therefore the way may be called new. Next, as to their worship, they had in the wilderness a curious tabernacle, in Canaan a stately temple, and there was a multitude of glorious ornaments in the outside and in the inside; there were courts, there were washings, there was incense, there was blood, sprinkling with blood; and what signified these things? Since we have got the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man, Heb. 8:2. We worship towards the true tabernacle, that their tabernacle was but a type of. How weak a type and resemblance was that of a great house of threescore cubits long, twenty cubits broad, and thirty cubits high, 1 Kings 6:2, &c. what sort of resemblance was this to a man like to this? But it was so, and all that they had. Our Lord is the minister of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man; all their washings and sacrifices were but shadows of that, of which we have got the substance; these were all the shadows of things to come, but the body is of Christ, Col. 2:17. So I may say as to their promises; they had promises, but there was something of a vail even upon the promises of the Old Testament; a great many spiritual promises were veiled under temporal blessings. The apostle saith concerning them, These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, Heb. 11:13. That is the second, the way is called new, because it is of a new, lightsome, glorious revelation, under the gospel. The apostle Paul saith, Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, &c. Acts 13:38, 39.

What great difference is there between Paul's preaching, and the bringing of a beast upon the altar? and the sinner laying his hand

upon his head, and the priest cutting his throat? What a poor thing was this, in regard of the plain gospel-revelation of Jesus Christ's sacrifice?

3dly, It is said to be a new way, because it is newly and lately made: and the word in the original has something in it, that favours this sense. Some read it a new slain way. It is a way that comes by blood, that blood is newly shed; there is no abatement of the virtue of Christ's death, his blood is as warm, cries as loud this day, as the day it was shed: yet, notwithstanding, it had something in it to work upon people the more readily, because it was newly done at this time. Now, when we come to a matter of sixteen hundred years, we are apt to think that the virtue is in a great measure impaired; but this is our sin and folly.

4thly, It is a new way, because it is always new, and never gives place to another. It is never called old, for that which is old is ready to decay, and to vanish away; it is called new, because there is never to be another way to heaven. People had need take heed how they improve this. If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifices for sins, Heb. 10:26. A scripture that, by the cunning of Satan, and by the darkness of the minds of many good people, has raised a storm in many good people's consciences without ground. The meaning is this, God will never provide another way to the end of the world, but only this one way.

Lastly, It is a new way, because it is well prepared, as new ways use to be. In the order that God gives about the city of refuge, Deut. 19:3, 4. Thou shalt prepare thee a way, says the Lord; thou shalt make a new way on purpose, a way that a man may easily find, a way that may be distinguished from all other ways, that may direct itself to the

passenger; whenever a man should stand in need of the city of refuge, that he may find the Way ready before him. Christ as slain as the new way to heaven, that is, well prepared, all impediments being removed out of the way, and all furtherances being in it; every thing that may hinder is removed, justice, the law, conscience condemning, and sin working; of all these we find plenty spoken of in the word of God. The Lord puts away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he sprinkles conscience, and gives full assurances of faith; but some of these I have spoken to already. Only now a little of the positive furtherances that are in this way, or the properties of it, as it is a new prepared way.

1. Christ Jesus is a safe and sure way, so that a man needs fear nothing, if he be in Christ: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? says the apostle, Rom. 8:35. I know that they that are in Christ will fear often, but that is their weakness. It is a reflection on our Lord Jesus, as to this sure way to heaven, to have trembling travellers walking in it; people should walk confidently, the way is sure and safe. There are many enemies in it, that is certain; but they are not properly in the way, but are in our way as we travel in it; so that believers cannot walk quietly to heaven for them, but they walk safely for all that. The devil has been busy for above these five thousand years upon the road to heaven, yet he never slew one believer to this day. If a man be in Christ, the ark, he is certainly safe: he may be frightened, he may be disturbed, he may apprehend danger, but he shall feel none.

2. This way is a well-provided way. If a man have a great way to go, if there be danger of his being starved by the way, he is in a poor case; but there is no danger of being starved, if we walk in Christ. Here, if I may so speak, we may live upon the way; here is a cordial to the soul, food to the soul. Remember our Lord's body was given for us, his

blood was shed for us; the eating his flesh and drinking his blood, is food to the traveller in this way.

3. It is a very pleasant way. All they that know it find it to be pleasing both to God, and to his people. May we conceive, Sirs, how pleasing it is to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to see multitudes of poor sinners coming home to heaven in the arms and heart of his own Son? to see the strayed sheep come home upon the good Shepherd's shoulders? to hear him say, Behold, Here am I, and the children thou hast given me? It is pleasant also to all believers; there is no believer that usually hath great trouble, but either when his interest in Christ is hid, or when his enjoyment of Christ is small. When we know we are in him, and when we do feel the blessedness of being in him, it is not ordinary affliction that will work much upon the soul of a believer. With what contempt does the apostle speak of all afflictions? I know, says he, and am persuaded, that they are not able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. He was walking in the way, and encompassed with the love of God in Christ Jesus; therefore he gives a defiance to things present, and things to come, as not being able to hinder him from reaching to his journey's end.

4. Christ is the way to heaven, and he is prepared as a neat way. It is not far betwixt Christ and heaven; for as soon as ever a believer sets foot in Christ as the way, he is immediately possessed of begun eternal life. We are to lay hold of eternal life; that eternal life is in his Son, and he that hath the Son, hath life, saith the apostle, 1 John 5:11, 12. Alas, poor people commonly misreckon most wofully, that we are so far from heaven as from death and the grave; for though heaven's full enjoyment lies beyond both, and such as be young may possibly be a good many years from heaven; yet if so be that you be truly in Christ, Christ is now in heaven, and heaven is in him: we receive

eternal life by receiving him; we do not receive the full enjoyment of it, but we receive a right to it, and earnest of it. It is a near way, for a man may see heaven when he is in the way. There is a promise in the prophet Isaiah that has its veil on it: Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty, and they shall behold the land that is very far off, chap. 33:17. All that I allude to is, that as soon as a believer by faith takes up Christ Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, immediately he sees the land that is far off; for there is no man can have a believing look of Christ Jesus, but he must see heaven and salvation in his face. We have access, says the apostle, by faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God Rom. 5:2.

SERMON XV

HEBREWS 10:20

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

THERE are two things, that if they were more upon our hearts and minds, would make both the speaking and hearing of this subject sweet and savoury. If our hearts were set on heaven, it would be delightful to hear of the way to it; and if our hearts were filled with love to Christ Jesus, his most lovely appearing would be very desirable; and the most useful and sweetest sight that believers can have of Jesus Christ, till they come before his throne, is to see him, as

by his death and blood, making his way to heaven for them. Christ crucified and Christ glorified is all that we are to study; the one we are to study as long as we are on earth, and the other we shall be admitted to study when we get well to heaven. It is upon this theme I have been speaking again and again, and, if the Lord will, shall do it yet farther, That Jesus Christ as slain is the way to heaven; or, That the flesh of the slain Son of God is the veil through which we must pass to heaven. This point I have opened in several things; and before I come to the large application of it that I design, I thought fit first to speak of the commendations of this way, that are in the text, and last day spake to the first of them, That it is called a new way, new not for its being newly contrived, for the contrivance of this way is as old as eternity; it was an eternal purpose, that God purposed in himself, about bringing the elect number of Adam's fallen seed to glory by his Son Christ Jesus. It is not new in the revelation of it; for it was revealed as soon as sin came into the world, and sin is as old as the world, within a week or little more. I mean sin is as old as any creature is; it may be that sin was on the sixth day, or at least the seventh, it was very quickly. As soon as sin came in, the revelation of this way comes in also. It is not new for the use and benefit of it; it is not this day, nor yesterday, nor from the death of Christ, that believers get entrance to heaven, but from the beginning, from Abel the righteous, unto Zechariah that was slain betwixt the altar and the temple; and in all the Old Testament times, the access to heaven was the same as it is now. Why then is it called a new way? It is neither newly contrived, nor lately revealed, nor lately felt in the profit of it. It is new, because there was another before it; there was a way to heaven before it; but never man got to heaven that way, and never man shall. God never meant that ever man should perfect obedience unto himself by the terms of the first covenant; though life was promised by it, yet the least disobedience was threatened with death. It is new, because it is so clearly and newly revealed in the gospel;

therefore the gospel, in the declaration that we have of it, is called the New Testament. It is new, because it was but lately that this way was actually declared, and made known by the death of the Son of God. It is new, because it is constantly fresh, and is never to give place to a successor; as long as the world lasts, God will never contrive another way to bring men unto eternal life, but this through his Son shall remain for ever. If men sin wilfully in the contempt of this, says the apostle, there is no more sacrifice for sin; God will never provide another sacrifice for them that contemn this. It is new, because it is well prepared, and made fit with all the encouragements that may be to the traveller. Of these things I have spoken already.

It remains, that I speak of the second property of this way, it is a living way. Christ slain as the way to heaven is a living way. Now, this is a more marvellous property than the former. Here is, in the preceding verse, a man whose blood was shed and all of it, and by blood shedding he was slain; in this verse here is a man whose life was taken away, and his flesh rent, so the word implies in the original, his body and soul were plucked asunder by violence. That our Lord Jesus as slain is the way to heaven, and a living way, is what we would inquire into the sense of, and see what we are taught thereby.

First, Christ as slain is a living way to heaven, because there was great life in his death, mighty power, mighty effects, it did great things. The apostle Paul was a great divine, you know; O what a blessing were it to the world, if there were but one man in it that knew Jesus Christ but half as well as Paul did! Now, what was this great man's study all his life, but to know him? That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, Philip. 3:10. Observe, every body knew as well as Paul, that Christ had died and

was buried, that Christ had suffered and had risen again; but, says the apostle, I do not study that, that I know sufficiently; there is something else about it, there is power and virtue in that death, and suffering, and resurrection, that every day I am studying more and more. See now how the apostle does most excellently and elegantly vary the word. The general word is, That I may know him, that is, Christ: the particulars are various; that I may know his resurrection, and the power of it, that is one phrase; that I may know his sufferings in their power, is another; and the third is, That I may know his death in being conformable to it. The fellowship of his sufferings, conformity to his death, and the power of his resurrection, are but various words expressing the same great fruit, that the apostle aimed at in his knowledge of Jesus Christ. When I am dead to sin as he was; when I am like him in suffering and weanedness from this world; when I know his resurrection, in being raised up to newness of life, as he was raised up, by the glory of the Father, to a new resurrection. There was never a death in this world, that had life and power in it, but Christ's; God be thanked, death is the way to life, and we pass through death unto life; but there is no life in the death of martyrs, when slain for Christ's sake, as Abel the righteous was; when they are dead, their blood cries for vengeance; but in the very death of our Lord there were great and mighty effects, there were great acts of life. I will name them for our study and use in our spiritual knowledge, for in this exercise of our faith should be our daily employment.

1st, There was life in Christ's death, for by it he reconciled us to God. There is a great word to this purpose: And having made peace, says the apostle, through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, Col. 1:20. The greatest quarrel that ever was in the world, or ever will be, is that betwixt God and sinners, taking up of which is the greatest difficulty; the quarrel is just on God's side, for he is offended; the quarrel is unjust on man's side, for the fault is his;

the parties are mightily unequally matched, the Almighty God and a frail worm. But our Lord by death made up this quarrel, and there was no way of making it up but only this. Now, we commonly know this, and say it, that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son; but this matter should be distinctly known, and narrowly thought upon; we should have our faith exercised so about it, as that we may be able to improve it a little. I Would therefore shew you now, how Christ, by his death, reconciled us to God. He did this,

(1.) In that he satisfied divine justice by his death. There can be no peace betwixt God and men, as long as God's justice is demanding vengeance; as long as the justice of God has any thing to crave, there is no man can stand before him. Now, there are only two ways of satisfying divine justice, and there will never be a third. If all the devils in hell or men on earth should study to devise one, it will be impossible to find it. Divine justice is either satisfied by falling upon the sinner himself, or the surety for him: when justice falls upon the sinner, and exacts payment of him, the poor wretch must be perpetually paying, because he can never pay to purpose: a great reason why hell's torments are eternal, is, because justice can never get enough of them. But the satisfaction that justice got of our Lord Jesus, was full measure heaped up and running over; he offered himself a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour; justice was pacified and satisfied, and love got a vent towards men.

(2.) The law must be fulfilled before there can be any reconciliation with God. The law of God is not to be shifted off or put by; God's holy law is a perpetual bar in the way of all men to heaven, unless Christ remove it and take it out of the way. God's law demands a perfect obedience or death. Our Lord Jesus comes in and gives both, on the behalf of those that he redeemed; he was made under the law, and

came under the curse, that we might receive the blessing, and that the curse might be diverted from us.

(3.) Sin must be taken out of the way. Justice was not only to be satisfied, and the law honourably fulfilled, but sin must be taken away, in order to our salvation and to our reconciliation with God. About this great work of our Lord, and that he did it by his death, the word speaks great things: But now once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, Heb. 9:26. He hath done it for ever; sin is sufficiently put away. But how is sin put away? Sin by Christ's death is not put out of the world, but remains still in the world, and is greatly aggravated by Christ's death: If I had not come and done amongst them the works that never man did, they had not had sin. Small sins get great advantage this way, upon gospel-despisers. Christ did not come then to put sin out of the world, neither did his death put sin altogether out of his people. Where his death and the virtue of it is applied, sin is subdued, but is not expelled. The Canaanites were worsted, but were not quite put out of their coasts. Much less is sin by Christ's death put away as to its vile nature, but remains still wherever it is, a vile loathsome thing to God. Neither did Christ put away the deservings of sin. What then did he? Christ put away the condemning power of sin, that it shall no more be an impediment to the peace and reconciliation of believers. Therefore, says the apostle, There is therefore now no condemnation to them, which are in Christ Jesus, Rom. 8:1. The second word of Christ's death about sin is, that he condemned sin, he condemned sin in his flesh. Sin is a word that is too well understood even by those that are unacquainted with both the Hebrew and Greek. All sin requires a sacrifice for its expiation: He condemned sin in the flesh. There is nothing more reasonable in all the world, than for a poor creature to fear that sin should condemn him, that he should be condemned for sin, there is nothing more known in the scriptures

than that Christ died for our sins. Then it would seem that sin condemned Christ; how then did he condemn it? Let us consider now for this where the strength of sin lies. The apostle tells us, The strength of sin is the law, 1 Cor. 15:56. That which makes sin able to bind a man over to eternal vengeance, is the strength and power of God's law; and God's law is as strong as God himself, for almighty power is engaged to see the law fulfilled. Now, when Christ engages with sin's strength, and hath overcome that, may it not well be understood, that he did condemn sin? All sin's power to condemn, is from the law. Our Lord hath taken that out of the way, he hath satisfied it fully. The law demands blood for transgression; it is granted, it is given, and blood of a high sort, even the blood of the Son of God. So much for this first thing, Christ as slain is a living way, for there was life in his death, as appears in his reconciling us to God by his death. But never shall a man, to the end of the world, if it should last as long as it hath already (and blessed be God, it shall never last long) get God's peace and favour, but that man whose peace with God was bought by this blood.

2dly, There was great power and life in Christ's death, in his overcoming the power of hell; he did it by his death. A great many words there are in the scripture about this. Hell never did act more like hell, than in slaying the Son of God; hell was never so rampant as it was at that time, Luke 22:53 says our Lord, This is your hour, and the power of darkness, your sad hour of temptation; the devil's great power is exercised now Christ is taken, and to be condemned. It is strange, if the devil were ignorant of the consequences of this thing; he that entered into Peter, and got hold of his tongue for to persuade Christ not to go to Jerusalem, where he was to die; our Lord perceives the devil's hand in it, and calls Peter Satan for his pains. Is it not marvellous now, that this wicked one should have entered into the heart of Judas to betray him, and should have stirred up the chief

priests and people to cry, Crucify him? Like enough the devil thought he had done a greater exploit than in throwing down the first Adam; and what says our Lord concerning it? Now it the judgment of this world: Now shall the prince of this world be cast out, John 12:31. Our Lord prophesied of his own death in these words, And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me, John 12:32. And in another place he tells us, The prince of this world is judged, John 16:11. This now we would consider, what way this power of our Lord's death appeared in the conquering of Satan: and in order to this, we would shew where Satan's armour lies, if I may allude to that word, for that word is spoken of the same wicked person, the devil, Luke 11:22. When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. Pray what is the devil's armour, think you? Where lies his strength. His strength lies in sin, which is his seed and offspring; his strength lies in the law, whereof he is the hangman and executioner; his strength lies in the justice of God, wherein sometimes he is the instrument: therefore, because of this, the apostle says expressly, Heb. 2:14 that our Lord took part of flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil. How came the devil to have the power of death? According to his interest in sin, according to his interest in the executing of God's vengeance, he has the power of death; but our Lord through death overcame him: Col. 2:15. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Though death and hell united their powers against him, he proved too strong for them, and by dying overcame them. Hereby also he rent the vail betwixt Jew and Gentile; and because the Spirit of God does expressly and particularly mention it, therefore we may. It was a greater matter at first than now, through time, it is with Christians; we do not sufficiently ponder this great blessing: For he is our peace, who hath

made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, for to make in himself, of twain, one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, Eph. 2:14, 15, 16. When Christ died, the vail of the temple was rent from top to bottom, Matth. 27:51. Here now our Lord Jesus' flesh was the vail that we must go to heaven by.—When Christ the true vail was rent and died, immediately the typical vail was rent also; as if God had said, Now let all men know, upon the death of my Son, that all the partitions betwixt Jew and Gentile are removed. But this was a great mystery for a good while in the church, and Paul reckons upon his knowledge in this mystery of Christ, Eph. 3:4, 5. Whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel. So much for this first thing, Christ as slain, is called a living way, for there were great works of life even in his death.

Secondly, He is the living way, because all the life of man is lodged in him. Whatsoever extent life is drawn to, whatever sense we put upon this word life, as to all blessings for this and the other world, they are all contained together in Christ Jesus; so contained in him, as to be found no where else. He is that living bread that came down from heaven, that gave his flesh for the life of the world, John 6:51. The brazen serpent was a type of this. As the life of the stung Israelites stood in that ordinance of God, so the life of poor sinners stands in this grand ordinance of God, his slain son. The first man Adam, says the apostle, was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit, 1 Cor. 15:45. Surely all the natural life that is in the

world, of sense, and reason, and understanding, is derived from the first Adam: he hath made of one blood all nations upon the face of the earth. Adam appears to have been a very fruitful root; the world now for almost six thousand years, has been filled with his offspring, for of two there sprung all mankind that are upon the face of the earth; but there is no quickening here, for all this. The second Adam, says the apostle, was a quickening spirit; he alone gives the quickening spirit to this mighty offspring of the first Adam.

Thirdly, Christ is a living way, because all that are in him, as soon as they are in him live. That is one of the meanings of this word. There is no dead man can be in this way. Do not ask the question, for it is a very idle one, Whether is a man quickened before he is in Christ, or whether he is in Christ before he is quickened? Neither the one or other, but both together; his life comes by being in Christ. How can men conceive of quickening now? Quickening is a work of God. Can it be said, that he quickens before we have life, or that we have life before he quickens? We can easily perceive, that we act life by his quickening, but the Lord quickens not a moment before we are alive. How did the Lord raise Lazarus? There went life-giving power along with the word, by which life was received, and the voice was heard, as our Lord calls it; the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live; they must live before they hear; for hearing is an act of life, and they receive life by the powerful word of Christ.

Fourthly, He is a living way, because he lives for ever to be the way. There is continual virtue in Christ's death, which perpetually issues forth, in order to the salvation of all his people. You would think it strange, if one should ask, What is heaven? What is eternal life? Why, it is Jesus Christ, that is eternal life; it is one of Christ's names: And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him

that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life, 1 John 5:20. This way lives for ever, to preserve all his people; he lives for ever to make intercession for them, Heb. 7:25. Nay, if I may so speak, even in heaven, this way is not forgotten, I mean in the songs of the glorified; the song of the Lamb is perpetual: they sang the song of Moses and of the Lamb. What is in the song of the Lamb, think ye? Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, Rev. 5:12. Christ's blood in heaven, in the virtue and life of it, raises the notes of perpetual praises most highly. I know the book of the Revelation is a mysterious one, and every word of it is to be narrowly canvassed:—And in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, Rev. 5:6 so that though there be no appearance, nor will be, of any infirmity that attended the low estate of the Son of God, when he dwelt in mortal flesh, yet there will be a perpetual remembrance of the dearest acts of his love, and richest acts of his grace towards us, in loving us, and giving himself for us.

Fifthly, It is a living way, for no man can die in this way. That way may be called a living way indeed, if there were such a one that led to a good place that no traveller in it could die, and would be a great temptation for people to undertake it. There are some places in the world where riches and honours are, that people run towards, and run through a great many dangers for; but they may die in that way, but never a man dies in this way, they sleep in Jesus, but they die not. I am the resurrection, and the life, says he: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this? John 11:25, 26. O how sweet a question is that, Believest thou this, that a believer in Christ can never die? Wherefore now, since our Lord died, death hath got a more sweet name. It is called sleeping, and sleeping in the Lord. Thus it is said of Stephen, that he was stoned, calling upon

God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.—And when he had said this, he fell asleep, Acts 7:59, 60. It is called sleeping in Jesus, 1 Thess. 4:14, 15. Do not you see, say you, that believers die like other men? Yes; but then they die in Christ Jesus; they only fall asleep in the way. And the Lord, the way, will awake in a little while, and raise them up again, and bring them their new apparel, their house from heaven, 2 Cor. 5:1, 2, 3.

Lastly, It is a living way, because the traveller must live upon this way. Here is a marvellous living way; the traveller must live upon this way; he lives as soon as he is in it, and he lives as long as he is in it, for he cannot, die in it, and he lives upon it while he is in it. My meaning is, that all the fare that believers must cherish their new life with, is Christ himself. Therefore our Lord speaks of it so frequently: Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, John 6:53, 55. Blessed are they that can eat and drink plentifully of it. When the faint and weary traveller walks in Christ as the way to heaven, and has any thing that overtakes him, any faintness, any distemper that seizes upon him, nothing is he to do, but only to fall upon Christ by faith, and to live upon him, and to eat and drink this blessed way. This was Paul's life: The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me, Gal. 2:20 as if the apostle had said, The stay of my life, the comfort my life, the security and continuance of my life, depends upon this; whenever I can get but a look, whenever I can get but hold of this love of Christ, that loved me, and gave himself for me, life, and strength, and vigour return upon me. So much for this second property of the way, that it is a living way. There was life in his death; all our life is lodged in it, as soon as we are in him, we live. Whenever a poor sinner is drawn to Christ as the way to heaven, he comes and lives, and lives and comes,

and comes by life, and lives by coming. Turn it which way you will, the truth lies equally sure on all hands. This way is living, because Christ as the way lives for ever; because no man that walks in it, can die; and because a believer can live upon this way, as long as he is in this world. Never bid better fare to a child of God than more of Christ, more of the sap and virtue of a crucified Saviour. If there were more of that among us, our souls would be more fat and flourishing.

A word or two only, at this time, of Application, before I proceed to the third property.

1. Is Christ a living way to heaven? Is a slain Christ for us, the living way in which we must walk to heaven? Then surely it should be very pleasant to the people of God to go to heaven. What is there to make it irksome to a believer? What is going to heaven? It is nothing but walking in Christ towards Christ, to be ever with Christ; that is going to heaven; our way is walking in him, our way is walking towards him, our hope is to be ever with him. I know that there are a great many impediments and hindrances in the way, and yet these Christ has disarmed and removed by his death; they may make an appearance that may be frightful to such weak people as we be; weak believers take the shadow for an armed man, and are afraid many times unreasonably; but how pleasant will it be, I say, for a believer to find himself guarded from all attempts against him in his way to heaven? As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, Col. 2:6, 7. Fix your root in him, and draw your fruit from him.

2. Is Christ a living way to heaven? Then what a sorry pitiful case are they in, that walk in the ways of death, that despise this way of life? It is very common, and it does not cease to be the more sad, because it is common, but is so much the more grievous, that persons love

death rather than life. The matter now is balanced thus: every sinner is by nature dead in sin; if he continues in that state, he dies in his sin, and dying in his sin, he dies for ever, for his sin: this miserable case now is to be balanced with what our Lord proffers, that he will give the. light of life, that he offers to lead men to heaven; that if they will but set foot in him, set their hearts on him, lodge their faith on him, and put all their trust in him, he will guide them safe thither. You should reckon it a mercy, that you have sinners to preach to you; if it were not, that we have the experience of that rebellion of the natural heart in ourselves ministers would be mighty impatient in dealing with ungodly persons. What ails men, that they refuse Christ Jesus? What madness possesses the hearts of men, that they will rather go to hell, with the devil, than to heaven with Christ Jesus? Do not they well deserve to be in hell for ever, that make such an abominable choice? Yet every natural man does so, every natural man prefers the way of death to the way of life, and prefers Satan's driving to hell, unto Christ's gracious and blessed leading to heaven.

SERMON XVI

HEBREWS 10:20

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh.

I HAVE spoke, upon the 20th verse, of the way that is made to heaven, as the apostle does delightfully and wisely by the Spirit of God teach it; the various aspects as, it were, that Christ hath on our salvation, which we must have in our faith on him for salvation. I told you from this verse, that the way to heaven lies through the vail of the flesh of a slain Saviour, and this is the only way. I proposed to handle the properties of this way, before I came to the large application that so great a theme calls for. I have spoke of the first of them, That it is a new way, a new slain way. Last day I spake of this property of the way, That it is a living way. Jesus Christ as the way to heaven is a very great mystery; take but the words now as they are in our text. This sense of them is inseparable from them; and can there be any thing more mysterious than they do express, that a slain Christ is a living way for dead sinners to walk in unto eternal life? Who understands this? who believes this? I spake of the signification of this property at some length last day, how that Christ as slain is a living way to heaven. 1. In that there was life in his death. He was crucified through weakness, as to outward appearance of his low state; yet the great things that were done by that powerful death, are unspeakably mighty and many. He hath reconciled us to God, he overcame Satan, he overcame death in dying; death was never conquered until it got one man in its hands, that was our Lord Jesus; and from that day to this, it is able to master none that believes on

him, but must make an entrance for them to the heavenly kingdom. Death cannot stop a believer in Christ from going on to heaven, but rather it is made now one of the last dark gates that we must pass through. 2. He is a living way, in that all the life of poor man, all saving spiritual and eternal life, is lodged in the Son of God: This is the record that God hath given of his Son, that he hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, 1 John 5:11. There is nobody makes a question of that, that call themselves by that common name of Christians, that all life is from Christ; and there are but few, but know that all life is in him, and that men get life by being in him; that they have it when they have him. 3. He is a living way, in that, as soon as a man is in Christ, he is made alive. When that power of divine grace draws a poor wandering sinner, and puts him in the way of Christ, he is made alive immediately to God. 4. He is a living way, because he lives for ever. The virtue and savour of his sacrifice is as fresh in heaven, as in the day wherein it was offered. 5. He is a living way, because all that are in him shall live for ever; never can a man die in Christ. I know that we sometimes use the word dying so frequently that this phrase is common amongst Christians, living in the Lord, and dying in the Lord; but the New Testament phrase is fitter; believers in Christ only sleep in the Lord: They that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. Lastly, He is a living way, because the walker in Christ lives upon the way, the way is food to him. The same sacrifice of atonement before God is made a feast for the believer. As under the law and before the law, in peace-offerings, by which covenants of peace were confirmed, there was some part thereof that was to be made a feast of; so this flesh and blood of our Lord that is rent for us for a propitiation, is made a feast unto our faith: Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you, John 6:53.

The third property of this way remains now to be spoke to; that it is a consecrated way: By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us. The words as they run in the original have consecrated before the other two properties, and may be equally fairly rendered, which he hath consecrated for us, to be a new and living way; and that consecrating relates not only to the substance of Christ's being the way, but to his being a new and living way;

There are three things that I would discourse to you from these words.

1. Of Christ's consecration.
2. His own interest in it, his hand in it; so it is told us in the text, By a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us.
3. For whom it is that this way, this consecrated way is; it is consecrated for some body; it is consecrated for us, for our sakes, for our benefit, for our advantage.

First, Of Christ's consecration. This word consecrate as it is in the English, is not in all the New Testament, that I know of, but in this epistle; and it is twice in this epistle, though not the same Greek word in both places. See Heb. 7:28. Consecrate in the Old Testament is very frequent; and you know that the apostle, as hath been frequently observed to you, in this epistle, and particularly in this part of the epistle, has wisely accommodated himself to those he wrote to, who understood these words a great deal better than we do, for they knew well whence they were borrowed; they were borrowed from the temple, and tabernacle, and Old Testament worship, where consecrating was used about every thing. Consecrating is dedicating and devoting a person or thing to a special or holy service; so we find consecrating or dedicating of things and places. There was the book

of the covenant, and there was the tabernacle, and all the utensils thereof, all of them dedicated with blood; and this ceremony in their consecration was used, that, by being sprinkled with blood, they were dedicated to the holy use and service God appointed them for. So was it also as to persons: we find it especially concerning Aaron, the high-priest, who was the first type, and concerning his sons that were under him; they were separated and set apart by divine appointment for a special use, none else were appointed for it. The sense then of this word is, That Christ's consecration is, that he is devoted, and appointed, and dedicated to, for a special use, and that is, to be the way to heaven, that by him men may come to God. John Baptist understood this when he preached Christ: Behold the Lamb of God, says he, which taketh away the sin of the world, John 1:29. Here comes the true sacrifice, who bears the iniquity of his people. The apostle, in Heb. 9:22 makes a deep and excellent use of this consecration: Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; purging there is partly in the same sense with our consecrating. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. What were the patterns of the things in the heavens? The holiest of all was the grand one; the high-priest was a pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ; the temple was a pattern of the heavenly things; yet these were but shadows of them; the things themselves must be purified with better sacrifices than these, even with the blood of the Son of God. We find therefore the truth of consecrating, and devoting, and dedicating our Lord Jesus to be the way to heaven; it is frequently in the word, and used upon many accounts. We will therefore take notice, that it is the Father hath dedicated him to be the way; for this is of great use in the exercise of our faith, to know our Lord Jesus under this name, That he is the consecrated way to heaven.

1. He is consecrated by the oath of God; as in Psal. 110:4. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. And this the apostle discourses of at great length in chap. 7 of this epistle, and makes one of the grand differences betwixt his priesthood and all that went before, to consist in this, That they were made without an oath; hinting there was a time when they should cease: but when he made our Lord Jesus a Priest, it was by an oath; which was a demonstration, that he was to continue for ever in that employment. Therefore in the conclusion of that chapter, he says, For the law maketh men high priests, which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son who is consecrated for evermore. Take in this matter now by a true faith, and it may be that some time or other you will find food for your faith from it, That, by the oath and appointment of Jehovah, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christ the Son is sworn and appointed to be the only way to bring sinners to glory.

2. Our Lord Jesus is dedicated and consecrated to be the way to heaven, by the preparing him a body to suffer in. The covenant betwixt the Father and Son had all the blessings therein secured, by the mutual faithfulness betwixt Father and Son; but the way by which these were to be brought about, was the sacrifice of the Son in man's nature; therefore his consecration is carried on by his getting a human body: verse 5 of this chapter, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me. Did not God will and command sacrifices? Yes, but never out of his Son Christ Jesus; these were all but shadows and types of the great one, and there was no such thing required of our Lord Jesus, neither did he offer any such thing; but, A body, says he, hast thou prepared me.

3. By the commission and charge that our Lord had for the setting about this great work of redemption. He not only had a body to suffer

in, but was commanded by the Father to lay down his life for his people. This our Lord frequently takes notice of: This commandment have I received of my Father, John 10:17, 18.

4. He is dedicated by the holy anointing. One of the grand ceremonies of consecrating a person under the Old Testament, was by anointing. Aaron was to be anointed, and his sons; when they came in to be priests of God's appointment, they were God's anointed. And all this is typical of the true anointing, of our Lord Jesus. The anointing of Christ is the fulness of the Holy Ghost, and his pouring upon him: Therefore God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows, Psal. 45:7.

Lastly, By giving him all power over all persons and things, in order to the accomplishment of his work. All judgment is committed to him: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him, John 5:21, Matth. 28:18, John 17:2.

Secondly, How is it that Christ hath a hand in his own consecration? The word is, He hath consecrated himself to be the new and living way.

1. Christ devotes and consecrates himself to be the way to heaven, in a cheerful and willing compliance with all the will of his Father about him. In order to his being the way, the Lord God his Father opened his ears, and he was not rebellious; it was his delight to do his will; and in compliance with the divine will a great matter of his consecration stood; by the which will we are sanctified; the Father's will willing him to come, the Son's will willing him to come willingly.

2. By his dying. Our Lord Jesus died willingly, in another manner than any of us either can or should. He laid down that life that he

could keep, if he would; he laid it down as an act of great obedience unto the will of his Father; he died cheerfully, and died willingly. See what he says of it before-hand: And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth, John 17:19. What is that sanctifying of himself? A sacrificing of himself, devoting of himself to be a sacrifice for the saving of his sheep. They could never come to that sanctification, by gospel-devotedness to God, unless our Lord Jesus had devoted himself to death.

Lastly, He consecrates and devotes himself by the consequent practice and exercise of his office. Every poor sinner upon whom our Lord Jesus puts forth his skill in saving him, is a display of his authority to save, is a further declaration of the power and might that he was clothed with in bringing men to glory. Therefore, says the apostle, it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings, Heb. 2:10. He was made perfect through sufferings, to the end that he might bring many sons to glory; and the more he brings, this perfection is the more evident in him.

The third thing in the words to be explained is, For whom is this consecrating of Christ? The apostle says, he has consecrated this way for us, for a particular sort of people, for some of the children of men. Christ did not consecrate and make himself a way to heaven, and send the gospel into the world, that men, according as they incline, and according to the direction of their free-will, might come in and get life and salvation by him. Our Lord Jesus went about his work more knowingly, more fixedly than that; he knew what would come of it. It is done, I say, for particular persons. Consider, with respect to this,

1. That all the springs of salvation are towards particular persons.

2. That the covenant, the charter of salvation, is with, and for, and to particular persons.

3. The possession of it is by, and for particular persons.

1. The great springs of salvation are all for particular persons; the three grand springs of salvation, are the election of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the sanctification of the Holy Ghost. Now, all these are determined towards distinct and particular persons, 1st, The election of grace is upon persons; there is no election of qualifications, the election is of persons. Wherever it is spoken in the word, it is spoken of persons: He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. The election is all of persons.

2dly, The grace of redemption by our Lord, with his redeeming love, is of persons: He laid down his life for his sheep, and, I know you are not of my sheep, says our Lord. That was a not Christ could speak; but none of his servants must ever offer to speak after him; never was there an apostle could say so in an assembly of people concerning one particular person, I know they are none of Christ's sheep, that is only for the great shepherd to say. The chief shepherd can only tell his sheep exactly.

3dly, The sanctification of the Spirit, which is the great spring of salvation, as it is begun in us, is of persons. There is a devoting of the whole church, the body of Christ. But as it is a work on particular persons, this work must pass upon particular men; the springs must work in every man that is called to this salvation. For we ourselves

were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. So that we find, I say, that the springs of salvation are all about particular persons. The springs run in one distinct channel towards particular persons, and always answer the same. Every one that is elected by the grace of the Father, is redeemed by the blood of his Son; every one that is elected and redeemed, is sanctified by the inhabitation of the Holy Ghost: they are not equally visible, but equally certain.

2. The charter of salvation is to particular persons. Every one must have God's covenant made with himself. None are saved by a general covenant of God with a body of people. A church covenant under the gospel signifies nothing at all in matters of salvation; it may be of good use in church-order. But every one in particular must have salvation come to him, through the channel of a particular covenant betwixt God and him: He has made with me, says David, an everlasting covenant. If it had been only with Israel in general, it had been a cold business for a dying man's comfort; but he has made with me, as particularly with me, as if there were not another man in all the world that God covenanted with.

3. The possession of salvation is by particular persons. People are not saved in crowds and corporations. There are bodies of Christian churches, as they are called, that are to attend to the means of grace and mutual edification, according to the Lord's appointment; but when we come to partake of begun, or of complete salvation, every one must have it for himself; no other body's salvation can serve him. This is the substance of the meaning of this word, that our Lord as slain is consecrated, and hath consecrated himself to be the way to heaven for his people.

I would make some little use of this at this time, and reserve the more general application of this slain Christ, as the way to heaven, unto another opportunity. Two things I shall infer from hence, and speak to at this time.

1. Is Christ a consecrated way to heaven, and hath he consecrated himself for his people? Then behold how he loved them! If the Jews said so of Christ's weeping at Lazarus's grave, what must we say of our Lord's consecrating himself to the death for us, that he might make a way to heaven for us? Jesus wept, John 11:35. The Jews said, Behold how he loved him! We find most frequently in the word, when either this great devoting of Christ to death is spoken of in general as to churches, or applied in particular to particular persons, it is still ascribed to love as its spring. Husbands, says the apostle, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, Eph. 5:25. He loved me, and gave himself for me, says the apostle, Gal. 2:20. Great must that love be, when the love-gift is so great. It must be a strong love that must give so great a gift, Who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, Rev. 1:5, 6. The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, &c. 2 Cor. 5:14. This I would speak a little to in a few particulars, this consecrating himself to be the new and living way to heaven.

1st, Our Lord Jesus did consult the necessity of his people out of mere pure love. He was upon the Father's counsel from eternity about the way of saving man; he is the wisdom of God, and hath an interest in the contriving of it; the eternal purpose was purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: The contrivance was, What way may poor fallen sinners be brought well and safe to glory? They are fallen by sin, conquered by Satan, proclaimed rebels by God, attainted and condemned by God's holy law, are beggared and impoverished, and

cannot pay a farthing to divine justice. The law must not be broken, justice must not be affronted, God's power cannot be resisted: How then can man be saved? It is impossible but only this way; here is the mystery of our Christianity. It is impossible that a man can be brought up to God, until God come down to man, and become man for him; and that God-man is made the great mean to bring all his people up again to God; the sacrifice of the man, and the power of God, and the merit of that sacrifice of that God-man, is made an everlasting chariot, that will carry all that believe on him certainly safe to glory. He consulted, I say, our necessity in great love. He consulted not his own conveniency at all: Even Christ pleased not himself, &c. O what an argument is here! The apostle brings the sweetest arguments sometimes to press the easiest ordinary duties. Let us not please ourselves, but every one another, for edification; that is wholesome advice, but the argument is beyond it, even Christ pleased not himself.

2dly, Our Lord's love in being thus a consecrated way appears in this, that he draws all his redeemed to himself. Christ being the way to heaven is no man's way till he be in it; no man is brought to heaven by Christ, till he be in him. Therefore our Lord, knowing this, draws them to himself: And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me; that is, all that I have laid down my life for.

3dly, This love appears not only in drawing them, but in preserving them to the heavenly kingdom. We do not fall out with ourselves so much as we ought; but we were in a bad case if Christ should fall out with us, as often as we do with ourselves; if the Lord Jesus had had the same thoughts of us, that we ought to have of ourselves, where had we been? But he pities and spares in his great love, and by his great might keeps his poor people in the way, and gives them the

crown in the end, Rev. 2:7. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Sirs, Christ's love is a blessed thing. If a poor believer can but see it through a glass darkly, and perceive something of the stream of it, he is joyful. But Christ's love as a Saviour will never appear in its glory, till the crown of glory comes out of his own hand; when a believer, if I may so speak, kneels before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and receives the crown of eternal life; our Lord may well say then, Hereby thou mayest know how I have loved thee. Christ consecrated himself to be the way to heaven, and a great demonstration of his love we should gather out of it. See Rev. 3:9.

2. Did Christ consecrate himself to be the way to heaven? Then surely men may boldly use him as the way; he is devoted for this end. There are two grand abuses of consecrated things, When they either are not used for that end they were consecrated for, or when they are abused to another end.

Is our Lord consecrated to be the way to heaven? Men must boldly by faith make use of him. See our Lord's own argument, John 6:27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: For him hath God the Father sealed. He hath consecrated him, set him a part to be the bread of life, and giver thereof. This now I would only branch out in two particulars.

1st, Christ as the way to heaven maketh us bold in entering by him; he is consecrated for this end. There is a boldness of faith, that in the day of God's power is practicable. At first believing some have found it. I will not say very many. The very first adventure of a sinner, that has been despairing of all relief before, may trust with a great confidence upon Jesus Christ, as the consecrated way to heaven. But,

say you, I do not know that he has been consecrated for me. I know that he is consecrated to be the only way to heaven; but is he consecrated for me? I answer, (1.) No man ever did, and no man can, and you never will be able to know that Christ is consecrated for you, till you be in him. This is the great wisdom of God. God's great book of life, I say, is not to be read by any eyes, but the eyes of a believer; and when he reads the book, he can only read his own name in it. But indeed Paul, by an apostolic spirit and discerning charity, might speak as he did, Whose names are written in the book of life. The book of election, and the book of Christ's sheep, can be read by no eyes but the eyes of a believer; and this is enough, we need no more. It would be enough to confound all things in the church of Christ, if so be that the secret books of God's purposes were visible unto and legible by believers. If I may so speak, there would be no living in the world, if men knew who were elected, and who not. The very doctrine thereof, you see how many tumults it raises; how much more would it be, if they saw the thing? Take heed, remember that Christ is consecrated to be the way to heaven; he is consecrated to be so for a particular number of men; no man can know himself to be of that number, but a believer, and every believer may. Whenever a poor creature can assure his heart before God, that he, in the sense and plain conviction of his deserving hell, and of his being utterly unable to do any thing to bring him to heaven, takes Christ as God's appointed way, and ventures his all upon the slain Son of God, this man is a believer, and the way was consecrated for him; as soon as he is in it, he may know it. Make but your calling sure, and you make your election sure thereby. (2.) Whatever darkness there be about this, whether the way was consecrated for you, you have encouragement to venture upon the way by all the scripture. It is not the doctrine of the purpose of God on the death of Christ, that is the ground of our faith; it is the doctrine about the sufficiency of Christ's death; it is the doctrine of the gospel, wherein the tender of the

Saviour and great salvation is brought to every man's door so closely, that the issue must be either an acceptance unto salvation, or a refusal with the great aggravation of condemnation; and so will the judgment at the last day proceed.

2dly, In using Christ as the way to heaven, we must not only, because he is consecrated for this end, venture on him boldly, but we must walk in him confidently.

(1.) Without fear of enemies; I do not say without apprehension; there is an apprehension of enemies, that is an act of wisdom and faith, in order to prepare for the encounter. Take ye the whole armour of God, we have need of it, for there are great enemies; not flesh and blood only, but greater enemies we have to fight with. Remember this, that you cannot get to heaven in that road that the devil does not haunt; there is no path lies to heaven that the devil cannot meet a walker in it. We must not expect to get to heaven without meeting him by the way; but let us remember this, I am upon consecrated ground; if I be in Christ, Satan cannot prevail against me: And the more confidence we have of our security in Jesus Christ, the more courage and strength we have against Satan.

(2.) Fear not miscarrying at last, if ye be in Christ. It is a pitiful case that a great many believers are in; there are believers, God help them, that are so weak, they believe all their days, and they unbelieve all their days; they walk on in Christ, and fear they shall never come to the end. What, art thou in Christ, and yet fearest thy missing heaven? Whither can Christ the way lead a believer, but home to himself? Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: For thou lovedest me before the foundation of the world, John 17:24. I will not lose a bit of them, I will not lose the man,

notwithstanding his temptations, corruptions, and weakness in grace. I will make the poor creature get good of all. It will be seen when our Lord has perfected his work, that he has lost nothing of all that was given him.

Lastly, Walk confidently in Christ, and do not fear wandering. Believers have the promise of the Spirit to lead them into all truth. If they be in Christ, Christ will keep them. I do not say, but many believers may be left to great mistakes and errors about several things of smaller moment. But every believer that is in Christ, as to greater matters, is kept in the truth as it is in Jesus. O that this were duly minded! How wisely does the apostle speak of this point, Eph. 4:14, 15, 16 compared with ver. 19, 20 and onward of Col. 2.? The thing that I observe from both these places is, the instruction the Holy Ghost gives us of the spring of error in the church. The apostle cautions us, that we be not overtaken with the cunning craftiness of them that lie in wait to deceive. How shall we know them? would the poor man say. Know them? Always by this, they do not hold the head, says he: Not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God, Col. 2:19. As long as a believer is in Christ as the way, he can never miscarry, never wander totally; he may mistake in something in his way, but he is in the right way in the great matters of salvation, and shall be safely landed at last.

SERMON XVII

HEBREWS 10:20

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh.

THIS is the second encouragement, that the apostle, by the direction of the Spirit of God, gives in encouraging Christians to approach to God. They are all drawn from Christ Jesus; and all our encouragements for faith are in Christ alone; nothing that is in him, but is encouraging to faith; and nothing that can encourage faith is out of him, or any where else to be had. The first is, That there is an entrance allowed to us by the blood of Jesus Christ, ver. 19. The second is, That there is a way prepared, and consecrated for us through the vail; that is Christ too. And the third encouragement is, That we have an High Priest himself, set over the house of God.

Upon this second encouragement from the 20th verse, I have been several days speaking upon this truth, That the way to heaven is through the vail of the slain Son of God, it is through the vail of his flesh; and upon it, at several times, I have shewn, what is meant by Christ's flesh; it is his human nature offered in sacrifice to God for the salvation of his people, with all its spirit, and power, and virtue. Next, I shewed, why this flesh is called the vail. It hid and covered the glory of his Godhead, and yet makes a passage unto us by faith to approach to God; for an immediate approach to God, now that sin hath entered in to the world, is impossible; therefore all our approaches must be by a mediator, and this Mediator did mediate mainly by his blood and sacrifice. What sort of a way this is, has been spoke to, both in general, and according to the three properties of it in the text: That it is a new way, a living way, and a way of Christ's own consecrating for us; and upon each of these some little application has been made suitable to the doctrine that has been

discoursed to. I design now, as I promised, to make some more large application of this great truth, That our Lord Jesus as slain is the way to heaven: though I know the apostle makes the grand application in the 22d verse, for he points forth the use we should make thereof, to draw near to God.

I will, notwithstanding, as the Lord shall help, speak something of application previous unto that; and it shall be only in two particulars.

First, If Christ be the way to heaven, we may plainly see how fatally and wofully the greatest part of the world are mistaken about the way; and if mistaken about the way, they must miss of the end. If one do not take the right way to heaven, he can never come at it. This is an inference that is very plain, and very sad. There are two false sorts of religions in the world, I mean that almost all the rest are reducible to two. There is natural religion; and there is the Antichristian one, which is but a grand corruption of Christianity, and a changing of it some way into the old Pagans natural religion, and many gross things therein. I would speak but briefly unto both of them, and reduce what I mean mainly to warn you of, as inferences from thence.

1. There is natural religion. I call it by that name, because something of it is every where, and it is only what remains in that fallen state that man is come into. We will see now what this is made up of, what are those principles that are so deeply engraven in the hearts of men, that they do fill all the inhabitants of the earth with some form of religion. Wherever travellers have come, and observations have been made, among the most savage people, there is something left of some notions of religion; forms of it, though very sorry ones they be, it is acknowledged. You had need consider this, for this kind of religion is in every one of your hearts; but unless the grace of God, and the light

of the gospel expel it, and plant something better in its room, you are lost for ever. Natural religion has in it these particulars.

1st, Some notion of the being of a God, that there is a God, and that this God is to be worshipped, and served, and obeyed. All the world own something of this. The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head; so that they are without excuse, Rom. 1:20. There is nothing more invisible than the God-head; eternal power is also invisible: but, says the apostle, the very Heathens have these things made visible by the mighty works of God; and their natural reason can instruct them so far, that the rearing up of this glorious canopy of the heavens, the frame of the earth, the making of these great seas, and the making of so many beautiful creatures upon the earth, must be the work of some great, powerful, wise agent. Atheism is against nature, and is no where found, but where the principles of natural religion are extinguished by the power of the devil, and the justice of God by mens abuse of revealed religion. When men come to struggle with the right way of the knowledge of God revealed in the word, and shut their eyes against that, God suffers them to be blinded, as to those things that the very Heathens have more light in. I believe that there are more Atheists in England, than among all the Pagan nations through the whole earth. A place where the gospel-light doth shine, and men rebel against it, is the only place where such monsters are bred.

2dly, In natural religion, there is always some distinction made about good and evil, some light about good and evil, and some conscience there is exercised about these. Conscience is as natural to us, as understanding, and will, and memory are. It is as natural to us to have a conscience, as it is to be men and women, or to have reason; for conscience is nothing else but the exercise of reason about the

greatest concernments; it is only a man's judging himself, according as he stands before a greater and supreme judge. Therefore the apostle speaks thus of the Heathen: These having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew, says he, the work of the law written in their hearts, Rom. 2:14, 15. Pray observe, one of the grand promises of the new covenant, is God's writing his laws in our hearts. Here the apostle speaks of the law of nature, as written in the heart of a Heathen, their conscience in the mean while, says he, accusing, or else excusing one another, according to the light that they receive.

3dly, There is amongst all natural men, and a natural religion, some notion of forgiveness, and pardoning mercy and goodness in God. Amidst all their darkness about God, yet they do know, that it is a great excellency, and all excellencies they will ascribe to God, to be good and gracious, and ready to forgive. As there is a conscience of sin amongst all men, so they do give this praise to God, that he is a God that can forgive; thereupon they address to him, in their several ways, for it. All the Heathen have some sense of judgment to come; and from these principles all the fabrics of natural religion are reared up in the world. Now, where this natural religion comes to be polished by the light of the word, it will look a great deal better, and a great many are deceived by it.

What then are the grand wants and defects that are in a natural religion, which must certainly leave a man that has no more, in a condemned state?

(1.) With all their light, and all the knowledge they have of God, they do not know the true God; they do not know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, they do not know God in Christ. All gods not seen in Christ are the idols of the nations. It is a deep word that the apostle has, For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by

wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, 1 Cor. 1:21. All their wisdom could not bring them to know God, because they did not know God in Christ.

(2) All natural men, whatever thoughts they may have of God's goodness in saving and forgiving, yet know nothing of God's way of doing it; and if they do not know of God's doing of it, how can they come by it? They do not know God's forgiving through a satisfaction, they do not know of God's saving men by a mediator; and a great many that hear of these things every day, seem to know it as little as they; I mean, though they subscribe to the notion, the power of the truth is as little upon their hearts as upon the Heathens. Therefore all this natural religion, that fills the nations of the earth, is nothing but a dark and dim light, a false fire that leads men into the pit, and never did lead a man to heaven; for no man can be made wise to salvation, but by the revelation of the word of God; and no man can savingly know the word of God, but by the revelation of the Spirit of God.

2. The second great religion that fills the world is Popery, as we commonly call it, Antichrist's religion. They call it the way to heaven; but the word of God calls it the mystery of iniquity, and the head of it, the son of perdition, 2 Thess. 2:3 and man of sin. The spirit of Popery lies in this, in inventing, devising, and imposing of false ways to heaven. All their several religions, as they call them, are but so many ways to lead people from Jesus Christ. There is a way to heaven that they propose by the merit of good works, sometimes by our own, and sometimes by those of others; there is a way to heaven by the intercession of saints or angels, thereupon they pray to them, and expect relief from them; there is a way to heaven in that pardon that they stand much upon, and that is by the absolution of a sinful priest like themselves. Really it is amazing to behold the judgment of

God, that so many of the wise, and prudent, and great, of the kings, and princes, and learned of the earth, have been so long bewitched with these sorceries. They have another way to salvation which is yet worse, and more dangerous, because it comes nearer the true one; and that is, their carnal representing the true way to heaven, that is, Christ crucified. Here lies a great part of the mystery of Antichristianism. If so be that this were laid quite aside, that Christ is the way to heaven, Christianity were firmly and in plain terms laid aside; therefore they are left to be so gross in their life to serve their design. In the mean time, Antichrist does so paint forth and represent Jesus Christ to poor people, that quite enervates and Spoils all the virtue of this great contrivance of God. There is representing him by an image and picture; they worship the picture of a man extended upon the cross, and this is called by them their saviour; but the Spirit of God calls it a devil; for every image or every creature that becomes the worship of man in the stead and room of God, is called worshipping of devils, worshipping stocks, and stones, and devils. Another gross abuse of Christianity is this, that is reckoned one of their great ways to heaven; and that is, they turn the memorial of the death of our Lord, that is to be perpetually kept up in the church, into a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the quick and dead; besides the other abominable things that are therein, is that of transubstantiation. But that which serves my purpose is mainly the sacrifice of it. The design of our Lord Jesus in appointing his last supper was, that bread might be eaten, and wine drunk amongst believers in the churches of Christ, in the remembrance of Christ's death, till he come again; a plain naked teaching thing, and has its own signification in the institution of it. Instead of this, they have the bread turned, as they fancy, into the flesh and body of a man, and this body eaten; and this they reckon the way to eternal life, when the abuse of it is a sin, enough to damn men. But now, say you, what does all this serve for? We are neither Pagans nor Papists. But

notwithstanding there is not one of you, but are in some danger this way; for, from a mixture of natural and Antichristian religion, there spring up a great many sorts of people among us.

1. There is the superstitious formalist. These are in all sorts of religion. They imagine, that because they are in the true church, therefore they shall be saved. The true church is not the way to heaven, but Christ is the way to heaven; and all that are in Christ will betake themselves to that church that is true. They commonly lay a great stress upon their outward performances and duties, and many times on the smallest.

2. There is the moralist. Would any believe it, unless they read it in books and in some mens preaching, that in such a land as England is and has been, there should in it either man or woman, or child of seven years of age, that should drink in this dreadful notion, that if I do justly, and do as I would be done by, I shall surely be saved? But thou shalt surely be damned, if thou dost no more. Is not this a wonder, that after all the light that has shone from the word of God about the way of salvation by the slain Son of God, that civility that is to be found amongst Heathens is all a great many have for their title to eternal life!

3. There is the self-righteous legalist; a man that goes beyond the former: he will not stint himself in the matter of his salvation, and lodge it in the form of his profession, but will bring it farther to the exercise of his conscience, and the employment of his heart about good works, about striving to please God; he is about the establishing his own righteousness, and he will find out a way to heaven for himself. Much is said against this in the word of God, and much should be daily said against it by the ministers of the word. There are some men so impatient in hearing any speak against self-

righteousness, as though it were not a sin, and nobody were in danger to be ruined by it; when it is the sin that is the last strong hold of Satan, and that keeps many men in, that the word of God hath ferretted out of others. What can be the grand reason of this, that men should fall into so many fatal mistakes about the way to heaven? I do not speak of them that want the light of the word, nor of Popery; but that there should be so many of these remaining mistakes where the light of the word is, is strange. The reason is only this, the great darkness that men naturally labour under as to the way to heaven; this darkness leads men to mistake it, and to take up other ways, because they do not know the true way. Every body thinks that it is very hard to get to heaven, and it will cost a great deal of time and pains, and struggling before they get thither; but here is the mischief of it; people do not know it is hard to know the way to heaven, they are not convinced of this, that unless a beam of light shine in upon thy heart, thou mayest hear of the way to heaven all thy life long, and not know it. There is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that every one had need to pray for. I might instance a great many of the ordinary simple mistakes of people. Some do imagine, that any way that is contrary to the way to hell, is the way to heaven; a great mistake. Every sin is the way to hell, will you say, every duty is the way to heaven. Any sin may ruin a man, but nothing can save him but Christ Jesus. Intemperance, drunkenness, &c. is the way to hell; but is there any so unreasonable as therefore to think, that soberness is the way to heaven? It is a duty, it is that which God commands of them that are in the way; and some imagine, that what every one that is in the way to heaven does, is the way. But the way to heaven still is through Christ himself; for though all this walking is to be in the way, yet walking is not the way; we are to walk in holiness, but this is but our walking in the way of Christ; none can walk in him, but they are sanctified; and the more they are sanctified, the more they partake of

him. That which is reckoned a very abominable heresy amongst the Socinians, is indeed that which is very natural amongst many that would be reckoned good Christians, that our Lord Jesus Christ came to shew the way to heaven; but they do not believe, he came to be the way to heaven; they think he came to tell us the way to heaven, and to make a way for us; but they cannot understand, that he came to be the way to heaven, that we cannot get to heaven, unless we be in him. So much for the first, That the way to heaven is through the vail of the flesh of the slain Son of God. There are many in the world that are most wofully and fatally mistaken, and we may make use of our Lord's words and arguments in this point, there are few that find this way: Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: why so? Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it, Matth. 7:13, 14.

The second word that I would give in application of this truth, That Christ as slain is the way to heaven, shall be in exhorting of you to take this way. Labour to be acquainted with a crucified Saviour. The apostle Paul was a better preacher than any one in England: He determined to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified, and he knew his work, he knew wherein profitable preaching lay. You must labour, I say, to be in him; see that you be in the way. This I Would exhort unto, and inforce upon you in a few things, if the Lord give them force, for it is in his hand only.

1. Consider, and be serious in this matter, whether you have a mind to be in heaven or no. Sirs, ministers are deceived wofully here; we expect when we come to preach to people, and study for them, and pray for them, we expect the company has a mind to go to heaven; but the matter is otherwise. A great part of our work is to persuade people to have a mind to be in heaven; but if you have a mind to be in

heaven, have you ever been at that question, What shall I do to be saved? Would you pretend to be Christians, or, for God's sake, would you have any to think you Christians, that have not come this length, Oh what shall we do to be saved? Do you think, that any man will ever come to heaven, that never thought of it before he came thither? How God deals with infants, we do not know; but for persons that live under the means of grace, the salvation of folks that are mindless of salvation is impossible. God never designed it, and will never perform it. This is the first consideration. Enter into your own hearts, and think with yourselves, what an answer ye can give to so plain a question as this is, Is hell the most unholy and unhappy place of all? Is heaven the holiest and happiest place of all? Is it lovely above all other lovely things to you? Then here is the way to it: Labour to get into Christ Jesus.

2. Consider, that if you have a mind to be in heaven, you must be in that way wherein you may be safe against all that can assault you. Have you a mind in earnest to be at heaven, to be surely there? You must be in that way wherein you may be safe against all assaults from enemies; you must be found there where you shall be surely safe. This made the apostle Paul so desirous to be found in him. I fear nothing, if I be found in him, Phil. 3:9.; found in him, there lies the business. I shall but run through, and name a few of those difficulties that you will have to encounter withal, and that you can be no way secured against, but by being in Christ as the way.

1st, You have the world to oppose you; and the world is too hard for any man that is out of Christ. The world has been too hard for a great many that thought themselves strong enough for it; its cunning, its wiles, its violence, its temptations, have overcome a great many. There is no overcoming the world but through him that has overcome it for us, John 16:33. We have the devil to oppose us, and

we must be in that way, wherein we can be safe against him. If you be in Christ, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you: Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world, 1 John 4:4. You had need to be in that way, wherein you can give an answer to your consciences. How needful is it to have something that can stop the mouth of the most craving clamorous conscience, that can answer it satisfyingly. So that it shall speak no more? What can that can be? The answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Chrest, 1 Pet. 3:21. People will imagine now that the grand security is the answer of a good conscience towards God, as to our conversation, heart, and way: that indeed has its own use, and an inferior use; but when men come to reckon with conscience, truly there is nothing but the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus upon it, that can make it good. But here is more, I will not say worse, but more dreadful than all this; God's holy nature, God's holy law, God's spotless justice, they will appear against you in the way to heaven; unless you be in Christ the way, there is no standing before these. When a man is in Christ, he has a ready answer, I do not fear God's holy nature, for he hath provided a Saviour; I do not fear the law, Christ, in whom I am, has fulfilled it; I do not fear the justice of God, for Christ has satisfied that to the full. When death, judgment, and awful eternity stares a man in the face, he had need to be sure that he is in Christ. Death, that is the greatest terror to all natural men, to a believer is looked upon as overcome by Christ. This is the great comfort of a believer, I know I must die; but Christ has died, and has overcome him that had the power of death. And why should a believer be afraid of judgment, who is in the way, walking towards him who is the Judge? We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5:10. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Do you think a man that is in Christ, has reason to be afraid to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ? No; a believer reckons thus with himself, He that spared not his own Son, the Son that spared not his

own blood, will he not give a favourable sentence in that day? And for eternity, that awful endless thing, that we can never fathom in our thoughts, the believer looks upon as a very amiable thing: This eternity that confounds other folks, to the believer is the great joy of his heart; for there, and through all the ages of it, will he be with the Lord, praising him, enjoying his company, and partaking of his fellowship. This is the second consideration, You should be sure, I say, to be in Christ the only way to heaven, where you may be safe against all you can encounter with. Whenever people come to have an awful prospect of these things, of God's holy nature, law, and justice; of death, judgment, and eternity; when their consciences are truly awakened, all the fig-leaf coverings that men used to cover their nakedness with, are all blown off. It is only mens trifling thoughts of heaven, and of these awful things, that make Christ so much despised.

3. Consider this, what a great sin it is, how extraordinarily damnable and damning, to neglect Christ as the way to heaven; a sin, as our Lord seems to call it the only sin: If I had not come, says he, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. They had been an innocent kind of people, if Christ had never come amongst them: John 15:22, 24. This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Christ came into the world, lightening them in the way to heaven, and they will not make use of him. There are three most sacred things; and whosoever stumbles at any one of them, is broken in pieces, if they stumble finally at one or at all. The first is, The rich grace of God the Father, in providing the way to heaven by his Son. The Second is, The blood of the Son of God, that made the way to heaven. The third is, The gracious strivings of the Spirit of grace in the gospel to bring men to walk in this way. Whoever they be that live and die under the

gospel, and do not make use of Christ as the only way to heaven, they are chargeable with all these; they frustrate the grace of God; they trample upon the blood of Christ; and do violence and despite to the Spirit of grace; which are the highest expressions of wickedness that are in all the Bible, though I know the highest degree of them is applied to the grand unpardona blesin.

Lastly, Consider, that all excuses are taken off. Nothing can justify a man in refusing to betake himself to Christ as the Way. The Lord has provided and framed the gospel, by which he deals with men so, that they must be rendered inexcusable, that do not embrace it, and venture on Christ offered therein. For consider, the light of nature makes men inexcusable, the light of God's law stops mens mouths, and all the world are guilty before him. The light of the gospel is also framed so, that it much more stops all mens mouths, and provides an answer for every thing. And indeed men are very fruitful in these objections: "I am a singular sinner, therefore I dare not venture to come into Christ as the way to heaven." What sort of an objection is this? Art thou a singular sinner? Why, Jesus Christ is a singular Saviour; let that Stand against that; and his business was with sinners; he came into the world to save sinners; and all sinners that are in the world, and hear of him, should come to him for salvation, then there is a happy meeting. "I am a vile sinful creature." What then? We are called to come to a fountain that is opened for sin, and for uncleanness, if I may so speak. Come in filthy, and go out clean: Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool, Isa. 1:18. What reason has God to argue thus with poor sinners? That he should reason thus with unreasonable sinners? That he should freely offer his pardoning mercy to those that are altogether undeserving of it? As if God should say, I know all that you can speak must only be from your sins; I

know them better than you do; come hearken to me, take my counsel, your sins shall be no hindrance, they shall be removed quickly. But, say you now, what shall a poor creature do that would be in Christ as the way to heaven? He is sensible that he must be in him, how shall he do to get into him?

First, Be willing to be taken by him. All that are saved are begun to be saved when Christ begins to lay hold of them. The first act that is upon a sinner, is of Christ's putting forth: That I may apprehend that, says the apostle, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. I was a poor wandering creature, as if the apostle had said, one time and for a long time; but, at last, Christ laid hold of me. He remembered time, and place, and day, as long as he lived. Believing is sometimes denoted by the name of coming, so it be by him. Would you be acquainted with Christ Jesus, and be in him as the way? Resolve to say thus much, Though I cannot climb to Christ Jesus, and though I cannot find him; yet, by God's grace, I will not run away further from him, I will stay and long for his laying hold on me. The misery of people is this, they are constantly striving against Christ's saving of them. Whenever a poor sinner is broke as to this resolved resisting of the grace of God, grace does overpower him immediately. Be therefore willing to be taken by him.

2dly, Is it a hard matter to look on Christ Jesus and be saved? A man may look on one that he cannot come to. Look upon him as the way. If people do but get a view of Jesus Christ as the way to heaven, their hearts will follow their eyes immediately; but this eye to see him is of his own giving; and he has an eye-salve to give to make us see, as he promises, Rev. 3:18.

3dly, Love Christ as the way to heaven, and you shall be in him; nay, you are in him, when you love him. It is impossible, that a man that

loves Christ Jesus, should ever go to hell; it is impossible, that ever a man can love Christ Jesus, but one that is beloved of him. But now the love of Jesus Christ, though it be the most sensible of all graces, it is very hard to own it, because believers would fain love him more and better; they cannot tell how to own they love him at all. I would ask you but one question, Can you read, and seal, and subscribe your name, and put your amen to two verses in the Bible? I dare warrant you your eternal salvation, if you can do so. The first is a dreadful word. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be an Anathema Maranatha. Amen, says the poor believer: if God curse him, it is no wonder. What! not love the Lord Jesus? The other is, Rev. 5:12. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Amen, says the believer. That heart, I say, that is taken up with the love of Christ Jesus as the way to heaven, that is bent to his praise, is one that is in him.

4thly, If you can trust Christ Jesus as the way to heaven, you are in him. Do you know what trusting is? You know what it is in matters of money and trade; it is just the same thing in matters of your salvation. Do you know in whom you have laid your great stress, of bringing you to heaven? Say to yourselves, I do not know a better hand in heaven or earth, to lodge my immortal soul in, than in Christ Jesus the Son of God. We come to him by faith, and we go on in him by trusting: I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. I know my friend, would the apostle say, and I am sure he will give a good account of all I have trusted him with, 2 Tim. 1:12.

SERMON XVIII

HEBREWS 10:21, 22

And having an high-priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

APPROACHING to God is a very awful and dangerous thing. Many are undone thereby, as truly, as readily, as the poor curious priers into the ark were. There is nothing more common in people's practice, especially amongst us, than forms of approaching to God; little fear upon men's hearts in the work, and little profit by it. There is need of great encouragement unto a serious and sensible person to support his heart in drawing near to God. The prophet brings in men in distress, saying, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Mic. 6:6. Where the majesty of God is seen, and our own vileness seen also, it must be a great thing that can encourage such a creature as a sinner is, to approach to such a God as our God is. All the encouragements for approaching to God are in Christ Jesus, and from him; every thing that is in him is encouraging, and every thing that is revealed of him is encouraging, and there is no encouragement elsewhere to be had. Our apostle is here taking several views of Jesus Christ, with an eye to this scope, to encourage us to draw nigh to God. We have spoke to two of them already.

1. As his blood makes the entrance to the holiest.
2. As his slain body is the vail we must pass through.

We now come to the third encouragement, which is taken from Jesus Christ, with respect to his grand office of being a Priest: Having an high-priest, says the apostle, over the house of God. He doth not name who this high-priest is, neither needed he, for he had spoken so much of him before, that none that read this could doubt that this high-priest, though unnamed, is Jesus Christ our Lord.

In these words are three things I would take notice of, and speak to in order.

1. The name of the office of our Lord; he is an High Priest, and expressed in a singular manner. An high-priest we read it; but the word in the original is not an high-priest but a great priest. It is not the usual Greek word that the apostle uses in this epistle frequently, when he speaks of Christ the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, chap. 6:20 and several times in chap. 7, 8, and 9. It is a special phrase here: he is a great Priest; there is something very singular in it, something above all that we can conceive.

2. Where his charge lies. Says the apostle, He is an High Priest over the house of God. The house of God, in the New Testament phrase, has two proper significations. (1.) The things that pertain to God, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. 2:17. That he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, in things pertaining to God. Every high-priest, taken from among men, says he, is ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, chap. 5:1. (2.) God's house in the New Testament, and in this epistle, is God's church and people, that is, believers. So the apostle explains it, chap. 3:6.—Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. He is a Son and Lord over his Own house; whose house are we, says he. So the church is called the house of God, 1 Tim. 3:15. Hereabout then lies the charge of our Lord as Priest; it is in things pertaining to God,

for his people: this is a matter that is to be frequently and seriously minded, for it is of great use for the directing the exercise of our faith. Ye all know that our Lord Jesus, in his great work of Mediator and Redeemer, is clothed with three offices, Prophet, Priest, and King; and in two of them he deals with us from God, and in one of them he deals with God for us. As a Prophet he reveals God's mind from God to us; as a King he puts forth God's divine authority upon us, and over us, and all things else; but as a Priest our Lord's business is only with God for us. In all the exercise of our faith, the faith of a poor creature that flies to Christ for righteousness and eternal salvation, minds him mainly, in that office wherein Christ deals with God for us.

3. The third thing that we have in the words, is the interest that the church hath in this High Priest: Having an High Priest, says the apostle: the word having is not in the original, but it is necessarily supplied, to make our language run intelligible; and it relates to the former having, ver. 19. Having therefore boldness; and here again, Having therefore an High Priest. He is not an high-priest to be provided, nor to be got, nor to be sought, but he is already: every one has him not; but, says the apostle, we have him already; he says he is in his office, he has done the greatest part of it, and is ready to complete it quite. So much for the heads of what I would discourse upon from this verse.

The first shall be to discourse to you something of the priesthood of Christ; then afterwards of the singularity of it, and charge of it, and of the interest the church hath in it.

The truth that I am to speak to is this, That our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of the body, is a true and proper Priest. So the apostle calls him, and so the apostle proves him to be at more length, and

with more words in this epistle, than is any where else in all the Bible. Though this office of his be touched upon both by the prophets and by our Lord himself, and by the other apostles in other epistles, yet this epistle is principally written to shew forth the priesthood of our Lord Jesus. Concerning this I would give you a few things to be considered.

1. We must consider Christ's instalment, when and how it was that he was installed the great Priest over the house of God. He did not take this honour to himself, but was called of God as was Aaron; He glorified not himself to be made an High Priest, but he that said to him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee, Heb. 5:4, 5. Christ's instalment into the office is by oath: and this oath was a declaration, not only of the authority that was derived upon him, but of his continuance in it, and that he should have none to succeed him therein: Those priests, says the apostle, chap. 7:21. were made without an oath, but this with an oath: therefore is he surety of a better testament. The words of the oath consecrated and made the Son Priest, who is so for evermore. The great charge as Priest over the house of God was derived upon the Son of God in the eternal counsels of the Trinity, that in time, as soon as sin entered into the world, he should enter upon his office.

2. We are to consider the types of it; and when the truth is come, the shadows may be the better known; we may understand better by the antitype, what the types did signify. The greatest part of God's worship of old, until Christ came, did consist in a great many shadows of Christ's coming; they are called shadows of good things to come, but the body is of Christ; they are the shadows, but not the very image of the things, chap. 10:1. Of priesthoods we find three in the word; they do all shadow forth the priesthood of our Lord Jesus.

The first was the patriarchal priesthood, the priesthood of the fathers; for the first Word you read in all the Bible of worship to God is expressed by sacrifice; the first word of God's good-will towards men, is in the promise of Christ, Gen. 3:15. The first expression of worship to God is in offering sacrifice, by Cain and Abel; and it is not unlike but Adam was the priest. Adam, and Noah, and Abraham, these fathers that Were acquainted with God, were all priests by office, neither of the one order, nor of the other; yet notwithstanding they were priests, and did perform sacrifice: and all these sacrifices were shadows of the grand one that was to be offered by our Lord Jesus.

The second is the priesthood of Aaron. There is a great deal written of it in the word; the book of Leviticus is in a manner all of this priesthood: they were distinguished into many sorts; there was a high-priest over all, that had some of the holy things to manage, which none else should meddle with; there was the common priest, that ordinary sacrifices were to be slain by, and offered up according to the law. This was a shadow of Christ's coming, of his being a sacrifice, as the apostle at length in this epistle proves.

The third sort of priests is that of Melchisedec, that this apostle in chap. 7. is very exact in the examining of. There are but two places in the Old Testament that speak of him, yet what great matter does the apostle draw from these two scriptures! He leaves nothing that concerns the man without a mystery. He is Melchisedec, he gathers a mystery out of his name; he is king of righteousness, he gathers a mystery out of the kingdom, that he was king of; he was king of Salem, that is, king of peace, says he; so Christ was: he gathers a grand mystery out of the scripture-silence concerning him; the scripture neither tells when he was born, nor who were his parents, nor when he died; in this, saith he, he was made like unto the Son of

God, without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days nor end of life: he gathers a grand mystery out of his blessing Abraham, and out of his receiving the tithes of the spoils of Abraham; and from thence proves, that he was a great priest indeed, when he was greater than Abraham himself, when he received the tithes of Levi, that was then in Abraham's loins; and here he shews that Melchisedec was high beyond that of Aaron. Yet all this was but a type of Jesus Christ; and there is no doubt to be made but this Melchisedec was a man, and was born, and did die, and was buried like other men; but because the scripture speaks of him no otherwise, than by way of silence in these things, therefore the apostle gathers wisely from the scripture-silence, those things that were typical of our Lord Jesus.

3. We are to consider the parts of the priestly office, wherein it did consist. These we shall bring to our purpose, and to our Lord's priesthood. The parts of the priestly office were especially two; oblation and intercession, offering a sacrifice, and the making intercession in and by the virtue of that sacrifice. Every high-priest taken from among men, says the apostle, that he may offer gifts and sacrifices, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins, chap. 5:1. Every high-priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity, that this man have somewhat also to offer. See how the apostle argues. Is Christ called a High Priest? Then he must have something to offer; the offering that the priests of Aaron offered, he could not offer, for he was sprung of the tribe of Judah, of which the Holy Ghost speaks nothing of priesthood; nay, if he were on earth, he must not be a priest, not a priest of the order of Aaron.

1st, Then of Christ's oblation, the sacrifice he offered was himself; the sacrifice of his own body, of his own soul: He made his soul an

offering for sin; he poured out his soul unto death, are the Old Testament expressions of that sacrifice, Isa. 53:11, 12. Here now is the most common word in all Christianity; Christ died for us, and the very soul of Christianity lies in the believing improvement of it. The meaning of the word is, Christ died for us, Christ Jesus was offered in sacrifice to God for us; he did not die only in love for us, and he did not die only to give an example for us, and he did not die only for our good; but he died in our stead, he died as a sacrifice dies. The way in which the beast that was to be sacrificed died, was this; there was a transferring of the guilt of the master of him upon his head; that guilt deserved death by the law, and this death was inflicted upon the poor innocent creature; this was a shadow of that great sacrifice that the Son of God was to offer.—Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us, chap. 9:11, 12. Here we would consider, in order to the fixing and feeding our faith on this,

(1.) The vast dignity and preciousness of this sacrifice, the person who did assume this nature, that it was which raised its value and dignity infinitely; the comparison is very mean betwixt a man and a beast. The poor idolaters that fell into that dreadful blindness and wickedness, as to offer unto God the fruit of their bodies, for the sin of their souls; they did fall into that abominable wickedness upon this same principle; they thought always the more excellent the sacrifice was, the more pleasing it would be to God; if the Lord required the blood of a beast for man's sin, would he not much more be pleased with the blood of a child? Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions? Will not he accept of the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? It is marvellous to think, how strong the spirit of idolatry has been in the world. What a strong desire hath there been of peace with God! What a strong sense of sin hath been in these blinded

idolaters, that run into these ways of atonement! The Lord condemns them utterly, because they were all invented, he never commanded them. Now, the sacrifice is always, if commanded, the more excellent because of its native dignity. If God commanded the life of man for a sacrifice, it had been much more than that of a beast; but here the life of one that is more than a man is commanded, it is given, therefore it is of infinite dignity. You do not imagine, it may be, some of you, what you may feel before you die, even of the great difficulty of having faith firmly fixed, that the death of our Lord upon the cross, without the gates of Jerusalem, should be a sufficient atonement to God, for all the provocations that he hath received: yet in truth ye believe nothing, unless you believe that, ye believe nothing that will stand you in stead in a great storm. The man that was sacrificed was in human nature; but the divine person that assumed it, made it of infinite dignity; therefore it is called, the blood of God; the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

2dly, This sacrifice that Christ made an oblation of, was commanded, and required; and covenanted, upon the terms of our salvation; the conditions of it were adjusted from eternity; the decree of election adjusted it, the covenant of redemption adjusted it, that when Christ should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed, he should prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand. Thereupon we find, that the apostle brings Christ, as coming into the world with this, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, a body hast thou prepared me: as if the apostle would direct us to this, that Christ's thoughts were according to that appointment: "Father, I know, I am not coming into the world to be a priest after the order of Aaron, to offer bullocks and goats on the altar at Jerusalem; but I am to offer that body which thou hast prepared me

upon the altar of my Godhead, for the satisfying thy justice, and saving thy elect." These thoughts were in his heart.

3dly, The power that our Lord had to do it. Never had any man, no mere man, power over his own life. We have neither physical nor moral power; we can neither lay it down lawfully, when we will, nor can we keep it as long as we will; but in the keeping, and having, and losing it, we are under the law, under his appointment, and under the conduct of his word. Our Lord Jesus was the only man that had power over his own life; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again, John 10:18.

Lastly, The last virtue and grand effect of this sacrifice is, that that should be in our eyes when we think of our Lord's priesthood, he offered a sacrifice, he gave himself a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour; the greatest things that ever were done in this world, were done by our Lord upon the cross: The law fulfilled, justice satisfied, heaven appeased, God reconciled, the world of the elect redeemed, eternal redemption brought in, salvation in God's covenant for us ratified and made unalterable by this blood. This was a great sacrifice, and great effects it had.

The second part of the priestly office is intercession. Intercession is nothing else but the application of the virtue of that sacrifice, according to the appointment of God. The intercession of the high-priest under the law was explained and expressed to us, by his entering with the blood of the sin-offering into the holiest of all, and anointing the corners of the mercy-seat therewith, for an atonement for all the, children of Israel, that they might be cleansed from all their transgressions. Now, this was a shadow, I say, of the intercession of our great High-priest, Christ Jesus. I shall speak a little of this intercession, and consider it in three seasons.

1. Before he came into the world. 2. While in the world. 3. After he went out of it; for, in all these seasons, our Lord was a priest, and managed intercession.

1. Before he came into the world. Pray observe, we touched a little upon Christ's being installed in the office of high-priest. There could be no exercise of this office, till there were sinners; what use could a priest be of, till there were sinners, and some elect sinners in the world? We hope in God, the first pair that lived in it were of that number, I mean our first parents. Pray observe this, all the salvation, and pardon of sin, and entrance to heaven, that was given to the fathers before Christ came, was all given in the view, and in the virtue of the death of our Lord, who was to die once for sin. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and all the saints of old, had their peace with God, those large measures of the love and favour of God and salvation in the end dispensed to them, through the virtue of the sacrifice of Christ not yet offered. The Father trusted his Son firmly, that in the fulness of time he would pay the debt. The discharge is given before the payment, the discharge is given to the criminal before the payment is made by the surety. The believers before Christ came, looked to him as come; and according to that small light that they had in that time, so was their faith. Now, if salvation and all spiritual blessing were given to believers before Christ's coming, before he was in the flesh, we may well conceive, that the intercession, which was a part of his office, and which he was to discharge in heaven, was not unminded by him.

2. When he was in the world, when he was in the flesh, we find he was greatly given to prayer. We find him spending several nights alone in prayer to God. Were it lawful to wish, and may be it is not; but surely, if it had been lawful to wish it, and if it had been attained, and if grace had been given to guide it, the most happy opportunity

that ever was in the world, had been to have heard our Lord Jesus praying a whole night to the Father. The scripture does not tell us what he prayed for; but we are sure of this, that he prayed for his sheep: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine, John 17:9. Somewhat our Lord used to utter, and to pour forth his heart to his Father about. Many prayers he put up for himself; Christ made no sacrifice for himself, but he put up many prayers for himself: Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and he was heard, in that he feared, Heb. 5:7.

3. The third season is, Christ's intercession in heaven, when he went out of the world into his exalted state; and that is the word most commonly used in the scriptures about his intercession. His intercession is frequently both in the Old and New Testament subjoined to his sacrifice; He hath poured out his soul unto death: And he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors, Isa. 53:12. It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us, Rom. 8:34. He ever liveth to make intercession, Heb. 7:25. Of this intercession of our Lord, as managed in his exalted state, we find several expressions in the scripture, and I chuse rather, and will advise you accordingly to confine your thoughts to scripture phrase, about these things, wherein we may overdo, and overthink, and think amiss.

1st, His intercession stands in his entering into heaven in our name, and in our room. See how the apostle expresses it, Heb. 9:12, 24. The most glorious, the most powerful entrance, the stateliest thing that we can imagine next to his return again, was when a slain, quickened, ascended Lord Jesus in man's nature entered into the

heavenly places; not the places made with hands, but into heaven itself, says the apostle. As long as he is there we are there, for all his peoples cases will be minded effectually.

2dly, It is called appearing before God for us; not only entering in our name, but staying there on our behalf, for our good. To this purpose seems the word of our Lord to point: The spirit shall convince the world of righteousness; why so? Because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more. This is a dark expression, I go to my Father, and ye see me no more. The meaning of it is plainly this, that the certainty of our justification by the virtue of the righteousness of Jesus Christ stands in this, that the person whose blood wrought out this righteousness is gone into heaven, and is not returned again. Pray observe, the high-priest under the law was to go in, and to accomplish righteousness for the atoning of God's anger against Israel, in the seventh month once; and he was to come out again, the poor man was not to stay there: but our grand High-priest is to stay for ever in heaven, until all the virtue of his death is fully applied to them that it was appointed for: when all that is done, then he comes out of his throne, in the clouds to gather all his people.

3dly, His intercession is expressed to us by his knowledge and sympathy with the ails, wants, and infirmities of his people. So the apostle argues, Seeing then that we have a great High-priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession, Heb. 4:14. But, might the poor believer say, Our dear Lord is passed into heaven, and we are here in this miserable world; how shall there be converse betwixt him and us? We have not, says he, an high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; out was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, ver. 15. Pray observe, that of the apostle's argument, the main thing is implied, the other things are but the outside of it. The thing

that is the outside, is, Christ was once tempted as we are; the apostle's argument from thence is, Therefore we have an high-priest that can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but the force and scope of it is, for our consolation, that he is touched with them. What his glorified state does admit of, is what we cannot conceive of, but what our necessities crave, our faith is allowed to expect. Our Lord will not cry and weep at Lazarus's grave now; he will not grieve in himself, because of the hardness and unbelief of their hearts, as he did when on earth; he does not bear our infirmities, nor feel them with that afflicting sense and sorrow that he had in the days of his flesh; but every thing that ails a poor believer, is as well felt and as really known by our Lord Jesus, as if Christ and the man were in one place and room together.

Lastly, His intercession stands in blessing, and wishing well. These wishes and this blessing rise upward to the Father, and come downwards to us; he wishes as it were, he wishes and wills that all the blessings purchased by his death may be bestowed on all them for whom his blood was shed. See how he expresses it in his intercession on earth, how he prays, Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, John 17:24. Is that a word for a man in prayer to say, Lord, I will? You see how in some cases our Lord with the deepest humility addresses to the Father, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, Matth. 11:25. But here now, when he is giving us a copy of his intercession, and is fore-acting his intercession in heaven, he puts on the authority that in his glorified state he is fully clothed with: I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me. Christ's blessing of his people is the virtue of his intercession; when his wishes as it were, and his will is delivered to his Father, then the blessing wished for comes down upon us. The last thing our Lord did on earth should be

dear to us, to think how Christ and his people parted; he lifted up his hands and blessed them, that they might remember him as long as they lived. Christ came into the world to bless his people, and died to obtain a blessings and when he went to heaven, he left his blessing upon them; and it was the last thing he did upon earth.

APPLICATION. Is Christ a proper priest, a true priest? 1. Be very thankful to God for this provision, that we have an high-priest. 2. Be careful to make use of him.

1. Be highly thankful to God for Christ, as a High-priest. The provision made is absolutely needful, no dealing with God but by him. It is provision that is made in mere grace and mercy; nothing is in us to move God to it but mere mercy. It is provision that is made very costly. To be a high-priest cost our Lord a great deal: he made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, Phil. 2:7, 8. It is however such a provision as brought a great deal of honour to Christ: he glorified not himself, to be made an high-priest, but his Father glorified him; this is a very strange word, Heb. 5:5. This high-priest was to be made a sacrifice; was there any great glory in being made a sacrifice? To be made sin to be made a curse, to be made shame, to be made, as it were, the channel of the wrath and displeasure of God, for all the sins of the people of God; where is the honour of all this? But look through this; there is grand honour, he is to be the reconciler of all things to God, the great umpire of heaven and earth, the great purchaser of eternal salvation for all the elect. The condescension and lowness that our Lord stooped to in undertaking this office, had great dignity in it; and so it appears in the issue, and will appear more when all is done.

2. Be careful to use Christ as an High-priest. Wo to them that do not know Christ; but a great deal more wo to them that know any thing of him, and do not make use of him. Every believer hath need of every thing that Christ has to give. Christ's fulness was never so laid open before the eyes of a believer, but the more he sees Christ hath, the more the man is convinced of his need of every thing he sees. In this using of Christ as an High-priest, only take notice of these two particulars:—

1st, Never deal with God without him in any thing. It is only the pride, and ignorance, and folly of the children of men, that they dare venture into God's presence without Christ Jesus. An understanding believer cannot do so. He dares not come into God's presence, but in the hand of this great high-priest, and with him upon his heart. Do not offer, I say, in any concern, to deal with God without this high-priest. Judge ye what would have been done in the state of the church of the Jews, if any man had brought his sacrifice to the altar, and laid his own hands upon it, and said, This sacrifice is mine, and I will be priest myself. That soul had been cut off from amongst his people. This was but typical of the severe charge we lie tinder. In all things that pertain to God, we must still bring Christ along with us. I will name some of those things that we must not deal with God in without him, and that we must deal with God by him, and with him.

(1.) When we draw nigh to God for the acceptance of our persons, and obtaining peace with God; this must be by our great High-priest, for it is in the beloved only that we are accepted, Eph. 1:6. It is in his Son only that he is well pleased. If ever you think to bring that to God that may make him love you, or that will render you lovely in his sight without Christ Jesus, you will find yourselves dreadfully mistaken, when it comes to the issue.

(2.) In all the offerings of service to him, let them be all by the hand of this High-priest. If you pray, pray in his name, and not in your own; if you offer the sacrifice of praise, do it by him: By him let us offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Whatever you do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. This great high-priest must receive all our services and sacrifices, and he only must present them, if ever they be accepted, Heb. 13:15.

(3.) In all your expectations of good from God; let all those expectations be through Christ, if there be any looking and working of heart, as there will be if you be believers, in begging something, and looking for somewhat. There is no Christian that is exercised in begging much, but that poor creature will find some expectation and hope rising, that there shall be an answer of peace, there will come some good, some blessing will be returned. Now, take heed of this in all these expectations, let the answer of them all be through Christ.

In sum, The eyes of a believer are to be fixed on Christ, in all his dealings with God, (if I may divide them so, and this dividing is but uniting the eyes of faith that are fixed on Christ.) The one eye is to be set on his oblation, and the other on his intercession; and when your eyes are fixed, serve God as painfully, and expect as highly as you please; ask as largely, and expect as confidently according to his word. Then your eyes are singly upon this high-priest set over the house of God when your hearts beat you witness, and you are persuaded in yourselves, that there is nothing in you, nothing done by you, that can ever turn to a good account in God's sight, unless this great High-priest put incense thereto, and obtain acceptance from God for you.

SERMON XIX

HEBREWS 10:21

Having an High Priest ever the house of God.

THE apostle pressing the great duty of drawing near to God, presses it from mighty arguments. The strength and multitude of the arguments are so many implied proofs of the backwardness of our hearts unto this great work, and of their great indisposition for it. His arguments, as you have heard, are all taken from Jesus Christ, concerning whom the apostle speaks and holds forth the mysteries of the gospel, under the veil of the expressions of the law; that, by the blood of our Lord, access with boldness is made unto the holiest; that through the veil of his flesh, that is, him as slain, we have a new and living way consecrated for us.

The third encouragement is, That this Jesus is a great Priest over the house of God. There was no approaching to God's worship under the law but by the priests; the altar was not to be approached to, nor sacrifice to be offered by any hand but that of the priests; the holiest of all was not to be approached but only by the high-priest. This the apostle here alludes to: We have, saith he, an High Priest over the house of God. All the Jewish priests, all of the order of Aaron are removed, and the use of the temple is removed also, and all the service and ceremonies that belonged to it, are removed also: but the substance that they all signified we have; we have Christ as an High Priest over the house of God. From this argument for our encouragement, that the apostle here gives us, I did take up three things to be spoke to in order.

1. The office of our Lord Jesus, that though he be not named, yet he is named immediately before and quickly after, and all the apostle's discourse was of him: therefore there was no hazard of any man's mistaking; when the apostle named the High Priest, every Christian would understand whom he meant.
2. We have the extent of his charge in his office; it is over the house of God.
3. We have the church's interest in him: Having an High Priest. It is true, that word in the original is wanting, which is to be drawn from the preceding verse; but it is necessarily implied; this is certain in the sense of it, we have an High Priest.

Of the first of these, Christ's office, I spake last day, That our Lord Jesus Christ, in the great work of saving of men, was and is a true and proper Priest. I spake both of his instalment in his office, of the types and shadows of his office, and the parts of his office in the oblation that he made, and in the intercession that he doth daily make, for our Lord is about part of his priestly office now. These things I did speak to, and entered a little upon the application thereof.

Now it remains to take a little further notice of a word I observed to you before, because it is singular, I would not pass it, but speak something to it apart. The note is this, That our Lord Jesus Christ is a great Priest. I told you that this word that we read here in our translation an High Priest, is not the ordinary Greek word by which the high-priest is expressed; but it is a singular word, very different what we find in other places of scripture, a great Priest. There is something singular to be observed in every iota, in the smallest particle of the word of God. This then is that that I would speak to,

what is pointed forth to us about Christ's priesthood, when he is called a great Priest.

1. He is a great Priest, because he is a great person. He is God's own Son, God's own equal. Though he be man, and conversed among men, the person is more than man, he is God. If we therefore consider this, that this Priest, Christ Jesus, is God, he must be a great one. The greatest priests that ever were in the world were men. Melchisedec was certainly a man, though we know nothing of his pedigree; the Holy Ghost conceals it, and makes good use of that concealment, he being the grand type of the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

2. Our Lord Jesus is a great Priest, for, by the virtue of his priesthood, he makes all whom he undertakes for priests: For he hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, Rev. 1:6. He hath made us kings and priests unto God, Rev. 5:10. Ye are an holy priesthood, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9. These things I pass, as not conceiving them to be of so much importance at present.

3. Then and mainly Christ is a great Priest, because of his greatness in his office, or the greatness of the office he was clothed with, A proper priest as under the law, was a sort of mediator betwixt God and men; and this mediation was most eminently and solemnly acted and performed in the great day of atonement, when the high-priest entered into the holiest of all in the name of all Israel and with their names upon his breast; never a one of them Upon pain of death must follow him; he brought back the answer of peace from God to them. Our Lord is a greater High Priest; Israel's fate depended on his welcome in the holiest of all, upon the account of a far greater office than this. Let us consider, for the shewing of the greatness of the office of Christ as High Priest,

1st, The greatness of the parties he deals betwixt: he deals betwixt God and creatures; that is great, but there is a great deal more; he deals betwixt an angry God and provoking sinners. That is Christ's work, I say, that he is a mediator betwixt God and men, the man Christ Jesus; a work that never any was fit for, and never any called to, but he alone. They were but little inferior shadows that were acted by some of the saints of old. We find indeed in the Old Testament, (and there is no reason to question, but some may be again in the New, in our days), that some have stood, by faith and prayer, betwixt the dead and the living, and stayed the plague; that when God hath been angry, and his anger hath begun to burn, some of his servants have stood in the breach before him to turn his anger away, Psalm 106:23. That is recorded to the praise of Moses, Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. If I may so speak, there was but temporal anger, and a temporal judgment threatened, and a temporal mediator, and a temporal mercy obtained; but the mercy is far otherwise here, Christ undertakes as Priest betwixt these two great parties, an offended God and a sinful people.

2dly, His greatness in his office appears in the great work he doth in it; and that is, to reconcile both, to make up the peace: We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, Rom. 5:10. Therefore being justified by his blood, we are reconciled to God by the blood of his cross, Col. 1:20. What a marvellous way was this, the taking up this controversy, that this great High Priest's undertaking in this manner should bring about, which otherwise was utterly impossible!

3dly, His greatness in his office appears in the greatness of the sacrifice that he offered; he offered himself; but who knows the value and worth of that self? He gave himself a ransom for all, 1 Tim. 2:6.

Immediately after that he had said, that there is one God, and one mediator betwixt God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Sirs, the people that lived when Christ was in the world, and saw him, and heard him preach, that saw him eat and drink, the greatest part of them thought with themselves they saw no more but a man; they could not see through the vail of his flesh, to see who dwelt in that temple; yet there were a few that did see: The Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, John 1:14. The sacrifice that Christ offered was himself; thereupon the apostle prefers him greatly unto all the priests of old; for it was but the blood of bulls, or calves, or goats, of creatures meaner and lower than themselves, that they offered in sacrifice to God; but our Lord Jesus Christ becomes a greater Priest by a greater offering. Nothing but the human nature of Christ could be the sacrifice; there was more than the man Christ that was the priest: He offered himself up to God through the eternal Spirit without spot, Heb. 9:14. I would be loath to draw people's imaginations unto the knowing of Christ after the flesh: but whosoever he be that believeth not that Jesus is come in the flesh, is a man not born of God. We must know Christ's flesh, we must know the sacrifice, and what made it to be so great. If Christ had been only a man, his blood had been no more than the blood of another man, only because it was a sinless man, that made it better: as we may say of the sacrifices that were offered to the praise and service of God, by the blood and sufferings of many witnesses of Jesus, they are called sacrifices in the word; but there is nothing of priesthood here, they are not sacrifices of atonement nor propitiation, they are but sacrifices of praise and testimony. The great view that we have, and that our faith should feed on about the sacrifice of our Lord, is this, That there was a piece of man's nature, by the extraordinary operation of the Holy Ghost, framed in the womb of the virgin, and which was assumed by the Son of God, and made the temple wherein

God dwelt; there dwelled the fulness of the Godhead bodily; it is this temple of his body that was the great sacrifice, to which all the worship, and trust, and adoration of his people was rightly directed. For it is certain, that if our Lord Jesus Christ were in his human nature on earth, he in that nature is to be immediately, and formally, and directly adored and worshipped; they are never reprov'd that did so. When he was in his low estate, the poor woman fell down and worshipp'd him, crying, Lord, help me, Matt. 15:25. Christ never found fault with that; but when any poor believers, in the height of their zeal or respect, either to apostles or angels, did so, they were checked immediately: Stand up, said Peter to the centurion, I myself also am a man, Acts 10:26. See thou do it not, says the angel, I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren, Rev. 19:10 and 22:9.

Lastly, Christ's greatness in his office appears in the great glory that accrues to him in it, and by it.

(1.) He in and by this office is made the head of the new creation; Christ is made the head of the new world. As God equal with the Father, and as the eternal Word of God, he made all things, and without him was nothing made that was made; by him were created all things, both angels, and principalities, and powers, all things were created by him and for him, Col. 1:15, 16. But now, if I may so speak, there hath entered one thing into the world, that hath marred all the creation; that is sin: Our Lord came to repair this with advantage. For be persuaded of it, that unless the Lord had contriv'd to have brought more glory to his name by sin's entrance into the world, than its entrance could bring dishonour to him, it had never entered: For he does all things for himself; and the very permitting of sin was an act of infinite wisdom in God, willing his own glory; and by Jesus Christ, as the great High Priest, is this end reach'd; he is made the head of the whole creation; all things are reconcil'd, all things are set

to rights in him, all things are to be gathered together unto an head in him as the head.

(2.) There is this glory to our Lord as Priest, that makes him a great one, that the everlasting salvation of all the elect and redeemed is purchased by him. What an unspeakable honour is this? He is the proper cause of the salvation of all that are saved; he becomes the captain, head, and author of our salvation: He is the author of eternal salvation, Heb. 5:9. He hath obtained eternal redemption for us, Heb. 9:12. This I would consider a little more particularly, namely, the glory that comes to our great High Priest, by his being the author of eternal salvation.

[1.] We find that all faith in approaches to God is to be made through him; all acts of trust Godward are to be made through him: No man cometh to the Father but by him. He saves them that come unto God by him, Heb. 7:25. By him we believe in God, that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory, 1 Peter 1:21. This is proper divine honour to be a mean of peace with God; and that person that is the mean of approaching to God, and that is the object of our faith, is always divine. We can approach to God by no creature, it is an honour too big for them: but we may approach to God by Christ Jesus, for the Father hath consecrated him in this station: He suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, 1 Peter 3:18.

[2.] All the gracious communications that are betwixt God and men, is all through this great High Priest. This is his glory, this makes him a great one. All the gracious communications and fellowship, either of God's giving to us, or our returning again to him, are all through this great High Priest; the communications, and blessings, and

privileges to us, and the return of praise to God again, are all through Christ.

[1.] The communications that are from God to us, do all come from Christ. If you receive them, you know which way they come, for they taste of the channel.

[1. Our justification. This is by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Rom. 3:24. Whenever a sinner stands accepted before God, that state of acceptance is owing to this great High Priest; if God look graciously upon him, if we may stand with confidence in his presence, it is all through Jesus Christ.

[2. Our sanctification is by the Spirit of Jesus. Whenever sanctification is begun, Christ is formed within; whenever sanctification goes on, conformity to Christ is advanced, and we are going on towards perfection. What is perfect holiness, but only conformity to the image of his Son? And to this the Lord hath predestinated all his chosen, Rom. 8:29.

[3. Our adoption is through this great Priest also: He hath redeemed them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons, Gal. 4:5.

[4. Our perseverance is only owing to Christ's grace and power. He is able to make us stand, and he will make us stand. See what the apostle says concerning the poor weak tottering Christian, that is weak in the faith, Rom. 14:4. Our supports and encouragements under all our temptations and difficulties are owing to Christ; and eternal glory at last is owing to him also; he purchased it for us, he hath possessed it in our room, and receives us to himself at last; that where he is, there we may be also, as his own words are. So,

[2.] Is it as to all returns of service unto God again. These are all to the honour of our great High Priest; that as God dispenses all his good-will and favour through Christ, we are to return all service and worship to God in him. This I would explain to you in these things:—

[1. That all the adoration, and worship, and obedience, and service, call them by what name you will, that is now given by Christians, is given at the command of our Lord Jesus. We must take this great High Priest's will as the rule of our worship. So the Lord hath commanded, is enough for a Christian's conscience; and where the Lord hath not commanded, no tender conscience will act. Let men talk what they will, let the authority of men, either of churchmen or statesmen, work as they will, if they be in matters of the worship of God, our great High Priest must command it, or we dare not do it. It had been a great deal better for the interest of Christ's church in the earth, if the great High Priest had been better consulted. Consider, says the apostle, the High Priest and Apostle of our profession. How many names hath the Lord Jesus Christ in the word? He is called the Apostle and the High Priest of our profession; he is the Lord our righteousness. We must profess nothing but what he enjoins, believe nothing but what he reveals, do nothing but what he commands.

[2. Not only must all worship, and service, and obedience, be done as obedience to him, but it must be all done in his name; that is more, not only at his command, but in his name. If we pray, it is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, John 14:13. If we offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God, it is by Christ our great High Priest, that we are to offer them, Heb. 13:15. To offer worship to God in the name of Christ, is another sort of business than people commonly imagine; it is to set about the performance with an eye to the great undertaking of this great High Priest.

[3. It tends to his glory not a little, that the eternal praises of the saints in heaven will all depend, and border, and rest upon this great Priest our Lord Jesus; that when the heirs of glory are come to the possession of the inheritance that is purchased for them, the praise of this grace will be eternally sung by them. That song in Rev. 5:9, 11 is a song of praise to this great Priest, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, says he. Must not then Christ be a great Priest, when all the salvation that is dispensed on earth is all owing to him, and all the praise that will be given in heaven will be all paid to him? Thereupon the apostle hath that word, 2 Thess. 1:10. When he shall come, (speaking of our Lord's second coming), to be glorified in his saints. The greatness of Christ's priesthood will never appear so fully, as when the whole virtue of his sacrifice shall be seen, when all the heirs that his blood has bought shall appear together, and all the glory and the possessors thereof.

APPLICATION. Our Lord Jesus is a great Priest. 1. Then let him be great in your eye. He is great in himself, great in his office, great in his Father's eye; let him be also great in yours. Low and common, and mean thoughts of Christ are very ordinary, and very sinful. If people would take the apostle's exhortation, Heb. 3:1. Consider the High Priest of our profession; if people would take a more near and close view of Jesus Christ in his office of a priest, what a beautiful sight would they see? Christ always rises in mens esteem, according as he is bright or dark in their eyes. Every man esteems Christ highly, that knows him clearly. It is impossible, but the beams of the saving discovery of Christ must imprint upon the soul unspeakable apprehensions of his greatness and value. See how the apostle speaks of him; that very word is enough to make one have high thoughts of Christ, if they were heard by faith: Heb. 1:2, 3. God—hath in these

last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power. Must not this be a great person now, that is the very brightness of the Father's glory? that is, another person, but the same God? and exactly like him? What does this great one now? He upholds all things by the word of his power; he made all things of nothing in the beginning, and, by the same word of power, keeps all things from dropping again into nothing. What more stately can be said in the word of the divine dignity of his person? Now, in the next word, he comes to speak of his office, when he had by himself purged our sins. How marvellous was it so great a person should come down for so mean and sordid an employment as to purge our sins? A prince removing dung from his own stable is a mean thing in regard of this: he did not commit this great work to another, but he did it himself; he purged our sins by himself, that is, himself offered in sacrifice for sins.

2. Have a care that you make use of Jesus Christ as a great Priest.

1st, Bind this matter upon your consciences, that the greatest sin, or the greatest duty, that is committed or performed by men, lies here. The greatest sin is not improving Christ, the greatest duty is using him in that station the Father hath set him in. See, says the apostle, that ye refuse not him that speaketh, Heb. 12:25. Pray, observe what the connection is. Ye are come, saith he, ver. 24. unto Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh. If Christ come to speak to you as a Priest, if Christ come to you by his blood; take heed, that you refuse not him that speaketh: there is no escaping, if you turn away from him that speaketh from heaven,

2dly, As you would be careful to make use of Christ as a Priest to you, so you should learn to do it confidently. We shall have further occasion to speak of the confidence of faith which is allowed, in the next verse; yet I would not pass it now, when it is so needful to speak of this great duty, this great grace of making use of and improving of this great Priest. It should be done with confidence.

1. With confidence as to the greatness of his office, and the sufficiency of his sacrifice. Lay that down and settle upon it, whenever you come to act faith on Christ for the pardon of your sins, and bringing you into the favour of God. Remember, you come before God in the name of a High Priest, whose sacrifice is great. There are many great objections that hinder confidence; I will name a few of them, and I will tell you where their answer only lies. You may try and search for other answers, and the answers may please sometimes for a little while.

The first objection is this, "Shall I draw near to God? I have to do with a great God." So you have; in all your dealings with God about salvation, you have to do with a great God; his majesty when it is discovered, unless Christ be discovered also, is one of the grandest shakings of faith: Wo is me, saith Isaiah, I have seen the holy one of Israel.

The second objection is, "I am a great sinner."

The third is, "That the law is a great and awful law, that I am to answer to."

All this is true. What shall a man do with this? Will God grow less, will the law be unbanded, or thy sin removed? No; they stand all as they are, an infinitely great God, a vile guilty sinner, a righteous holy law, that cannot be defeated.

The only answer is here, if I have a great God to deal with, and if I am a great sinner, and if a great law to reckon with; I have a great High Priest, and I can set this alone against all these: he is a High Priest whose sacrifice is of a sweet-smelling savour before the great God; the virtue of it cleanseth sin, and the virtue of it fulfils the law. The apostle therefore, when he is giving the grand foundations of a Christian's faith, lodges it all upon this great High Priest: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. But how can God justify? It is Christ that died, says he, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. His dying is the oblation of this great High Priest, his rising again is the application thereof, Rom. 8:33, 34.

(2.) In your making use of Christ as High Priest betwixt God and you, you must do it not only with confidence of the worth and virtue of the sacrifice, bur with confidence as to your right to make use of it. Here is a common deceit that Satan hinders the peace of many a poor Christian by; the greater our shame; his cunning is not so great as our folly is great. The common thought of men is this, there is no doubt, but that Christ is a great Priest, and that his sacrifice is a great sacrifice, happy are they that have the virtue of it; but what right have I to make use of it. The meaning of this question, What right have I? is commonly this, May I adventure upon it without sin? This is undeniable that thou mayst; for there are these three things I would lay before you:—

(1.) God commands thee, whoever thou art, to deal with him about salvation. Pray lay down this for a conclusion; it is the certain revealed mind and will of God, that every man and woman, how great sinners soever they be, should deal with him about their salvation. God never allows men to run to hell, neither in security, nor in despair; but he proclaims his displeasure against those that do

either way. If men run to hell sleeping or roaring, and depart from God with a tormenting conscience, they are both condemned justly. This then is a principle, that is some way befriended by the light of nature, the only true God commands me in his word to deal with him about salvation; and since his patience has kept me out of hell, he allows me to lay hold of his grace, for the preventing of that dreadful ruin.

(2.) God forbids thee to deal with him about salvation in any other name, but in Christ's name. That is as plain as the other. As God would have men mind their salvation, and glorify him in seeking for it from him; so he forbids them expressly, to come about salvation in any name but Christ's: There is no salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, Acts 4:12. There are two things that are pretty plain: God commands us to deal with him about salvation, and not to go to hell quietly and tamely; and he forbids us to deal with him about salvation in any name but Christ's.

(3.) He has revealed and set forth Christ Jesus unto men in the gospel to be thus made use of: Rom. 3:25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood. As really as the brazen serpent was erected upon the pole, that the stung Israelites might look and live; so truly is Christ Jesus held forth in the gospel, that every man that has a mind to salvation may look to him and get it. All men that live where the gospel is preached have alike right to believe on Christ Jesus; no man has a right in Christ, till he is a believer. There are secret purposes and thoughts in God's heart where to apply his grace; but in the public dispensations of it, all men are alike afar off, and all have alike equal right to believe. There is not a poor creature upon the face of the earth, that lives where the gospel is preached, but he has as much right to believe on Christ for

the salvation of his soul, as Saul had when he went to Damascus. Indeed an actual right follows faith. Does God command you to treat about salvation with him? doth he forbid thee to treat in any other, but in Christ's name? hath he revealed Christ Jesus in the gospel, for this end to be made use of? How can the devil prevail with any creature ever to fall into this dreadful imagination, I am afraid God will be angry, if I should venture the burthen of my lost soul upon Christ Jesus? Be ye persuaded of it, that murther and adultery, and the greatest abominations, are not more displeasing, by virtue of that command of the law, than a bare not improving of the Son of God for salvation, is by virtue of the gospel. This is the condemnation, this is that which sends multitudes of poor sinners to hell, if I may so speak; it sends more to hell in London, than all the profaneness in the midst of us; and until the power of the gospel be sent more into the hearts of the people; these open sorts of profaneness will never be destroyed. This confidence is so far from pride, that it is a great act of humility; and it is only the pride of mens hearts that hinders this confidence; they are unwilling to cast themselves upon this plea alone, to intrust the whole burthen of their salvation upon this great Priest alone; that is the way to make all miscarry.

3dly, Make use of this great High Priest entirely in all things, in all things wherein you need him, in all things wherein he may be useful to you. We must use our High Priest about our good things, as well as about our bad. A great many poor creatures are so ignorant, I hope some may be Christians that are so ignorant, but this may be, and it is certain with many of them, that whenever they come to treat with God about their sin, then they know they must treat with him by Christ Jesus; but when they treat with God about their services, and when they present their grace, and faith, and repentance, and love, and worship, they do not see so much need of the High Priest. If you make right use of Christ as the High Priest over the house of God,

remember this, that you must use him as really, as humbly, as entirely, in presenting your good works to God for acceptance, as in pleading for pardon for your bad ones.

4thly, Make use of Christ as a High Priest constantly. There may be such a weakness amongst some believers, that they think, that when they began first upon godliness, they stood in need daily of the High Priest, they are weak and feeble: but after they have got a great deal of experience, they hope that that experience and the means of grace may do pretty well with them. And that is the reason, why so many do so very ill. No Christian can ever outlive the necessity of employing Christ as High Priest in all the steps of his life; and in the last step through death we must still lean upon this High Priest; we go by our High Priest within the vail, leaning and going through the vail of his flesh. And truly I am afraid, the Lord prevent it in you mercifully and graciously, there are many worse things to be afraid of; I am afraid of some Christians, that their best acts of faith on Christ Jesus are at their last, that their believing through the course of their pilgrimage is a little mingled and mixed with something of themselves; and when they come to the awful and dreadful step, and look death and judgment in the face, then they throw all away to the moles and bats; then their renouncing their own righteousness is no great business to a believer.

Lastly, Use him delightfully, use him with pleasure. Sirs, the constraint of conscience is good where there can be no better: but I would lead you to a better constraint, and that is the constraint of love: The love of Christ constrains me, says the apostle, to live to him. There is no man ever will be in heaven, but he that loves heaven, and no man walks in the way to heaven, but he that loves that way. There is a perverse love of heaven, and a mistaken love of the way to it; and if people would examine their hearts, and find the

matter thus with them, I may say, in a word, there is a determination about your state. A Christian loves heaven because Christ is there, and there he is seen and enjoyed; and a Christian loves the way to heaven, because it all lies through Christ: I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. The virtue of the sacrifice, giving himself for me, is the very strength of my life; whenever I would be recovered, and refreshed, and strengthened, I take a meal by faith of this love, and of his giving himself for me, and do it delightfully. I know that there is something of the new nature, that does prompt every believer to some spiritual pleasure in all actings of faith; but sometimes this is not so very remarkable. Says the apostle, Ye fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you. Great dangers constrain people in a manner to take the first way of escape; but the believer comes to see what a glorious refuge Christ is, that not only is he a sure defence, but a glorious habitation; he blesses the danger that drove him, as well as the grace that welcomes him; he in a manner blesses the disease, that hath sent him to so sweet a physician. A great many make use of Christ as a Priest, when they cannot help themselves otherwise. Let it be your thought, If there were a possibility of doing my matters with God about salvation, otherwise than by Jesus Christ, I would renounce them all, and take Jesus Christ. But this is the only way; it should be as our meat and drink. Believing on the Son of God, will never be strongly done till delightfully done. When the weary traveller casts himself with delight, as well as with confidence, upon the stone laid in Zion, he then feels the benefit of rest.

SERMON XX

HEBREWS 10:21

And having an High Priest over the house of God.

THIS verse contains the third encouragement which the apostle draws from Jesus Christ, to stir up believers to approach to God in the right manner. I did propose three things to be spoke to; I have spoke to the first of them. The first thing in this encouragement is taken from Christ's office; he is a Priest, and a great one. Accordingly I spoke to these two: 1. That our Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour is a true and proper Priest betwixt God and men. 2. That he is a great one; as it is his office to be a Priest, he is a great one in that office. From these I have spoke.

The second thing in the verse, is that which follows now to be discoursed of; and that is our Lord's charge in this office. We are told by the Spirit of God in the word, that he is a Priest over the house of God, in it, towards it, and over it. On this truth, That Christ is a great Priest over the house of God, I would spend this time in speaking, and would do it in this order.

I. Shew you, what is the house of God that Christ's charge is in and over.

II. What sort of charge and authority he hath in it and over it.

Then apply it.

First, What is the house of God that Christ's charge lies about and over? We all know, that there was of old a typical house, and it had a

typical priest, which was the chief officer over it. Of this there was a change in the wilderness, and a good many years after they came to Canaan; the tabernacle was removed in all their journeyings in the wilderness, and was removed according to God's ordinance and appointment several times; in the land of promise it was sometimes in Kirjath-jearim; the ark was a while in captivity; it was at last brought to the city of David, then settled by Solomon in the temple, which the Lord calls his house, 2 Sam. 7:6, 7. This house of God, the temple, was a type of Christ's body. So our Lord uses it of his natural body, if I may so call it: Destroy this temple, says our Lord, and I will raise it again in three days; but he spake of the temple of his body, John 2:19, 20, 21. All the glory that was in the temple, was but so many shadows of the great glory of that tabernacle wherein God was to dwell, where the fulness of the Godhead was to dwell in the man Christ. This temple was typical also of Christ's mystical body, the church: therefore we find the church often called by this name, the temple of the living God: Ye are the temple of the living God. Our bodies are so, the whole man is so: 1 Tim. 3:15. That thou mayest know, how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. That we have now no more to do with this typical temple, it pleased the Lord, in the depth of his providence, a little while after our Lord Jesus came in the flesh, and after he had gone to heaven, and had fulfilled all righteousness, and had dispatched all his work; it pleased God, I say, to lay this temple desolate by the hands of strangers, and it remains a ruin to this day; and so perhaps it will to the last day. There is now no house can be called the house of God, as the temple at Jerusalem was. Typical temples and typical priests are all expired with the ceasing of the Levitical service; and it is but an aping of this, that Antichrist, and they that would work after the same spirit, labour to rear up in the church of Christ. What then is the true house of God? The apostle certainly had no thoughts to draw the minds of these Hebrews unto

the dotting upon the outward worldly temple, that he knew was shortly to be removed and destroyed. By the house of God, that Christ's charge is about and over, we are to understand two things, 1. All the matters; and, 2. All the people of God.

1. All the matters of God. All those things wherein God deals with us, and we with him, our Lord is concerned about them all: He is a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, Heb. 2:17. Every high priest is chosen from amongst men for things pertaining to God, Heb. 5:1. Let us look a little to this.

1st, In all God's dealing with us, he deals with us altogether by this High Priest. The Lord hath resolved, and he keeps his purpose, that he never will treat graciously with men, but only in, and through, and by Christ Jesus. (1.) In all the revealings of his mind to us, they are in and by Christ Jesus. If ever God manifest his will, if he speak forth all his mind unto the children of men, it is by his Son, as the apostle tells us, Heb. 1:2. (2.) In all his ruling, and managing, and guiding of his church and people, it is all done by Christ Jesus. (3.) In all the communications of his love, and grace, and mercy to the children of men, they are all given through Christ Jesus. Never did any man obtain a saving blessing immediately out of God's hand, it is all given by Christ Jesus.

2dly, In all our dealings with God, we must do so too. If God deal with us only by Christ Jesus, we must deal with him, and thereby acknowledge this power that our Lord hath over the house of God. As for instance, (1.) If ever we set about the knowing of God, or thinking on him, or studying of him, we must do it all by Christ Jesus. There is nothing so hard to bring your hearts to; I know it well by my own; and every one that knows his own heart, will find it so; there is nothing so hard as for a person to confine all his meditations and

thoughts of God unto those discoveries that are made of God in the face of Christ Jesus. There are some natural notions we have of God, and by the light of the word; these are polished in a great many people; thereupon you will find, that the religion of a great many folks (a great part of it) who bear their heads high in Christianity before men, lies wholly and altogether, if I may so call them, in a company of philosophical thoughts, of the majesty, and power, and attributes of God, and never a thought of God in Christ. Whenever a man thinks of God out of Christ, he enters immediately into a maze and labyrinth, and he will be confounded and wander unavoidably: The light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines to us in the face of Christ Jesus, 2 Cor. 4:6. If thou hast seen me, saith our Lord, thou hast seen the Father also: believest thou this? John 14:9. (2.) In all our treatings with God for reconciliation, they must all be managed in Christ Jesus. This is one of the matters, that God is specially concerned in in this office. It is a great reflection on Christ as a High Priest over the house of God, when a sinner offers to make his peace, or seek his peace from God, without Christ. No man can come to the Father but by him; he is the only introducer of poor men into God's favour and friendship. (3.) In all the exercise of grace and performance of worship and duty, these are matters of God, these are things wherein we have to do with God, and in all these we must deal with God through Christ Jesus. Whatever our sacrifices be, they must all be offered up in and by the hand of this great High Priest. Never was there a man in this world, that had so good a gift to give to God, as that he durst give it out of his own hand. No, we must put it in Christ's hand; and till it come out of his own hand, it can never be accepted of God: We are built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:4, 5. So also as to all our expectations from God, all the hopes that we have of good things from God, are all to be in Christ Jesus; the apostle therefore does well call him Jesus Christ, who is our hope, 1

Tim. 1:1. That is the first thing that is to be understood by the house of God; all the matters of God, all things that pertain to God, every thing wherein God deals with men, and wherein men deal with God, he deals with us by this Mediator and High Priest, and we must deal with him so too. He knows we cannot bear his immediate dealings with us, and we should know that we are not able to deal with him; therefore the Mediator is betwixt God and men, that all the affairs of God and men may be well and fitly managed.

2. By the house of God, is understood, in the word, the people, the church of God, a company of people that our Lord hath chosen and gathered unto himself in every age. Sometimes they have been fewer, and sometimes they have been more; but it is a plantation that hath been of so long standing, and there have been so many in every age, that doubtless when they come all together, there will be a great and goodly company; they are the house of God: In whom you also are builded together, says he, for an habitation of God through the Spirit, Eph. 2:22. So much for this thing, What this house of God is, that Christ's charge is over; all matters of God, and all the people of God.

II. The second thing to be spoke to is, what is this authority that Christ has over this house of God? I will name a few of the general properties of it, and give you a few of the instances thereof, that may give some understanding of the nature of it.

1. This authority that our Lord hath is divine, though delegated, though commissioned. All commission from God is not divine, is not so divine as Christ's authority is. The apostles had their authority from Jesus Christ, yet their authority was but that of men; whatever power they were clothed with, it was still in the name of another, in the name of God. But our Lord Jesus comes in his own name, and in the name of his Father; his power, though delegated, is divine,

because the person is so; so that all the respect that we owe to divine authority in its most glorious exertings and exercises, is due to the Son of God. He hath committed all power to him, that all men should honour the Son, as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him, John 5:23.

2. This authority of our Lord's is universal and absolute; it is over all things, it is over all things with reference to his church and people. The immediate exercise of his charge as Priest is about the house of God, but every thing besides, as it may serve that. So says the apostle,—And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Eph. 1:21, 22. He hath put all things under his feet; therefore it is evident, that there is nothing that is not put under him, as the apostle exactly reasons upon Psal. 8 in Heb. 2:8. In that he saith all things are put under him, it is evident, that there is nothing left that is not put under him; where we have the Spirit of God, in the New Testament, giving a full meaning of the Spirit in the Old. This authority that Christ hath over the house of God, is altogether incommunicable; there is none but he that is God's fellow and equal, that is worthy of this honour, nor able to manage this great trust; there is none capable of this trust but Christ Jesus; no men, no angels have a share in it. None of the apostles ever had a share in an authority over the house of God; they had but the power of servants and ministers in the house; they were not lords in it: as the same apostle in Heb. 3 does most elegantly compare Moses and Christ: Moses was faithful in all his house; but how? as a servant, saith he; but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, verse 6. This now is the general nature of this great authority that our Lord Jesus, as High Priest, hath over the house of God; it is divine, it is absolute in all things, it is communicable to none, it passes not from him to any body. The first typical priesthood was put into Aaron's hands; when he died, it was left to his son, and so from one

to another's son; says the apostle, They could not continue in their office by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, Heb. 7:24. It were well then, if so be, that the name of a priest had been buried in the ruins of the temple at Jerusalem: for that name and the office did alone belong to that constitution, and is quite foreign to the ministry of the gospel: but Antichrist hath brought it in, as he makes himself the grand high-priest, and ordinary ministers as underlings unto him; and he hath framed a sacrifice for them, which is the very abomination of abominable Popery, he has a priest, and altar, and sacrifice, for they will be perpetually together; where there is no altar, nor sacrifice, wherefore should there be a priest? If our Lord hath offered the grand sacrifice, and be the everlasting Priest, and about his work in heaven, and has ended all his work on earth, there is no work for any man under that name, and in that office upon earth.

Now, the other thing that I promised to speak to about the power of our Lord, is to shew you some particular instances of it, that we may not rest only in generals about Christ's power over the house of God.

1. Christ's power over the house of God is seen in this, that he calleth and bringeth into the house of God whom he will; he calls strangers, he hath the key of the house of David, and he opens when he will, and shuts when he will, Rev. 3:7. Do any of you partake of the grace of God? are you brought in truly to this spiritual house of God? All the thanks is owing to this great High Priest. Our Lord puts forth his power and saves whom he will; he brings men to God; he follows after strangers; he knows them well. There is not an elect person in the purpose of God, and there is not a redeemed person in the design of Christ's dying, but our Lord knows them, and will pursue them, and follow them, and overtake them and bring them in: Other sheep,

says he, I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, John 10:16.

2. Christ's power over the house of God is seen in this, that he dispenses and disposes the treasure of the house as he sees good. All the riches of this great house of God are given forth by our Lord Jesus, as he thinks good: Unto every one of us, saith the apostle, is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, Eph. 4:7. No wonder that our Lord has great power in dispensing his grace, for it is all his own; all that is given out of his house is the purchase of his blood, and what he hath dearly bought, that he might be the Lord thereof: Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

3. Christ's power over the house of God is seen in this, that he welcomes all his people to the mansions in his Father's house, which he has prepared for them. After he hath brought them into the lower house here, and hath enriched them as he sees good, he at last brings them into his presence above, and they enter by him as the gate. John 14:2, 3 our Lord speaks of his going to prepare a place for them, and of his receiving them to himself. The crown of eternal life is given particularly by Christ Jesus to every saved one, as certainly as every bit of saving grace is Christ's free gift. Now, the crown of eternal glory is his free gift: Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, saith the apostle, Jude, verse 21. They are vain lookers for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, that are rejecters of the mercy of our Lord Jesus in fitting us for eternal life now. But a poor believer that hath partaked of eternal life in its seed, and hath received a great deal of Christ's mercy, this man may easily expect, and confidently look for the greatest at last; he that hath lived upon Christ's grace and mercy all his days, may expect the last gift when he stands in need of it, and when our Lord's time is to give it.

Lastly, The last instance of Christ's great power over the house of God is in his coming again, and fetching the whole family together. Now heaven is filled with the spirits of just men made perfect, as Christ calls them. We do not know how heaven is filled now; sometimes we see believers expiring, and they breathe out their breath, and leave a carcase lying upon the bed; we can see no further; how the immortal soul maketh its passage into the heavens, and is received there, passeth our understandings. But there is one filling of heaven that is a coming, which every one of you will be witnesses of, God grant you may be joyful witnesses thereof; that is, when our Lord shall come again, and gather the dust of his people, and raise up glorious temples out of their vile bodies, and shall carry up soul and body to heaven. This is a proof, I say, of the last great instance of Christ's power over the house of God, that as he did ascend himself, and entered heaven with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption; so the day is coming, and may be nearer than you apprehend, when he shall come again and gather all his people, and judge them, and save them, and carry them up to heaven, and present them to the Father. The one is as sure as the other. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin unto salvation. As if the apostle had said, As sure as Christ died without the gates of Jerusalem, and there were thousands then alive that knew it, and saw it, as sure as that was, he will make another appearance without sin to salvation, to all them that look for him. This is the last act of our Lord's conduct in his great guidance of the house of God, that he then puts down all power, and authority, and rule, and lays aside his own mediatory dispensation of the kingdom, that God may be all in all, as the apostle speaks of it, 1 Cor. 15:26.

APPLICATION. Is Christ a great Priest over the house of God? Then I would, 1. Exhort you to have great and high thoughts of Christ Jesus. Pay a great deal of honour to him. Never think so highly of Christ as to be afraid to employ him; but, in all your employings of him, have a great sense of his grandeur and power. With what reverence, and adoration, and submission, should we employ him, when we exercise faith on him! Believing on Jesus Christ, and exercising faith on him, trusting him with the concerns of our eternal salvation, is one of the most bold and familiar, and also one of the most reverent and awful things that a poor creature can do.

2. Learn to pay your due respect unto the true house of God, because of its Master's sake. Every thing that concerns the house of God should be regarded reverently by us, because it is Christ's charge.

1st, All the orders, and all the ordinances of the house of God are to be reverently regarded, because they are under Christ's charge; he is the Lord and Master of them all. All gospel-ordinances are Christ's appointments, and they are to be used as such; and we are to submit to them, and use them reverently as such. What our Lord said of his supper, may be said of every appointment, Do this, saith our Lord, in remembrance of me; hear the word in remembrance of Christ that appointed it; pray in remembrance of him that commands men every where to follow his example, and to lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. All the ordinances and order of his house are to be reverently regarded, because of the Master thereof. The word is the word of Christ: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, Col. 3:16. This would make your Bibles dearer to you, and make you use them spiritually, if every time you open your books, you thought, This is Christ's will, and this is a letter to me sent by Jesus Christ from heaven; and he by his Spirit can speak them to me, and I by faith

may vent that back in prayer, that may make as true comfort and converse with him, as if he were upon the earth.

2dly, There is in Christ's house the dwellers, the inhabitants; his people are of the house, they dwell there. That charge our Lord gave, and the Lord grant its power may reach our hearts: Take heed, says he, that ye despise not one of these little ones that believe on me, Matth. 18:6, 10. They are little, they are weak as to a great many things; wherefore they may be despised. There is a deep providence of God in this, that there is not a perfect sinless Christian on the earth. I do not believe the world would like them the better, if they were so; I do believe, if there were a perfectly holy person upon earth, that perfectly holy person would be more perfectly hated by all the ungodly than any. But whatever the infirmities and weaknesses of the children of God are, which things commonly make them to be despised, our Lord warns against it. Now, if I may so speak, our Lord's argument is not so great, though it be a good one, as that which this text does afford. Our Lord's argument is only drawn from a smaller thing: Take heed, that ye despise not one of these little ones that believe on me; for as mean as they be, their angels behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. You would think it a great thing to have the company of an angel, you would be loath to despise an angel; but you can despise a weak silly believer, says our Lord; that weak one that believes in me is under the guard of these angels, yea of him who is the Master of angels, of our Lord Jesus, who is the head of all principalities and powers; take heed therefore you despise not such a believer.

3dly, There are the concerns of the house of God, that you should be concerned about greatly. It is a shame to think, how we are outstripped by Old Testament saints in this point. What great things are spoken of the zeal of the people of God of old! The zeal of thine

house hath eaten me up, saith David, typically of Christ. And Psal. 122:7, 8. For my brethren and companions sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee; peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. How much more may we say, for our Lord's sake, who is the Master of his house, we wish well to the church of Christ. There is a great want of public-spiritedness, and it is a great sign that God hath no great mind to do any great public work for his glory, and for his people, in that he hath restrained the spirit of due concernment about the house and interest of Christ. All men seek their own things, but no man the things of Jesus Christ. If a particular church, and a particular city or land have the gospel in any tolerable quietness amongst them, and all is well with them, very unconcerned are they about the great dishonour that Christ sustains in the world. For Christ's sake we should be concerned about all the affairs of his house, about the prosperity and adversity of it; rejoice when it is well with Zion, and mourn when it is otherwise.

3. You that have a mind to be in the house of God, to be brought into his favour now, and into his presence hereafter; you must mind Christ Jesus, make use of him, for he is set over the house of God; you must enter by him, or you can never come into this house. If you enter not by him that is the door, ye are but thieves and robbers, and will be punished for your trespass, rather than commendably entertained. Now, how shameful is the practice of a great many in this particular? There are many that do think they are in God's house already, as far as God's house is to be entered into by men on earth, and they hope they shall be in God's house above for ever; whereas in the mean time they have no acquaintance with Jesus Christ, and no employment for him. See now how men mistake, There are some that think they are born in God's house, and therefore they shall be well, because they are born of godly parents. There is no man born in God's house, no man born in God's inward house; a great many are

born in the outer courts. There is no man born to good purpose, unless he be born again. There is no man born in God's house; though I acknowledge, that there is an external foederal right which the children of believers may have.

Some think they are in God's house by education; they have light and knowledge, and have been instructed in the ways and things of God from their youth and childhood: and by the fruits of these, they begin to imagine that surely they are in God's house. There are some that go yet further, and they think they are entered into the house of God by their profession, by their professed subjection to the gospel of Christ; and I acknowledge, that where this is sincerely done, it goes a great way: but that is not a man's entering into this spiritual house, but a man's declaring that he is in it already, and that he desires to be trained up in it. Unless you have a particular exercise in the employing Christ to introduce you into God's presence; unless you have particular experience, that Christ hath taken you by the hand, and hath brought you in, you have little to say for your being Christ's. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only man that can introduce a man into God's presence; and O how sweetly can he do it! When we speak, we must consider that we frame our words with reverence. Our Lord Jesus, in presenting a sinner to his Father, says in a manner, "Father, here is a poor one that thou hast given me, and that I have redeemed; he has been wandering from me, and I have pursued, and overtaken, and found, and brought him home, and now I present him unto thee; Father, welcome this lost sheep." O, when our Lord as it were takes a sinner in his own hand, and presents him to his Father as a returning sheep, as the apostle saith, You were sometimes gone astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls, 1 Peter 2:25 how sweet, how great, and how sure is the welcome!

SERMON XXI

HEBREWS 10:21

And having an High Priest over the house of God.

YOU have heard again and again, that the scope of the apostle, and of the Spirit of God that guided him in this context, is to encourage believers in approaching to God, by several great discoveries of Jesus Christ, and of the great provision made in him for them.

1. That the entrance to the holiest is made by his blood.
2. That the way that leads unto the holiest of all, is through the vail of his flesh.
3. That he is a High Priest to introduce us, and to bring us unto God. From this third argument of encouragement that is contained in this verse, I proposed three things to be spoke to.

1. What that office is that the apostle here holds forth Christ to be in; he is a High Priest, a great one; the word here is only in the original a great priest, our translators have rendered it an high priest; the same apostle in chap. 4:14 calls him a great High Priest.

2. I have spoke something of Christ's charge, whereabout it lies. It is, saith the apostle, over, or upon, or in the house of God. What this house of God, and what Christ's power and authority in it, and over it is, I spake to you last day The house of God, is all the matters of God,

and all the people of God, and all things wherein God deals with us. He deals with us by Christ; and in all matters wherein we deal with God, we must deal with him by Christ. The high-priest under the law, was a kind of mediator betwixt God and men. The immediate approaches unto Israel's God, were not to be made by the people immediately, but by the high-priest; and the answers of peace were to be returned by him, when he came forth from the holiest of all.

This I shall dismiss with a word or two more of application; and that is, Since believers are the house of God, they that are such should mind their duty. A great duty lies on them by this name, that they are of the house of God.

I will name a few things that are plainly contained in it, and may be strongly urged from it. I speak now to them that are true believers, that are Christ's special charge.

1. You that are the house of God by faith in Christ Jesus, know humbly and remember frequently your great debt unto our Lord Jesus. I do not believe that ever there was a believer on earth, that had that sense that the greatness of the matter calls for, that sense of thankfulness for the marvellous change that grace makes when it plucks us out of nature, and brings us into Christ, that the case requires. To be translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, as the apostle's phrase is, Col. 1:12, 13 is a just ground of great thanksgiving. Every one by nature is not only in the house of the devil, that is bad enough; but every one by nature is the devil's house; that is a great deal worse: it is a great deal worse to have him dwelling in us, than to have us dwelling with him: Ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, Eph. 2:2. Is it not wonderful grace, that our Lord Jesus

Christ will make that heart to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, that was, till he entered, the habitation of the devil, and under the power of sin, and dominion of Satan! For sin, and Satan the father of sin, are perpetually inseparable. If a man be sin's captive, he is the devil's, and taken captive by him at his will, as the apostle's phrase is. Therefore you that have this change wrought in you, that are made the house of God, and are brought under the charge of our Lord Jesus, should humbly and heartily own his great goodness in this dispensation.

2. You should know where your standing is, what foundation you stand upon. All grace comes from Christ Jesus; and the end of his giving of grace is, that he may be more improved and used by his people; for all the saving graces of the Spirit of God, are but like so many various tools and instruments, by which the new creature acts towards its original. Now, here is a woful course of a great many; when Christ bestows his grace, grace many a time is put in his own room; when he makes his grace to dwell in us, we are apt to forget that our standing is in himself alone, that created, and infused, and dispensed the grace that is lodged in us. As we are made vessels of grace, we are as feeble as ever; no dispensation of grace was ever given in this world for that end; and if it be used for that end, it is grossly abused. That a believer should live the less dependent upon Jesus Christ, is a snare that you have great need all of you to take good heed of, and beware of. Remember that you do not live, and that you do not stand by the grace that is in you, but only by the grace that is in him. Our strength stands in the fountain: Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. A believer thinks himself exceeding weak, when he can see nothing of Christ's grace in himself; but that is a great mistake; that man is exceeding weak indeed, that can see no grace in Christ Jesus; that man is fallen wofully. How excellently does the apostle speak of it, 2 Cor. 12:9, 10.: Most gladly therefore

will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then am I strong. It is best with me when I am nothing. What a mighty word is that, Though I be nothing, ver. 11.!

3. You that are made the house of God, the charge of this great High Priest, mind the perfection of your state, press towards that. Though believers are the house of God now, and he dwells in them, yet there is another house and another sort of dwelling, that they do expect and should long for. All dispensations of grace unto the children of God, are not only given in order to prepare them for glory, but in order to enable them to press further to the obtaining of the glory of God. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God, Rom. 15:7. As soon as Christ's call has reached the heart of a poor sinner, immediately he should be thinking within himself, What is that I am called to? I am called to heaven, I am called to march towards heaven, and I have Christ, and, the Spirit, and promise, and all dispensations of grace as seals and earnest of that great profession. There are some things, Sirs, that are needful to make a lovely Christian, and I am afraid, that we may go far, and search long before we can find any of them; but we hope some such there are. A lovely Christian is a man whose root is deep in Christ, rooted and built up in him, Col. 2:7. People will not perceive it, until many sad experiences make them to feel it; there are many things amiss with many Christians, and they are full of complaints; they do not fully ponder this, that the root is not deep enough, they have not taken deep root in Christ Jesus. Again, a lovely Christian is one whose fruit abounds: That your fruit may abound through him. Abide in me, and I in you, says our Lord, so shall you bear much fruit. Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples, John 15:8.; and several places in the same chapter. The third property of a lovely Christian is, that his leaf is

green, his profession fair, and clean, and not withered. It is said of the happy man in the first psalm, His leaf fadeth not; he is well planted, and he brings forth much fruit in season. Alas! fruit is in a great measure gone, and the beauty of the leaves of our profession is in a great measure withdrawn also. How few can speak David's words, Psal. 52:8. But I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God. The loveliness of our profession tends to our Lord's praise, and our fruitfulness therein not only to his praise, but to our advantage. The last thing in a beautiful Christian is, that I may allude to the word of the prophet Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, that his branches reach to heaven. My meaning is this, that there should be breathings and pantings after perfection, and there should be springings up towards eternal life. Examine yourselves now about this point. I dare say, that the greatest part of Christians, sound honest Christians, have more mind to beg grace of God, that they may glorify him here, than they feel of any great desires of enjoying a perfect state hereafter. It is a shame, Sirs, to think, how many Christians are plucked to heaven against their will; my meaning is, before they would be there. They would be there at last; but the shame is, that we should be so unwilling to be there, whenever he calls. A believer, an heir of heaven, to be sorry to leave this earth, is a most shameful thing; but the churches of Christ are full of such shameful things. It was wont to be otherwise, and God can make it otherwise again. We groan within ourselves, being burthened, says the apostle. Why, what burthened the man? Did his afflictions burthen him? No; he gloried in them. Was it his temptations burthened him? No; he rejoiced in them too. His burthen was, that he was out of heaven, 2 Cor. 5:2, 4.

Lastly, You that are the house of God and believers, concern yourselves in the prosperity of the great house of God. Every believer is a temple of God, and the whole church is the great one. Is Christ

set over the house of God as a great Priest; is his charge lying there? and should not the care of our hearts go where Christ's charge is?

1st, Walk honourably, you that are the house of God; do not disgrace and disparage the temple of God: Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy. The true spring of true tenderness and holiness in all manner of conversation, is the faith of those privileges that by the grace of God we are possessed of.

2dly, You that are the house of God and believers, labour to bring in many to the same house with you. The leavening power of godliness is greatly gone: time hath been when it was otherwise, when the enemies took notice of it, that Christianity was in a manner catching wherever it came; that some Christians, by their conversations and by their example, by their exhortations, and speakings, and teachings of others, have been of great use to bring in many strangers to the house. O that that were more minded!

Lastly, Let us all pray more for the prosperity and increasing of the house of God. There is room enough in this house for Jew and Gentile. The great High Priest is able to take care of them all, and he will take care of all that are given him; they shall be spoke for, and brought in, in his time. So much now for this second thing.

The third thing in the verse, and which I would dispatch also at this time, is the interest that the church hath in the High Priest: Having an High Priest over the house of God. Christ is the High Priest, the house of God is his charge, all his people have him; that is what the apostle speaks. It is not, seeing there is an high-priest, though that is something; but it is an argument of far greater force, having him. But though the word having be not in the original here, it is necessarily understood from the 19th verse, and is expressed chap. 4:14. That

which I am to speak to then is this, That the church of believers has a true and certain interest in and possession of Jesus Christ, as their High Priest. I shall only speak unto this, and then make application, What that interest is that believers have in Jesus Christ as a High Priest, how far we may carry this word having.

1. We have this High Priest taken from amongst men. He is a man as we are; he is one of our nature, though not of our condition. Every high-priest, says the apostle, is taken from amongst men in things pertaining to God, Heb. 5:1. So Jesus Christ must be taken from among men.

2. We have this High Priest, as the Spirit of God calls it, with us: He shall be called Emmanuel, God with us, Matth. 1:23 taken from Isa. 7:14.; with us not only in the union of nature, but with us in another union, as he is our Lord, and head, as he is the head, and surety, and undertaker for his people.

3. We have him made, and framed, and shapen for us. What did Jesus Christ do in the world, and what had he to do to be a High Priest, but only for his people? In all things it beloved him to be like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, Heb. 2:17. There is a greater word in Heb. 7:26. For such an High Priest became us. Pray what doth become us? Nothing doth become a sinner, as a sinner, but hell; that he deserves, and that he is ripe for: but, says the apostle, such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; such a High Priest became us. In the framing of our Lord Jesus as a High Priest, and as a Mediator, the infinite wisdom of God consulted what was fit, and meet, and needful for poor men. Thereupon, says the apostle, He is made unto us of

God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, 1 Cor. 1:30. So that if we must conceive, as indeed we must some way, of the works of God, according to the weak thought that we are capable of bestowing upon them, the Father, in framing his Son Christ, considered what man needed; and whatever was needful, and wanting in them, as all good was, that Christ was made to be. If they are fools, he is made wisdom; if they are guilty sinners, he is made righteousness; if they are defiled creatures, he is made sanctification; if they be captives and slaves, he is made redemption.

4. We have him not only made thus, but sent, sent with the highest authority, coming in his Father's name; as he says himself, I am come unto you in my Father's name: he is consecrated by the word of the oath for evermore, Heb. 7:21, 28. This man is made a Priest by an oath, by him that said unto him, The Lord sware, and will not repent, Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

5. We have this Priest with the greatest part of his work done already, and the rest he is daily doing. The comfortable doctrine of Christ's priestly office was not so clearly known, until he had done the greatest part of it. It is marvellous to think what dreadful darkness was in the minds of believers before he died. Peter very readily saith, Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, Matth. 16:16. And the Lord owns him a blessed man for so saying, and tells him, that the Father had revealed this to him; that it was true faith he had, and that it was of a divine original; so that it was an infallible evidence, that the man was a believer: but as soon as Christ comes immediately after to preach to them the doctrine of his sufferings, that he was to be a sacrifice, and was to go up to Jerusalem, and there was to be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and to be slain, Be it far from thee, says Peter. Accordingly you know how sharply he was reprov'd by our Lord. But we need not aggravate the wickedness of that word

of the good man; for their darkness was such that they commonly stumbled in these things grievously. What! speak against Christ's offering the grand sacrifice, by the virtue whereof Peter himself was to get eternal life! But so it was with him. But now we have this advantage, that the main, the hardest part of it is past: We have a great High Priest, saith the apostle, the Son of God, that is passed into the heavens. There were some that saw him upon the cross, that beheld our Lord in his agony, that saw him paying that price to divine justice, by the sacrifice of himself. We see Jesus, saith the apostle, who was a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man, Heb. 2:9. As for his intercession, he is daily about it.

Lastly, Every true believer hath Jesus Christ given to him, and he is possessed of him, with all the virtues and benefits of his great office, the virtues of his sacrifice, and the benefits of his daily intercession; the virtue of that one offering, and the benefit of his interceding before God, this is the proper and complete meaning of this word, We have an High Priest; we have an interest in him, we have all the benefit of this great office the Father hath set him in.

Thus I have gone through these arguments of the apostles. What follows in the following verses, is the proper use the apostle makes of this doctrine; yet as I have, upon every one of the particular arguments and branches of them, made some little use thereof; so would I of this.

The only thing I would speak to you about from this truth is, That since believers have Christ the High Priest, I would exhort you to try and see carefully whether you have him or no. That is a plain question, Have you Christ or no? Christ saves none but them that

have him: Christ saves no man at a distance; he enter into us, and we into him; and, if I may so speak, we go to heaven together. The question is this now, and it is a very plain one, and an important one; and it is a pity that the question is not more frequently put, and seriously considered, and that there are so few can truly answer it, Whether you have Christ or no? I believe if there were one to stand at the door as you go out, and ask every one this question, whether you have Christ or no, there would be confounded answers. You can tell what you have, and what you want of worldly things; cannot you tell, whether you have Christ or no? The importance of this inquiry should prompt you highly to the resolution of it.

1. It is certain, that Jesus Christ is come into the world, and did all his work he came for, and that he is gone to heaven, and is about that work he has there, and will quickly finish it, and return again: Behold, I come quickly.

The inference I draw from it, as to this question, is, If Christ be certainly an High Priest of good things to come, it is mighty important for people to know, whether they have a special interest in him; for Christ's coming does not make it absolutely necessary, that all that are in the world after his coming should be in heaven; but multitudes perish, notwithstanding the light is come into the world, and many perish thereby, through the corruption of their hearts, refusing this tender of the grace of God.

2. It is certain, that you have heard of Jesus Christ as a great High Priest, and this is a great blessing that many want, and perish for the want of it. Now, to hear daily of Jesus Christ, and not to have him, is a grievous thing. The Lord has ways unknown to us to justify himself, when he shall judge the Heathen world: but the greatest judgment

will be upon them that daily have heard of Christ, and never labour to get him.

3. There is more than that, it is sure that you have had the offer of him. The gospel is properly made up of two things, a declaring of what Christ is by the Father's appointment, and the tendering of him. As the Father hath made him unto sinners according to their need; so in preaching of the gospel, is the offering of Christ to all men. In all the preaching of the word that you hear, you never hear a word with one exception; you never hear our Lord commanding his servants to preach the gospel with any exception; but preach the gospel, and whoever believes and is baptized, shall be saved. The tender of Christ as a High Priest is a great matter. Now, to have Christ offered, and not to have him, is worse than not to hear of him, and not to have him. This gospel-offer of Jesus Christ is of that nature, that every thing in it, look on it which way you will, makes the sin of refusing him very dreadful; especially if we consider, who it is that makes the offer, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; all three are witnesses to it; and if we consider what that offer is, how great, how taking. Christ Jesus deals wonderfully with them he has a mind to save; Christ courts his bride, if I may so speak, always in his blood; and to a believer, Christ is never more beautiful, than when his garments are stained or adorned with his own blood for our redemption. Christ is made a feast to us in his death: Therefore let us keep that feast, says the apostle; why, what feast? Christ our passover is sacrificed for us, 1 Cor. 5:7, 8. That person is in a very poor case, stark dead in sin, and may be dead, and in hell within a little while, unless God prevent it by his grace, to whom Jesus Christ was never beautiful in his bloody garments, in his working out eternal salvation for us. The offer is an offer also that is most fit and suitable for us. What can be more fit for them that cannot deal with God, and cannot bear God's dealing with them, than to have an High Priest that can

undertake for both, that can speak from God to us, so that we shall not be confounded, and carry our mind to God, so as we shall not be rejected? If God should deal with us out of a mediator, we should be confounded with his glory; and should we deal with God out of a mediator, he would abhor us, and all our attempts, and all our services.

Lastly, It is certain, you all make profession to have Christ. Pray take heed to this, that when you have the offer of the gospel, and the offer of Christ in it, that you get the thing offered, that you have the thing you profess to have. Pray, what is the profession of a Christian? What is it to be a professor of Christianity? Is it to make parties in the church of Christ? We know a great many things a man may profess, but take the matter of Christianity simply, What is it that man professes? He professeth he hath Christ. A Christian without Christ is a monster of hypocrisy, a piece of contradiction. Men must either make sure, that they have Christ, or, I assure you, it were good manners for them to renounce the name of Christianity. Why should I be called a Christian, and have not Jesus Christ? The advantage of this reasonable name is from the possessing the person. A Christian is a man that hath, and is possessed of, and by Christ. How may one know that he hath Christ as an High Priest? I will name a few things concerning this, and they shall not be very hard, nor very high.

1st, Do you love to have him? Do you look upon the possession of Jesus Christ, as that part which would make you completely happy? Paul proved his sincerity this way: That I may win Christ, says he. Why, had he not won him long since, and got him long since? Yes; but the man is for winning him still, Phil. 3:8, 9. Abraham's word has more gospel in it, than a great many carnal professors understand, Gen. 15:2. When the Lord comforts him after the slaughter of the kings, Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great

reward. Lord, says Abraham, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? Pray observe, our Lord could give him safety from his enemies without children. Here lay the stress of the matter, the gospel had been preached to Abraham before; as the apostle Paul tells us, Gal. 3:8 and the gospel that was preached to Abraham was this, In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Christ was preached to Abraham, as one that was to spring out of his loins. Now, Lord, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? It is like Abraham did not well know, how many generations the Messiah was to come after him; it may be he expected his coming sooner than it was; like enough he knew it would be a good while: but here lay the grand trial of the man's faith; God hath promised, that in my seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed; the universal blessing upon poor man after sin came into the world, is to come into the world by a certain one, that is to be born of my posterity: this is that which Abraham had in his eye: Now, Lord, says he, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless? In a manner the force lay here; Lord, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go Christless; where is the blessing of all the families of the earth? Sirs, if you can turn this now into the spiritual sense of it, and your hearts can deal so with God, if the Lord should give you riches, and long life, and posterity, and all the comforts of this life, Lord, what wilt thou give me, nay, what canst thou give me, that can be a blessing to me, if I do not receive Jesus Christ?

2dly, You may know, whether you have Christ or no by this; what is it that you are aiming at and catching at in the gospel? I would fain know, what people come to hear for, what is the inward thought of your heart to this, and the other places? Is it, O that I may get hold of Jesus Christ? If I may but lay hold of the skirt of this Jew, this great High Priest over the house of God, it is enough? Our work in hearing the gospel, is to see if we can get hold of Christ Jesus; he comes near to us in the word, and sometimes comes so near, that a poor creature

is enabled to get hold of him. Many ways do poor believers lay hold on Christ; he is only laid hold on by faith, but faith acts and works many ways; faith works many times strong desires; pantings and breathings after him, so frequently expressed by our Lord, by hungering and thirsting after him; but the proper meaning of this, is accepting Christ in the gospel. Try yourselves by it. Can you trust Christ Jesus this great High Priest with all your affairs? If you can trust him, you have him, for he is possessed by trusting. When the matter of your eternal salvation is great in your eye, when you know the preciousness of your immortal souls, when you see the multitude of those sins you have to answer for, and fear the strength of corruption that is raging in you, and see the power of temptation that surrounds you; now, in all this, can you, with the heart, trust this great High Priest that is set over the house of God, to cast yourself alone upon him, and to seek no relief elsewhere, knowing that you need no more than what he is willing to give? Trusting in Christ Jesus is a very deliberate act, and a very determinate act. That man that trusts in Christ Jesus, can trust in nothing else in that act wherewith he trusts him. People that are trifling, whose hearts are secure and carnal, can easily join these two together as they imagine; they can trust in Christ, and in themselves too. But it is impossible; trust must be always determined upon one single foot of account; it must be undivided. Certainly every man may know this easily, upon what account it is that he lodges that safety of his soul. I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.

3dly, You may know if you have Christ by this, Hath he done any thing in you? We have not only a great High Priest for us, but this great High Priest does many things in us, and by that we know we have him. Whenever Christ comes to take possession of the heart, he does something in the heart that will easily make a difference betwixt

Christ the new possessor, and the devil that was the old one. You will find that the savour of his sacrifice hath been powerful upon your hearts; you will find the benefit of his intercession has been many times perceived by you. Every child of God finds frequently experience of the thing. They many times pray and pray poorly, and are heard graciously; they wonder, they are surprised with mercies they did not look for; they admire whence they flow. Alas, the poor creature does not know, that there is a great friend in heaven that remembers them, and these are the fruits of his remembrance.

Lastly, You may know if you have Christ thus; if you have daily work for him, you have him; for if you understand it rightly, it is a certain truth, that the employing of Christ is the possessing of him, the employing of him is the enjoying of him. It is impossible, that any can employ Christ in any part of his office, that has not Christ in that office really bestowed upon them. If therefore you have Christ, this will unavoidably be; you have an evidence, that you have him by this, that you have daily work for this great High Priest, you need the sprinkling of his blood for your daily transgressions, and need the efficacy of his grace for your daily wants. Never bid a worse sign for a man that has not Christ, than that he has no sense of the want of him. He that has no work for Christ, is yet without God and Christ in the world; and a poor believer that groans in a sense of his need of Christ, is oftentimes discouraged, when it should be an argument of encouragement. Believers, if they be lively and growing, will find the universal sense of all of them is: In truth I find I have far more need of Christ than I had twenty, thirty years ago. As his fulness is discovered, and our emptiness discovered to us, our employing him does increase, as well as our enjoyment of him.

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