

Monergism

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

AN EXPOSITION OF THE SECOND
CHAPTER OF PAUL'S EPISTLE TO
THE PHILIPPIANS

RICHARD SIBBES

Monergism

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

AN EXPOSITION OF THE SECOND
CHAPTER OF PAUL'S EPISTLE TO
THE PHILIPPIANS

RICHARD SIBBES

Work Out Your Salvation

An Exposition of the Second Chapter Of Paul's Epistle to the
Philippians

by **Richard Sibbes**

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do according to his good pleasure.—PHIL. 2:12-13.

But godliness is profitable, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. 1 TIM. 4:8.

LONDON,

Printed by T. Cotes for Peter Cole,* and are to be sold at the Glove & Lyon in Corne-hill, neare the Royall Exchange, 1639.

Table of Contents

[TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE](#)

[SIR MAURICE ABBOT KNIGHT](#)

[TO THE READER](#)

DIRECTIONS TO THE READER

THE CHRISTIAN WORK - —PHIL. 2:12.

GOD WORKS IN YOU - PHIL 2:13

WITHOUT MURMURING - PHIL 2:14.

THAT WE MAY BE BLAMELESS - PHIL 2:15

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE - PHIL 2:16

OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD - PHIL 2:24.

IT WAS NECESSARY - PHIL 2:25

HE LONGED AFTER YOU ALL - PHIL 2:26

SORROW ON SORROW - PHIL 2:27.

I SENT HIM - PHIL 2:28

RECEIVE HIM - PHIL 2:29.

HE WAS NIGH TO DEATH - PHIL 2:30

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR MAURICE ABBOT KNIGHT,

NOW LORD MAYOR OF THE HONOURABLE CITY OF LONDON.*

RIGHT HONOURABLE—My respects unto you, being your honour's engaged many ways, have put me upon a design or project for you; the God of heaven graciously prosper it in my hand! The tenor of it is

briefly this: to increase your honour, and to ease the burden of that laborious government which now lieth upon your shoulder.

To mention your name before the glorious labour of so great and worthy an agent in the factorage of heaven as the author of this piece was, and to make you a protector of them, cannot, I conceive, in sober interpretation but be conceived to add honour unto him that hath, and cause him to have more abundantly. Blessed is the wing that is spread over any of the things of Jesus Christ, to shelter them.

Again, to put into your hand, and from your hand into your heart, the remembrance of that God that will gloriously recompense your faithfulness in that great trust committed to you, cannot but (by the blessing of him to whom blessings belongeth) be a cordial means to strengthen your heart in the pang of government, and cause you to travail and bring forth with more ease. There is no labour, nor travail, nor sorrow, nor difficulty, nor danger, nor death, that hath any evil or bitterness in it when heaven is before us, and the truth and faithfulness of the living God embracing us.

If I have miscarried in point of good manners or otherwise in this dedication, your honour shall do but justice to charge your own courtesy and respects always shewed unto me (at least in part) with the blame of it. Had not there been the tempter, doubtless in this case I had not been the transgressor. The God of peace prosper the government of this great city in your hand, and make it a glorious rise and advantage unto you of your greater glory in the heavens. And your Honour may assure yourself that so it shall come to pass, unless that God that heareth prayer shall reject the prayer of,

Your honour to command in the Lord,

J. G.†

TO THE READER

GOOD READER, to discourse the worth or commendations of the author (especially the pens of others having done sacrifice unto him in that kind), I judge it but an impertinency, and make no question, but that if I should exchange thoughts or judgments with thee herein, I should have but mine own again. The book itself, judiciously interpreted, is a volume of his commendation; and those, though from his own mouth, without any touch or tincture of vanity or self-affectation. The best sight of a man is to hear him speak—loquere, ut videam—the tongue being a voluntary and pleasant rack to the heart, to make it confess its treasure, whether it be good or evil. The diligence and care of those that have interposed for the preserving of what came from him in this way from perishing, have made the Christian world debtors unto them; and great pity it had been, that what he spake in public should have died in secret, and not be made seven times more public than speaking could do. The sparks of such fires as he kindled would have been ill quenched till the world had been further served with the light and heat of them.

It is true, heaps of books is one of the oppressions of the world, and the invention of the press hath been the exaltation of weakness and vanity amongst men, as well as of learning and knowledge. Yet know I no way better to retain the oppressed in this kind, than for men of worth and grown judgments and learning to appear in books also among the multitude. The time was when there were, as the apostle speaketh, 'gods many and lords many in the world,' 1 Cor. 8:5; when the world was pestered with devils of all sorts, instead of gods; but the only means of discharging the world of them, was the setting forth and preaching of the one true God and Lord Jesus Christ. So the furnishing the world with such books, as are books indeed, that breathe spirit and life, and are strong of heaven, speaking with authority and power to the consciences of men, is the only way to affamish the multitude of idol* books, and to have them desolate without a reader. It is, questionless, with men in respect of books, as it is in respect of men themselves (and indeed how there should be

any difference between men and books I know not, the book being but the mind of a man, and the mind of a man being the man himself). Homo homini Deus, homo homini lupus.† There are men that are gods to men, and there are men that are wolves to men; and the more men-wolves there are in the world, the more men-gods there had need to be; otherwise the darkness would overcome the light, and make the earth as the shadow of death. So there are books that are laden with divine and true treasure; that will recompense the reader, his labour and pains sevenfold into his bosom; that will open his mouth and enlarge his heart to bless God, that hath given gifts unto men. Again, there are books also that will deal cruelly and deceitfully with men, consuming their precious time and opportunities; taking their money for that which is not bread. Now the more dreamers of dreams there are, there had need be the more that see visions. The weak, hungry, loose, and empty discourses the world is overlaid and encumbered withal, the more need it hath, by way of a counter recompence, of a full provision of solid and masculine writings, that may make men men, and not always children in understanding.

But I must remember that prefacing authors with long epistles is no employment of any sovereign necessity. Therefore I will no longer separate between thee and that which I desire to recommend unto thee more than anything of mine own. The blessing of Him that giveth the increase be upon the labour of him that planted and watered much in the courts of the house of his God; that though he be dead, he may yet speak to the edification of thine and of many souls.

Thine with a single heart and multiplied affections in the Lord,

I. G.*

DIRECTIONS TO THE READER

CHRISTIAN READER, thou mayest please to take notice that this book is divided into two parts: the first whereof is upon the whole third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, and contains 256 pages; and because it is entire, and upon the whole third chapter, we have therefore put it first. The second part is upon some certain verses only of the second chapter to the Philippians, and some other texts of Scripture, and contains 204 pages.

Now, for the ready finding out of any principal or material things in the whole book, we have to the book annexed this alphabetical index; for the understanding whereof take thou notice, that the first p signifies the part, and the second p the page of that part, as for example: There being nothing observed in A, we begin with B, where first thou seest, Christians must be blameless, p. 92; that is, part the second, page 92 of the second part; then how Saint Paul was blameless, when he was without the law, p. 1, p. 67, 68; that is, part the first, page 67, 68 of the first part.†

THE CHRISTIAN WORK

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.—PHIL. 2:12.

THE first word, 'wherefore,' carries our minds back to things formerly delivered. Before, the apostle had taught them out of the

example of Christ that they should not mind their own things: 'He went about doing good,' and humbled himself. Now when God is humble, how shall any man be proud? Having therefore such an example as Christ, without all exception, as he hath done do you, be obedient, &c. In the words consider,

First, The duty, 'work.'

Secondly, Directions to the right manner of performing this duty.

Thirdly, The motives to this duty.

The manner of performance of this work: First, it must be in sincerity; secondly, in obedience; thirdly, it must be earnestly and thoroughly; fourthly, it must be constant; fifthly, it must be ever tending to assure to us our salvation; sixthly, it must be in fear, or holy jealousy. The motives to this duty: First, Christ, he was obedient, follow him; secondly, 'my beloved,' that is, as you shew or deserve my care of you and diligence to do you good, obey; thirdly, you have done it heretofore: it is no new thing I require; it is not impossible; you have done it already; fourthly, if you do, it shall not be in vain. It tends to the assurance of salvation here, and to the accomplishment thereof hereafter, therefore 'work.'

1. 'Work.' The estate of a Christian is a working estate, not idle. Christianity is not a verbal profession, nor speculative. 'If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them,' saith Christ, John 13:17, Observe, he placeth the word 'blessed' in the midst, to unite those two which the world so ordinarily divides. I mean knowledge and practice. If words would go for excellent payment, many there are that would be admirable Christians; but we must know that a Christian's estate is accomplished by works; and that not only outwardly but inwardly, and by all manner of works: works of preparation; works of propriety;* and these inward, or outward and all, is in our general or particular calling.

Works of preparation are those that prepare men to believe; as hearing, reading, meditating; for these make not a Christian, but by these a Christian is prepared to be wrought on by God's Spirit. In these a Christian must be still working, and from these he ought to proceed to works of propriety: as belief in God, hope more strongly; love more ardently; pray fervently; do works of charity cheerfully—the three first duties being inward, the two last outward. And these concern our general callings as we are Christians, and then in our particular callings, to love, to reverence one another; seek the good of others, and to be bountiful to others. A Christian he must work in all these.

Use. The use of all this is, to cause in us a right conceit of religion. Many are good talkers, use fair words, are excellent in discourse; and these pass for current Christians. Nay, many there are that come not to this degree of speaking well. No; cannot endure to hear others speak well, but endeavour to turn their speech to other matters. Yet these go for good Christians, and think they shall be saved as well as the best, when, alas! they never came one step to salvation. Thus for the work. Now,

2. To the manner. He said before, 'As you have heretofore obeyed, even so work now,' shewing the first thing:

(1.) That all our works must be done in obedience. Whatsoever we do, it must be done in obedience to God. Many are damned for misdoing their good works, because they did them not in obedience to God. To this end it is expedient,

First, That we should know what God's will is: Rom. 12:2, 'That you may prove what is that good, that acceptable and perfect will of God,' saith the apostle; and in the Ephesians 5:10, 'Proving what is acceptable to the Lord.' And therefore an ignorant man is a rebellious man. When he knows not God's will, how can he do his will?

Secondly, This obedience must be to all God's laws, for partial obedience is no obedience. For he is a lord, and not a servant, that will cull and pick out his obedience. 'Then shall I not be confounded,' saith David, 'when I have respect to all thy commandments,' Ps. 119:6. It is the devil's sophistry to put men in heart with the consideration of some few good duties that they have done; when, alas! if a fowl or bird be caught by one wing or leg, it is as sure as if a man had her whole body in his hand. The devil hath a man as sure in one sin unrepented as in many; and therefore the apostle limits not this obedience, but lays it down indefinitely.

(2.) The second thing in the manner is, that this working must be in sincerity. 'Whether I am present to see you or not, obey God: he sees you.' A Christian must do all things sincerely, as in the presence of God. The Pharisees did many good works, but it was to be seen of men. Therefore Christ saith, 'they have their reward already,' Mat. 6:2. I will pay them no wages; they did it not to please me. Many are this way faulty. They do nothing but for applause: pray in public for fashion sake, never in private; whenas Christ saith, 'Enter into thy chamber, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret,' Mat. 6:6. Many can talk well and discourse well; but for inward graces they never look nor regard: and it is this that upholds many Christians. They see religion is respected of those of whom they desire to be had in some esteem, but God sees thy hypocrisy, and thou hast thy reward.

Joash was a good king so long as Jehoiada lived.* Many seem to be good, so long as those in authority are good; but if they die once, all good goes away with them. But a good Christian is ever good; and in all places, occasions, companies, he will be like himself. Thus much of the second thing in the manner. Now for the third.

(3.) He says, 'Work out.' The word signifies, with toil to labour. So in the 6th of St John's gospel, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth.' It is a good saying, no perfunctory thing can please God. To this end as Seneca says (a), of performing of duties natural; so in religious

duties there is required, first, a right judgment of the nature of the things we do; secondly, an affection to do it; and thirdly, that affection must be proportionable to the worth of the things we do, else what do we; yea, as good not do it at all. And therefore the Scripture to every part of God's worship adds words of intention: 'Take heed how you hear,' Mark 4:24; 'so run,' 1 Cor. 9:24; 'pray fervently in spirit,' Rom. 12:11; 'give cheerfully,' 2 Cor. 9:7; 'repent thoroughly,' Acts 17:30. So that our affection must be proportionable to the thing we are about, serious in good. A thorough serious prayer is worth a thousand perfunctory; and one doctrine well digested and applied, worth all the rest, be they never so many, if they be done slightly; and the rather are we to look to this duty, for that the devil is busy in such duties to withdraw thy mind, and to steal away the seed sown. The poor husbandman lost three parts of his seed. Many feel such flashes of comfort while they hear the word, as they could wish they might be dissolved at that present; but being gone, pleasures, profits, and such like, take away and choke the seed sown. Many there are that will play or recreate themselves with all their might; but when they come to pray, instead of all their sinful life, think the saying of 'Lord, have mercy upon me,' or 'I am a sinner,' or such like, make even all accounts between God and their consciences. Those that are and will be Christians indeed, they see what they ought to do, and how they are to perform duties. They shall find themselves to be no losers, but gainers at the end; for by performing of things in this manner they shall strengthen the assurance of their salvation to themselves more and more. For God punisheth such slighting of duties justly, with slight assurance, and with many doubtings of salvation and of their secure estate. Well, the next thing to be considered in the manner of working is;—

(4.) Fourthly, It must be constant, not like the morning dew, or Lot's wife that looked back. For religion is a living and trade. It must be maintained with continuance in labour, and working in a constant course of goodness 'all the days of our life,' saith Zacharias' song, Luke 1:75. 'Father,' saith Christ, 'I have finished the work thou gavest me,' John 17:4. He never left till all was finished. 'It is finished,' saith

Christ on the cross, John 19:30; and the apostle, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,' 2 Tim. 4:7, and then he speaks of 'a crown of righteousness,' 2 Tim. 4:8. The want of this makes many die in extreme grief. They wish they had done such and such things, when it is too late. To this end we must come with a resolution not to be scared from performance of duties, and therefore to furnish ourselves with patience. For we must meet with many discouragements from without and within. Brethren, saith the apostle, 'you have need of patience,' Heb. 10:36. For 'you shall reap if you faint not,' Gal. 6:9. And then consider that all promises of a crown are made to such as are sincere. 'To him that overcometh,' saith John, 'I will give,' &c., Rev. 3:21. 'He that endures to the end shall be saved,' saith Christ, Mat. 10:22. Many decay in their first love, and God justly suffers them to fall into many gross sins, and he vomits up such as are grown cold.

(5.) The fifth thing in the manner is, that it must tend to salvation. We must go on in a constant course of goodness till we come, and that we may come, to the end of our faith. Let this end, viz., salvation, make you work in the duties of grace. For salvation is begun here; and the state of grace here is called salvation, even as well as the state hereafter.

The doctrine is, that all which we do here ought to tend to the assurance of salvation.

We say in nature that all conclusions are to be reduced to their principles. So is Christianity. All is to be referred to our salvation as to a main principle; those things that tend directly to salvation to be done in the first place, and most especially. And then other works, they must tend the same way, for all works that are good, do either express holiness, or increase it in us; and thereby they increase our own salvation, as in our ordinary callings, if we perform them in obedience to God constantly, it expresses the gifts and graces of God's Spirit in us. Do we sanctify them by prayer? Do we refer all the good to the good of those amongst whom we live, especially to the

good of the faithful? This strengthens the assurance of our salvation, and tells us that God's Spirit is in us. The poorest servant in his drudgery, he serves God if he does it as in the presence of God, Col. 3:24. The poor woman, in bearing and bringing up of children, shall be saved; that is, notwithstanding that sentence, 'that in sorrow and pains she should conceive,' yet her salvation, is no whit hindered thereby, but rather furthered. So that it is grace that elevates earthly works, and makes them heavenly.

But take this caution withal, that we more highly esteem our Christian calling than our ordinary vocations and duties; and to that end we ought to redeem some time from our ordinary callings to meditate, and to examine ourselves, and to pray. And this to be done daily, for Christ saith, 'Labour not for the meat that perisheth,' in comparison of that meat which lasteth for ever. Especially on that day which God hath chosen to his own use, I mean the 'Lord's day.' Mingle not thine own callings with holy duties on such days, unless it be in case of mercy, and that also of great necessity. God made this day for his own glory, and for our good, knowing how earthly-minded else we would be, unless some time were allotted wholly to vindicate our minds from these earthly things. Take heed, therefore, how we be bold* on this day especially.

'Your own.' Here is contained another direction in this Christian work. In our works and doings we must begin with ourselves, contrary to the custom of many, who are in their own duties negligent, but lord-like in overseeing of other men's works. We are to know, true zeal and practice begins at home.

'Work out your own.' Whatsoever others do, look you to yourselves. So did Joshua: 'Let the people do what they will, I and my house will serve the Lord,' Josh. 24:15. So that a Christian ought to resolve with himself concerning his own carriage; he that is wise is wise for himself. Better it is that you alone should work out your own salvation, than go to hell with others for company.

'Your own.' Every one hath a cup that he in particular must taste of, and every one a particular work to do. Though all go one way that are saved, yet some go by more sufferings than others. Some hath harder tasks set them to perform than others. Some must live in some callings, and therein 'work out their own salvation,' others in others. Eph. 2:10, 'Every one is created to good works which God prepares for him.'

For the sixth direction, contained in 'fear,' &c., the time is too short to speak of; and therefore I come,

3. To the motives.

(1.) The first is taken from the example of Christ, comprehended in the word 'Wherefore.' Christ, he did as he would have us to do; he did all in obedience to God; he came to do his will; he was sincere, cared not for the world. What he did, he did thoroughly; he healed all; did all good; did all things well; and he finished his course. Now we must imitate Christ in all these; never give over till we may say with comfort at our deaths, 'All is finished.' This must needs move us, if we consider what an honour it is for us to be like him and to follow him; and then it will be gainful to us. He got honour by it—was exalted; so shall we therefore be like him. And then he is a pattern without all exception. We cannot offend so long as we propound him for our example. It is a foolish opinion therefore that men may be too religious. Can any go beyond Christ, nay, or come near him?

(2.) The second motive is taken from the apostle's love, 'my beloved.' Shew that you will answer my care and love to you. Whence observe,

That it ought to be a motive to Christians to take good courses, that they may thereby comfort those that have care of their good. The apostle, Heb. 13:17, bids the Hebrews, 'that they obey them that are their guides.' Why? 'That they may give account with joy, and not with grief, for it is unprofitable for them.' But to leave this personal manner of speech. Christians ought to seek good courses, to give

content to the souls of those Christians with whom they live; for they make it a matter of joy to see one grow in religious behaviour, and contrarily are grieved when they see it decay in any.

(3.) The third motive is drawn from the possibility of it; as if he should have said, You have already begun; you know what it is I require; it is no new thing, nor is it impossible; do but work out that which you have begun. He that hath set one step into religion is half way. It was a great commendation in the church of Thyatira, that their last works were more than the first, Rev. 2:19. We should labour to grow on still, from one degree to another, even as the sun 'shines more and more to the perfect day,' Prov. 4:18; and therefore it is a Christian course to compare ourselves with ourselves daily, and if we find a decay in ourselves, rest not contented till thou findest thyself amended. We pity men when they decay in outward things; but of all decays, the decay of goodness is the most lamentable; and therefore as you have obeyed, so obey still.

'Now much more in my absence.' These words I take not to be so meant, as if the apostle had spoken of what they already had done, but rather what he would have them to do, as if he should have said, 'I know now that I am absent, you shall want no allurements nor temptations to draw you away; and I know now I am gone grievous wolves shall enter in, not sparing the flock,' as it is in Acts 20:29, 'therefore now be much more careful, and watch.' Hence therefore observe, the want of means that formerly men had is no sufficient plea to excuse decay in grace in any man. 'Redeem the time.' Why? Not because goodness increases amongst all sorts, but 'because the days are evil,' Eph. 5:16. The world would have reasoned clean contrary. Because the days are evil, be thou also evil, follow the fashion. Religion teaches us to reason otherwise. Because you have not the helps you formerly enjoyed, double your diligence; God will graciously supply you. If you be not wanting to yourselves, he will never depart from you though I am gone. He was a sanctuary to the Jews in Babylon when they wanted the sanctuary; and yet then were

they in greatest glory. And it is remarkable, men have been still most glorious for religion in want of outward means.

(4.) The fourth motive is laid down in the end. It is to our salvation; which as it carries the form of a direction, so as it is an end it hath a power to move us to it. Considering we are not yet perfect, go on till you come to perfection. It is an encouragement to us to begin, and when we have begun, it doth encourage us to go on forward. See this in Titus 2:11: 'The grace of God teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly,' &c., and encourageth us on, looking for the glorious appearing of Christ. We are sons; shall we be rebellious? We look for salvation; shall we not then work it out? Yes. Moses chose rather to suffer afflictions with the children of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Why? 'He had respect to the recompence of reward,' Heb. 11:26. We have an evidence here [that] we shall be saved hereafter; and this makes us strive to ascertain it more and more to us. And indeed, he that carries his salvation in his eye, needs no better encouragement. What made them, in Heb. 11:38, to wander about and to forsake all? They looked for another city, whose builder was God. Thus it is in ordinary affairs. What seasons war but the hope of peace? the troubles and the tempests on the sea, but the hope of the haven? the labour and cost in sowing, but the expectation of harvest? Shall not we much more endure a little labour here, for endless happiness assured to us hereafter? This is much forgotten. What makes persons so dull in good duties? They either know not, or forget this reward; for he that sets his mind on it cannot be cold or dull. But here's the pity! Men labour, sweat, take pains and travail, spare no cost; and all this to go to hell, to heap up wrath against the day of wrath. The devil has more servants in his barren and fruitless service than God gets with all his promises and good things that he liberally gives. Besides, I add one or two directions more.

First, Labour to get a platform of wholesome words. If we would work, we must have an idea of the thing we work in our head. We

must labour to get a form of practice and doctrine out of the word of God, and to carry it still about with us.

Then cast thyself into that mould thou hast thus framed, Rom. 6:17. Be moulded in that form of doctrine; believe what he will have us to believe; love that which he will have us to love. And having this frame in thy mind, in what estate soever thou art, whether single or married, governing or governed, thou shalt have still with thee a platform of duties, fitting for the carriage of thyself; and there will be no duty thou hearest taught but thou will be able to draw it to thine own practice. The want of this makes most men unfruitful, heaping up thereby damnation unto themselves.

Lastly, Observe the good motions of God's Spirit in thee; further them to the most advantage; turn them to present practice; lose nor delay them not; for the devil will steal thee away from them.

Now when we come to another part of the manner of a Christian's work, it must be done 'in fear and trembling,' Not to stand on the divers kinds of fear; in general, it is an affection planted by God in our natures, whereby we, foreseeing dangers which may hinder our being or wellbeing, are afraid of them. This is incident to our natures, and it was also in Christ. And were it not for this, men would be prodigal of their lives, and would rush into desperate dangers. There is a carnal fear, as when we fear the creatures of whom we are lords; and this proceeds from a carnal distrust in God. But in this place is meant a spiritual fear, which may be branched into three divers kinds. First, a fear of reverence, which is a fear mixed with love; when we fear one or stand in awe of him for his greatness, yet love him for his goodness to us; and thus a Christian fears God. Secondly, hence proceeds the second kind of fear, which is a fear of watchfulness; and thirdly, a fear of jealousy, lest we should offend against God; and this arises from the consideration of our weakness and the falseness of our hearts. So that he here saying, 'Work out your salvation with fear,' bids them that they proceed on in their course with reverence, watchfulness, and jealousy. As for the word

'trembling,' it is none other but an effect or symptom of the passion of fear, arising from excess of fear in regard of fearful objects. For then the spirits retiring in to comfort the heart, leave the outward parts destitute, so as they tremble. And on the contrary, in objects of delight and comfort, they come outward, to the outmost parts as it were, to meet with such pleasing objects as are presented to the sense. It being thus in nature, it is also in us spiritually; for we beholding the majesty and power of God, and considering our own baseness and infirmities, are drawn to a kind of fear, which, if it be somewhat more than ordinary, it produces a spiritual trembling. Having thus opened the words, we will come to some doctrine; and first, in general observe,

Doct. God requires all duties that are done to him to be done with affection. The careless Christian thinks the deed done to be sufficient to please God. No; verily he requires work, but it must be done with affection. The affection must first be obedient, and then the outward man. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself,' Lev. 19:18. 'My son, give me thy heart,' saith Solomon, Prov. 23:26. I might infer this doctrine to shew how many are faulty this way, but I come to this particular affection of fear. All things that are done must be done in the fear of God; and this must we do before our calling and after our calling: before our calling to work ourselves into our salvation, and in our calling to work out our own salvation. Before our conversion fear is necessary for us. God uses it to bring us to Christ. Legal fear is always or most commonly before evangelical. It is as the needle that draws faith after it as the thread. Such is God's goodness to us, that lest we should fall into hell ere we are aware, he hath left us objects of terror and threatening judgments, to keep us from hell; and all to provoke fear in us that we may be saved. There is a spirit of bondage before the spirit of adoption: Rom. 8:15, 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption,' implying that once they had received the spirit of bondage. For verily, first men see their miserable estate by nature, and this convincing their consciences, comes to stir up fear in them, which

drives them to the rock of salvation, Christ Jesus. I speak this the rather, for that it is evident many never yet came to this spirit of fear. They live in a course of known gross sins, between whom and damnation is but a step. They know they are abominable sinners, yet fear not hell. How can men think well of such? They never yet came to the spirit of bondage to fear. Tell them of hell, they tush at it scornfully, being herein more brutish than an ass. Lay burdens on him, he will bear them patiently; but press him never so much to go into the fire, you cannot make him come near to it; whenas wicked men, they cannot be kept from running into hell with all violence. They are worse than the devil, James 2:19. They neither tremble nor believe, but live contemptuously and presumptuously in their courses. Well, let such look to it. What they do now they shall do it hereafter, when there will be no comfort left for them, though they seek it with tears.

Thus have I shewn that before conversion fear is necessary. I add, moreover, that men after conversion, believers, they ought to have fear of reverence; wherein we will speak somewhat of fear in general; then of the manner of it; and lastly, of the motives thereto. For the fear that here is spoken of observe that,

First, It must be general at all times, in all actions. Job said, 'I feared all my works,' Job 3:25, and indeed in this estate we must continually fear till we be in heaven. And as it belongs to all works and times, so to all Christians, nay, and to them most of all, for that the devil is set against you. And your actions, if they be ill, are the most scandalous; and by them is God most of all dishonoured. And therefore the more grace a man hath he will fear the more. Even as a rich man, the more riches he hath the more care he taketh, lest they should be stolen from him.

Secondly, This fear must be serious. It must work a kind of trembling, by reason of the dangers that we meet withal, which are like to be many and great.

Thirdly, This fear must be total, in the whole man. For that the image of God is in the body, even as in the soul, and as in other affections a proud man is known by his proud eye and careless carriage, even so the countenance will be wray whether the heart be humble, loving, careful, and the like. It is an idle speech that many have, they will say their heart is good. Let such know, where grace is, it works a change, and that thoroughly in body and soul. David therefore joins prostration with calling on the Lord: Ps. 95:6, 'Let us fall down;' and in other places, casting up of the eye, and extending of the hands.*

Means to this duty; observe,

[1.] First, We must consider God's love to us. It is the first and main thing in reverence. This will breed fearfulness in us; for the more assured we are, the more fearful will we be of offending.

[2.] Secondly, Set before your eyes the other attributes of God, as his justice. What though it be true, he revenges not the sin of his children, so as it were better for him that he had not offended, for he will not suffer sin to dwell in his children.

[3.] Thirdly, Add the examples of those that have felt his justice, especially of the best servants of God. Moses, for a few words, never entered the land of promise. David, for a proud conceit in numbering the people, lost seventy thousand men of the pestilence. The Corinthians, for unworthy receiving of the Lord's supper, many of them died. And if it be thus with his dearest children, have not we cause to fear? Yes, assuredly. God will be honoured in all those that come near him.

Obj. It will be said that there are no examples of late of God's justice in this kind, as to strike with sudden death.

Ans. I answer, true. But God strikes with hardness of heart, which is far more worse. And God doth strike men with temporal judgments, although they think not of it, even for those sins they think not of. And if it were not thus, let such men know there is a judgment to

come, and that God is the same God now that he was ever, a powerful, just, and all-seeing God. And it will make them, if they belong to God, to set themselves in the presence of God even in their most secret closets. This is, notwithstanding, forgotten everywhere. And many sins are committed which sinners would be loath that a child should see, yet are they not afraid of God, that sees them and sets them down in a book. Well then, a Christian after conversion ought to fear with a fear of reverence.

It follows, in the second and third place, a Christian must have a fear of jealousy and watchfulness, and thus 'work out his salvation.' For by this means we keep ourselves from displeasing God, it being a carefulness wrought in us by the Spirit of God, causing us to take heed how we offend God in any thing. For a Christian, knowing the falseness of his own heart, is jealous thereof, there being a spiritual marriage between Christ and us, lest it should offend. And this is the ground of this spirit of jealousy, and therefore none deceives another, but he also deceives himself; for his corrupt heart is as a traitor in his own bosom. Another ground is Satan, that ever joins with our corruptions; for so long as there is a false heart there will be a fawning devil. Now this should make us to examine ourselves, and to fear our hearts, and to 'try our thoughts,' Ps. 139:23, before they come out into word or action.* For sin is like Elijah his cloud, at the first small, but afterward covers the whole heaven. See it in David. One eye-glance! What a world of sins followed. And therefore we must take heed of beginnings. And then look that thou drawest not the guilt of other men's sins on thyself. Take heed of 'scandal.'† See how Jeroboam is branded; ever mention being made of him, 'Jeroboam that made Israel to sin,' 1 Kings 14:16. Then again, labour to set thy corruptions in thine eye continually, and to stir up our hearts to hate them. For they trouble us more than the devil, although most men study to gratify their enemy, and how to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. And who are their enemies but such as tell them and bid them beware of their enemies? Now to the reason.

GOD WORKS IN YOU

For it is God that worketh in you to will and to do according to his good pleasure. - VERSE 13

It is as much as if he should say, because God works, therefore work you, lest he should take both the power of working from you and also the act. For he gives both 'to will and to do,' not only the power to will and to do, but the very act of willing and doing; and this he doth out of his free grace and pleasure. In the opening of which words, observe with me these things. First, that a Christian hath a power in him to will and to do good; secondly, that God works this in him; thirdly, this work is a powerful work; fourthly, it is an inward work; fifthly, this work is entire; sixthly, observe how this work is a ground of fear and trembling.

1. For the first, that a Christian hath a will and power to do good, this is necessary. For in all estates, whether a man be good or bad, his will is the chief; and therefore, in conversion of any one, the will and judgment is first wrought upon and converted. And therefore this may be noted to shew us our estates, whether we be good or not. If we be good, we will that which is good, and choose the better part; for those that choose the worst ever are opposite to the best. Their estate is naught, let them boast what they will. The Christian therefore ever hath a will to do, though many times he doth not what he will, being sometimes (for secret causes best known to God) kept by him from performing their wills. David would have built a temple, and Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac. Other times hindered by corruptions. The will, or to will, saith Paul, is present, but not the deed, Rom. 7:18; and Christ saith, 'The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak,' Mat. 26:41. If we do therefore any good, the deed is God's. If we will it, the will is God's. And then we please God when we will that which God wills, and not when we do that which God wills not.

2. Secondly, This power that we have, we have it not from ourselves, but God gives it to us. Some things are done for us which were neither wrought by us nor in us; and thus Christ's death was wrought. Some things wrought in us, not by us, as our first work of conversion. Other things are wrought both in us and by us, and these are all good works after conversion. This will whereof we speak is wrought in us by God, as we be his temples, and the deed is wrought by us as instruments of God's working in us. Thought is not so much as will, it being but a way to it. Yet can we not think a good thought without the Spirit of God working in us. For we have no life at all, but are 'dead in sins and trespasses,' much less can we have any motion to that which is good for ourselves.

Quest. But it will be demanded, how can the work be done by God, and yet we work the same work?

Ans. I answer, in every work that is done, there is God's power and man's joined together. But how? So far as we think or will, it is from us, but to think or will that which is good, that is from God. We work not as horses draw together and equally. We are not co-ordinate, but subordinate. We work as understanding creatures. But God guides our understanding to this or that as he pleases. We hear, but God he bores the ear first. Lydia believed, but God opened her heart, and framed it to believe, Acts 16:14. We think, but God gives us to think well.

3. In the next place we are to shew, that this work of God in us is a powerful work. It determines our will. God deals not per omnipotentiam to constrain our wills to this or that which is contrary to the will, but he gives us to will that which he wills. Now when God intends that man shall do anything, he gives him a will to do it; and in this respect his work is powerful in us. Magnify therefore this power, that preserves us in the midst of temptation, even as it preserved the three children in the fire from burning, Dan. 3:27; that makes earth to be in heaven; and labour to find experience of this

power in thee, the want of the sense whereof brings much want of inward comfort of God's Spirit.

4. In the next place, note that this work is inward within us, not without us. He uses exhortations, monitions, allurements, but he puts power to these to prevail: Fortiter pro te, suaviter pro me, Domine, saith the Father (b). For God may work fortiter, strongly, and yet liberty be preserved too, as it is evident in the angels. For freedom consists not in doing this or that ad libitum as we say; but then are we free and at liberty, when we do anything out of a sound judgment. The angels see good reason why they should depend on God, and man seeing that happiness only lies in the enjoyment of the favour of God, do voluntarily depend on him. God therefore enters into the heart, changes the stony heart into a heart of flesh, takes away all rebellious dispositions of our heart, and makes them pliable to his will.

5. Come we in the next place to consider the perfection and entireness of this work. God, he is 'Alpha and Omega, the author and finisher of our faith,' Heb. 12:2, and the beginning and perfection of every good thing is from him. Omne bonum, a summo Bono; and therefore he is the cause of the not doing of that which is not done; he is causa quiescendo, as well as agendo. For why is a thing not, but because he gives it not a being? So that all the ill which we will not, is of him. We should therefore be as thankful to him for any sin he keeps us from, as for any good that he causes us to perform; for there is not any sin that another hath committed, but if God had pleased I might have committed. This is an excellent point to teach us humility. Note therefore hence,

Doct. That perseverance is from God. He gives to will and to do. 'He that hath begun will finish the good work,' saith the apostle in the first of this epistle, and the sixth verse. It is not in our strength to hold out; for after we are once changed, God gives grace sufficient to restrain us and to hold us up. God deals not with us as the husbandman does, sows the ground and leaves it. No. God watches

and weeds us, and continues his labour upon us, till he brings us to the end of his promise. If he uphold us not, we are ready to return to our first principles again.

Use. This enforces a particular and resolute dependence on God, in full assurance that what he hath promised, he will perform. He will put his fear into our hearts, so as we shall not depart from him.

Doct. And this is done freely of his own good pleasure; and thus he doth all things. Not of necessity; he is not forced to this or that, either by any foreign power, or internal; he is not bound to this or that, as fire burns necessarily: as the school saith, *necessitate naturæ*. Indeed, he is good necessarily, for it is his nature; but in his acts he is free from all manner of compulsion, for none can compel him, neither is he drawn to this or that by any merit in us, for we merit nothing but destruction. It was his own will that he made any creature at all; that he ranked them into angels and men; that he passed by the angels, and redeemed man; to give means of salvation to some and not to others; to make the means effectual to some and not to others; that some are called sooner, some later; some have more strength, some less; to some more comfort, some less; and to those that have more, to give more at some time and less at other times, as is his free will. What meritorious disposition can there be in a dead person, as the apostle saith we are? Oh, but it will be objected that one grace deserves another; and God giving us, for example, the Spirit of prayer, we deserve the thing we prayed for. I answer, nothing less. God indeed uses this order, but hereby do we not deserve anything. God says, 'Ask, and it shall be given,' Mat. 7:7. But how? Not by desert in praying; but he hath established this order, that men shall ask before we have.

Uses. (1.) Hence have we a ground of thankfulness to God.

(2.) Secondly, take not offence though thou seest thou hast less grace than others have. All are not strong; some are babes; and it is God's will it should be so, even as there are divers degrees in ages. If thou

beest in any esteem with Christ, thank God for that thou art. I speak the rather, being* many are vexed because they are not so holy and pure as such are to whom God hath given a large portion of the grace of his Spirit. No. God gives according to his good pleasure.

(3.) Despair not therefore. If thou wantest grace, go to God for more. He gives according to his own good pleasure. Many complain they are sinners, dead, dull, indisposed. Go to God. He gives sharpness of wit to the dull, but according to his good pleasure. More hurt and hindrance comes ordinarily from the abundance of God's gifts of this sort than good. For it may be God sees thou wilt be hereby lifted up and extolled, as Paul was; and therefore for thy good he withholds it from thee. Vex not thyself therefore for the want of that which, if thou hadst it, would turn to thine own bane.

Take heed how thou insultest over others, that as yet are not wrought upon. It may be their hour is not yet come; and therefore use thou all means to do good to such as stand in need. God appoints times and seasons, when and what means he will bless. Thou mayest be the instrument to convert thy brother.

And above all take heed of self-conceit. God gives thee all, and if it be not of or from thyself, why shouldst thou boast, or be lifted up? Be therefore content, and repose thyself on God. What though perchance thou wantest outward means and worldly riches? Pass* not for them. Thank God that he hath wrought a spiritual change in thee. He hath given thee the main. I am sure thou wouldst not change thy estate for all the riches in the world, nor pomp and pride thereof. And if thou findest a decay of the sense of God's love and favour towards thee, seek it of him, but with submission. What if thou findest an ebb of goodness in thee? and that it is not with thee now as formerly it hath been, that thou art more easily overcome with temptation, and that thou canst not wrestle as once thou couldst against thy corruptions? Know, God he gives his power to work and fight, as his pleasure is. God by suffering thee thus to be foiled, tells thee that the work is not thine own, but his, and that he gives and

bestows increase as he pleases. Take notice therefore of these things. Thus far have we spoken of the words simply considered.

Now, let us come to them, as they have relation one to another, and particularly of the force of the reason. 'God gives the will and deed, according to his own good pleasure:' therefore fear, and take heed how thou neglectest the means. Fear exaltation of spirit, and trust not on outward means. David, that holy man, he had a touch of this: Ps. 30:6, 'I said in my prosperity, I shall not be moved.' Fear how thou vowest anything in thine own strength in time to come; for in that St James gives a good instruction, 'You ought to say, If the Lord will,' 4:15. Submit thyself to him, for he gives the power 'to will and to do, according to his own good pleasure.'

Doct. It ought therefore [to] be an encouragement to a Christian to work, when he considers that God works the will and the deed, according to his good pleasure. That God is willing to give 'the will and the deed' in obedience to his ordinance, will make a Christian confident in every good work; and therefore, to that end, he must learn to know God's will, as favourites in court they learn to know what will please the prince, and accordingly they fashion their behaviour. And when we know his will, then come boldly to him for to desire strength in doing his will. For he hath made us gracious promises, 'to take away our stony hearts, and to give us hearts of flesh,' Ezek. 11:19, and 'to lay no more on us than we are able to bear,' 1 Cor. 10:13. Let us repair to him for the accomplishment of these promises and others. Take heed how we distrust his promises. It made the Israelites travel forty years, till all the generation of them perished, and entered not into that good land. God hath promised us, not an earthly inheritance, but an heavenly, and victory over our sins. Let us then set on this conquest boldly and with courage, for God hath made himself our debtor by his promise, and he is faithful that hath promised: where, by the way, observe the difference between our estate in the 'first,' from this present estate of ours in the 'second Adam.' The first Adam had no such promise to continue in that estate of integrity. But we have. We are assured. We are

united to Christ more surely than he was to his estate in paradise. Magnify, therefore, this condition of thine. And in the fourth place, labour to know aright the nature of the covenant of grace; for it is a part of his covenant with us, that what he enjoins us he will enable us to perform. 'If we believe, we shall be saved,' saith the covenant. Well, God, he gives us to believe, he bids us to repent, he gives us power to repent. The commandments which are given us concerning faith and repentance, and the like graces here, they shew the order that God uses in saving man, 'To you,' saith Christ, 'it is given to know and believe,' Mat. 13:11. This ought, therefore, to comfort us, seeing this covenant of grace is, not only a covenant which requires duties of our parts, but also it is a testament wherein these graces are given us in way of legacies. If we knew the privileges that in this covenant do belong unto us, it should surely make us bold. God promises the will and deed, that we may apply these things unto ourselves; which if we do, we may go about our works with resolution, that they shall be prosperous to us: our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. In reverence, therefore, use all means. Trust not on the means, but use them in reverence and in fear; and hereby thou shalt avoid many corrections, which otherwise thy sins will draw on thee, For the difference in the performance of duties makes the difference of Christians. Some are more careless in their performances than others. Is it not just with God to punish such, by letting them fall into many gross sins? See this in David and Peter. They trusted to themselves, and called not on God for his gracious direction in temptation. Mark their sins. Observe what comfort they lost. And surely those that are watchful Christians are ever careful of their rules; and God to such gives what he requires of them. He sends us not to seek straw ourselves as Pharaoh, Exod. 5:7; but he provides it to us.

Obj. But it will be objected that, by this doctrine of trusting and relying on God, men will grow idle. God will work his will in us though we sleep, say they.

Ans. But to answer them. First, such men as these will be ashamed to argue thus in outward and worldly businesses. For example, in husbandry, God hath promised every good thing to us; therefore, let me sit still: the corn will grow, though I sow not nor till the ground. Would not such an one be thought mad, that should reason thus? Because we know that as God hath appointed every end, so he hath ordained order and means, whereby such things shall be effected. Thus is it in grace. He gives 'the will and the deed,' but he prescribes prayer and other ordinances, as the means attaining to this will, for we have it not of ourselves. And therefore he bids us hear, read and meditate, watch, and such like, and depend on God for a blessing in the use of the means he appoints us. Do that which is required of you. God will do that [that] belongs to him. He will give 'the will and deed.' Christ he knew that the Father loved him and would honour him, but yet he prays, 'Father, glorify thy Son,' John 17:1. So in sickness, to whom God purposes and decrees health, he shall do well. But how? Without means? No. They must use advice of physicians, as one of God's ordinances. Thus is it with our souls. We are all naturally sick and dead. God hath predestinated some to live. But how? 'Faith comes by hearing,' Rom. 10:17. He must be conversant still in the use of means appointed to that end. But the comfortless and weak soul will say, 'Alas! I use means, yet feel I no grace; I am not the better.' To such I say, 'It may be thou art not so instant and urgent in the use of the means as thou mayest and should be.' And secondly, thou must not measure thyself by thy will; for a Christian's will is ever beyond his ability, tending still to that perfection which they cannot come to in this world. Rich men that are covetous think themselves poor, and still desire more. 'I know thy tribulation and thy poverty, but thou art rich,' saith the Spirit to the church of Smyrna, Rev. 2:9; and therefore discourage not thyself. God is faithful. Use the means, and depend not on the means; but depend on God in the use of the means, else thou shalt find but little comfort. And if thou findest thy affections any whit enlarged to good duties, and lifted up, and cheered in the performance of them, and art glad that thou art not so conversant in sinning as formerly thou wert, but that thou makest a conscience of thy ways, thank God and give him

the glory, and abase and humble thyself. David was much conversant in this. 'Blessed be the Lord, that hath kept me from shedding of blood,' saith he to Abigail, 1 Sam. 25:32, 33, seq. And his psalms are full of praises and thanksgiving. And if thou hast any good motions in thine heart, practise them with all speed, and strengthen them.

WITHOUT MURMURING

Do all things without murmurings and disputings. - VERSE 14

This verse contains a new precept of Christian modesty, enforced by removing of contraries. 'Murmuring' is well known among us, it is so ordinarily practised of us. It arises from discontent against God or one another, breaking into words, works, disputings; whereby one endeavours to defend that with reasons which in the heat of his affections passed from him, lest he should be thought inconsiderate and rash. But to come to the particulars, consider with me, first, the kinds of it; secondly, the causes of it; and thirdly, the cure and remedies of it. For the kinds of it, it is either against God or against man.

First, Against God. Man since the fall quarrels with his Maker. Whenas heaven and earth must be judged by him, man thinks this unequal, and therefore he first murmureth against God's counsels and decrees. God he appoints some to this, others to that. This is unequal, saith the proud man; all of us are alike, saith he; I am as good a man as another. 'Who art thou that contendest with God?' Rom. 9:20. Remember thou art clay, and God is the potter; he hath power to make one vessel to honour, another to dishonour, Rom. 9:21. God's decrees are divine and above thy reach. If that men could apprehend them by reason, then they were not divine. Lay thy hand therefore on thy heart, and cry, 'O the depth of the counsels and wisdom of God,' Rom. 11:33. Shall not we give him leave to do what he will, whenas he is the just Judge of all the world? Can he do any wrong?

Second, It is usual with natural men to murmur against God's providence, in doing better to some others than unto themselves. They think themselves much wronged when they see some others rich and have all, whereas they themselves are poor; and this sin is many times found in the children of God, in David, Job, Habakkuk, 'Why do the wicked prosper?' They found fault with the wicked's prosperity, till they went into the sanctuary of the Lord. There they found the end of such men, Ps. 73:17. Therefore judge not of any but by his end. Think not all things run round, because thou seest no reason thereof, for God's wisdom is unsearchable. Observe the sweet end, issue, and event of all things. Princes they have *arcana imperii*. Shall not we suffer God to enjoy such privileges? Can we endure that our servant should know all our counsels and minds? Let us therefore yield to God liberty in that which belongs to him; yield glory, who disposes all things sweetly.

A third thing which men often murmur at is God's ordinance in magistracy and ministry. Such men, they think God is not wise enough, but they will teach him whom he shall advance to high place, and whom not; and thus they despise not only the magistracy, but God himself. 'They have not cast thee off, but me,' saith God to Samuel concerning the people, 1 Sam. 8:7; and indeed what are they but lawless and wild persons, that cannot away with order? They will have none to overrule them; or, if they be content for shame to admit thereof, yet *nolumus hunc regnare*, Christ must not rule over them, nor this nor that man. But know, whosoever thou art, that all power is from God, and he will defend his own ordinance against all such as malign it. Ministers are not free from murmurers. How many have we that think it tedious to attend on God at public service! how many that think and are not ashamed to say they can profit more in their private studies! and that this observation of the Lord's day causeth them to lose a whole year in seven!* Ay, but consider, God justly curses thy calling whenas thou makest them a stay[†] to good duties. It is also thus in families; wife murmurs against husband, and husband against wife, blaming themselves in that they matched with such, whenas they think they might have done better with others. No. Thou

couldst not have done better. God he hath decreed this, and his decrees are not to be blamed. Servants also are troubled with this disease. They murmur against their masters, and learn to dispute with them; and therefore St Paul wills servants to count their masters worthy of all honour, that the word of God be not blasphemed, Tit. 2:5. And that they do not contend in 'answering again,' verse 9. It is also much in children against parents, and likewise parents against children; so that this sin reigneth over all estates and degrees. Take notice therefore hereof, that thou beest not overtaken in it.

Causes of murmuring

1. The first cause of murmuring is ignorance of God's particular providence; his excellency and thy baseness. Job when he came to see the glory and power of God, then said, 'I abhor myself, I will dispute no more,' Job 42:6. If we did likewise consider of his majesty, power, wisdom, and goodness, would we contend with our Maker? Consider this in thine own cause, will any of us endure a murmuring servant? shall we think it is reason in us, and that God must notwithstanding suffer with patience our murmurings and disputations with his sacred Majesty, who is justice itself, and is not bound to render account of his actions to any.

2. The second cause of murmuring in us is self-love. Man thinks himself worthy of all honour, never considering his weakness and infirmities. Moses was very meek; he gave no cause to Dathan and Abiram, and the rest, to provoke them to murmur. God yet having set them in some place in the congregation, they were so lifted up with desire of honour as they were too good to be governed, Numb. 16:3. Thus is it with every one of us. We willingly puff up ourselves in our own conceits of self-sufficiency, and hence arises discontentedness, when we think God is not so good to us as our merits do deserve. We look on those good things that God hath given us, we think not of our infirmities. Hence it is we are never thankful for that we have, but desirous of that which we have not. Hence also arises unfruitfulness,

for such look for greatness, but never or seldom to do good with that they have, whether power, or riches, or such like.

Cures for this

The cures of this disease consists partly in meditation, and partly in practice. First, labour to have a right understanding and knowledge of God's justice without all exception. Secondly, that he is infinitely good, disposing all for the benefit and good of his own children. Thirdly, labour to know and observe his particular providence to these baser creatures, as that the hair falls not without his providence, and that he regards the sparrows, Mat. 10:29. These will make us practise these things. First, in justifying God in whatsoever is done and decreed, as David, Ps. 119:137, 'Just art thou, O Lord, and holy, and righteous are thy judgments.' This was Eli his practice, 1 Sam. 3:18: 'It is the Lord,' said he. And Hezekiah, 'the word of the Lord is good,' 2 Kings 20:19; and in the 39th Psalm, David held his tongue, ver. 1.* The reason he renders, 'It is thou, Lord, who art good, and dost all for good.' Therefore learn a holy silence as David leads us, 62d Psalm ver. 1: 'My soul waiteth on God with silence,' for so is the signification of the word (c). Thus did Aaron: though his sons were destroyed, 'yet he held his peace,' Lev. 10:3. And when thou findest any discontented thoughts to arise in thine heart, check thyself in the beginning, Ps. 73:22: 'So foolish and like a beast am I,' saith David; and 'why art thou disquieted, O my soul? and why art thou troubled within me?' Ps. 42:5. And examine ourselves: Is it fit that God should answer me? is he not wiser than I? 'What am I?' Am I not wicked, dead, dull? Have not I infinitely displeased him? Let me judge myself, that he may not enter into judgment with me. What though God hath not heard my prayers! I have not hearkened to him when he called me; he may justly neglect me, I have neglected him. Yet hath he been wonderfully good to me; I have received much good from him, and no evil; he hath often spared and doth now spare me; his corrections are gentle and loving, above that we deserve. In his judgments his mercies are great: 'It is his mercy that I am not consumed,' Lam. 3:22. Propound to thyself the example of Christ. He

suffered more than we do, when there was no ill found in him. What says he? 'Not my will, but thine be done,' Luke 22:42. Indeed, we may wish afflictions to be removed as grievances, but joining them with the will of God, then our will must give place to his. Resign thyself into his hands. It is God that will have it thus with me; and therefore take and bear with meekness. And as Paul did, also pray that the will of the Lord may be done. Let his wisdom be thine, his will thine. And why? It will be so; it shall be so; subject thyself therefore to it. Though we behave ourselves as stubborn horses, he will tame us and overrule us well enough; he is too mighty for us. Our stubbornness is the ground of all our crosses and afflictions; for if we will not easily be brought in, God, that out of his mercy chose us, will bring us in to yield. For he will have his will in us, or of us. He will glorify his justice upon us, if his mercies will not work. Lastly, consider the greatness of this sin, to whet us on to the duty enjoined. Though we seem to murmur only against men, we murmur against God; for what saith he to Moses?* 'They have not cast off thee, but they have cast off me,' 1 Sam. 8:7. God takes part with those in authority, as Moses was. For there is no contempt of man, but comes from a contempt of God. The breaches of the second table do spring from the breaches of the first. Observe also, this sin hath ever been grievously punished, it being a sin that pulls God out of his throne, and makes men dare to teach God how to rule. It robs God of his worship, fear, trust, reverence; for it proceeds from the want of them; and lastly, it brings with it great unthankfulness, making men forget all God's goodness bestowed on them.

'Disputing or reasoning'

It issues from murmuring. For when we are come to that pass that we murmur, lest men should think us rash in doing it without cause, we then endeavour to defend ourselves with reason; and indeed there is nothing that a carnal man does, but he will have reason for it; and he will have the world see that he doth not anything without reason. He will dispute with God by questioning whether this or that duty is necessary, and against civil authority by questioning the

lawfulness or necessity of such duties as he is enjoined. This is a great sin. In divine truths, disputing is partly about probables, and therefore it is excellent to find out of probables the truth; but in divine truths, to dispute or make question, is little less than blasphemy. And it is observable that in those times when there was most disputing, as among the schoolmen and the like, about religion and divinity, there was least divinity practised, and very few good men. For the heart of man was then taken up in the consideration of this or that quiddity; and quite neglected the practice of those truths that were known.

Quest. But it will be asked, is all disputing evil?

Ans. No. The Turk will have none about the Alkoran, and the pope he will not have men dispute about anything that concerns him. The devil and his instruments they ever run into extremes. Either men must call in question all the grounds of divinity, or else receive upon trust whatsoever is delivered to us. No. We must know in doubtful things, this is good and required to find out certainty. The end of motion is rest, and the end of questions and doubts tends to truth. Yet have we many spend all their life in this or that question or doubt, and edify little or nothing. Like those physicians are they who contend and question about the goodness or badness of this or that meat, when a strong labouring man eats it, and finds as good nourishment out of it as out of any other. While men dispute and talk about this or that doctrine, a sound downright Christian receives it, digests it, and is nourished thereby, while the others do even starve themselves. Let therefore God alone with his secret will. *Homosum, said Salvian, secreta Dei non intelligo (d)*. God does what is done, be thou content. In human authority also we ought not to dispute, for the subject hath no calling to know the mysteries of state. It may be a sin to command, and yet a virtue to obey. It is thy duty to obey, not to question. But if in thine understanding it be plainly evil which is commanded, obey not.* Job did thus, and Job would hear his servant speak, Job 19:16. But if it be uncertain to thee and doubtful, certain it

is thou must obey. Obedience must be without syllogisms. The servant ought to obey, the master must question.

THAT WE MAY BE BLAMELESS

'That we may be blameless, and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.' - VERSE 15

This verse contains a reason, drawn from the end, why we should do all things without murmuring or disputing. The reason is threefold.

First, that you may be blameless. Secondly, harmless. Thirdly, that you may be the sons of God.

'Blameless.' This word, if it be taken generally, is a thing that none can attain to. God cannot be without blame, for wicked men will quarrel with him, be he never so good. Christ could not live without blame, though he went about doing good continually, Heb. 12:3. It is said he endured the cross and despised the shame; nay, the best men are subject to most shame. Stop wicked men in their lewd courses, they[†] are thought presently to be enemies. And the wicked take that for a wrong, whenas they receive so much good from others that they cannot requite it. But the proper signification of the word is in effect thus much, that they should so behave themselves, as they should not give any just occasion of offence, either to their own consciences, or that of other men. Walk towards God without all manner of profanation or irreligious course, and let your gesture towards men be just, that your conscience may clear you of all fraud or guile; and let your carriage toward your own self be free from all abuse of your person, by gluttony, drunkenness, and the like. In a word, be holy, righteous, and sober.

'Harmless.' The word signifies simple, without all mixture or composition; or else void of hurt, without horn, as the word imports

(e).

The doctrine is, that it is the property of Christians to do no harm. The reason is, because our nature now is changed from that it was; for by nature we are to one another lions and wolves, as Heb. 11:33. Now therefore our nature being changed, our actions also become changed. The gospel makes us tame. The Spirit of Christ in all our members is as Christ himself. His miracles were for good, and they were beneficial to men. He did all things well. Those therefore that are led by this Spirit of his do no harm, so far as they are Christ's.

Use. For use note this as a main difference between the Christian and another man. For all other people are harmful creatures. The four monarchies were as so many beasts, because to the poor church of God they were as so many beasts, cruel and devouring. Nay, the civillest man of all, to his neighbours he seems to be harmless, but towards the church none so fierce as they.

On the contrary, Christians are meek as doves. The wicked are as ravenous birds, like eagles' feathers; † self-love turns all to its own end. Among the beasts, the Christian is as a lamb, innocent, fruitful; a common good. 'When he is exalted the land rejoices,' Prov. 11:11. Contrarily the wicked are termed lions and bears, and the like. Among the plants wicked men are as briars: a man must be fenced that deals with them, 2 Sam. 23:7; the godly as lilies, sweet, not fenced with pricks. Among earthly creatures the godly are as the worm; the wicked, a generation of vipers and serpents. They will do no right, take no wrong, but a word and a blow; a word and presently to suit, right Esau and Ishmaels. Nay, they glory in it. Oh, say they, he is a shrewd man. Hence comes duels, combats, and the like. Men now are come to that pass, they will not put up a word. Nay, those that are innocent, and will pass by injuries, tush! they are fools. But know, thus to be foolish is to be wise, to be Christian like; and such fools as these are shall find comfort on their deathbeds, when those wise men shall wish they had been such fools.

Such fools as these are, I mean the innocent, shall have God for their help and shelter, for want whereof these worldly wise men come often to ill ends, and to be made fearful examples. The Psalms are full of encouragements herein: Ps. 18:2, 'The Lord is my rock and fortress,' said David; and so in Ps. 25:8, 9, 10, &c. Wicked men have horns, but God is a hammer to break the horns of the wicked. The innocent person, and he that is harmless, brings peace to the land, and a blessing to the place where he lives. Here prayers and intercessions are as the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof. Let those things be noted to provoke us unto this duty.

'Sons of God'

This is the third ground whereby we are incited, to be without murmuring and disputing, that you may be 'the sons of God;' that is, that by this you may appear to your own comfort to be the sons of God, or that herein you may be as the sons of God, in shewing yourselves harmless and blameless, which may testify it to yourselves and others.

Doct. Therefore Christians that are harmless and blameless indeed, are the sons of God. The ground of this is the love of God, who freely gave his own Son to take our nature upon him, and to die to save us from the sting of death; he became the Son of man to make us the sons of God without rebuke. And as God gave him to us, so by faith doth he give us to him; and by this God gives us power to be his sons, John 1:12. Our nature is hereby changed; for whom he makes sons he sanctifies them and makes them new, and thus become we his sons. God hath adopted us, not as natural men, for this or that respect, to an earthly inheritance, but God freely adopts us to an heavenly inheritance that fadeth not; neither doth God adopt us as men do men in *solamen orbitatis*,* for God hath a Son in whom he is pleased; neither again can men's adoption make their adopted sons to be good; but when God adopts us, he makes us as he would have us to be, like himself. Fourthly, other adopted sons, many of them are not sharers together of the inheritance to one allotted; but we are made

heirs and fellow-heirs with Christ himself. This love of God was such as the apostle could not express in any fit terms; therefore he saith, 'Behold what love hath the Father shewed us!' 1 John 3:1. David thought it not to be a small thing to be the son-in-law of an earthly prince, 1 Sam. 18:23; behold, we are sons of the King of kings. By nature we are sons of the devil, and rebels. Now, that God should freely, out of his own free love, set his love on us, passing over angels and other men, and not sparing his own Son, have we not hence cause to cry, 'Behold what love!' and 'Oh the depth of that love!' Earthly fathers adopt sons because they die, but God is eternal; he never dies; his Son is everlasting. Consider this as a point of comfort, for this relation is everlasting; he never leaveth us nor forsakes us. Servants are cast out, but the Son abideth for ever; servants know not the counsels of their masters, but sons they know the whole will of God. Consider this as a ground of protection in all dangers, and of provision of all good. 'I have a father,' saith the prodigal; 'what need I die for hunger? I will go to him,' Luke 15:17. In a word, the word Father is an epitome of the whole gospel. All the promises therein contained are sealed up by and in this one word, God is our Father. Can we go to our Father for pardon of sin and not obtain it? By Christ's death and satisfaction he is become our Father; and therefore Christ is Christ after his resurrection. Can we then want any good thing? How can we think he will deny us his Spirit, or that inheritance in heaven, which as a Father he hath promised! How then, or at what shall we be dismayed and discomfited? What can trouble us? Mark what is promised in Ps. 103:2, seq. All good that may any way concern thy soul or body. Dost thou fear thy corruptions? The Spirit tells thee that God is thy Father; there can be no condemnation to thee, Rom. 8:1. Dost thou fear want? Surely he that hath given thee Christ, his own Son, how shall he not with him give thee all things, Rom. 8:32. Thou shalt want nothing for thy good. Thou mayest fall into sin, but God is still thy Father. This relation is everlasting. He will not forsake thee. From hence thou mayest have an argument against all suggestions. This brings with it comfort; but to whom? It must be to such as are sons, not to the traitorous and rebellious. It hath been treason for any man to term

himself the son of a king, not being indeed so, yea, though the king were dead; and is it not high treason for a presumptuous traitor to come into the presence chamber of the great God, and with an impudent face to style God his Father? Verily God's answer will be to such, 'You are of your father the devil: his works ye do,' John 8:44.

1. Those that are God's sons* he renews to do his will and commandments. 1 Pet. 1:16: 'Be ye holy,' saith he, 'for I am holy.' But when men hate goodness and good men, nay, and persecute them, defame them, murder them, John 8:44, they are of the devil. They are murderers and liars; and that religion that teacheth them is devilish.

2. Again, If God be thy Father, thou wilt have a spirit of prayer. We are no sooner born but we begin to cry, as Paul did at his first conversion, Acts 9:11. Every child of God, in respect of his measure of grace, he will do his endeavour to sigh and sob out his grief to God: and as the grace increases, so will this duty be more perfect, till at length he comes to provoke[†] God, by his promise to urge and bind him by reasons to hear him. Those, therefore, that pass day after day, never finding time for the performance of this duty, they have not God's Spirit; for by it we have access to God, Eph. 2:18; Eph. 3:12; and there is no child but will use this privilege; and those that use it not may well suspect they are not children.

3. Thirdly, If thou be the child of God, and hast his Holy Spirit in thee, thou shalt have, whensoever thou standest in need, a sweet consolation; for that ever reveals to thee what thou art, and comforts thee in all distress. For, Rom. 5:1, 'being justified by faith, thou hast peace with God.' What cross soever troubles the child of God, this will ever comfort him: Well! I am the child of God; I am assured God is reconciled to me; I have my confidence in him, that when he sees fit I shall be eased; in the mean time I am assured I shall not be overcome. This is that which no natural man can have; he cannot rejoice in affliction.

4. Fourthly, If thou beest the son of God, thou art not overmuch careful for the things that concern this life. Thou usest the means that God hath ordained, and thou trustest God with the issue and event of all. It is the property of orphans to care much for their living, and for the things of this world; not for those that have such a father as God, that provides for all his children liberally; and men in thus doing shew themselves orphans, or bastards, and not sons.

Quest. But some will ask, Is it not possible to be the son of God, and yet ignorant thereof?

Ans. I answer, Yes. For the child at the first knows not his father; but by little and little he comes to know him as he grows in years. So is it with the child of God. At the first he only cries and bewails his miserable estate; but as they grow up, out of the word they learn to see their estates that is laid up for them, and to know their Father that hath been so good to them, and to call upon him as their Father for anything that they want. They know that the Scripture gives it as a note of one that is born of God, that 'he sins not'; that is, that not with delight and continuance in sin, but that his new nature stirs him up to repent, and to beg pardon and to strive against it, so as at length he comes to grow so perfect as no temptation shall overthrow him, though it may foil* him. But he always considers his estate when any temptation comes: Shall I, that am a prince, a son and heir to God, do thus, and offend against him?

'Without rebuke'

This is comprehended in the former words, and therefore I speak the less thereof. The words are not to be taken in a strict legal sense, but in an evangelical sense, implying that we should walk so as we may be free from rebuke of the best, from gross sins, from common infirmities and personal corruptions. Whether it be rashness, anger, worldliness, intractableness, the child of God must labour to free himself of them. He ought to endeavour to attain to perfection, though we cannot attain to it in this world; and we ought to pray as

the apostle, Eph. 3:18, 'to know the length, breadth, depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge;' and thus doing we shall dignify this estate of ours.

'In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.'

The word 'crooked,' or 'perverse,' is a borrowed word from timber,† whose excellency is to be right and straight; and if it be not, must be squared by the rule. Here it is applied to the disposition and nature of men, who naturally are of a crooked condition, especially those that are in the bosom of the church. They are so crooked as they cannot be squared aright by means; and so it is with those that are right, they are very right.

Doct. The doctrine then is, that wicked men are all perverse and crooked, Deut. 32:5.

Reason. The reason hereof is, since the fall of Adam we are under sin and Satan. Sin is nothing but crookedness. We lying in sin are therefore crooked inwardly and outwardly, in will and in judgment. Even in the church, men perversely judge of a Christian's life, and of preaching. So that till we be converted, our wisdom is enmity to God. But the will especially is perverse. Men they will die. 'Why will ye die, O house of Israel?' Jer. 27:13. 'How often would I have gathered you,' saith Christ, 'and you would not!' Mat. 23:37. Endeavour to bring men to rules: they will not; they will perish. Bring them to make conscience of private prayer, good company: away with it, they will not yield. Our affections are also perverse. Do not most men love their bane? Ill company, bad courses, swearing and blaspheming. Men will die rather than they will leave their courses. Men are also naturally perverse in opposition to means. God commands, promises, sends mercies and judgments, but who regards? They will go on in their ways; nay, as in Deut. 29:19, 'they will bless themselves in them.' This is the nature of most men in the visible church, more perverse than the Jews.

'Signs hereof'

1. The first sign of this perverse estate is, bring thyself to the rules of God's truth; if thou do it unwillingly, and art brought to it by violence, if you shun the word and the means of salvation, if you shun good company, it is a sign you are crooked; nay, so crooked, as you desire to be crooked still.

2. But be it so that thou canst be content to apply thyself to the rule, then whether do you tremble to apply the rules to your lusts and corruptions? You have many are so set on their sins as they will justify sin by the word, and wrest the meaning thereof to their own lusts. This is a sure infallible sign of a perverse estate.

Cure hereof

1. Bring thyself to God's ordinance, where thou shalt know thine own crookedness and the danger of it.

2. But especially do this when thou art young; for those that are settled in their dregs are not to be dealt withal. It is good therefore to do as nurses do, strengthen ourselves when we are young and pliable.

3. Thirdly, Keep good company, and such as by their life will discover to thyself thy corruptions and perverse estate; and thus when thou findest it.

4. Consider what a miserable estate thou art in. We amongst us account it a great eyesore to see a body that should be straight to be crooked. Oh that we had eyes to see this spiritual crooked estate we are in! Oh what fear and grief would possess us! How would we labour to free ourselves of it, and to straighten ourselves every day, lest we should be found unfit for God's building, and good for nothing but to burn! With such as walk perversely God will deal perversely, Lev. 26:28. It may be he will seem to sleep for a while,

but at the hour of death it will shew that he looked for better courses at thy hands.

5. Pray with the psalmist, Ps. 119:5, 'Oh that my ways were so direct, that I might keep thy statutes!' Observe again, that the godly here live in the midst of lions and wolves; those that are of a froward and perverse heart. For those that live under the means of grace, and will not be wrought upon, they are much worse for it. There is more innocence in a Turk than in some that profess better. And those that profess most, if they be hypocrites, of all other make the most bitter opposition against the truth.

The reasons hereof are: First, God hereby shews his power, in that he can and doth preserve his children among lions from the wrath of the lion. Christ he must rule, but it is in the midst of his enemies; and therefore his church must be in the midst of his enemies, for he is king of his church.

2. Again, in regard of the wicked, it justifies their just condemnation. They cannot say but that they had the means, as well of the gospel as the examples of those that were good. Thus did Noah justly condemn the old world, and Lot Sodom.

3. Furthermore, those that are not desperately wicked, but of whom we may conceive some hope, surely they by living with the godly may be won; as when they see religion in others bringing forth good works, they see religion is no impossible thing, for they see men troubled with the like infirmities that they are that practise it; and they see it is sweet, because it makes men tractable and loving.

4. Moreover, in regard of the godly, God suffers them to be amongst the wicked, for it refines them. Envy and malice are quick-sighted. God's children know they live in the midst of envy, therefore they are wary. Lot lived more uprightly in Sodom than when he was out of it. Wickedness binds in religion, and makes it more forcible, even as by an antiperistasis;* it unites it and strengthens it. It makes the godly

to be more careful, to be unblameable, and to watch to keep themselves from doing hurt, and from taking hurt; for wicked men are watchful to take advantage of any ill example in the weak Christian, and to follow it. But, on the contrary, the weak Christian is overcome, and carried away with the streams of vice, and therefore are the more watchful.

'Directions for life'

1. Remember thy calling—that you are sons of God; and forget not your profession, and fetch reasons from your callings. You are God's children; you are called with a holy calling. Shall I do thus, and offend against my Father? and shall I disgrace that holy calling, and scandalise it? Shall I give cause to make the enemy to blaspheme?
2. Again, Observe the persons with whom thou conversest. Are they malicious and envious?
3. Beware how thou give them offence; especially watch thy natural corruptions and weaknesses. Take heed of secret ill thoughts.
4. Carry the example of David about with thee; see in him what his thoughts wrought. That which thou tremblest to do, tremble to think on; for God justly leaves such in great sins that solace themselves in ill thoughts.
5. Again, Look to duties of the second table. These sins are great sores in the eyes of our enemies.
6. Use a loving, pitiful carriage towards them that are without. Though they be never so wicked, give them their due, and consider the goodness thou hast was given thee. Therefore be not puffed up in thine own conceit, but fear continually.

'Among whom you shine as lights in the world'

These words contain another reason why the children of God ought to be unreprouable. For, saith the apostle, 'you are lights.' All God's children are lights, but so as there is an order of them. God is the ground of all light; he is the Father of lights. Christ he is the Sun of righteousness. These are the grand lights. The word of God is also a light and a lantern to light us in the dark ways of this world. From hence light is derived to the saints, who receive it from Christ by the word and Spirit. You being therefore thus enlightened, you are to converse amongst men as lights, saith the apostle. For the better understanding thereof, consider in what things God's children resemble light; and,

1. First, We know this creature of light is an excellent creature, shewing the excellency of all other creatures; and it is a beautiful creature. Thus is the word, and children of God. By it all the world is discovered to be as Egypt, and the church to be as the land of Goshen.* And this is beautiful in the eyes of God, who loves that which is like himself. He is light indeed, and nothing but light is lovely to him. He loves those sparks which our natural corruption hath left unto us; and therefore much more the light of his own Spirit which he places in us.

2. Secondly, Light is pure, and admits of no contagion, though it be in the most contagious places of all. So is the word: it is pure, and makes us pure and sincere, and that we should not be defiled with the lusts and corruptions of this world wherein we converse.

3. Thirdly, Light makes us to discern of differences. It shews itself, and discovers other things. Thus doth the word shew itself where it is, and the man that hath it doth discern of things that differ. He judges of the wicked, and censures their lewd courses. The child of God is above all wicked men, and themselves are justly judged of none; for the wicked men cannot judge of those that are lights, no more than a blind man of colours, for they are blind by nature. The world would indeed censure them, when indeed they cannot discern

themselves, when contrarily he discerns himself and knows his infirmities and his slidings.

4. Again, Light is a heavenly quality. So is the word of God, holy, pure, transforming godly men to its own likeness, to be heavenly. His bread is from heaven; his affections, desires, thoughts, endeavours are heavenly. His way is upward. He is heavenly-minded; while he is on earth he is in heaven.

5. Moreover, Light is a most comfortable thing in darkness, expelling terrors and discomforts. Thus is a Christian that is enlightened by the word. Terrors are in the word, but the word comforts the heart of a Christian. It makes him able to judge of his way and estate; to know he is the Son of God; that all the promises are his; that heaven is his; that he hath God's mark. Contrarily, the wicked have no light at all; for while they live here their life here is as a death, full of discomfort; they having no comfort in anything, save a little glimpse of false joy in the creatures; which when they leave them they are in the more terror,—all their comfort being in this, that they see not that miserable estate before they fall into it and feel it.

6. Furthermore, Light makes a thing full of evidence. All the world cannot persuade a man contrary to that they see. Thus the word so discovers to us our estates in grace, and so surely as all the world can never shake the foundation of our faith. 'Though he kills me,' saith Job, 'I will trust in him,' Job 13:15. But for the wicked, their life is full of staggering, full of doubtings; and hence is it that the children of God are counted by God holy, pure, comely, fair and dear, because they live with a resolution. The papists, they will tell us that the word is obscure; let them tell us the light is obscure, for we may as well believe one as the other.

7. But to proceed: Light is a quality of surest motion. It spreads suddenly. Thus do the children of God. They communicate to others. They shine, spreading forth the grace, first of all to those that are next them, as children and friends, then to such as are further off.

Those that have not this nature, that do not desire to do good to others, they are not children of the light; for it is the nature of all good to communicate.

8. Light, we know, hath a secret influence wheresoever it is. Thus also is the grace of God in his children. It is ever operative and working. What light soever they receive from the Sun of righteousness, they diffuse it and spread it to others, like the moon; and therefore he adds further:

'As lights in the world'

We that are 'lights in this world,' we are, it is true, in a dampish place, yet must we shine, though but dimly. Therefore ministers, let them look both to their doctrine and life, for they are great lights, or at the least should be so, and they will be noted. We know when the sun or moon are eclipsed. We all observe it as a wonder. And thus will it be with such lights as ministers should be. Men continually eye them. If they be eclipsed, it will be wondered at and observed of all. Let therefore not only ministers but others also look to themselves, that they take heed of those things that will eclipse them. We know whence the eclipse in nature of these heavenly bodies do come; from the interposition of dark, gross, earthly bodies. Thus it is with God's children. Their cares, griefs, and studies in this world being ever more carnal than is meet, they eclipse us and make us dark, keeping us from the presence of that light which should enlighten us. But especially, and above the rest, self-love, that blinds us and eclipses all other lights from us.

9. Again, Heavenly lights are perpetual. Even as *stellæ cadentes*, so is it with the wicked man. Though he seems to shine fairly, yet because the causes of this light in him are earthly, no marvel if after the force of them be spent they suddenly vanish. But the godly man's light is of another substance and nature. It is heavenly, and is ever like himself. It may indeed be obscured, but never wholly eclipsed. Either worldly sorrow or joy doth for a time sometimes darken them, and may be so

obscured as neither the world, no, nor themselves can discern their estates for their own comfort; yet for all this will they at length recover their former brightness and glory again. Saint Paul, he saith, a Christian life is concealed and hid with Christ in God, Col. 3:3; but yet when he shall appear, then shall we also appear.

Use. The use of all this is to try us whether we be lights. Surely if we be, we will have no communion with those that work the works of darkness. So saith Saint John, 1 John 1:5–7. Again, if we be lights we shall wonder at our glorious estate we are in; we shall think all our life before we came into this estate to be dark; yea, though formerly we were civilly disposed. And especially shall we wonder at that which we have in future expectation and hope, reserved to us in heaven. A carnal man wonders still at worldly matters, as stately buildings and the like; a Christian thinks all base in respect of the immense love of God freely set upon him.

Directions how to attain to be lights

1. First, If we desire to be lights, communicate thyself with the chiefest light, as the stars are ever in the presence of the sun, and from his light they receive theirs. Be sure thou placest thyself in God's eye continually.
2. Secondly, Use the means, use the glass of God's word. Thou shalt not only see thy estate therein, but by it thou shalt be transformed into God's image, 2 Cor. 3:18. Other glasses have no such power like this mirror of the gospel. It makes us like God, because it hath the Spirit of God ever accompanying with it, whence it is the word of light. Those therefore that are out of the sunshine of the gospel, no marvel if they be dark. The moon, so far as it is averse from the sun, is ever dark. So is a Christian. So far as he is turned from Christ, so far he is dark. Let thine eyes therefore be ever towards him in the use of the means, the word, prayer, and the sacraments, and such like.

3. Again, In thy conversation have no correspondency with the world, for what fellowship is there between light and darkness? How foully do they therefore deceive themselves that will be wise. They will be protestant or papist, zealous or profane, according as their company are. God will turn such worldly wisdom into mere folly, who will be ashamed of such when he shall come in his kingdom. It is a comely thing to be Christians with Christians. Light with light augments the light, even as the multitude of stars joined in the heaven make the galaxia.* A company of Christians meeting in one make a glorious light indeed, and such a lustre as will dazzle the eyes of the wicked world. Be stirred up therefore to use good company.

4. And follow the example of those that be lights, and the directions thou findest in the word, and thou shalt shine as the sun in the kingdom of God. It is true the wicked they will labour to cover this light with clouds of disgrace and detraction, and thus they reward God for his goodness, but they have their lesson. There is no surer sign of a wicked man than when they endeavour to deprave these lights and to obscure them. And yet this practice is very usual, when they see especially any new light risen up, they deride and scoff at that man or woman; they hate him for his light. Like Cain are they, that hated his brother for his goodness; and herein are not only imitators of Cain, but they shew themselves to be of their father the devil, for his works they do. Well, as we desire not to be of this sort, let us see that we use the means. Go and be where the word of light is, where it shines; for those that live without it live in darkness. Set not thy carnal reason against God's wisdom. He bids thee do this. And as thou desirest the peace of Zion,

5. Pray for this light that it may grow more and more unto the perfect day thereof.

6. And labour to see the contrary estate of such as are in darkness, where the king of fear ruleth, and where is nothing but terror.

7. And entreat God that he would open thy dull eyes, that the glorious light of the gospel may shine therein. So doth the apostle, Eph. 1:18; and thus shalt thou at the length come to shine here in this world, without which thou shalt not shine in the world to come. The light of nature and reason cannot bring thee to the light of glory.

8. And when thou art converted, 'strengthen thy brethren,' Luke 22:32; labour to bring others into this marvellous light. 'He that gains a soul shall shine as the stars,' Dan. 12:3. But will some men say, May we converse then or live among wicked men? Yes, verily; for the Holy Spirit saith that we must 'shine in the world.' Christ did not pray that God would take his disciples out of the world, but that he would keep them in the world from evil, John 17:15. But that which is forbidden is familiar conversation and amity with them; otherwise we may live with them so as by example to gain them. And herein the Christian reasoneth contrary to the world; for the world saith, Do this. Why? Because it is the custom, and most men use it. Nay, saith the Christian, we must live so as we ought to endeavour to make others, which are wicked, like ourselves. We must gain others by our good example. We must 'redeem the time, because the days are evil,' Eph. 5:16. Because others are perverse, be thou good. Noah was not as the old world, nor Lot as Sodom. We as they ought to be preachers of righteousness; and if we cannot bring others to the light of the truth, yet to grieve and pity their estates. And as David bewailed, 'Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell in Mesech,' &c., Ps. 120:5, and yet to comfort ourselves in this, that it will not be always thus with us. The time will come that we shall be freed from them, and we shall have communion with the Trinity and with all the saints. In the mean time shine here; swear not with them; be not dissolute with them, but be constant in going against the stream. Call to mind thy calling, that thou art the son of God. Thou art to be a light to those that are in darkness. Reason not for thy corruptions, but ever against them. I am a Christian; shall I hate him that I profess to follow? I am a son of God; shall company make me perverse? I am a light; shall I cease to shine? No, Lord; while I am here give me grace that I may

grow more and more fit for that light and glorious estate that thou hast in keeping for me against that great day of accounts.

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE

Holding forth the word of life. - VERSE 16

That which is of light is life, saith John, 1:4: 'The life was the light of men;' and therefore he saith we should be as lights, 'holding forth the word of life.' It is not enough for us to shine to ourselves, but we ought to shine to others in speech and conversation. By 'the word of life' here especially is meant the gospel; for the law is a killing letter. We being in our corrupt estate, the law pronounces us dead as concerning ourselves. Then comes the gospel, that sends us out of ourselves to Christ; and in him it pronounces life to such as come to him; and it describes to us the way that leads to life, and the degrees of life, as redemption, grace, and glory, 2 Tim. 1:10. It again begins this life in us, and works faith in us, whereby we lay hold on life; and therefore it is also called the word of faith. It is called the word of the kingdom; for it offers the kingdom to us. It is also called the word of reconciliation; for that it tells us where it is to be had, and works it in us. It is therefore the word of life; and those that believe it not, are dead in law, for the sentence is already passed upon such. He is already condemned as dead men. He wants sense, motion, and comeliness. For sense, he cannot relish any goodness, either in hearing or seeing it. He is blinded, and he stops his ear at the voice of the charmer; and this makes him wonder how others are affected with any good thing. For motion, he cannot set one step onward to salvation. And for that comeliness, we all by nature are more loathsome than the dead carcass. Abraham could not endure the sight of his own wife when she was dead, though living she was so dear to him, Gen. 23:4. Thus are we by nature altogether rotten and polluted; speech, fine discourse, favour, and all other outward good parts, they can put no comeliness upon us. They are but on us as flowers stuck upon a dead carcass. All men know that it is rotten and

stinking, and void of all comeliness notwithstanding them. This then must teach us to regard more this word of life, and to pity them that have it not; and how to judge of such that withhold this word of life from them that live in darkness, as the papists do. Surely there is no cruelty like this cruelty, to starve men's souls. Observe we therefore from hence, he that refuseth God's ordinance he refuseth life. What shall we then think of those private devotions, wherewith many men put off God's ordinance, thinking that they can get as much good in their warm chamber by reading of books, as in the public congregation by hearing God's word taught? These are fools, setting their foolish inventions against God's wisdom, as though they could tell God better means to beget and strengthen faith, than he himself can appoint. Oh, but men will say, it hinders us from our callings; in seven years we lose a year. But dost thou not live by this word? Shalt thou do well to be ashamed of that, and lightly esteem of that word that brings with it life and glory? But why is this word no more esteemed? Surely men deceive themselves with self-conceit. They think themselves good, when they are stark naught; and that they are alive, whenas like to the Laodiceans they are dead in sin and iniquity, Rev. 2:16, seq.

(1.) The reason hereof is, they want the Spirit to convince them. For the Spirit convinces us of death. Where this Spirit is not, none will seek for life; for they know not that they are dead by nature; they believe not God's law that should convince them. No marvel then if they affect not a change.

(2.) A second reason is, for that such men as these are carried by sense. They see they want no outward content, and for other things they think God will be merciful; they think God loves them, for that he gives them worldly riches. There is another sort of men, and these are brought to despair; how is it that these, seeing their misery, do not esteem of this word aright, and come to it as to the word of life? I answer, they consider not of this word aright; they think their sins so many as that the word cannot enlighten their darkness. To such I say, they are most fit for this word of life; for Christ bids such come

to him as are 'weary and heavy laden' with their sins, and he hath promised release, Mat. 11:28. And he saith he came 'to bind up the broken in heart and the bruised in spirit,' Isa. 61:1; and therefore, let such be encouraged by these and such like gracious invitations and promises to come to the word, and with attention to search into the depth of these promises made to them. But thus much of this, that the word is a word of life. Now we come to the next, that Christians must 'hold forth this word of light or life.' And this is done in speech and action, profession and confession, when they are called thereto. For every Christian is a light that must shine. What use is there of light under a bushel? Many are of contrary judgment. They think it wisdom to be close in their profession; in company of papists, to be popish; of religious, to be religiously disposed. Surely this wisdom is carnal and devilish. What use is there of such light? They are like false lanthorns, which are commonly called thieves' lanthorns. They carry their light to themselves; none is benefited thereby; they are fit for works of darkness. Of such, Christ hath already said, 'He will hereafter be ashamed,' Mark 8:38. Others there are inwardly one thing, outwardly another, contrary to the Christian's duty, which is to hold forth the light that he hath. And this do they, whenas in all passages of their life they are turned into the word, and cast into the mould thereof; then it teaches us to pray, to be patient, to joy, yea, in the midst of afflictions, and to do good even to those that hate us. And if we, according as we are taught, do these things, then do we hold forth this word of life, and it will be an exceeding great comfort to us in life, in death, in all estates. It will assure us that we are transformed into the image of this word, and the holding forth of this word in our lives thus, will cause a far louder report in the ears of God than all the verbal profession we can make.

In temptation, if we find ourselves even at despair, by considering the curse of the law, due to us for our sins, if in this estate we can apply the gospel so to us, as thereby we find comfort out of it, and such as upholds us, surely this is a great sure sign that we are transformed; and by this we hold forth the power of the word, and thereby the light thereof. In the hour of death, when the devil is most

busy to shake our faith, we notwithstanding are not daunted, but ground our faith on the word, and can comfortably apply that speech of St Paul, 'There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ.' We hereby do set forth the power, comfort, and truth of the word. Contrarily, those that are impatient in trouble, and puzzled with every temptation, swallowed up with fear, and shew no assurance of faith in them, notwithstanding the great means they have had, these live as though there were no word. Nay, they do in a manner slander the word in their lives, making show as if the word had no power, comfort, or strength at all in it. For our parts, let us not leave till we have digested all the promises and comfortable assurances the gospel doth everywhere lay out to us. Hereby we shall shew ourselves far above all other men, and in all estates we shall be the same, not moved at all. Let us be therefore thankful for this word of life, and joyful in it, and treasure it up against the evil day, setting our minds ever upon it; let it be as a paradise to us, where the tree of life is placed. Christ in the word is as the tree of life. He that tasteth of this tree shall never die. By the 'first Adam' we come to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, by woeful experience, by the which we all died, but by the second Adam we come to eat of the tree of life, by which we live perpetually.

OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

But I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall come shortly.—
PHIL. 2:24.

IN the former verses the apostle Paul shews his care and love that he bore to the Philippians, in that he would not leave them destitute of a

guide and director; and therefore he sends Timothy, whom he commends, to shew his love the more; and for his greater commendations, he shews the wickedness of the contrary sort, that thereby Timothy his sincerity may the better appear; 'others seek their own, but Timothy as a son hath served me.' He lays down the causes of this his sincerity. He first had learned the Scriptures of a child; then he had a gracious grandmother and mother. It is an excellent comfortable thing whenas children can say, 'I am the son of thy servant and thy handmaid,' Ps. 86:16. And a third cause or help was his conversing with him. He drew in the sweet spirit of the blessed apostle. God, he derives[†] good to men by good society. They are therefore enemies to themselves that regard not good, choice company; for it makes of good excellent, and of those that are not yet good, if they belong to God, it makes them good.

In this verse he shews a further degree of his care of the Philippians. There are[‡] divers ways to come to the knowledge of men's estate; as first by report; secondly, by messengers; thirdly, by letter. St Paul had used all these; but his care was such as all these would not content him. He must see them himself, which is indeed the surest means and way of all.

In these words, therefore, consider the manner of the delivery of this speech, 'I trust in the Lord.' Then the matter, which contains a purpose of his coming. Then the ground, his trust in God. Here, first of all, mark the language of Canaan; and the heavenly dialect,

1. To express future purposes with a reservation of, and resignation to, God's will and guidance. 'I trust in God,' saith the apostle; for the hearts of men, yea of kings, are in God's hand, to turn and wind them as the rivers of waters, Prov. 21:1. This shews Christ to be God, for he is the object of trust. Observe in the second place,

2. God's providence extends to every particular thing. He guides our incomings and our outgoings; he disposes of our journeys; nay, his

providence extends to the smallest things, to the sparrows and to the hair of our heads; he governs every particular passage of our lives.

Use 1. This should teach us to set upon our affairs with looking up to heaven for permission, power, and sufferance; and this St James enforces by reproofing the contrary. 'Go to,' saith he in his fourth chapter, and ver. 13th, and adds the instruction thereupon; 'for that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.' Let us therefore in all our affairs be holy, and not bind or limit our holiness only to coming to church; but seeing at all times and in all places we are Christians, and ever in the presence of God, let us place ourselves still in his eye, and do nothing but that we would be willing God shall see; and labour to behold him in every good thing we have, and give him thanks in all the good we enjoy.

Use 2. And secondly, it ought to give us warning, that we ought not to set upon anything, wherein we cannot expect God's guidance: and so consequently cannot trust on him for a blessing upon what we do. For if we do, we must look to meet the Lord standing in our way, as Balaam did, in opposing our lewd and wicked intentions.

Use 3. And thirdly, it ought to teach us to take nothing but that for which we may give God the thanks and praise; as contrarily many do, who may thank the devil for what they have gotten, and yet make God implicitly the giver of their most unjust exactions.

IT WAS NECESSARY

Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. -
VERSE 25

Paul thought it not enough to plant the seeds of the word amongst them, but he would be viewing it and watering. 'I purpose shortly to see you,' saith he; but because I am now in prison I cannot come myself, but I purpose presently to send you Epaphroditus, and afterwards Timothy; and this he thought necessary—for well he knew that the residence of the pastor is necessary to the flock of the Lord, in some sort. But to stand upon this doctrine is not my purpose. The next thing I come to is, the commendations of Epaphroditus, which is divers; out of which generally thus much we learn, that it is our duty to give them commendations that are praiseworthy, even to this end that thereby we might raise a good opinion of them, especially of the ministers of the gospel; for hereby is the gospel itself glorified by us. And indeed it is a great sign that the spirit of the devil rests in that man, that doth detract and disparage the good children of God. For it comes hereby that the gospel of God is also blamed, and neglected. For the commendation of the minister is a preparative, and makes way for the word.

My brother

The word in this place signifies one of the same office. As judges call one another 'brother,' so doth St Paul call Epaphroditus 'brother,' in regard of his office and spiritual function; and hereby he shews his love to him; for 'brother' is a name of love and friendship. Secondly, it shews his care of Epaphroditus; for one brother will care for another, unless they be of a Cainish nature. Thirdly, it is a name of equality, for brothers are equal. And hereby the apostle shews his humility, who being an apostle and pillar of the church, descended so low as to call one of inferior rank and calling, 'brother.' He had another spirit before his conversion; he persecutes the church of God. But afterward those that he formerly persecutes are now his 'brethren.' Now he thinks he is a debtor to all, both Jew and Grecian, Rom. 1:14. The proud man thinks all are debtors to him, that all do owe him respect and reverence; and indeed it is the spirit of the devil that 'lifteth up.' Antichrist is his eldest son indeed, who lifteth himself up against, and above all that is called God. Contrarily Christ

humbles himself to the death to call us brothers. Shall we then disdain to live together in terms of equality and love? Is there not infinite difference between Christ and us? Was there not in him such a glory as passeth our apprehension? and what had we, or what have we, that we should lift ourselves up after this fashion? If we will strive to be above and outgo others, let it be in humility. Go each before others, in giving honour to others above ourselves. Observe, therefore, grace takes advantage of all bonds to increase love; bonds of office as well as of nature. Men of the same profession emulate and envy one another. Thus it is naturally, but let religion teach us better, and take away this natural poison from us.

Fellow-labourer

The apostle commends him yet further. He calls Epaphroditus his 'fellow labourer,' in regard of the pains he endured; and 'fellow soldier,' in regard of the perils and dangers he jointly did undergo with the apostle. The doctrine that hence arises is, that ministers are fellow-labourers. They are not, or should not be, fellow-loiterers, as many are. No. The Scriptures compares them to the most painful and laborious professions; to husbandmen, whose labour is circular, every year renewing as the year doth renew. Such is the ministers' labour, converting and strengthening others. It is a great labour to break the shell of the word; to lay open the right interpretation thereof; to divide it aright; to convert a soul; to preserve it from the devil. It is as the peril of women in travail; 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth till Christ be formed in you,' saith Paul our apostle in Gal. 4:19. Idle people are therefore unjust esteemers and judgers of the pains of ministers, they knowing it is out of their proper element.

Use. If ministers then be labourers, you to whom we preach are God's orchard; you must submit yourselves to be wrought on. If we be builders, you must be lively stones of this building. You must suffer yourselves to be squared, and cut, and made fit for this building while you are here. At the building and finishing of the

material temple there was no noise of hammers, or such instruments; all were fitted in the mountain. Thus* must we expect to be fitted here while we live; for in that beautiful temple in heaven, there is no fashioning or fitting, either by crosses to hammer us, or by any other means. We must here be conformable to his death, that we may also be conformed to the similitude of his resurrection hereafter. If ministers be husbandmen, you must be 'ground,' and such as may bring forth fruit to perfection, else all our labour and pains that we take with you will be to no other end than to make you to be near cursing, Heb. 6:7. And know, it is not sufficient that you bring not forth evil fruit; but every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, must be hewed down and cast into the fire, Mat. 3:10. Remember Christ cursed the fig-tree for unfruitfulness; and with what curse? Even unfruitfulness. Thus will God do with us. If he finds us unfruitful, he will take away his Spirit, and we shall be unfruitful still; and this[†] by woeful experience we see daily, with many that come indeed within the sound of the word every day, but mend not one jot; nay, they become every day worse. May not God complain, as he did of Judah in the parable of the vineyard, Isa. 5:5, that he hath hedged us and fenced us about with government, and authority, and good laws, and hath taken out of us the stones and thorns of popery, and profaneness; and yet we bring forth wild grapes. And might he not break down the wall; and that justly, and suffer us to be devoured. Surely yes; and yet must needs we acknowledge him to be just. But it follows, the apostle calls Epaphroditus here his,

Fellow-labourer. It is observable here, concerning God's goodness, that he suffers not his faithful labourers to be alone. Christ sends them out by 'two and two,' before his face, Mark 6:7; and this he doth that they might be a mutual aid, strengthening and comforting one another. Thus did Christ in old time, and thus he doth also in later times. He sent Augustine and Jerome, Luther and Melancthon; where, by the way also, observe God's wisdom in sending men of diversity of gifts: Jerome, severe and powerful; Augustine, meek and gentle; Luther, hot and fiery; Melancthon, of a soft and mild spirit;

one to temper the other's over forwardness, and thereby to prevail with some that liked not of the strictness of the other. And by this means God sent teachers suitable to the natures and fitting the several humours of men, among whom some desire to hear the 'sons of consolation,' others the 'sons of thunder.'

Fellow-soldier

Every man's life is a warfare, but most of all and above all, the minister is continually in war and strife. They are soldiers, leaders; they carry the standard, but they of all others are in the most danger, they stand in the brunt of the battle. The reason hereof is: the devil, having malice against the whole church in general, specially aimeth at them that pull men out of his service into the church, even as beasts do rage against such as take their young away from them. It is the minister that treads on the serpent's head: no marvel, then, if the devil endeavoureth to bite them by the heel. Thus dealt he with Christ, when he first set upon his office of mediator; and thus did he with Moses and Paul, in the main plots contrived against them. Such as those are great eyesores to him, and this is it that makes them soldiers and captains. But how? I answer, even as Paul, 1 Cor. 10:4. So the ministers do fight against the strongholds of corruption within us, against natural reason, corrupt affections, proud conceits; they fight against these imaginations, and in them, against the devil himself, who doth* use these instruments to bring his purposes to pass. In ministers, therefore, it is required principally knowledge in the stratagems of the devil, in especial manner in those amongst whom they should converse; by observing the corruptions of the times, places, and the corrupt customs, and also the general corruptions of callings. He, therefore, that would be a good soldier, had need be continually resident in his charge; for the devil having gotten hold once, he seeks to sing them asleep with 'Soul, thou hast much goods,' &c., Luke 12:19. This is dangerous. The minister had need look to it; for men do soothe themselves up in pleasure, thinking that religion may well stand with the love of the world. The watchman must tell them plainly, 'You cannot serve God and

mammon.' If these false conceits, this false divinity that is in us, were once removed, we should easily resist the devil. Our enemies are within us, and therefore what saith Christ? 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath found nothing in me,' John 14:30, and therefore he got nothing. 'Be not deceived,' saith St Paul; thereby shewing that their offence did arise of a false conceit and an error in judgment. If then the ministers be soldiers under Jesus Christ our general,

Use 1. Then all by nature are in an opposite kingdom. We have natural lusts in us against every commandment, and there is no act of faith in us, but we have false conclusions in us to fight against them. We are by nature not only void of all goodness, but we have a nature opposite to all goodness.

Use 2. The second use is for instruction. If we would be brought and redeemed out of this estate, let us not hold forth against the ministry of the gospel. Some will have such carnal conceits, that do what we can, they will not see; they are wilfully blind. Such as these are by the ministry of the gospel hastened to hell. Their course is made more swift, their fall more desperate. Let it not be with us so; but let us come with yielding hearts to the word, not resisting the Spirit. God will not always strive with us, but will give us up to our own courses, to live and die under the dominion of the devil, and so will glorify himself in our confusion. For the word is as the man on the white horse which is spoken of in the Revelation, it goes forth conquering, it condemns men already, Rev. 19:11. It is like Jonathan's bow, it never returns empty from the blood of the slain,* 2 Sam. 1:22. Christ he continues to preach to us here by his Spirit, as he did to those in the time of Noah, 1 Pet. 3:19. If we will not hear, we shall into prison, as they are now without redemption, for blood shall be upon our own heads.

Use 3. In the third place, if ministers be soldiers for us, let us help them by our prayers. 'Curse Meroz,' saith the angel of the Lord. Why? 'Because they came not to help the Lord,' Judges 5:23. If those are cursed with a bitter curse, that came not to help them that fight for

the Lord, what curse remaineth to them that fight against them, and deprave them that fight for the Lord?

Use 4. Lastly, Seeing we are here in a working estate, nay, in a warring estate, it should make us more willing, nay, to desire, to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, where all assaults and trials shall cease, all tears shall be wiped away. And therefore, if we see afflictions, be not terrified, for God will give thee strength here and hereafter. Thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

But your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants

The word in the original that is translated 'messenger,' signifieth an apostle,[†] and it may be taken, either for a messenger sent by them to the apostle Paul, or for a messenger sent by the apostle Paul to them. However, it is an honourable office to be an ambassador to the church of God, or to be a messenger from the church of God; and therefore the Philippians sent him that was most dear to them to the apostle Paul, out of the love they bare to him; and Paul again would not keep him long from them, because he loved them. It is a happy contention, when men contend who shall express most love and affection toward each other. This Epaphroditus brought refreshing to the apostle, being then in durance, from the Philippians. Whence observe,

Doct. 1. That the child of God is subject to wants here whiles he lives. Thus it is with them at all times. Thus is it with us. Sometimes we want this thing, sometimes that; but [he] gives them what they most want. Thus was it with Christ. He wants water, and was constrained to beg it of a poor silly woman, John 4:7, seq. And if it was thus with Christ, we must not look for better. And therefore, let us be comforted against it; for, as it followeth in the next place,

Doct. 2. The children of God shall be satisfied. Rather than Elias shall perish for hunger, the ravens shall feed him, 1 Kings 17:4.*. If rich Dives will not have mercy on such, the brutish dogs shall, Luke 16:21.

For Paul, God provides one Epaphroditus, or Onesiphorus, 2 Tim. 1:16–18. In Acts 16:25, Paul's trials were many; but see, those places which of themselves were places of horror become[†] so comfortable as in them he sings psalms; and those persons that were his tormentors, become his great friends and comforters in his adversities. So that assuredly, one way or other, God will provide for his children, especially for his ministers. And therefore Christ bids his apostles, that when they went to preach, they should not carry anything with them; for well he knew that those that were converted would not suffer them to lack anything that was necessary. It must encourage us to our work. God, he will give us wages, even for the performance of our ordinary duties of our callings, if we do them in obedience to his laws. And indeed, if we could live by faith as we should, we would not care for anything, for God hath promised liberally, and if we could believe, he would not be less than his word, who doth suffer his children to want some few outward things, but it is for their good. And to such God ever gives patience to suffer, and to expect and wait the time of God's visitation.

HE LONGED AFTER YOU ALL

For he longed after you all. - VERSE 26

Epaphroditus, he longed after all the Philippians; yea, there was none but he had a regard of; yea, of the meanest, whom he knew to be as dear in Christ's acceptation as the greatest. For the soul and salvation of the meanest cost him as dear as the salvation of the greatest. Again, the weakest are soonest discontented and most subject thereunto, who therefore ordinarily are soonest brought to complain. It is a ground therefore for the ministers so to behave themselves, that they also have a respect unto all the meanest even as the greatest.

And was full of heaviness

It grieved Epaphroditus to think that they mourned for his sickness. Grief returns by reflection on the party loved. Observe then the wicked nature of men that make music in the sorrow of others. Surely they have a poisonous heart within them; and it ought to reprove those that regard not to grieve those by whom they were brought into the world. Surely if such had the principles of nature within them, such a slavish condition of serving their own unbridled lusts could never settle on them.

Because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick, &c.

Observe here how one wave follows another. After Epaphroditus had endured a long and dangerous voyage, he meets with a long and dangerous sickness. It is the nature of us. Let us not dream of any immunity. God's children are subject to sicknesses while they live. Daily experience proves it; for they have bodies that have the seeds of sickness in them. Their heaven is not here; for they are not clean from corruption, which bringeth death and sickness, by which also God intends good to the body. For if such recover, their bodies are purged from many bad humours; if they do not recover it, God by little and little unties the marriage knot between the soul and the body, and so death comes more easy. And thus also grace is strengthened in the soul; as the outward man is weakened, so is the inward man renewed, 2 Cor. 4:16. For by sickness we are put in mind to make even our accounts with God, and by it he also makes pleasures of the world to be bitter unto us, that we may the more willingly part with them; even as nurses use to anoint the pap with some bitter thing to make the child refuse the pap. Observe in the second place, that God often suffers his children to come to extremities, yea, even to death itself, and into desperate estates. Thus did he suffer Hezekiah, Job, Jonas, David, Daniel, and the 'three children' to run into the jaws of death. Thus suffered he also his disciples to be overwhelmed with water ere he would seem to take notice of it.* Nay, thus suffered he his only Son Christ upon the cross while he said, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and by

this means it comes to pass that when all natural and ordinary means fail them, their trust is not placed on the means, but on some more durable and constant help, upon God's own good will and power. For else our nature is such as soon we should idolise the means, and set them in the place of God, if means should continually recover us. And this offence was Asa[†] guilty of in his sickness; he trusted not the Lord, but physicians. God is jealous of our affections. And hence lest Paul should be lifted up, he gave him over to some base temptation, which he calls 'the messenger of Satan.' In the second place, God suffers his children to fall into extremities, to the end that we having experience of God's helping hand in them, we might come to rely more confidently on him in all adversities. He suffers us to receive the sentence of death in us, to the end that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, 2 Cor. 1:9. For God is never nearer than in extremities. His power is seen in man's weakness. In the third place, God suffers us to fall into extremities that he might try what is in us, and that he might exercise the graces in us. And commonly it is seen, those that rely upon means in such extremities make themselves executioners of themselves. Thus did Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas; for while they trust on the means, they failing them, what marvel if they seeing no remedy run into despair, whenas God's children go to their own Father, exercising their faith, hope, prayers, and all Christian graces and duties. And therefore afflictions are called trials, because they try our graces. For if it were not for them, we should not know what faith, patience, hope, or grace were. Fourthly, hence it comes that the communion between God and us might be more sincere; for whenas nothing is between God and us to rely on, then do we come more sensibly and experimentally to taste, see, and feel God more to our comfort; for where ordinary helps fail, God's help begins.

The use of all this is, That we should not be dismayed, though we be in the most forlorn estate; for in extremity God is most near us, and then shall our graces be strengthened, and we shall have experience of God's favour strengthening us. And in the second place, when thou seest any in great afflictions, pronounce not thy sentence rashly on

him, for even then he may be nearest God: Ps. 41:1, 'Blessed,' saith the prophet, 'is he that considereth the poor aright: the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble.' The papists, indeed, are unmerciful in this kind. See what he is by his diseases and sicknesses, say they of Calvin, who, as Beza writes of him, was much afflicted that way (a). But see even in Epaphroditus, of whom Paul said none was minded like to him, yet he in a good cause was afflicted, and came to great extremities. Seeing then we cannot avoid sickness nor death, but we must all come to it, let us consider briefly how to fit ourselves for it beforehand, that it comes not suddenly, and takes us before we are aware thereof. And herein let us consider what we are to do before sickness, and what in sickness.

(1.) Before sickness labour to make God thy friend, who is Lord of life and death. Is there any hope that a prisoner which abuses the judge continually till he be on the ladder shall have pardon? How can he imagine that a man that all his lifetime followed his own wilful courses of sin, and persecuted, by scandalising and slandering good men; that continually blasphemed God and abused him in his word; how can this man think to command comfort in sickness? How can he think God will be pleased with him? No. All such repentance in sickness may justly be suspected to be hypocritical, that it is made rather for fear of punishment than loathing of sin; and therefore God often leaves such men to despair, and that justly. See what he saith, Prov. 1:25, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh,' and so forth to the end of the chapter. It is just with God, seeing when he called you would not answer, that when you call he should not answer. Be wise therefore to foresee the time to come.

(2.) In the second place, if thou wilt be sick to thy comfort, disease not thy soul beforehand. Those that will avoid sickness, they will abstain from such meats and other things as may increase their malady. Let it be thus in our soul sickness; find what thou art sick of, and take heed of hunting after such temptations and occasions as

may inflame thy soul. Those that are profane swearers and loose livers they think they shall never hear of their wickedness; they think it will be forgotten and borne withal, whenas, even while they are thus wretched, they distemper both their souls and their own bodies also. Thus do they eat their own bane. Take away the strength and power of sickness. Take heed of sin beforehand. For it is the sin that thou now committest that breeds sickness. And he that tempts thee now to sin, when sickness comes will tempt thee to despair of pardon.

(3.) Thirdly, Wean thine affections from the earth; for else when any cross comes, we shall not be able to endure. The saying is true, qui nimis amat, nimis dolet. In what proportion a man loves this world too much in the enjoyment of it, in that proportion he grieves too much at his departure from it. It is an easy matter for one to die that hath died in heart and affection before. And to help this, consider the uncertainty and vanity of these things, and how unable they will be to help thee when thou shalt stand most in need of help. Men when they are well, they consider not what these things will do, but they consider what they cannot do. Friends in adversity are true friends. Alas, when thou art sick, what will thy friends or thy riches do! Yea, what can they do for thy recovery!

(4.) In the fourth place, make up thy accounts daily, that when sickness and weakness comes we have not our greatest and most laborious work to do. It is an atheistical folly to put off all till sickness, whenas they know not but God may call them by sudden death, or if he warns them by sickness, God may suffer their understanding and senses to be so troubled as they shall neither be able to conceive or judge. Now, what madness is it to put off our hardest works to our weakest estate. There is no day but the best of us gather soil, especially those that have much dealing in the world. We had need to wash ourselves daily, and pray to God that he would cleanse us.

(5.) Fifthly, While thou art in health, lay a foundation and ground of comfort for sickness; and still be doing of something that may further thine account, and testify of the reconciliation between God and thee. It is strange to see how many account of death; send for a minister, be absolved, and take the communion, and say, 'Lord, have mercy on me;' and we presently conclude he is assuredly saved.' 'Tis true, these are good if well used; but if there be not a foundation laid, these are but miserable comforters. A good death is ever laid in a good life. Absolution to such as these that so lightly esteem of their estate is no other than as a seal to a blank. It is true, we ought to deny absolution to none as will say they repent; but know this, you may be hypocrites, notwithstanding our absolution. We spend all our wits and powers to get unto us a little worldly pelf; and shall we think to go to heaven, and to be carried thither, through pleasures and ease? No. He that made thee without thee will not save thee without thee. This is one reason why we condemn popery; and though we in show hate it, yet are we popish in our conceits. It is the good that in our health we do that comforts us in our sickness; for considering how it hath pleased God not only to put into our minds but into our wills to do this or that good—Such a good man have I raised; such a poor man have I relieved—we think of it as an evidence of God's Spirit in us. Contrarily, when we think how brave our apparel hath been, how gallant our company, what pleasing plays and spectacles we have seen, what can this comfort us? Nay, will it not discomfort us to consider we have spent our means and time unprofitably; we have delighted in worldly delights? How shall I account with that just Judge for my time and means ill spent? Doth not this argue want of grace, want of God's Spirit? Be wise therefore with Joseph against times of famine, of sickness, of death; prepare such cordials as may strengthen thee. Now,

2. In the next place consider we how we are to behave ourselves in sickness.

(1.) First, therefore, know and consider that as Job saith, 'Sickness comes not from the dust,' Job 5:6; but consider thy ways, especially

thy antecedent course of life, which of late thou hast passed over next before thy sickness. For God corrects not for sin in general so much as for some one sin that rules. If it appears not, pray to God to help thee in this thy search: and when thou hast found out the Jonah, the Achan that thus troubleth thee, 'then judge thyself and justify God,' Josh. 7:19.

(2.) 'Judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord,' 1 Cor. 11:31; lay thyself open by confession; renew thy repentance, and confess thyself thoroughly, and spare not thyself. It is cruelty to be merciful to thyself in this thing. And justify God; say with the holy prophet, 'Just art thou, O Lord, and righteous are thy judgments,' Ps. 119:75; and thus by meeting with God we do allay our sickness. For God uses it no other than as a messenger to call us to meet with him, who else would never look after him; and when the messenger hath his answer, he is gone. When we repent and amend, the sickness departs, unless it be sent for a better end, to call us out of this miserable world, to perfect his promises to us. When therefore God summons thee, do not as the common course is, send first for the bodily physician, and when thou art past natural care,* then for the divine; but contrarily let the divine begin, Ps. 32:3, seq. Until David had confessed his sin, 'his bones waxed old with roaring, and his moisture was turned to the drought of summer.' But when he confessed his sins, 'Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;' for indeed the sickness of the body begins from the iniquity of the soul. Begin with it; look to heal it, and comfort in thy bodily estate will follow; and it is just with God to suffer those that trust so to the physician to continue in hope of health, till they be past recovery, and then to send them to their own places, as it was said of Judas, without thinking of their soul's good. Thus, when thou hast found out thy disease, and laid it open to God,

(3.) In the next place, look for evidences of comfort; desire God to witness to thy soul his peace with her; and upon every warning of sickness, look for thy evidence afresh. This will strengthen thee as it did Job. Whatsoever discomforts he saw, 'yet I know my Redeemer

liveth, and that I shall see him,' Job 19:25. And thou thus going to God, if thou lookest on the earth, thou wilt count all as dross and dung, as Paul did, Philip. 3:8. All worldly matters will be despised in thine eyes.

(4.) In the fourth place, labour for love. Consider how the world is with us. We know not what will become of us. Begin with justice, in giving every man his own, and then with bounty; then forgive. We cannot go to heaven with anger. Thus did Christ, 'Father, forgive them,' Luke 23:34; and Stephen, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,' Acts 7:60. Be far from revenge. If thou lookest to come where Christ is, do as he did. This is hard to fleshly minds, but it must be done. Thou must first deny thyself before thou canst be saved.

(5.) In the next place, labour for patience; but such as must be ruled by reason, and not blockish. To this end consider, first, whence the sickness is. It is from God who is powerful. [Consider] that we shall get nothing by striving or murmuring; that we cannot resist him so but he will have his will fulfilled upon us; and therefore let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Then also, consider it comes from God, who is thy Father, and therefore loveth thee. What then though the cup be bitter? Shall I not drink of the cup which my father giveth me to drink of? Know also, that all the circumstances of thy sickness are ordered by him, the degree and time are limited by him, he knows what is needful and fitting, he is Lord of life and death, resign thyself therefore to him; and then hath God his end he looks for, viz., that his children should cast themselves on his mercy. In the next place, remember that thou deservest much worse, and that he shews thee favour in this gentle correction. Remember what Christ hath done for thee, what he hath suffered, what he hath delivered thee from, and what these things are in comparison of those that thou justly deservest.

Consider also what will be the fruit and end of all these thy troubles and griefs, even the quiet fruits of righteousness; all shall be for our

good. Is it for thy good rather to drink of a bitter potion than sickness? what though it be bitter? It is for my health; God is working my good. Though I feel it not now, hereafter I shall in his good time. And thus shall we justify God, as David did, and behold him as in Christ a most loving Father who was an angry judge, and being turned, all are turned. Corrections they are now, which were before punishments, and they are become trials of graces.

(6.) In the last place, let us being sick be ever heavenly-minded, thinking on nothing but that which may administer to us spiritual comfort. If we have not this, look not to come thither. It is not fit our minds should be on these earthly things, whenas our souls are going or should be going to heaven. It is God's just judgment to suffer men's minds, being ready to depart the world, to be taken up with the world, and as they have lived, so to die. If we would have a pattern of dying well, look on Christ; before his death, when he was troubled, he will have his disciples with him. So when we are vexed with any temptation or trial, use such company as may bring spiritual comfort to thee, and thereby to strengthen thee. As Christ left his 'peace behind him,' John 14:27, let us study also how to preserve peace after our departure. As Christ did all the good he could so long as he lived, so should we, that our sickness may be fruitful of comfort. As Christ studied how to do all his work, thus should we endeavour to do what we have to do, that with a clear conscience we may say as Christ did, 'Father, I have done the work thou gavest me to do,' John 17:4. Christ had care of his disciples and friends before he died: of his mother, 'Woman, behold this son,' saith he, &c., John 19:26. 'I go away, but I will send you the Comforter,' John 15:26. We also ought to be careful for the well-leaving of them whom God hath committed to our care to provide for. Christ was not vindictive; 'Father, forgive them,' saith he, Luke 23:34. So we, specially when we die in peace, forgive all the world, yea, our enemies, for so also did Stephen. Lastly, Christ commends his soul to God: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,' saith he, Luke 23:46; dying, he dies in faith and obedience. Thus also ought we to imitate him; die in faith, be sure of God that he is thy Father, and

obediently submit thy soul into his hands when thou diest. Thus when we die we shall die with comfort, and we shall count it exceeding joy when we fall into any trouble or adversity whatsoever.

But the Lord

Doct. Observe this comfortable exception: God brings his children low, but he raises them up again, if it be for their good: Ps. 118:17, 'I will not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' Nay, then especially, when they are past all worldly means of recovery; and as it is in sickness, thus also is it in other troubles; and this God doth.

Reason 1. First, To glorify his power the more.

2. Secondly, That his enemies might not triumph still in overcoming us.

3. Thirdly, That we being thus delivered, might consecrate our lives and breath to him anew, as having received them from him, even by a new gift.

Use 1. The use hereof is, If God helps us above and against means, we ought to hope above, yea, against hope, believe in the greatest extremities; 'though he kill us, yet trust in him.' God is not tied to Galen's rules.* He can work above physical moans, as he shewed in the cure of Hezekiah. Especially in soul troubles let not our faith fail us, for he hath absolutely promised his helping hand in them.

Had mercy on him

Observe the language of the Holy Ghost, shewing the recovery of Epaphroditus, by the ground and cause of it, 'God had mercy on him.'

Doct. Observe, therefore, God's mercy is the spring of all God's dealing with us. Both his benefits and his corrections of us all comes from his mercy; all his ways are mercy and truth. We are sick, well;

we live, we die; all comes from his mercy. Seeing, therefore, all comes from his mercy, yea, our greatest extremities, because he might have dealt worse with us,

Use 1. Let us look that we wilfully neglect not or cast away mercy, in what estate soever we are.

Doct. In the next place observe, God's mercy extends to this temporal life. We think his mercy is only for things that belong to life everlasting. No. The same love and mercy that gives us heaven, it is the same that gives us our daily bread; and therefore the same faith we must have to God for the things of this life that we have on him for the other life in heaven. And thus did the saints, as we may see in Heb. 11:4, seq.

Use 2. This should direct us not to rest in deliverance, but to look to the ground of it, the mercy of God, and endeavour to taste the love and mercy of God in his gifts, for all his gifts are less than his mercy. This will cause us to have more comfort in our daily bread than the wicked have in all their abundance.

Use 3. Thirdly, We should learn from hence, in giving, to give thy soul and affection; let thy brother have thy heart with thy gifts, and thus shalt thou imitate thy heavenly Father.

Use 4. Lastly, If the very recovery from sickness comes from God's free love and mercy, what can we look for by merit? If health for Epaphroditus his body came from the free mercy of God, how can we expect for to merit the salvation of our souls. No. It must be from God's free grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

And not on him only, but on me also

As if he had said, It may be for him it had been good to have been taken away, and to have remained with Christ, but God had mercy on me in sparing him.

Obj. But it may be objected, How can it be the mercy of God that spared him, whenas God had rather shewed his mercy in taking him away from the evil to come, and in placing him with himself in glory? and Paul, he desired 'to be dissolved and to be with Christ,' and said it was far better for him so to be.

Ans. I answer, life, and especially health, is God's mercy, for without it life is no life. But why, and how?

1. Because by it we recover our spiritual comfort and assurance of heaven, Ps. 39:13. To this end David prayed, 'Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength.'

2. Secondly, In regard of others' health, life is a blessing. Thus, Hezekiah desired it, that he might get assurance of his salvation, and praise the Lord, Isa. 38:22.

3. Thirdly, Life is to be desired as a blessing from God, in regard of the church, that we might do good; for after death we are receivers only, and not doers. All the good we convey to others, we must do it while we live here. Therefore it is not unlawful to desire to live to see thy children brought up in the fear of God, and yet let that be with a resignation to God's will and purpose. We see Christ, that had contrary desires, who came to perform his Father's will and to die willingly, yet he said, 'Let this cup pass from me,' Mat. 26:39; for the soul is to be carried to desire as the objects are offered. If thou beest well, rejoice in it, and count it as God's blessing. If thou beest sick, patiently submit thyself to God's will, and count it as his merciful dealing with thee. Indeed, as we look on death being an enemy to our nature, and a destroyer thereof, we desire it not. Yet, considering it as God's decree and will, say still, 'Thy will be done, O Lord, and not mine,' Paul, he considered for himself it was better to die, but looking to the Philippians, 'nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is better for you,' Phil. 1:24. Learn from hence the sweet estate of God's children; whether he lives or dies, all is mercy; and this they have by being assured they have their part in the covenant of grace. Labour

therefore to find an interest therein for thyself. Observe, in the next place, God does good to us by others, as here he conveys good to Paul by Epaphroditus his life. Let us therefore praise him for parents, friends, benefactors; for by them God hath mercy on us. God uses man for the good of man, that he might knit the communion of saints together more straightly.* No doubt but the apostle Paul had begged Epaphroditus his life from God, and he here acknowledges it as a great mercy of God. Thus ought we to acknowledge God's mercy on us, by taking mercy on others for our sakes.

SORROW ON SORROW

Lest I should have sorrow on sorrow. - VERSE 27

Our blessed apostle had sorrowed much for the sickness of Epaphroditus; if he had died, he had had wave on wave. Observe, God's children have not sorrow on sorrow. We have matter of sorrow while we are here, as our corruptions, and the troubles of the church. These minister unto us matter of grief while we are here in this vale of tears. Let us not therefore be delicate nor dainty. We must sow in tears here, if we would reap hereafter in joy. We must shed tears, if we would hereafter have them wiped away. Yet is the sorrow of a Christian mingled ever with joy to support them. The Lord he weighs and measures the distresses of his children. The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the godly man's back, Ps. 125:3. And this mingled estate must be till we come into heaven, where all tears shall be wiped away.

Obj. But it will be objected, David had sorrow upon sorrow: one depth calls another, saith he, Ps. 42:7.

Ans. I answer, It is true there may be divers occasions of grief, but God doth so temper them as he giveth joy upon joy, grace upon grace, and comfort upon comfort; faith upon faith, patience upon patience; and it is much better to have access of comfort in

extremities than to want extremities and occasions of sorrow, by reason of the good we receive by such trials. And there is no distress but we may gather ground of comfort to ourselves in them. Art thou sick? Bless God that he hath left thee the use of reason and thy wits. Hast thou lost friends, and hath not God taken all away? He leaves thee some, nay, he leaves his Spirit to accompany thee. Paul was in prison, it is true, but did he want comfort? No. God will raise us up with one hand as he casts us down with the other; it is his 'mercy we are not consumed,' Lam. 3:22. But the wicked they shall have sorrow on sorrow. He lets them ruffle a while here, but at length their judgments come suddenly and unavoidably. He hath no mercy for them if he once begins. Thus did he add judgment to judgment on Pharaoh till he was consumed; and therefore upon little griefs they run into desperate courses, as Cain, Ahithophel. God suffers the wicked to add sin to sin, and so doth he add sorrow to sorrow. Lay up this for our comfort against the ill time. God will not suffer us to be tempted above measure. He will either abate our trouble or enlarge our grace, so as it shall not overwhelm us. Note this example of God as one for us to imitate and to follow. When we see any one afflicted, let us not vex them the more by adding sorrow to sorrow. David he complains of a kind of men that were of the nature of the devil, going over where the wall is lowest, like ill humours that resort all to ill affected places. No. God's children have pitiful and compassionate hearts. Examine therefore thy spirit, whether thou canst weep with them that weep; for as the Spirit of God helps us in misery, so do those that are led by his Spirit. It is the custom, and hath been, of God's children, to comfort those in misery. Thus did Job's friends, although they erred in the performance thereof.

I SENT HIM

I sent him therefore more carefully. - VERSE 28

In this verse St Paul sets forth the end of sending Epaphroditus, viz., that they might have the more joy, and he the less sorrow. But it will

be said, Paul had use of Epaphroditus himself; he was in prison; he had none to comfort him. But it is no wonder for him, that could set light by his own soul for God's people, to part with a friend for the comfort of his people; and this ought we also to respect, namely, the comforts of God's people above all. Thus did this apostle. He was content to forbear the joys of heaven for the good of the Philippians, in the first chapter. The children of God are of excellent spirits. They can overcome and deny themselves.

That when you see him again you may rejoice

The Philippians hereby had a double cause of joy. First, sight of their pastor whom they loved. Seeing friends is more comfortable than all ways of hearing from them; and the joys of heaven are commended to us by the beatifical vision we hear of these joys here. But when we see them, then is our joy accomplished. The second cause of joy was in this, that now they should see Epaphroditus, as given them anew and sent from God; whose love, mercy, goodness, and power is more clearly seen in delivering men from danger than in preserving of men from falling into danger. It is more honour to God, and more comfort to men. For the Philippians received him as a token of God's love to them, and as an effect of their prayers. Let us take notice of the enlargement of God's love to us in delivering and enlarging any of our friends to us free from afflictions.

And I may be the less sorrowful

The apostle was, and we must be sorrowful in this world; but sometimes more, sometimes less. For a Christian's estate is ever full of ebbs and floods. But of this I spake formerly.

RECEIVE HIM

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness. - VERSE 29

Our apostle first entreats them generally 'to receive him;' then he shews the manner, 'in the Lord with gladness;' thence he grounds a general, 'make much of such.' But it may be urged—the apostle might have spared this exhortation, for no doubt but the Philippians being glad to see him would receive him. It is true; but this is not all: they must receive him in the Lord,' as a man of God; as a man sent you from God; as a messenger of Christ; and receive him with a holy affection.

Doct. A Christian must do all things in the Lord: marry in the Lord; love in the Lord; salute in the Lord. All matters, both of necessity and courtesy, must be in the Lord. A Christian must 'live in the Lord,' and he must 'die in the Lord.'

Reason. The reason is, for that a Christian in all looks to God. Whatsoever befalls him he receives, whatsoever he does, he does in the Lord, looking only to him, and depending on him. Carnal men contrarily do all things carnally: marries, loves, salutes carnally; he lives carnally, dies carnally. But the Christian's life is ever to die and behold Christ in all things; in all estates; in all his thoughts, words, and deeds; in life, in death. Let this acquaint us with the manner of a Christian's life and estate, and with the language of the Holy Ghost.

And hold such in reputation

Others read it, 'make much of such' (b). The sense is the same with the former. 'Esteem of such as they are;' esteem of such ministers that are faithful as he is; of such Christians as he is; such excellent Christians as he. So as the words have a double reference, as to both his general and particular calling. For his particular calling of the ministry, see how he is formerly commended; that he was painful* and careful, and neglected his own life. Ministers, if they be such, they must be had in repute and esteem. If they be not of the best sort, surely they are of the worst. Angels and good men, none better than the good; none worse than them if they turn. But especially

ministers, if they be not good, they are unsavoury as salt; † neither good for the ground, nor yet for the dunghill.

Reason. The reason of this is, for by such as these are God conveys greatest good to men. He builds by them, he plants by them. They are watchmen, husbandmen, they are God's labourers; nay, they are his angels, discovering to the church the secrets of God's counsel. They are as Job saith, but as 'one among a thousand.' Such surely as these are worthy of all respects.

Obj. But it will be objected, they are ever opposite to us, they cross men.

Ans. Even then when they are most opposite they are to be esteemed the more, for they are 'the light of the world.' Their office is to discover the works of darkness. They are husbandmen to break up the fallow grounds of our hearts; and it is our part to embrace them in doing their duties. For it is a note of a wicked man to count such as these troublers. It was Ahab's speech to Elijah, 1 Kings 18:17. God's children loves them and reverences them when they are most sharp; for they know that they themselves do want such reproofs to check their corruptions; they wish their corruptions might be ripped up thoroughly. This is impossible that carnal men should allow of this. They have beloved sins. When they are met with they are touched to the quick, no marvel therefore if they repine. A true Christian will acknowledge and esteem the meanest part of them blessed and beautiful. The carnal man may esteem ministers indeed, but such as cry 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace,' Jer. 6:14; and surely such a prophet is a fit prophet for such a people. But let the true Christian love and reverence those that are the messengers of peace, and esteem of them by so much the more, by how much their degree in grace is the greater; for there will be an affection suitable to the proportion of grace they have.

And to this end observe with me some motives to incite us to this duty; and first, 1. It is the character of the child of God, and a sign we

are translated from death to life, if we love and reverence the brethren. If we be brethren as we profess ourselves, we are led with the same spirit; and therefore we ought to love those most especial that are means of begetting the grace of the Spirit in us. It is a part of grace to desire grace. Now there is no desire of grace but there must be a love of it; and therefore if we will prove ourselves to be marked with the mark of God in our foreheads, and that we are his children, let us get this character for a witness to us.

2. The second motive in regard of God,—the former was in regard of ourselves,—those that God esteems most we ought to make most account of. God spared not his own Son for their sake. The saints are precious in the eyes of the Lord. And in the second place, Christ he esteems of them above his own blood; he gave himself for them freely. Thirdly, the angels they esteem of them. Christ says, Offend them not, for the angels in heaven behold the face of God continually, Mat. 18:10. Fourthly, the ministers esteem them. 'I suffer all for the elect's sake,' says Paul. The Spirit of God esteems them; they are his temples to dwell in, 2 Tim. 2:10.

3. In regard of themselves they are to be esteemed, they are lively. They have the 'new creature' in them; they have God's Spirit ever in them. All created excellency is as 'the flower of grass.' It withers suddenly. But they have that which continues for ever, grace and the Spirit of God. They have the image of God seated in them. They have the word and the promises made sure to them. They are free-born; free from hell, death, wrath. They are of disposition free; they can want and they can abound. They are rich in the best riches, strong in the greatest strength. They overcome the devil, the world; they overcome and conquer death, who is the king of fears.

4. In the next place, in regard of the good we reap by them they are to be esteemed. God blesses us by them. They are the pillars of this tottering world. In regard of a few of God's elect not yet brought in, this world continues yet; but if the number be accomplished once, God will no longer withhold his coming. Lot's presence in Sodom

stayed God's wrath; he could do nothing till he was gone. So Noah in the old world, Joseph in Egypt, Moses among the Israelites, they stopped the passage of God's wrath; and therefore Job, 22:30, saith, 'He shall deliver the island of the innocent.' They are 'the chariots and horsemen of Israel;' their prayers are our protectors. And thus mayest thou try thyself and thy estate; for dost thou despise those that are good, thou art ranked amongst vile persons. Look 2 Tim. 3:3, and such as are signs of the last times, wherein corruption shall abound. Many things are much set by, but where are those that have their delight set on the excellent of the earth? A wicked man, I deny not, may esteem some one that is good, but it shall not be for that they are good, but it may be for some by-respects of profit or pleasure that they shall reap thereby. They will commend stars that be within their own horizon; praise martyrs being dead, whom, if alive, likely it is they would be the first persecutors of them; for thirty pieces of silver, a little gain, sell even Christ himself, and make shipwreck of their faith. Yet the time will shortly come when these despised shall be had in greatest honour, and those that scorn them now would be glad to keep them company, and ever be with them.

Quest. But it will be asked, Where are these men you speak of? how is it they are not respected?

Ans. I answer, They are not known, 'the world knows them not;'—First, Because it knows not their Father; for if it esteemed him, it would esteem also of them; and therefore, Secondly, they are 'strangers and pilgrims,' although excellent in themselves. Thirdly, 'Their life is hid with Christ,' Col. 3:3. They are eclipsed and disgraced. Disgraces, scandals, miseries, and their own infirmities, these make the children of God to be unknown; yet those that know them will even in their infirmities see many things worth observation and practice. Contrarily in wicked men what is to be respected? Shall we think of them the better for their degree, state, comeliness, riches, or the like? Surely these end in death, whenas all respects are taken away; but goodness is more accomplished in death, it shall never be at an end; and therefore to be the rather respected and esteemed,

and men also as they are good. Wicked men may be also esteemed, but not otherwise than as they are marked with the image of God, as they are in place of magistracy and government; and so they are not esteemed, but their images they carry about with them of superiority. And therefore among these of the like kind those are to be most esteemed that are most good, and this is, as I said before, a note of a good man; for what saith David, Ps. 15:4? 'He shall enter into the tabernacle of God, in whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.' To this end begin with thyself. How dost thou value thyself? Dost thou do it carnally? How then canst thou esteem aright of others? Be therefore of Theodosius his mind, 'value thyself according to thy measure in grace and assurance of salvation' (c). What though the world think basely of thee! So did it of those saints, Heb. 11:38. They thought them unworthy to live. But remember God is not ashamed to be called our God and Father. Heaven is ours, Christ, grace, and glory are all ours. Thus by esteeming thyself aright thou shalt begin to reverence that in others which thou so much accountest of in thyself; and we all together shall find what God esteems most of, and of whom, when we shall be together crowned with joys unspeakable, which are hidden from the eyes of the world. It appears not to them what we shall be, the glory being such and so great as they, judging carnally, cannot conceive thereof.

HE WAS NIGH TO DEATH

Because for the work of Christ he was nigh to death. - VERSE 30

This work of Christ especially aims at works of mercy to Paul while he was in prison, and for these he is said to be nigh to death. By his long and tedious journey he took a sickness, and thereby was nigh to death. And these are called 'the works of Christ;' partly because all good works are from Christ—for he commands them, he allows them,

he did them—and partly also because in the doing of them our aim is at Christ's honour. So then the excellency of good works consists not in doing those which are good in their own nature, but in well doing of them. All our particular actions must be done with having an eye on and a respect to Christ. What if therefore thou doest any good thing with an eye on credit or a good name, nay, if of mere pity, without respect of Christ's command, example, and obedience thereunto; all that thou doest in this manner cannot merit the name of a good work, or a work of Christ. For Christ saith, that which you do to any of his little ones you do to him. And do you think that he will take it done to him, when he seeth in thy heart that thou regardest by-respects, and never intendest him in the thing thou doest? No. You did it for commendation, to get popular applause, or for your own profit, or the like. Let it not be with us in this manner. Let us do all things commanded in the second table, as in obedience of the first, to glorify God. Let us do good works thoroughly, though they cost us labour, cost, and danger; also pray zealously, give cheerfully. 'Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently,' Jer. 48:10. Give freely therefore to every one in whom Christ comes a-begging to thee. 'This is pure religion before God and undefiled, to visit the fatherless and widows,' James 1:27; but see that you keep yourselves 'unspotted of the world.' And these things done as they ought to be, will comfort us on our deathbed, and be an assurance to our consciences of our faith, and will strengthen us when all other works, done for any self-respect, shall be so far from comforting us, as they shall weaken and discomfort us, and bear witness to our guilty consciences of our hypocrisy. But to proceed. It may seem St Paul was ill advised of his work of Epaphroditus, that he called it a work of Christ, when it had like to have cost him his life. Yet ought it not to seem strange, for by this very pattern we learn not to avoid or fly from the doing of any work of Christ; no, though by doing of it we incur danger of our lives. For the best good must take the chief and first place with us; and by how much the soul is more excellent than the body, by so much is the good of the soul to be preferred before the good of the body. He that hates not father, mother, yea, his own life, in respect of God's glory, cannot be the disciple of Christ. God

would have us exercise our judgments in these things beforehand, that we may go about all such things with a holy and zealous resolution. Hence we may gather grounds to answer divers doubts.

1st Quest. As, first, whether in time of persecution we ought to lose our lives or deny the truth?

Ans. To this I answer, out of the example of Epaphroditus, affirmatively, that we ought rather to lose our lives than deny the truth; for God's truth is better than our lives. It was commendable in Priscilla and Aquila that they laid down their necks for Paul's life, Rom. 16:3, 4; much more is the truth of God's word to be esteemed above man's life. And they are counted wise that have that esteem; as the martyrs, whose estate is accounted a blessed estate.

2d Quest. Furthermore, it will be asked, Whether a minister ought to leave his congregation in the time of pestilence, or not?

Ans. I answer, upon the same ground, he ought not; for he is not, in regard of the work of God, to esteem his own life. But so as he is not bound to a particular visitation of every one whom it hath pleased God to visit with sickness, neither ought the sick party to require this at the hands of the pastor; but rather to reserve him to the general good of all of them, and the rather to spare him. Thus did Beza. And in the law the leprous person was to go about and to cry 'Unclean, unclean,' to the end that others might not unawares be polluted by him. And therefore every one ought to be a good husband for himself, to lay up with himself grounds of comfort against such a time as it may please God to afflict him in any such manner. Another question may hence be answered.

3d Quest. Whether a man may equivocate to save his own life?

Ans. I answer: If a man be lawfully called to answer for himself, he must know that he ought to tell the truth, and not to be ashamed thereof; for why do men live but to live honestly, and to keep a good conscience? And it is more necessary that truth should flourish and

be cleared than that thou shouldst live. Those that now are ashamed to confess the truth, the God of truth will be ashamed of them hereafter. And therefore a fourth question may arise.

4th Quest. Whether a man may break prison to save himself?

Ans. I answer: Thou oughtest not to do anything that may endanger another man to save thine own life; and therefore mayest not, by breaking of prison, endanger the jailor's life to save thyself. And the reasons are, for that it shames the truth and equity of thy cause; and therefore when the prison doors were open Paul would not fly, Acts 16:28, seq. Peter did it indeed, he came out of prison; but it was an extraordinary and miraculous deliverance by the command of the angel, Acts 12:11. Secondly, it is a contempt of magistracy and law; for every man is to be governed by and to submit himself to the law.

5th Quest. Again, some have doubted whether a minister, being called to a place of unwholesome air, whether he may leave it.

Ans. I answer: Let them consider before they go whether they shall be able to endure or not; but if they be once called, and are there, let them look to the salvation of God's people, and provide for themselves as they may. We see Epaphroditus neglects his own life for the service of God.

6th Quest. A sixth question or doubt may hence be resolved, Whether, in case of persecution, a minister may fly.

Ans. I answer: We may fly for our own safeties; and a minister may, if there be those left that being good shepherds will stand for the flock, that it be not scattered. Yet if God gives thee a spirit of courage to hold out, consult thou with God by earnest prayer for the direction of his Holy Spirit, and he will assuredly direct thee; for if out of thine own confidence thou shouldst stand out, and afterward give back, it would weaken and discourage others, who else it may be would stand out. Yet if thou beest once taken, whether thou art a minister or not, thou art under the law, thou must obey.

7th Quest. And in the seventh place, we may and ought to be ready to lay down our lives for the commonwealth, for common good is to be preferred before private good. The hand doth endanger itself for the good of the head, and therefore a private man may venture himself to save a public person; and from hence is grounded the lawfulness of a Christian war.

Quest. But it will be asked, How shall we come to this resolution, to lay down our lives for the truth?

Ans. I answer: First, thou must labour to have thy judgment enlightened, discern of the order of good things; and this only a Christian can get to account of his life but slightly in comparison, knowing that it is 'but a vapour that soon vanisheth,' James 4:14, and that the peace of conscience will never leave a man till it hath brought him to eternity. He knows also the terrors of conscience are above all terrors, and that it will never leave him. He knows the world cannot be worth a soul, that nothing can redeem it being once lost; and these things being truly learned, we shall be ready to deny father, mother, yea, our very life, if they once oppose Christ; and thus shall we beforehand get a resolution by daily considering these things, and a mind truly prepared for all trials. And to that end put cases with thyself. Now, what thou wouldst do or suffer rather than be drawn to offend God, if the time of trial were now to come. If thy heart doth tell thee that thou canst forego all, and countest them as nought in respect of Christ, surely God he accepts of this thy resolution. If thou canst not find this in thee, know for a certainty thy faith is but weak. And therefore consider with thyself, that if thou come to this, to lose all for Christ, thou shalt be no loser. The peace of conscience is above all good that can be desired; and [consider] that thy life is not thine own, for both it, our estate, friends, are all of God's gift to us, who may take them when he will. But if they be lost for God's service, thou shalt be no loser. It cannot stand with God's justice to suffer it. Let this bring shame upon many that will do nothing for the church, lose no credit amongst the wicked men, part with no jot of their goods, take no pains nor labour. We see it that

martyrs they will spend their blood. Esther counted not her life dear unto her: 'If I perish, I perish,' 4:16. And yet these are loath to venture displeasure of some inferior, mean person. How can such ever think to get assurance of salvation? In this case those that thus love their lives do hate them, and that which they fear shall fall suddenly on them; as it was with those that, starting aside for fear, and denying their profession, thinking to save themselves from the fire, they fell into a worse fire, the hell of a guilty conscience, which cannot be quenched, nor they made insensible thereof.

MONERGISM BOOKS

Work Out Your Salvation With Fear and Trembling, by Richard Sibbes, Copyright © 2022

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions September 2022. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068

