



THE RIGHTEOUS  
MAN'S REFUGE

\*\*\*\*\*

JOHN FLAVEL



THE RIGHTEOUS  
MAN'S REFUGE

\*\*\*\*\*

JOHN FLAVEL

# The Righteous Man's Refuge

by John Flavel

## Table of Contents

[The Epistle to the Reader](#)

[Chapter I: The Text Considered](#)

[Chapter II: Times and Seasons Appointed by God for the Pouring out of His Indignation Upon the World](#)

[Chapter III: God's Own People Ought to be Suitably Affected with those Judgments that Befal the Nation](#)

[Chapter IV: God Hath a Special and Peculiar Care of His Own People in the Days of His Indignation](#)

[Chapter V: God Usually Premonisheth the World, Especially His Own People, of His Judgments Before they Befal Them](#)

[Chapter VI: God's Attributes, Promises, and Providences, are Prepared for the Security of his People](#)

[Chapter VII: Divine Wisdom, as a Second Chamber of Security to the Saints in Difficult Times](#)

[Chapter VIII: Divine Faithfulness, as a Third Chamber of Security to the People of God, in Times of Distress and Danger](#)

[Chapter IX: The Unchangeableness of God, as a Fourth Chamber of Refuge and Rest in Times of Trouble](#)

[Chapter X: The Care of God for His People in Times of Trouble, as the Fifth Chamber of Rest to Believers](#)

[Chapter XI: The Love of God, as a Resting-Place to Believing Souls in Evil Times](#)

[Chapter XII: Consectaries](#)

## **THE EPISTLE TO THE READER**

Christian Reader,

"IF\* Heinsius, when he had shut up himself in the library at Leyden, reckoned himself placed in the very lap of eternity, because he conversed there with so many Divine souls, and professed he took his seat in it with so lofty a spirit and sweet content, that he heartily pitied all the great and rich men of the world, that were ignorant of the happiness he there daily enjoyed;" How much more may that soul rejoice in its own happiness, who hath shut himself up in the chambers of the Divine Attributes, and exerciseth pity for the exposed and miserable multitude that are left as a prey to the temptations and troubles of the world.

That the days are evil, is a truth preached to us by the convincing voice of sense; and that they are like to be worse, few can doubt that look into the moral causes of evil times, the impudent height of sin, or into the prophecies relating to these latter days; for whom the sharpest sufferings are appointed to make way for the sweetest mercies. A faithful<sup>†</sup> watchman of our own hath given us fresh and late warning in these words of truth: Hath God said nothing? doth faith see nothing of a flood coming upon us? Is there such a deluge of sin among us, and doth not that prophesy to us a deluge of wrath?

Lift up your eyes, Christians, stand, and look through the land, eastward and westward, northward and southward, and tell me what you see? Behold, a flood cometh: a flood of sin is already broken forth upon us, the fountains of the great deeps are broken up, and the windows of hell are opened, &c. In such an evil day as this is, happy is the soul that hath made God its refuge, even the most high God its habitation. He shall sit Noah-like, *Mediis tranquillus in undis*, safe from the fear of evil. In consideration of the distress of many unprovided souls for the misery that is coming on them, and not knowing how short my time will be useful to any, (for I know it cannot be long) I have endeavoured once more the assistance of poor Christians in these two small treatises, one of fear, the other of preparation for the worst of times; which, it may be, is the last help I shall this way be able to afford them. It is therefore my earnest request to all that fear the Lord, and tremble at his word, to redeem their time with double diligence, because the days are evil; to clear up their interest in Christ and the promises, lest the darkness of their spiritual estate, meeeting with such a night of outward darkness, overwhelm them with terrors insupportable. Some help is offered in this treatise to direct the gracious soul to its rest in God: May the blessings of his Spirit accompany them, and bless them to the soul of him that readeth; it will be a matter of joy beyond all earthly joys to the heart of,

Thy friend and servant in Christ,

JOHN FLAVEL.

Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over-past. ISA. 26:20

# CHAPTER I

Wherein the literal and real importance of the text is considered, the doctrine propounded, and the method of the following discourse stated.

Sect. I. MAN being a prudent and prospecting creature, can never be satisfied with present safety, except he may also see himself well secured against future dangers. Upon all appearance of trouble, it is natural for him to seek a refuge, that he may be able to shun what he is loath to suffer, and survive those calamities which will ruin the defenceless and exposed multitude. Natural men seek refuge in natural things. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit," Prov. 18:11. Hypocrites make lies their refuge, and under falsehood do they hide themselves, Isa. 28:15. not doubting but they shall stand dry and safe, when the over-flowing flood lays all others under water. But,

Godly men make God himself their hiding place, to him they have still betaken themselves in all ages, as often as calamities have befallen the world, Psal. 46:1. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." As chickens run under the wings of the hen for safety when the kite hovers over them, so do they fly to their God for sanctuary, Psal. 56:3. "At what time I am afraid I will trust in thee;" q. d. Lord, if a storm of trouble at any time overtake me, I will make bold to come under thy roof for shelter; and indeed not so bold as welcome: it is no presumption in them after so gracious an invitation from their God, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers."

My friends, a sound of trouble is in our ears, the clouds gather and blacken upon us more and more: Distress of nations with perplexity seems to be near, our day hastens to an end, and the shadows of the night are stretching forth upon us. What greater service therefore can I do for your souls, than by the light of this scripture (as with a

candle in my hand) to lead you to your chambers, and shew you your lodgings in the attributes and promises of God, before I take my leave of you, and bid you good night.

O with what satisfaction should I part with you, were I but sure to leave you under Christ's wings! It was Christ's lamentation over Jerusalem that they should not be gathered under his wings, when the Roman eagle was ready to hover over that city; and you know how dear they paid for their obstinacy and infidelity. Be warned by that dreadful example, and among the rest of your mercies bless God heartily for this, that so sweet a voice sounds from heaven in your ears this day, this day of frights and troubles; "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers," &c.

This chapter contains a lovely song fitted for the lips of God's Israel, notwithstanding their sad captivity; for their God was with them in Babylon, and cheered their hearts there with many promises of deliverance, and in the mystical sense it relates to the New Testament churches, of whose troubles, protections, and deliverances, the Jews in Babylon were a type.

This chapter, though full of excellent and seasonable truths, will be too long to analyze; it shall suffice to search back only to the 17th verse, where you find the poor captivated church under despondency of mind, comparing her condition to that of a woman in travail, who hath many sharp pains and bitter throes, yet cannot be delivered, much like that in 2 Kings 19:3. "The children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth."

Against this discouragement a double relief is applied in the following verses; the one is a promise of full deliverance at last, the other an invitation into a sure sanctuary and place of defence for the present, until the time of their full deliverance came. The promise we have in verse 19. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust," &c. Their captivity was a civil death, and Babylon as a grave to them. So

it is elsewhere described, Ezek. 37:1, 2, 3, 14. "I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." And therefore their deliverance is carried under the notion of a resurrection in that promise.

Object. Yea, (might they reply) the hopes of deliverance at last is some comfort, but alas, that may be far off: How shall we subsist till then?

Solut. Well enough, for as you have in that promise a sure ground of deliverance at last, so in the interim here is a gracious invitation into a place of security for the present, Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers. In which invitation four things call for our close attention.

1. The form of the invitation, including in it the qualified subject, Come, my people. God's own peculiar people, who have chosen God for their protection, and resigned up themselves sincerely to him in the covenant, are the persons here invited, the same which he before called the righteous nation that kept the truth, ver. 2. he means those that remained faithful to God, as many of them did in Babylon, witness their sorrow for Sion, Psal. 137 per totum; and their solemn appeal to God, that their hearts were not turned back, nor had their steps declined though they were sore broken in the place of dragons, and covered with the shadow of death, Psal. 44:18, 19, 20. These are the people invited to the chambers of security. And the form of invitation is full of tender compassion; Come, my people; like a tender father who sees a storm coming upon his children in the fields, and takes them by the hand saying, Come away, my dear children, hasten home with me, lest the storm over-take you; or as the Lord said to Noah before the deluge, Come thou and all thy house into the ark, and God shut him in, Gen. 7:1, 16. This is the form of invitation, Come, my people.

2. The privilege invited to; Enter thou into thy chambers. There is some variety, and indeed variety rather than contrariety in the



exposition of these words.

In this all are agreed, that by their chambers is not meant the chambers of their own houses, Ezek. 21:14. for alas, their houses were left unto them desolate; and if not, yet they could be no security to them now, when neither their own houses nor their fortified city was able to defend them before.

Grotius\* expounds it of the grave, and makes these chambers the same with the chambers of death. *Ite in cubicula, i.e. sepulchra vestra.* The grave indeed is a place of security, where God sometimes hides some of his people in troublesome times, as it is plain in Isa. 57:1, 2. but I cannot allow this to be the sense of this text; God doth not comfort his captives with a natural against a civil death, but with protection in their troubles upon earth, as is evident from the scope of the whole chapter.

By chambers therefore, others understand the chambers of Divine Providence, where the saints are hid in evil days. So our Annotators on the place, and no doubt but this is in part the special intendment of the text.

Others understand the attributes and promises of God to be here meant, as well as his providence. And I conceive all three make the sense of the text full, i.e. the Divine attributes engaged in the promises, and exercised or actuated in the providences of God; these are the sanctuaries and refuges of God's people in days of trouble.

Calvin understands it of the quiet repose of the believer's mind in God, but that is rather the effect of his security, than the place of it. It is God's attributes, or his name (which is the same thing) to which the righteous fly and are safe, Prov. 18:10.

Object. But you will, say, why are they called their chambers? Those attributes are not theirs, but God's.

Solut. The answer is easy; though they be God's properties, yet they are his people's privileges and benefits; for when God makes over himself to them in covenant to be their God, he doth, as it were, deliver to them the keys of all his attributes for their benefit and security; and is as if he should say, my wisdom is yours, to contrive for your good; my power is yours, to protect your persons; my mercy yours, to forgive your sins; my all-sufficiency yours to supply your wants; all that I am, and all that I have, is for your benefit and comfort. These are the chambers provided for the saints' lodgings, and into these they are invited to enter. Enter thou into thy chambers. By entering into them understand their actual faith exercised in acts of affiance and resignation to God in all their dangers. So Psal. 56:3. "At what time I am afraid (saith David) I will trust in thee:" q. d. Lord, if a storm come I will make bold to shelter myself from it under thy wings by faith; look, as unbelief shuts the doors of all God's attributes and promises against us; so faith opens them all to the soul: and so much of the privilege invited to, which is the second thing.

3. We have here a needful caution for the securing of this privilege to ourselves in evil times, shut thy doors about thee. Or as the Syriac renders בעדך behind or after thee, i.e. saith Calvin, *Diligenter cavendum ne ulla rimula diabolo ad nos pateat*. Care must be taken that no passage be left open for the devil to creep in after us, and drive us out of our refuge; for so it falls out too often with God's people when they are at rest in God's name or promises, Satan creeps in by unbelieving doubts and puzzling objections, and beats them out of their refuge back again into trouble; it is therefore of great concernment, in such times especially, not to give place to the devil, as the phrase is, Eph. 4:17. but cleave to God by a resolved reliance.

4. Lastly, We are to note with what arguments or motives they are pressed to betake themselves to this refuge. There are two found in the text, the one working upon their fear, the other upon their hope.

1. That which works upon their fear is a supposition of a storm coming, the indignation of God will fall like a tempest; this is supposed in the text, and plainly expressed in the words following, "For the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth," ver. 21.

2. The other is fitted to work upon their hope, though his indignation fall like a storm, yet it will not continue long; it shall be but for a moment, better days and more comfortable dispensations will follow. From all which the general observation is this,

Doct. That the attributes, promises, and providences of God, are the chambers of rest and security, in which his people are to hide themselves, when they foresee the storms of his indignation coming upon the world.

"The name of the Lord (saith Solomon) is a strong tower; the righteous run into it, and are safe," Prov. 18:10. And his attributes are his name, Exod. 34:5. For by them he is known as a man is known by his name, and this his name is a strong tower for his people's security; now what is the use and end of a tower in a city, but to receive and secure the inhabitants when the outworks are beaten to the ground, the wall scaled, and the houses left desolate?

And as it is here resembled to a tower, so in Isa. 33:16. it is shadowed out unto us by a munition of rocks, "His place of defence shall be a munition of rocks." How secure is that person that is environed with rocks on every side? Yea, you will say, but yet a rock is but a cold and barren refuge; though other enemies cannot, yet hunger and thirst can invade and kill him there. No, in this rock is a storehouse of provision, as well as a magazine for defence; so it follows, "Bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure."

And sometimes it is resembled to us by the wings of a fowl, spread with much tenderness over her young for their defence, Ps. 57:1. "Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these

calamities be overpast." So Psal. 17:8. "Keep me as the apple of thine eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." No part of the body hath more guards upon it than the apple of the eye. God is as careful to preserve his people as men are to preserve their eyes; and he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. But we need not go from one metaphor to another to shew you where the saint's refuge is in time of danger; you have a whole bundle of them lying together in that one scripture, Psal. 18:2. "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Where you find all kinds of defence, whether natural or artificial, under a pleasant variety of apt metaphors, ascribed to God for the security of his people.

Now for the casting of this great point into as easy and profitable a method as I can; I shall resolve this general truth into these following propositions, which are implied or expressed in the text and doctrine thence deduced; and the first is this;

### Propositions

Prop. 1. That there are times and seasons appointed by God for the pouring out of his indignation upon the world.

Prop. 2. That God's own people are concerned in, and ought to be affected with those judgments.

Prop. 3. That God hath a special and particular care of his people in the days of his indignation.

Prop. 4. That God usually premonishes the world, especially his own people, of his judgments before they befall them.

Prop. 5. That God's attributes, promises, and providences are prepared for the security of his people, in the greatest distresses that befall them in the world.

Prop. 6. That none but God's people are taken into those chambers of security, or can expect his special protection in evil times.

And then I shall apply the whole in the proper uses of it.

## CHAPTER II

Demonstrating the first proposition, that there are times and seasons appointed by God for the pouring out of his indignation upon the world.

Sect. I. THIS is plainly implied in the text, that there are times of indignation appointed to befall the world; yea, and more than this; not only that such times shall come, but the duration and continuance is also under an appointment. "Hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be over-past." The prophet tells us in Zeph. 2:2. that these stormy times are under a decree, and that decree is there compared to a pregnant woman which is to go out her appointed months, and then to travail and bring forth: Even so it is in the judgments God brings upon the world. We see them not in the days of provocation, sed adhuc foetus in utero latent, but all this while they are in the womb of the decree, and at the appointed season they shall become visible to the world. As there are in nature fair halcyon days, and cloudy, over-cast, and stormy: So it is in providences, Eccl. 7:14. "God hath set the one over-against the other." Yea, one is the occasion of the other; for look as the sun in a hot day exhales abundance of vapours from the earth and sea, these occasion showers, thunder, and tempests, and those again clear the air, and dispose it to fair weather again. So it is here, prosperity is the occasion of abundance of sin, this brings on adversity from the justice of God to correct it; adversity being sanctified, humbles, reforms, and purges the people of God, and this again by mercy procures their prosperity: So you find the account stated in Psal.

107:17. "Fools because of their iniquities are afflicted, then they cry to the Lord in their troubles, and he saveth them out of their distresses."

And this appointment of times of distress is both profitable and necessary for the world, especially God's own people in it.

In general, hereby the being and righteousness of God is cleared and vindicated against the atheism and infidelity of the world, Psal. 9:16. "The Lord is known by the judgments that he executeth." Impunity is the occasion of many atheistical thoughts in the world, Jer. 48:11. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth; and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed." So Psal. 55:19. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." Kingdoms, families, and particular persons, like standing water and ponds, are apt to corrupt by long continued peace and prosperity; the Lord therefore sees it necessary to purge the world by his judgments; "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Those sermons that God preaches from heaven by the terrible voice of his judgments, startle and rouse the secure world, more than all the warnings and exhortations of his ministers could ever do. Those that slept securely under our ministry, will fear and tremble under his rods; those that are without faith, are not without sense and feeling, their own eyes will affect their hearts, though our words could make no impression on them.

Sect. 2. But of what use soever these national judgments are to others, to be sure they shall be beneficial to God's own people; when others die by fear, they shall live by faith; if they be baneful poison to the wicked, they shall be healthful physic to the godly. For,

1. By these calamities God will mortify and purge their corruptions; this winter weather shall be useful to destroy and rot those rank weeds, which the summer of prosperity bred, Isa. 27:9. "By this

therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." Physic in its own nature is griping and unpleasant, but very useful and necessary to purge the body from noxious and malignant humours, which retained, may put life itself in hazard: And it is with the body politic, as with the body natural.

2. National judgments drive the people of God nearer to him, and to one another; they drive the people of God to their knees, and make them pray more frequently, more fervently, and more feelingly than they ever were wont to do; in this posture you find them in ver. 8, 9. of this chapter. "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee, the desire of our souls is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."

3. In a word, by these distractions and distresses of nations, the people of God are more weaned from the world, and made to long more vehemently after heaven; being now convinced by experience that this is not their rest. When all things are tranquil and prosperous, God's own people are but too apt to fall asleep and dream of pleasure and rest on earth, to say as Job in his prosperity, "I shall die in my nest, I shall multiply my days as the sand." And then are their heads and hearts filled with many projects and designs, to promote their comforts, and make provision for their accommodations on earth: the multiplicity of earthly cares and comforts take up their time and thoughts too much, and make them that they mind death and eternity too little. But saith God, this must not be so, things must not go on at this rate, the prosperous world must not thus enchant my people; I must imbitter the earth that I may thereby sweeten heaven the more to them; when they find no rest below, they will surely seek it above.

These, and such like, are the gracious designs and ends of God in shaking the world by his terrible judgments; but yet, though national troubles must necessarily come, the wisest of men cannot positively determine the precise time of those judgments; we may indeed, by

the signs of the times, discern their near approach; yet our judgment can be but probable and conjectural, seeing there are tacit conditions in the dreadfullest threatenings, Jer. 18:7, 8. Jonah 3:9, 10. And such is the merciful nature of God, that he oft-times turns away his anger from his people, when it seems ready to pour down upon them, Psal. 78:38. The consideration whereof no way indulges security, but encourages to repentance and greater fervency in prayer.

## CHAPTER III

Opening and confirming the second proposition, viz. That God's own people are much concerned in, and ought to be suitably affected with those judgments that befall the nation wherein they live.

Sect. I. IF God's people have no concernment in these things, why are they called upon in this text, to turn into their chambers, hide themselves, and shut their doors, till the indignation be over-past? Certainly though God hath better provided for them than others, yet they are two ways concerned in these cases as much as others: viz.

1. Upon a political account.

2. Upon a religious account

1. Upon a political account, as they are members of the community, and so are equally concerned in the good or evil that befalls the nation in which they live; their cabins must follow the fate of the ship in which they sail: their lives, liberties, estates, and interest sink and swim with the Public. The good figs were carried away with the bad, Jer. 24:5. In these outward respects it often-times bears as hard upon the righteous as upon the wicked. Ezek. 21:3. "I will draw forth my soul out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked." In these outward respects, as it is with the good, so with the sinner, Eccl. 9:2. The same fire that burns the dry tree,



often-times burns the green tree too, Ezek. 20:47. Grace is above all hazards, but creature-enjoyments and comforts are not. The sins of the Sodomites involves not only their own houses and estates, but Lot's also, in the ruin and overthrow; wicked men often fare the better for the company of the godly, and the godly often fare the worse for the company of the wicked.

And it is not to be wondered at, if we consider that even the saints themselves have an hand in the provocation of these judgments, as well as others, Deut. 32:19. "And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters." We have contributed to the common heap of guilt, and therefore must justify God if we partake with others in the common calamity.

2. They are greatly concerned in such judgments upon a religious and Christian account, for it is usual for the flood of God's judgments not only to sweep away our civil and natural, but our spiritual and best enjoyments and comforts. Thus the ordinances of God ceased in Babylon, and there the faithful bewailed their misery upon that account, Psal. 137. *per totum*; "we wept when we remembered thee, O Zion." Not only Israel flies, but the ark is taken prisoner by the enemy, 1 Sam. 4:11. And you find the people of God more deeply concerned upon this account, than for all their outward losses and other sufferings, Zeph. 3:18. "I will gather them of thee that are sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, to whom the reproach of it was a burthen." For by how much our souls are more excellent than our bodies, and the concerns of eternity over-balance those of time; by so much the more are we concerned in the loss of our spiritual, more than of our temporal mercies and enjoyments.

Grace indeed cannot be lost, but the means and instruments by which it is begotten may; the golden candlestick is one of the moveables in God's house, Rev. 2:5.

Thus you see a two-fold concernment that the people of God have in the effects of national judgments.

Sect. 2. This being so, how should all that fear God be affected with the appearances and signs of his indignation? So was David, Psal. 119:120. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." He that feared not a bear, a lion, a Goliath, yet trembleth at God's judgment. So did Habakkuk, chap. 3 ver. 16. "When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones." Expressions denoting the deepest seizures of fear and greatest consternations: not that I would persuade you to such slavish fear or unchristian dejection, as it is not only sinful in itself, but the cause and inlet of many other sins; but to a due sense both of the evils of misery that will befall the nation when God's indignation comes upon it; and the evils of sin that have incensed it; and to such a fear of both as may seasonably awaken us to the use of all preventing remedies. And, First,

1. O that all would lay to heart the national miseries that God's indignation threatens upon us. It is said, Psal. 107:34. "A fruitful land is turned into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." It was long since told England by one of its faithful watchmen\*, "The nation and church in which we are, are the common ship in which we are all embarked, and if this in judgment be cast away, whether dashed against the rocks of any foreign power, or swallowed up in the quicksands of domestic divisions, it must need hazard all the passengers: Or if you were sure, that for your parts you might be safe, would it not be a bitter thing to stand upon the shore, and see such a glorious vessel as this nation is, to be cast away? To see this glorious land defaced, the blessed gospel polluted, the golden candlestick removed, it cannot but affect men that have any bowels.

Or if this move you not, yet to see a stranger to lord it in thy habitation, and thy dwelling place to cast thee out; for your delightful dwellings, your fruitful, pleasant, and well tilled fields to be made a prey; for you to sow, and another to reap, Impius has segetes; for the delicate women upon whom the wind must not blow, to be exposed to the lust and cruelty of an enemy, and be glad to fly

away naked to prolong a miserable life, which they would be glad to part with for death, were it not for fear of the exchange. For the tender mother to look upon the child of her womb, and consider, must this child in whom I have placed the hope of my age; for,

Omnis in Ascanio stat chari cura parentis;

'He that hath been so tenderly brought up, must he fall into the rough hands of a bloody soldier, skilful to destroy? It had been well for me if God had given me dry breasts, or a miscarrying womb, rather than to bring forth children unto murderers; or if you might be safe, how could you endure to see the miseries that should come upon your people, and the destruction of your kindred.' Thus far he. But alas! What security have any of us as to our earthly comforts from the common calamity? We may please ourselves as Baruch did, Jer. 45:4, 5. and dream of exemption, but by so much the greater will our distress be, when it shall surprize us.

2. You that are the people of God ought to be deeply affected with the spiritual miseries that threaten us in the day of God's indignation: do you consider what the removing the candlestick out of its place is? A departing gospel, the going down of the sun upon the prophets, the loss of your sweet sabbaths and gospel feasts, and the gross darkness of popery to fill the earth: O it is hard parting with these things. It is said, 1 Sam. 7:2. when the ark was removed, "that all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Pity your own souls, and be deeply affected with the misery of others, the poor Christless world who are like to perish for want of vision, Prov. 29:18. In the year 1072, saith Matthew Paris, preaching was suppressed at Rome, and then letters were framed by some as coming from hell, in which the devil gives them thanks for the multitude of souls sent to him that year.

3. But especially labour to affect your hearts with the sins that have incensed God's indignation: So did the saints in Jerusalem, Ezek. 9:4. they sighed and mourned for all the abominations committed in it. So did Lot, 2 Pet. 2:7. "He vexed his righteous soul from day to

day." So did David, Psal. 119:36. "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." O who that loves God can refrain tears, to see the God of pity, the God of tender mercies, a Father full of bowels of compassion, so incensed and provoked to indignation! Oh, it is an heart-melting consideration where there is any ingenuity. If our afflictions grieve God to the heart, as it doth, Judges 10:16. our souls should be grieved for his dishonour.

4. To conclude, get upon your hearts such a sense of God's indignation as may quicken you to the use of preventing duties. So Amos 4:12. "Because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." So the prophet, Zeph. 2:1, 2. "Gather yourselves before the decree bring forth." It was Moses's honour to stand in the breach, Psal. 106:23. And Abraham's to plead so with God, though he did not prevail.

## CHAPTER IV

Confirming the third proposition. viz. That God hath a special and peculiar care of his own people in the days of his indignation.

Sect. I. PROPRIETY and relation engage care and solicitude in times of danger; we see God hath put such a storge, and inclination into the very creatures, that they will expose themselves to preserve their young; and it cannot be imagined that the Fountain of pity which dropt this tenderness into the bowels of the creatures, should not abound with it himself; is there such strong inclination in the very birds of the air, that they will hazard their own lives to save their young; much more is God solicitous for his people, Isa. 31:5. As birds flying, &c. to their nest when their young are in danger, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem. No mother is more solicitous for her dearest child in danger and distress, than the Lord is for his people, Isa. 40:15. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should

not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee." A woman [the more affectionate sex] forget her child, a piece of herself, her sucking child, which, together with milk from her breast, draws love from the heart! This may rather be supposed, than that the Lord should forget his people.

Two things must here be cleared. 1. That it is so. 2. Why it is so.

1. That it is so, will appear from,

1. Scripture emblems.

2. Scripture promises.

3. Scripture instances.

1. Scripture emblems; and among many, I will, upon this occasion, single out two or three principal ones. In Ezek. 5:1, 2, 3. "And thou son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head, and upon thy beard, then take thee balances to weigh and divide the hair; thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled; and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife; and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind, and I will draw out a sword after them; thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts." You find this truth shadowed out in this excellent emblem; Jerusalem, the capital city, is the head; the numerous inhabitants are the hair; the King of Babylon the razor; the weighing it in balances is the exactness of God's procedure in judgment with them; the fire, knife, and wind, are the various judgments to which the people were appointed; the hiding of a few in the prophet's skirt, is the care of God for the preservation of his own remnant in the common calamity. This is one emblem clearing this point. And then Ezek. 9:3, 4. the same truth is presented to us in another emblem, as lively and significant as the former. "And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth towards the north, and every man a slaughter-weapon in his hand, and one

among them was clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, and they went in, and stood before the brazen altar; and the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house, and he called to the man clothed in linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; "and the Lord said unto him, go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." The men that had the charge of the city are the angels appointed for that service; some with slaughter-weapons, whose work it was to destroy; but one among them had a writer's inkhorn by his side, and he was employed to take the names and mark the persons of God's faithful ones among them, whom the Lord intended to preserve and hide in that common overthrow and desolation of the city, and these were to be all marked, man by man, before the destroying angel was to begin his bloody work. Oh! see the tender care of God over his upright mourning servants! Once more, the same truth is represented in a third emblem, Mal. 3:17. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I make up my jewels, and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him:" where the world is compared to an house on fire; God to the master and father of the family, the wicked to the useless lumber therein; the saints to the children and jewels in the house; about these his first and principal care of preservation is exercised, these he will be sure to save, whatever become of the rest. Thus you have the chosen emblems that illustrate this comfortable truth.

2. As these scripture-emblems illustrate it, so there are many excellent scripture-promises to confirm it, Isa. 32:2. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place." This man is the man Christ Jesus; the tempests spoken of, are the miseries and calamities of war, which make the land on which it falls, an hot, dry and weary land; in the midst and rage whereof, Christ shall be to his faithful ones a covert for protection, a river of water for supply, and a shadow for refreshment; that is to say, whatsoever shall be necessary either for

their safety or comfort. Christ is not only a shadow to his people from the wrath of God, but also from the rage of men. Again, Zech. 2:5. "I will be a wall of fire round about:" alluding to travellers in the desert, who, to prevent danger from wild beasts in the night, use to make a circular fire round about the place where they lie down to rest, and this fire was as a wall to secure them. You have the like gracious promise also made to the poor captivated church, in Ezek. 11:16. "Although I have cast them far off, among the Heathen, and scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

A little sanctuary. The\* word is variously rendered and expounded; some adverbially, and render it paulisper, a sanctuary for a little while, viz. during their danger, at the shortness of which this adverb points: so Junius. Others adjectively, as we translate it, templum paucorum, as Vatablus. There was but an handful of them, and God would be as a sanctuary to secure and protect that remnant.

3. And all these promises have in all ages been faithfully fulfilled to the saints. You have an excellent scripture for this, 2 Pet. 2:4, 5, 6. when the flood was brought upon the old world, there was one Noah a righteous man in it, and for him God provided an ark. When Sodom was overthrown, there was one Lot in it, a just man, and God secured him out of danger; upon which that comfortable conclusion is built, ver. 9. "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly." When Jerusalem was destroyed, a Pella was provided as a refuge for the godly there. Remarkable is that place to this purpose, Isa. 25:4. "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." And this hath God been not only once or twice, but in all ages, Psal. 90:1. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations;" or as the Hebrew, "in generations and generations." What he hath been in former generations to his distressed people, that he is, and will be without alteration in all generations.

Section II. Yet we must remember, that all who are preserved in common calamities, are not the people of God; nor are all that are indeed his people preserved; he hath people enough to divide into two ranks, as the husbandman his corn, some for the mill, and some to reserve for seed. There be stars enough in the heaven to shine in both hemispheres, and there are saints enough in the world, some to shine in heaven, and some to preserve the church on earth.

1. All that are preserved are not the people of God. In the ark a wicked Ham was preserved; and those that were preserved in Egypt, many of them were afterwards destroyed for their unbelief, Jude 5. So Ezekiel's vision, a part even of those hairs which were spared were afterwards cast into the fire, Ezek. 5:4. Preservation from the dominion of sin and the wrath to come, is peculiar to God's own people; but as for temporal deliverances, we cannot infer that conclusion.

2. Nor yet can we say that all God's people shall be preserved; that promise, Zeph. 2:3. leaves it upon a may-be; many a precious Christian hath fallen in the common calamity; they have been preserved in, but not from trouble.

But it is usual with God to preserve some in the sorest judgments: and the grounds of it are,

1. Because some must be left as a seed to propagate and preserve the church, which is perpetual, and can never fail; he never so overthrows nations as Sodom was overthrown, Isa. 1:9. This was the ground of that promise, Jer. 30:11. "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee, though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee." And of that plea, Amos 7:2. "O Lord God forgive, I beseech thee; by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." Except the Lord had left a small remnant, we had been as Sodom. Remarkable to this purpose is that scripture, Isa. 6:13. "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as the teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is



in them when they cast their leaves; so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." This preserved remnant is the holy seed by which the church is propagated and continued, Psal. 102:28.

2. Because God will, even in this world, own and reward the fears and sorrows of his people for the sins of the times, and sufferings of the church, with the joy and comfort of better times, and a participation of Sion's consolation; so Isa. 66:10. Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, ye that have mourned for her. They that have sown in tears, do sometimes live to reap in joy, Psal. 125:6. They shall say as Isa. 25:9. "Lo this is our God, we have waited for him, and he is come to save us." And those that live not to reap down in this world the harvest of their own prayers and tears, shall be no losers: a full and better reward shall be given them in heaven, Isa. 57:21.

3. Because the preserved remnant of saints are they that must actually give unto God the glory of all his providential administrations in the world, both of judgments and mercies upon others, and towards themselves: "They that go down to the pit do not celebrate his praise; the living, the living they praise him," Isa. 38:18, 19. Thus when God turned back Zion's captivity, the remnant of the saints that were preserved were they that recorded his praise, Psal. 126:1, 2. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter." And fully to this sense is that scripture, Psal. 102:19, 20, 21. "He delivers those that are appointed to death," i.e. that men had doomed to death, "that they may declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem."

4. The hiding of the saints in evil days is the greatest discovery of the hand of God in the world; when he hides them, he shews himself, and that both to the saints, and to their enemies.

It is one of the most glorious mysteries of providence that ever the world beheld, viz. the strange and wonderful protection of poor helpless Christians from the rage and fury of their mighty and malicious enemies; though they walk visibly among them, yet they

are, as it were, hid from their hands, but not from their eyes: So Jer. 1:18. you find God made that prophet, among the envious princes, and against an enraged and mighty king, as a defenced city, and as an iron pillar, and as a brazen wall. And indeed it was easier for them to conquer and take the strongest fort or garrison, than that single person, who yet walked day by day naked among them. So Luther, a poor monk, was made invincible; all the papal power could not touch him, for God hid him. All the world against one Athanasius, and yet not able to destroy him, for God hid him. This is the display of the glorious power of God in the world, and he hath much honour by it.

Well then, if there be a God that takes care of his own in evil days; do not you be distractingly careful what will become of you in such times; you cannot see how it is possible for you to escape: but, 2 Pet. 2:4, 5, 6. the Lord knows how to deliver when you do not. Little did Lot know the way and manner of his preservation till God opened it to him; nor Noah till God contrived it for him: there was no way to be contrived by them for escape: he that knew how to deliver them, can deliver you also.

Leave yourselves to God's disposal, it shall certainly be to your advantage: the church is his peculiar care; Isa. 28:3. "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

The more you commit yourselves to his care, the more you engage it, Isa. 26:2. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." He will certainly find a place of safety for his people under, or in heaven.

Neither be too much dejected when the number of visible professors seems but small; think not the church will perish when it is brought so low. This was Elijah's case, he thought he had been left alone, that religion had been preserved in his single person, as the phoenix of the world; but see, 1 Kings 9:18. God hath enough left, if we were all

in our graves, to continue religion in the world; it concerns him more than you to look to that.

## CHAPTER V

Evincing the fourth proposition, viz. That God usually premonisheth the world, especially his own people, of his judgments before they befall them.

Sect. I. GOD first warns, and then smites, he delights not to surprize men; when indignation was coming, he tells his people of it in the text, and admonisheth them to hide themselves. "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets," Amos 3:7. Thus when the flood was to come upon the old world, he gave them 120 years warning of it, Gen. 6:3. compared with 1 Pet. 3:19. So when Sodom was to be destroyed, God would not hide it from Abraham; Gen. 18:17. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I do?" The like discovery was made unto Lot, Gen. 19:12, 13, 14. So when the captivity was at hand, Ezekiel was commanded to give the Jews solemn warning of it from God, Ezek. 3:17. "Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."

And when their city and temple were to be destroyed by the Romans, how plainly did Christ foretel them of it by his own mouth! Luke 19:43, 44. "Thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Josephus\* also tells us, that a little before the execution of this judgment upon them, a voice was heard in the temple, *Migremus hinc*, i.e. Let us go hence; which voice Tacitus also in his annals, mentions, *Audita major humana vox, excedere Deos, simul ingenus motus excedentium*. It was more than a human voice, telling them God was departing from them, and withal there was

heard the rushing noise, as of some that were going out of the temple.

And as there were extraordinary premonitions of approaching judgments, by revelation to the prophets of old, and signs from heaven, so there are still standing and ordinary rules by which the world may be admonished of God's judgments before they come upon them.

And the general rule, by which men may discern the indignation of God before it comes, is this,

When the same provocations and evils are found in one nation, which have brought down the wrath of God upon another nation; this is an evident sign of God's judgment at the door. For God is unchangeably holy and just, and will not favour that in one people, which he hath punished in another; nor bless that in one age, which he hath cursed in another. And therefore that which hath been a sign of judgment to one, must be so to all.

Here it is that the carcasses of those sinners whose sins had cast them away, are, as it were, cast upon the scripture shore, for a warning to all others that they steer not the same ill course they did: 1 Cor. 10:9. "Now these things were our examples." The Israelites are made examples to us, plainly intimating, that if we tread the same path, we must expect the same punishment. Let us therefore consider what were the evils that provoked God's judgments against his ancient people, whom he was so loth to give up, Hos. 11:8. and so long ere he did give up, Jer. 15:9. and we shall find, by the concurrent accounts that the prophets give,

1. That God's worship among men was generally mixed and corrupted with their own inventions; for so it is said, Psal. 106:40, 41. "They went a whoring after their own inventions." And this so inflamed the wrath of God, who is a jealous God, and tender over his own honour, that he abhorred his own inheritance; yea, he expresses

himself as a man doth, whose heart is broken by the unfaithfulness of his wife, Ezek. 6:9. Upon this account his professing people became the generation of his wrath, Jer. 7:29, 30.

2. Incurrible obstinacy under gentler correction, Amos 4:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Scarcity, mildews, pestilence, and sword, had been upon them; and still those that remained, though saved as a brand out of the fire, in which their fellow-sinners perished, would not return to God; and this hastened on the general ruin, ver. 12. This presages the ruin of nations indeed.

3. Stupidity and senselessness of God's hand was a sad omen, and cause of that people's ruin; so Isa. 26:10, 11. Lord when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see." No, nor yet when his hand is laid on, Isa. 42:24, 25. It is not some small drop of God's anger that passes without observation, but the fury of his anger; not some light skirmish of his judgments with them; but the strength of battle: not in a corner upon some particular person, or family, but that which set him on fire round about; yet all this could not awaken them. "He hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle, and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew it not, and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart." Prodigious stupidity! to be in the midst of flames, yea, to be seized by them, and destroyed sooner than awakened. So you find again in Hos. 7:9. "Gray hairs were here and there upon Ephraim, yet he knew it not." Youth and age are easily distinguished, and gray hairs do plainly distinguish them, being the plain tokens of a declining state, yet they took no notice of them. Such stupidity is evermore the forerunner of misery.

4. Persecution of God's faithful ministers and people, was another forerunning sign of their ruin, 2 Chron. 36:16. "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." There were also a number of upright souls among them, that desired to worship God according to his own prescription, but a snare was laid for them in Mizpah, and a net

spread upon Tabor; and therefore was judgment towards that people, Hos. 5:1. Mizpah and Tabor were places in the way lying betwixt Samaria and Jerusalem, where the true worship of God was, and there was informers or spies set by the priest, to intercept such as would venture to serve God at Jerusalem, according to his own prescription; this also foreboded the judgments of God upon that nation.

5. The decay of the life and power of godliness among them plainly foreshewed their ruin at hand, Hos. 4:18. Their drink is sour: where, under the metaphor of dead and sour drink, which hath lost its spirit, and is become flat, their formal, heartless, and perfunctory duties are severely taxed and condemned.

6. To conclude, the mutual animosities and feuds among that professing people, evidently shewed judgment to be at the door. Hos. 9:7. "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come; Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred." This great, hatred was one of the greatest sins, and saddest signs upon them. This spirit of enmity sowed by the devil among them, hastened their calamity. If Ephraim will envy Judah, and Judah vex Ephraim, the common enemy shall part the fray: when the whole nation was under water, and the Roman armies under the very walls of Jerusalem, their own historians tells us, what bitter contentions and sharp conflicts continued among them to the very last; these things must be looked upon by all wise and considerate men, no otherwise than we look upon glaring meteors, and blazing comets portending judgment and ruin at the door. We have had indeed terrible signs in heaven, a dreadful rod of God shaken over us of late, which all men ought to behold with trembling; yet I must say those moral signs of judgments fore-mentioned, are much more terrible and portentous. According therefore to the evidence of these signs among us, let all upright hearts be affected and awakened with expectations of God's righteous judgments. It is indeed below faith to expect evil days with

despondency and distraction; but surely it is a noble exercise of faith, so to expect them, as to make due preparation for them.

Section 2. And if we enquire for what end God gives such warning to the world, and premonishes them from heaven of the judgments that are coming on the earth, know that he doth it upon a threefold account.

1. To prevent their execution.

2. To leave the careless inexcusable.

3. To make them more tolerable and easy to his own people.

1. Warning is given with a design to prevent the execution of judgments; this is plain from Amos 4:12. "Therefore will I do this unto thee;" there is warning given; "and because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel:" there is the gracious designs of preventing it, by bringing them seasonably upon their knees at the foot of an angry God: you see the Lord expects it from all his children, that they fall at his feet in deep humiliation, and fervent intercession, whenever he goes forth in the way of judgment. What else was the design of God in sending Jonah to Nineveh with that dreadful message, but to excite them to repentance, and prevent their ruin? This Jonah guessed at, and therefore declined the message, to secure his credit, well knowing, that if they took warning and repented, the gracious nature of God would soon melt into compassion over them: free grace would make him appear as a liar among the people; for to that sense his own words sound, Jonah 4:2. "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God." q. d. I thought before-hand it would come to this; I knew how willing thou art to be prevented by repentance; therefore to secure my credit, I fled to Tarshish.

2. He forewarns of judgments to leave the incorrigible wholly inexcusable, that those who have neither sense of sin, nor fear of

judgment before, might have no cloak for their folly, nor plea for themselves afterward? "What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?" Jer. 13:21, 22. q. d. What plea or apology is left thee, after so many fair warnings? You cannot say you were surprized before you were admonished, or ruined before you were warned.

3. God warns of judgments before they come, to make them the more easy to his people when they come indeed; thus in John 16:4. Christ foretold his disciples of their approaching sufferings, that when they come, they should not be found amazed at them, or unprovided for them; for unexpected miseries are astonishing to the best men, and destructive to wicked men, Luke 17:26, 27, 28.

Well then, if it be so, let all that are wise in heart consider the signs of the times, and seasonably hearken to God's warnings. "The Lord's voice crieth to the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name; hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it," Mic. 6:9. It is our wisdom to way-lay our troubles, and provide for the worst estate, whilst we enjoy the best: happy is he that is at once believing and praying for good days, and preparing for the worst. Noah's example is our advantage, Heb. 11:7. "Who, by faith being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark." Preventing mercies are the most ravishing mercies, Psal. 69:10. And preventing calamities are the sorest calamities, Amos 9:10.

And let us heartily beware the supineness and carelessness of the world in which we live, who take no notice of God's warning, but put the evil day far from them, Amos 6:3. who will admit no fear till they are past all hope; they see God housing his saints apace, yet will not see the evil to come from which God takes them, Isa. 57:1, 2. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness." They hear the cry of sin which is gone up to heaven, but cry not for the abominations that are committed, nor tremble at the judgments that they will procure.



O careless sinners, drowned in stupidity, and sleeping like Jonah under the hatches, when others are upon their knees, and at their wits-end! Do saints tremble, and are you secure? Have not you more reason to be afraid than they? if judgments come, the greatest harm it can do them is but to hasten them to heaven: but as for you, it may hurry you away to hell: they only fear tribulation in the way; but you will not fear damnation in the end. Believe it reader, in days of common calamity both heaven and hell will fill apace.

## CHAPTER VI

Demonstrating the fifth proposition, viz. That God's attributes, promises, and providences, are prepared for the security of his people, in the greatest distresses that can befall them in the world.

Sect. I. HAVING more briefly dispatched the foregoing preliminary propositions, it remains that we now more fully open this fifth proposition, which contains the main subject matter of this discourse; here therefore our meditations must fix and abide, and truly such is the deliciousness of the subject to spiritual hearts, that I judge it wholly needless to offer any other motive besides itself to engage your affections. Let us therefore view our chambers, and see how well God hath provided for his children in all the distresses that befall them in this world; it is our Father's voice that calls to us, Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers. And the

1. Chamber which comes to be opened as a refuge to distressed believers in a stormy day, is that most secure and safe attribute of Divine Power: into this let us first enter by serious and believing meditation, and see how safe they are whom God hides under the protection thereof, in the worst and most dangerous days. In opening this attribute, we shall consider it,

1. In its own nature and properties.
2. With respect to the promises.
3. As it is actuated by providence in the behalf of distressed saints.

And then give you a comfortable prospect of their safe and happy condition, who take up their lodgings by faith in this attribute of God.

1. Let us consider the power of God in itself, and We shall find it represented to us in the scriptures, in these three lovely properties, viz.

1. Omnipotent Power.
2. Supreme Power
3. Everlasting Power

1. As an omnipotent and all-sufficient power, which hath no bounds or limits but the pleasure and will of God, Dan. 4:34, 35. "He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?" So Psal. 135:6. "What-soever the Lord pleased that did he, in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places." You see Divine pleasure is the only rule according to which Divine Power exerts itself in the world; we are not therefore to limit and restrain it in our narrow and shallow thoughts, and to think in this, or in that, the power of God may help or secure us; but to believe that he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. Thus those worthies, Dan. 3:17. by faith exalted the power of God above the order and common rule of second causes. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." Their faith resting itself upon the omnipotent power of God, expected deliverance from it in an extraordinary way; it is true, this is no standing rule for our

faith ordinarily to work by; nor have we ground to expect such miraculous salvations, but yet when extraordinary difficulties press us, and the common ways and means of deliverance are shut up, we ought by faith to exalt the omnipotency of God, by ascribing the glory thereof to him, and leave ourselves to his good pleasure, without straitening or narrowing his Almighty Power, according to the mould of our poor, low thoughts and apprehensions of it: for so the Lord himself directeth our faith in difficult cases, Isa. 54:8, 9. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." He speaks there of his pardoning mercy, which he will not have his people to contract and limit according to the model and platform of their own desponding, misgiving, and unbelieving thoughts; but to exalt and glorify it, according to its unbounded fulness; as it is in the thoughts of God, the fountain of that mercy; so it ought to be with respect to his power, about which his thoughts and ours do vastly differ; the power of God as we cast in the mould of our thoughts, is as vastly different and disproportionate from what it is in the thoughts of God the fountain thereof, as the earth is to the heavens, which is but a small inconsiderable point compared with them.

2. The power of God is a supreme and sovereign power, from which all creature-power is derived, and by which it is over-ruled, restrained, and limited at his pleasure. Nebuchadnezzar was a great monarch, he ruled over other kings, yet he held his kingdom from God; it was God that placed not only the crown upon his head, but his head upon his shoulders, Dan. 2:37. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." Hence it follows, that no creature can move tongue or hand against any of God's people, but by virtue of a commission or permission from their God, albeit they think not so. Knowest thou not, saith Pilate unto Christ, that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee? Proud worm! what an ignorant and insolent boast was this of his own power! and how doth Christ spoil and shame it in his answer? John 19:11. Thou couldst

have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.

Wicked men, like wild horses, would run over and trample under foot all the people of God in the world, were it not that the bridle of Divine Providence had a strong curb to restrain them: Ezek. 22:6. "The princes of Israel every one were in thee, to their power to shed blood." And it was well for God's Israel that their power was not as large as their wills were; this world is a raging and boisterous sea, which sorely tosses the passengers for heaven that sail upon it, but this is their comfort and security: "The Lord stilleth the noise of the sea, the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the people," Psal. 65:7. Moral, as well as natural waves, are checked and bounded by Divine power. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain," Psal. 76:10. As a man turns so much water into the channel as will drive the mill, and turns away the rest into another sluice.

Yea, not only the power of man, but the power of devils also is under the restraint and limitation of this power, Rev. 3:10. "Satan shall cast some of you into prison, and ye shall have tribulation ten days." He would have cast them into their graves, yea, into hell if he could, but it must be only into a prison: He would have kept them in prison till they had died and rotted there, but it must be only for ten days. Oh glorious sovereign power! which thus keeps the reins of government in its own hand!

3. The power of God is an everlasting power; time doth not weaken or diminish it, as it doth all creature-powers, Isa. 40:28. "The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary," Isa. 59:1. "The Lord's hand is not shortened," i.e. He hath as much power now as ever he had, and can do for his people as much as ever he did; time will decay the power of the strongest creature, and make him faint and feeble; but the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not. "Thou (saith the Psalmist) abideth for ever, thy years flee not," Psal. 102:27. In God's working there is no expence of his strength, he

is able to do as much for his church now as ever he did, to act over-again all the glorious deliverances that ever he wrought for his people from the beginning of the world; to do as much for his church now, as he did at the Red-sea; and upon this ground the church builds its plea, Isa. 51:9, 10. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" q. d. Lord, why should not thy people at this day expect as glorious productions of thy power, as any of them found in former ages?

Sect. II. Let us view the power of God in the vast extent of its operations, and then you will find it working beyond the line,

1. Of creature-power,
2. Of creature-expectation,
3. Of human probability.

1. Beyond the line of all created power, even upon the hearts, thoughts, and minds of men, where no creature hath any jurisdiction. So Gen. 31:29. God bound up the spirit of Laban, and becalmed it towards Jacob. So Psal. 106:46. "He made them also to be pitied of all them that carried them captives." Thus the Lord promised Jeremiah, Jer. 15:11. "I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well, in the time of evil." This power of God softens the hearts of the most fierce and cruel enemies, and sweetens the spirits of the most bitter and enraged foes of his people.

2. Beyond the line of all creature-expectations, Eph. 3:20. "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." He doth so in spirituals; as appears by those two famous parables, Luke 15:19, 22. "And am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. But the Father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." The prodigal desired to be but as an hired servant, and lo, the fatted calf is killed for him, and music to

his meat; and the gold ring upon his finger. And in Matth. 18:26, 27. the debtor did but desire patience, and the creditor forgave the debt. Oh! thinks a poor humbled sinner, if I might have but the least glimpse of hope, how sweet would it be! But God brings him to more than he expects, even the clear shining of assurance. It is so in temporals, the church confesses the Lord did things they looked not for, Isa. 64:3. And in both spirituals and temporals this power moves in an higher orb than our thoughts, Isa. 55:8, 9. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor my ways your ways; but as far as the heavens are above the earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts." The earth is but a punctum to the heavens; all its tallest cedars, mountains and pyramids cannot reach it: He speaks, as was said before, of God's pitying, pardoning, and merciful thoughts, and shews that no creature can think of God, as he doth of the creature under sin, or under misery; our thoughts are not his thoughts; either first, by way of simple cogitation we cannot think such thoughts towards others in misery, by way of pity; or under sin against us by way of pardon, as God doth: Nor secondly, are our thoughts as God's in respect of reflexive comprehension; i.e. We cannot conceive or comprehend what those thoughts of God towards us are; when we fall into sin or misery, just as he thinks them, they are altered, debased, and straitened as soon as ever they come into our thoughts. See an excellent instance in Gen. 48:11. "I had not thought to see thy face, and lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed." A surprizing providence; and thus the divine power works in a sphere above all the thoughts, prayers, and expectations of men.

3. It works beyond all probabilities, and rational conjectures of men; this Almighty power hath created deliverances for the people of God, when things have been brought to the lowest ebb, and all the means of salvation have been hid from their eyes. We have divers famous instances of this in scripture, wherein we may observe a remarkable gradation in the working of this Almighty power: It is said in 2 Kings 14:26, 27. "The Lord saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter, for there was not any shut up, or any left, nor any helper for Israel." A deplorable state! How inevitable was their ruin to the eye

of sense? Well might it be called a bitter affliction; yet from this immediate power arose for them a sweet and unexpected salvation: And if we look into 2 Cor. 1:9, 10. we shall find the apostles and choicest Christians of those times, giving up themselves as lost men; all ways of escaping being quite out of sight, for so much those words signify, We had the sentence of death in ourselves; i.e. We yielded ourselves for dead men. But though they were sentenced to death, yea, though they sentenced themselves, this power, which wrought above all their thoughts and rational conjectures, reprieved them. And yet one step farther, in Ezek. 37:4, 5, 6, 7. The people of God are there represented as actually dead, yea, as in their graves, yea, as rotted in their graves, and their very bones dry, like those that are dead of old; so utterly improbable was their recovery: Yet by the working of this Almighty power, which subdueth all things to itself, their graves in Babylon were opened, the breath of life came into them, bone came to bone, and there stood up a very great army; it was the working of his power above the thoughts of man's heart, which gave the ground of that famous proverb, Gen. 22:14. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." And the ground of that famous promise, Zech. 14:7. "At evening time it shall be light;" i.e. Light shall unexpectedly spring up, when all men according to the course and order of nature, expect nothing but increasing darkness. How extensive is the power of God in its glorious operations!

Sect. III. Let us view the power of God in its relation to the promises, for so it becomes our sanctuary in the day of trouble; if the power of God be the chamber, it is the promise of God which is that golden key that opens it. And if we will consult the scriptures in this matter, we shall find the Almighty power of God made over to his people by promise, for many excellent ends and uses in the day of their trouble. As,

1. To uphold and support them when their own strength fails, Isa. 41:10. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee, with the right hand of my righteousness." And which of

the saints have not sensibly felt these everlasting arms underneath their spirits, when afflictions have pressed them above their own strength! So runs the promise to Paul, in 2 Cor. 12:9. "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness;" i.e. It is made known in thy weakness. Our weakness adds nothing to God's power, it doth not make his power perfect, but it hath the better advantage of its discovery, and puts forth itself more signally and conspicuously in our weakness; as the stars which never shine so gloriously as in the darkest night.

2. To preserve them in all their dangers, to which they lie exposed in soul and body, 1 Pet. 1:5. "You are kept (saith the apostle by the mighty power of God." Kept as in a garrison; this is their arm every morning, as it is Isa. 33:2. "O Lord be gracious unto us, we have waited for thee, be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." The arm is that member which is fitted for the defence of the body, and for that end so placed by the God of nature, that it may guard every part above and below it; but as good they were bound behind our backs, for any help they can give us in some cases: It is God's arm that defends us and not our own. This invisible power of God makes the saints the world's wonder. Psal. 71:7. "I am as a wonder to many, but thou art my strong refuge." To see the poor defenceless creatures preserved in the midst of furious enemies, that is just matter of wonder; but God being their invisible refuge, that solves the wonder; to this end the power of God is by promise engaged to his people, Isa. 27:3. "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." And thus they subsist in the midst of dangers and troubles; as the burning bush (the emblem of the church) did amidst the devouring flames, Exod. 3:3.

3. To deliver them out of their distresses; so runs the promise, Psal. 91:14, 15. "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name; he shall call upon me, and I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him." And Jer. 30:7. "Alas for



that day is great, so that none is like it: It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but ye shall be saved out of it." And surely there can be no distress so great, no case of believers so forlorn, but,

1. It is easy with God to save them out of it. Are they to the eye of sense lost, as hopeless as men in the grave? Yet see Ezek. 37:12. "O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel." And he doth whatever he doth easily, with a word, Psal. 44:4. "Thou art my king, O God, command deliverances for Jacob." And it requireth no more violent motion to do it, than he that swimmeth in the water uses, Isa. 25:11. A gentle easy motion of the hand doth it.

2. And as the power of God can deliver them easily, so speedily. Their deliverance is often wrought by way of surprisal. Isa. 17:14. "Behold, at evening-tide, trouble, and in the morning he is not." So the church prays, in Psal. 136:14. "Turn again our captivity as the streams in the south." The southern countries are dry, the streams there come not in a gentle and slow current, but being occasioned by violent sudden spouts of rain, they presently overflow the country, and as soon retire: So speedily can the power of God free his people from their dangers and fears.

3. Yea, such is the excellency of his delivering power, that he can save alone, without any contribution of creature-aids. So Isa. 59:16. "He wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore his hand brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness sustained him." We read indeed, Judg. 5:23. of helping the Lord, but that is not to express his need, but their duty; we have continual need of God, but he hath no need of us: he uses instruments, but not out of necessity, his arm alone can save us, be the danger never so great, or the visible means of deliverance never so remote.

4. Once more, let us view this chamber of Divine Power, as it is continually opened by the hand of providence, to receive and secure the people of God in all their dangers. It is said, 2 Chron. 16:9. "The

eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him." Where you have an excellent account of the immediacy, universality, and efficacy of Divine Providence, as it uses and applies this Divine Power for the guard and defence of that people who are its charge; he doth not only set angels to watch for them, but his own eyes guard them, even those seven eyes of providence mentioned, Zech. 3:9. which never sleep nor slumber; for they are said to run continually to and fro, and that not in this or that particular place only, for the service of some more eminent and excellent persons; but through the whole earth. It is an encompassing and surrounding providence which hath its eye upon all whose hearts are upright; all the saints are within the line of its care and protection; the eye of providence discovereth all their dangers, and its arm defends them, for he shews himself strong in their behalf.

The secret, but the almighty efficacy of providence is also excellently described to us in Ezek. 1:8. where the angels are said to have their hands under their wings, working secretly and un-discernibly, but very effectually for the saints committed to their charge. Like unto which is that in Hab. 3:4. where it is said of God, "that he had horns coming out of his hands, and there was the hiding of his power." The hand is the instrument of action, denoting God's active power, and the horns coming out of them are the glorious rays and beams of that power shining forth in the salvation of his people. Oh that we could sun ourselves in those cheerful and reviving beams of Divine Power, by considering how gloriously they have broken forth, and shone out for the salvation of his people in all ages. So it did for Israel at the Red-sea, Exod. 15:6. So for Jehoshaphat in that great strait, 2 Chron. 20:12, 15. And so in the time of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19:3, 7. Yea, in all ages from the beginning of the world the saints have been sheltered under these wings of Divine Power, Isa. 51:9, 10. Thus providence hath hanged and adorned this chamber of Divine Power with the delightful histories of the church's manifold preservations by it.

Section IV. Having taken a short view of this glorious chamber of God's power, absolutely in itself, and also in relation to his promises and providences, it remains now, that I press and persuade all the people of God under their fears and dangers, according to God's gracious invitation, to enter into it, shut their doors, and to behold with delight this glorious attribute working for them in all their exigencies and distresses.

1. Enter into this chamber of Divine Power, all ye that fear the Lord, and hide yourselves there in those dangerous and distressful days; let me say to you as the prophet did to the poor distressed Jews, Zech. 9:12. "Turn ye to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope." Strong holds might they say; why, where are they? The walls of Jerusalem are in the dust, the temple burnt with fire, Sion an heap; what meanest thou in telling us of our strong holds? Why, admit all this, yet there is *satis præsidi in uno Deo*; refuge enough for you in God alone, as Calvin excellently notes upon that place. Christian, art thou not able to fetch a good subsistence for thy soul by faith, out of the Almighty Power of God? The renowned saints of old did so. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob met with as many difficulties and plunges of trouble in their time, as ever you did, or shall meet with; yet, by the exercise of their faith upon this attribute, they lived comfortably, and why cannot you? Exod. 6:3. "I appeared (saith God) unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty." They kept house and feasted by faith upon this name of mine; O that we could do as Abraham did, Rom. 4:21. We have the same attribute, but, alas, we have not such a faith as his was to improve it. It is easy to believe the Almighty power of God in a calm, but not so easy to resign ourselves to it, and securely rest upon it in a storm of adversity; but oh what peace and rest would our faith procure us by the free use and exercise of it this way! to assist your faith in this difficulty wherein we find the faith of a Moses sometimes staggered, let me briefly offer you these four following encouragements.

1. Consider how your gracious God hath engaged this his Almighty Power, by promise and covenant for the security of his people. God

pawned it, as it were, to Abraham, in that famous promise, Gen. 17:1. "I am the Almighty God, walk thou before me, and be thou perfect." And Gen. 15:1. "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield." Say not, this was Abraham's peculiar privilege, for if thou consult Hosea 12:4. and Heb. 13:5, 6 you will find that believers in these days have as good a title to the promises made in those days, as those worthies had to whom they were immediately made.

2. If you be believers, your relation to God strongly engageth his power for you, as well as his own promises, "Surely, (saith God) they are my people, children that will not lie: so he became their Saviour," Isa. 63:8. We say relations have the least of entity, but the greatest efficacy; you find it so in your own experience, let a wife, child, or friend be in imminent danger, and it shall engage all the power you have to succour and deliver them.

3. This glorious power of God is engaged for you by the very malice and wickedness of your enemies, who will be apt to impute the ruin of the saints to the defect of power in God; from whence those excellent arguments are drawn, Numb. 14:15, 16. "Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee, will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness." And again, Deut. 32:26, 27 you will find the Lord improving this argument for them himself; if they do not plead it for themselves, he will. "I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men, were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this." O see how much you are beholden to the very rage of your enemies, for your deliverances from them!

4. To conclude, the very reliance of your souls by faith upon the power of God, your very leaning upon his arm engages it for your protection, Isa. 26:3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose

mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." Puzzle not yourselves therefore any longer about qualifications: but know that the very acting of your faith on God, the recumbency of your souls upon him, is that which will engage him for your defence, how weak and defective soever thou art in other respects.

2. Having thus entered by faith into this chamber of Divine Power, the next counsel the text gives you, is, to shut the door behind you; i.e. after the acting of your faith, and the quiet repose of your souls upon God's almighty power; then take heed lest unbelieving fears and jealousies creep in again, and disturb the rest of your souls in God; you find a sad instance of this in Moses, Numb. 11:21, 23. After so many glorious acts and triumphs of his faith, how were his heels tripped up by diffidence which crept in afterwards! Good men may be posed with difficult providences, and made to stagger. The Israelites had lived upon miracles many years, Psal. 78:20. "Can he give bread also?" Good Martha objects difficulty to Christ, John 11:39. "By this time he stinketh." Oh! it is a glorious thing to give God the glory of his Almighty Power in difficult eases that we cannot comprehend. See Zech. 8:6. "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it be as marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts." Difficulties are for men, but not for God; because it is marvellous in your eyes, must it be so in God's! Various objections will be apt to arise in your hearts to drive you out of this your refuge. As,

### Objections

Object. 1. Oh! but the long continuance of our troubles and distresses will sink our very hearts, Isa. 40:27. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God."

Sol. But, oh! wait upon God without fainting, Heb. 2:3. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie:

though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Object. 2. Oh, but our former hopes and expectations of deliverance are frustrated, Jer. 8:15. "We looked for peace, but no good came: and for a time of health, and behold trouble."

Sol. Oh, but yet be not discouraged: see how the Psalmist begins the 69th Psalm with trembling, and ends it with triumph; the husbandman waiteth, and so must you.

Object. 3. But there is no sign or appearance of our deliverance.

Sol. What then, this is no new thing, Psal. 74:9. "We see not our signs, there is no more any prophet, neither is there any among us that knoweth how long."

Object. 4. But all things work contrary to our hope.

Sol. Why, so did things with Abraham; yet see, Rom. 4:18. "Against hope, he believed in hope."

3. Observe farther with delight, the outgoings and glorious workings of Divine power for you and for the church in times of trouble: this is sweet entertainment for your souls, it is food for faith, Psal. 74:14. "Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." And here I beseech you behold and admire,

1. Its mysterious and admirable protection of the saints in all their dangers. They feed as sheep in the midst of wolves, Luke 10:3. They lie among them that are set on fire, Psal. 57:4. "Their habitation is in the midst of deceit," Jer. 9:6. Yet they are kept in safety by the mighty power of God.

2. Behold and admire it in casting the bonds of restraint upon your enemies, that though they would, yet they cannot hurt you; our

dangers are visible, and our fears great, but our security and safety admirable, Isa. 51:13. "Thou hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?"

3. Behold its opening unexpected and unlikely refuges and securities for the saints in their distresses; Isa. 16:4. "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab, be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler; for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." Rev. 12:16. "The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth."

5. Behold it frustrating all the designs of our enemies against us, Isa. 54:17. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. Behold, I have created the smith," Isa. 54:16. q. d. He that created the smith, can order as he pleaseth the weapon made by him; hence our enemies are not masters of their own designs.

Oh then, depend upon this power of God, for it is your security; there is a twofold dependence, the one natural and necessary, the other elective.

1. Natural dependence, so all do, and must depend upon him.

2. Elective and voluntary, and so we all ought to depend upon him; and for your encouragement take this scripture, Psal. 9:9, 10. "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble, and they that know thy name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." And thus of the first attribute of God, prepared for the safety of his people in times of trouble.

## CHAPTER VII

Opening that glorious attribute of Divine Wisdom, as a second chamber of security to the saints in difficult times.

Sect. I. THE next chamber of Divine protection into which I shall lead you is the infinite wisdom of God; I call it the next, because I so find it placed in scripture, Job 36:5. "He is mighty in power and wisdom." Dan. 2:20. "Wisdom and might are his."

This attribute may be fitly called the council-chamber of heaven, where all things are contrived in the deepest wisdom, which are afterwards wrought in the world by power, Eph. 1:11. "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Counsel in the creature implies weakness and defect; we are not able at one thought to fathom the depth of a business, and therefore must deliberate and spend many thoughts about it, and when we have spent all our thoughts, we are oft-times at a loss, and must borrow help, and ask counsel of others; but in God it notes the perfection of his understanding, for as those acts of the creature which are the results of deliberation and counsel, are the height and top of all rational contrivement; so in its accommodation to God, it notes the excellent results of his infinite and most perfect understanding.

Now this wisdom of God is to be considered either absolutely or relatively.

1. Absolutely in itself, and so it is, That whereby he most perfectly and exactly knows himself, and all things without himself, ordering and disposing them in the most convenient manner, to the glory of his own name.

Wisdom comprehends two things, 1. Knowledge of the nature of things which, in the creature, is called science. 2. Knowledge how to govern, order and dispose them, which, in the creature, is called prudence; these things in a man are but faint shadows of that which



is in God, in the most absolute perfection; he fully knows himself, for his understanding is infinite, Psal. 147:5. and the thoughts he thinks towards us, Jer. 29:11. And as he perfectly understands himself, so likewise all things that are without himself, Acts 15:18. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Together with all the secret designs, thoughts, and purposes which lie hid from all others, in the inmost recesses of men's hearts, Psal. 139:2.

And as he perfectly knows all things, so he fully understands how to govern and direct them to the best end, even the exalting of his own praise, Psal. 104:24. Rom. 11:36. "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things:" of him, as the efficient cause: through him as the conserving cause: and to him as the final cause. And in this wise disposition of all things, he hath a gracious respect to the good of his chosen, Rom. 8:28. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." More particularly, the wisdom of God is to be considered by us in its excellent properties, among which these four following are eminently conspicuous, as it is the

1. Original,
2. Essential,
3. Perfect, and
4. Only wisdom.

1. The wisdom of God is the original wisdom, from which all the wisdom found in angels or men is derived, and into that fountain we are directed to go for supplies of wisdom, James 1:5. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God." There is indeed a spirit in man, but it is the inspiration of the Almighty that giveth understanding, Job 32:8. The natural faculty is ours, but the illumination thereof is God's, the understanding of the creature is the dial, which signifies nothing till the sun shine upon it.

4. God's wisdom is essential wisdom. Wisdom in the creature is but a quality separable from the subject; but in God it is his nature, his very essence, he can as soon cease to be God as to be most wise.

3. The wisdom of God is perfect wisdom, full of itself, and exclusive of its contrary; the wisest of men are not wise at all times; the greatest wits are not without some mixture of madness; it is an high attainment in human wisdom to understand our own weakness and folly; the deepest heads are but shallows, but the wisdom of God is an unsearchable depth, Rom. 11:33. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

4. To conclude, the wisdom of God is the only wisdom: there is no wisdom without him, none against him, he is the only wise God, Jude, ver. 25.

2. The wisdom of God must be considered relatively, and that in a double respect:

1. To his promises.

2. To his providences.

Sect. II. Let us view it in its relation to the promises, where you shall find it made over by God to his people for divers excellent uses and purposes in times of distress and danger. As,

1. It was made over to them in promises for their direction and guidance when they knew not what to do, or which way to take. So Psal. 25:9. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way:" and Isa. 58:11. "The Lord shall guide thee continually;" and Psal. 33:8. "I will guide thee with mine eye." And with this the Psalmist encourages himself, Psal. 73:24. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." O what an invaluable mercy is this! we should make shipwreck both of

our temporal and eternal mercies quickly, were it not for the guidance of Divine wisdom.

2. To extricate them when involved in difficulties. So 2 Pet. 2:9. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." They know not how, but their God doth; they are often at a loss, but he is never. So 1 Cor. 10:13. "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

3. To over-rule and order all their troubles to their good and real advantage. So runs that most comprehensive promise, Rom. 8:28. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." In the faith whereof Paul concludes, Phil. 1:19. Even this shall work for his salvation. Thus the people of God were sent into captivity for their good, Jer. 24:8. and Joseph into Egypt, Gen. 1:20. "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive."

2. Let us view the wisdom of God in its relation to his providences, for there it shines forth eminently, Ezek. 1:18. The wheels were full of eyes, i.e. the motions and providential revolutions in this lower world are very judicious and advised motions; *Non cæco impetu volvuntur rotæ*; it hath an end and design which no man understands till it open itself in the event.

The enemies of the church are oft-times men of the finest brains and deepest policies: Herod a fox for subtlety, Luke 13:32. Julian and Ahithophel, with many others, who have digged as deep as hell in their counsels, and laid their designs so sure that they doubted not to be masters of it; yet their hands could not perform their enterprize.

The wisdom of providence has still befooled them, and baffled the cunningest head-pieces that ever undertook any design against the

church, as fast as ever they arose; and here the wisdom of providence is remarkable in three things especially.

1. In revealing and discovering the secret conspiracies and counsels of the church's enemies, and thereby frustrating their designs, Gen. 27:41, 42. Providence (as one calls it) is the bird of the air, that carries tidings, and whistles deeds of darkness; Job 12:22. "He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death." And this God hath done both immediately and mediately. 1. Immediately, 2 Kings 6:11. What counsel soever the king of Syria took in his bed-chamber was still discovered by the word to the prophet. So true is that, Job 34:22. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Thus the design of Herod is revealed to Joseph in a dream.

But commonly he doth it by means; as,

1. By giving knowledge of it to some that are under obligations of duty or affection to reveal it to those that are concerned in the danger. So Paul's sister's son, Acts 23:16 revealed the conspiracy against his life, and so the plot miscarried by revealing it before it was ripe for execution.

2. By the failure of some circumstance, the whole is brought to light; there be many fine threads upon which the designs of politicians hang; if one break, the whole design is unravelled. Thus the wisdom of God sometimes prevents his people's ruin, by taking away the speech of the trusty from him, and making their own tongues to fall upon themselves.

3. By their own confession, so Psal. 64:5, 6, 7, 8. where you have the plot laid, ver. 5. "They encourage themselves in an evil matter, they commune of laying snares privily, they say, who shall see them?" The deep contrivance of it, ver. 6. "They search out iniquity, they accomplish a diligent search, both the inward thought of every one of

them, and the heart is deep." Their plot destroyed, ver. 7. "But God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded." The method or way of providence in destroying it, ver. 8. "So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves, all that see them shall fly away." Thus hath the wisdom of our God wrought for us this day, beyond all the thoughts of our hearts; and oh that it might make such impressions upon all our hearts, as follow in ver. 9, 10. "All men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God, for they shall wisely consider his doing. The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him, and all the upright in heart shall glory."

2. The wisdom of God discovers itself in behalf of that people who are his own, in diverting the danger from them, and putting by the deadly thrusts their enemies make at them; thus it spoils their game by an unforeseen rub in the green, and that especially three ways.

1. By making their counsels to jar among themselves, in which jars is the sweetest harmony of providence; thus the counsel of Ahithophel jars with the counsel of Hushai, 2 Sam. 17:5, 7. by which means David escaped: The Pharisees clashed with the Sadducees, Acts 23:7. and by that means Paul escaped.

2. By cutting out other work, and starting some new design, which puts them, as a fresh scent does the dog, to a loss. Thus the people of God in Jerusalem were delivered by a diversion, 2 Kings 19:7. "Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour and shall return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land: so Rabshakeh returned." By this means also was David delivered from the hand of Saul, 1 Sam. 23:27. And in this method of providence, that scripture is often fulfilled, Prov. 21:18. "The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright."

3. By cutting off the capital enemies of his church, by whose seasonable destruction they are delivered. Thus fell Julian, that bitter enemy of the Christians, when he was preparing to put his last and

most bloody design against them in execution. And thus fell Haman, Nero, and many more in the very height and heat of their designs against the church.

4. The wisdom of God gloriously displays itself in causing the designs of the wicked, like a surcharged gun, to recoil upon and destroy themselves: it often falls out with the undermining enemies of the church, as it sometimes doth with them that dig deep mines in the earth, who are destroyed and buried in their own works, Psal. 9:15, 16. "The Heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made, in the net which they hid is their own feet taken. The Lord is known by the judgments which he executeth, the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgajon, Selah." There is a double mercy in this providence, one in delivering the saints from the danger, the other in causing it to fall upon the contrivers, and is therefore celebrated with a double note of attention: in these observable strokes, the righteousness of God shines forth in repaying his people's enemies in their own coin\*.

Thus Haman did eat the first-fruits of that tree which his own hands planted, and thus Jerusalem becomes a burdensome stone to all that burden themselves with it, Zech. 12:3.

4. Admire and adore the wisdom of your God in those great and unexpected advantages, which arise to you out of those very dangers and designs of your enemies that threatened your ruin; the hands of your very enemies are sometimes made the instruments of your advancement and enlargement; your persecutions become your privileges, the motto of the palm-tree fitly becomes yours, *Suppressa resurgo*.

In three things the wisdom of God makes advantage out of your troubles.

1. In fortifying your souls and bodies with suitable strength, when any eminent trial is intended for you; so it was with the apostles, 2

Cor. 1:5. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation by Christ." God lays in suitably to what men lay on mercilessly: Christ would not draw the poor timorous disciples out of Jerusalem unto hard encounters, until first he had endued them with power from on high, Luke 24:49.

2. The wisdom of your God can, and often doth make your very troubles and sufferings, instead of so many ordinances, to strengthen your faith and fortify your patience. So the heads of Leviathan became meat to his people inhabiting the wilderness, Psal. 74:14. And so the plots of Balak and Balaam were designed by God to be as a standing instructing ordinance for the encouragement of his people's faith in future difficulties, Mic. 6:5. "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." q. d. You cannot but remember how those your enemies courted me with multitudes of offerings to deliver you up into their hands, and how faithfully I stood by you in all those dangers; that plot discovered at once the policy of your enemies, and the righteousness of your God.

3. His wisdom is discovered to your advantage, in permitting your dangers to grow to an extremity, on purpose to magnify his goodness, and increase your comfort in your deliverance from it. Psal. 126:1. "When the Lord turned our captivity, we were as them that dreamed." Proportionable to the greatness of your dangers will your joys be.

Section III. Well then, if the wisdom of God shines forth so gloriously in the times of his people's trouble, be persuaded by faith to enter into this chamber also; it is a chamber where a believing soul may enjoy the sweetest rest and quietness in the most hurrying and distracting times; shut the door behind you, and improve this attribute to your best advantage.

1. Enter into this chamber by faith, believe firmly that the management of all the affairs of this world, whether public or personal, is in the hands of your all-wise God; more particularly, exercise your faith about the wisdom of God in these things:

1. Believe that the wisdom of God can contrive and order the way of your escape and deliverance, when all doors of hope are shut up to sense and reason; we know not what to do, said good Jehoshaphat, but our eyes are unto thee; q. d. Lord, though I am at a loss, and see no way of escape, thou art never at a loss. The Lord, (saith Peter) knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation: Divine Wisdom hath infinite methods and ways of deliverance unknown to man, till they are opened in the event.

2. Believe that the wisdom of God can turn your greatest troubles and fears into the choicest blessings and mercies to you: I know (saith Paul) that this shall turn to my salvation, Phil. 1:19. meaning his bonds and sufferings for Christ. Divine wisdom can give you honey out of the carcase of the lion, cause you to part with those afflictions, admiring and blessing God for them, which you met with fear and trembling, as suspecting your destruction was imported in them.

3. In consideration of both these, resign up yourselves to the wisdom of God, and lean not to your own understandings: "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established," Prov. 16:3. When Melancthon was oppressed with cares and doubts about the distracting affairs of the church in his time, Luther thus chides him out of his despondency, *Desinat Philippus esse rector mundi*, do not thou presume to be the governor of the world, but leave the reins of government in his hands that made it, and best knows how to rule it: let God alone to chuse thy lot and portion, to order thy condition, and manage all thy affairs, and let thy soul take its rest in this quiet chamber of Divine Wisdom. But then,



2. Be sure to shut thy door behind thee, and beware, lest unbelief, anxieties, fears, and doubts, creep in after thee to disturb thy rest, and shake thy faith in this point; we are apt, in two cases, to be stumbled in this matter.

1. When subtle and cunning enemies are engaged against us; this was David's case, 2 Sam. 15:31. "One told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom; and David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." When he heard Ahithophel was with the conspirators, it greatly puzzled him. Though a whole conclave of politicians be against us, yet if God be with us, let us not fear.

2. When our own reason intrudes too far, and offers its dictates too boldly in the case, we are apt to say in the arrogance of our own reason, we cannot be delivered; but oh that we would learn to resign it up to the wisdom of God. The Lord knows how to deliver the godly. When the question was asked the prophet, Ezek. 37:3. Can these dry bones live? he answers, Lord, thou knowest. That is excellent counsel, Prov. 3:5. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding."

3. Improve the wisdom of God for yourselves in all difficult and distressful cases.

1. Beg of God to exercise his wisdom for you, when enemies conspire against you: so did David, 2 Sam. 15:31. "Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!" Oh it is the noblest and surest way to vanquish an enemy: it was but asked and done.

2. Comfort yourselves with this whenever you are at a loss in your own thoughts, and know not what to do, then commit all to Divine conduct; let God steer for you in a storm; he loves to be trusted, Psal. 37:5. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

3. Encourage yourselves from this when the church is in the greatest danger, and most sorely shaken; O that is a blessed promise, Zech. 3:9. "Upon one stone shall be seven eyes." Meaning Christ, and the church built on him as the chief corner-stone; the seven eyes are the seven eyes of providence, which are never all asleep.

## CHAPTER VIII

Opening that glorious attribute of Divine faithfulness, as a third chamber of security to the people of God, in times of distress and danger.

Sect. I. HAVING viewed the saint's refuge in the power and wisdom of God, we next proceed to a third chamber of safety for the saints refuge, viz. The faithfulness of God.

In this attribute is our safety and rest, amidst the confusions of the world, and daily disappointments we are vexed withal, through the vanity and falseness of the creature; as to creatures, the very best of them are but vanity, yea, vanity of vanity, the vainest vanity, Eccl. 1:2. "Every man in his best estate is altogether vanity," Psal. 39:5. Yea, those that we expect most from, give us most trouble, Mic. 7:5. Nearest relations bring up the rear of sorrows, Job 6:15. "My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook." Especially their deceit appears most, when we have most need of their help, Psal 142:4. How great a mercy is it then to have a refuge in the faithfulness of God as David had; "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me, refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul." And likewise the church, Mic. 7:7. "I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me." A time may come, when you shall not know where to trust in all this world. Let me therefore open to you this chamber of rest in the

faithfulness of God against such a day, and this I shall do in a twofold consideration of it, viz.

1. Absolutely in its own nature.

2. Relatively in the promises and providences of God.

1. Absolutely, and so the faithfulness of God is his sincerity, firmness, and constancy in performing his word to his people in all times and cases. So Moses describes him to Israel, Deut. 7:9. "Know therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God." And Joshua appeals to their experience for the vindication of it, Josh. 23:14. "Ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass, and not one thing hath failed thereof." And it is also fully asserted, Jer. 31:35, 36, 37. and greatly admired even in the darkest day, Lam. 3:23. Great is thy faithfulness. And it is well for us that his faithfulness is great, for great is that weight that leans upon it, even all our hopes for both worlds, for this world, and for that to come, Tit. 1:2. "In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began."

It was was a very dishonourable character that\* Suidas gave of Tiberius, "That he never made shew of having what he desired to have, nor ever minded to do what he promised to do:" but God is faithful, and that will appear by these following evidences of it.

### Evidences

Evid. 1. By his exact fulfilling of his promises of the longest date. So Acts 7:6. four hundred and thirty years were run out before the promise of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt was accomplished; yet, Acts 7:17. when the time of the promise was come, God was punctual to a day: Seventy years in Babylon, and at the expiration of that time, they returned, 2 Chron. 36:21. Men may forget, but God cannot, Isa. 49:15, 16.

Evid. 2. By making way for his promises through the greatest difficulties, and seeming impossibilities. So to Abraham when old, Gen. 18:13, 14. "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time will I return unto thee, according to the time of life; and Sarah shall have a son." And likewise to the Israelites, Can these dry bones live? Ezek. 37:3. Difficulties are for men, not God, Gen. 18:14. What art thou, O great mountain, Zech. 8:9. "If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts."

Evid. 3. By fulfilling promises to his people, when their hopes and expectations have been given up. So Ezek. 37:11. Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our part. And Isa. 49:14. "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." There may be much unbelief in good men, their faith may be sorely staggered, yet God is faithful; men may question his promises, yet God cannot deny himself, 2 Tim. 2:13.

Evid. 4. By God's appealing to his people, and referring the matter to their own judgment, Micah 6:3, 4, 5. "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me, for I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants, and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord;" q. d. If I have failed in a punctilio of my promise, shew it: Did not Balak and Balaam court me, and try all ways to win me over to them by multitudes of sacrifices? yet I did not desert you. So Jer. 2:31. "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord: Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee," Isa. 44:8.

Evid. 5. The faithfulness of God is abundantly cleared by the constant testimonies given unto it in all ages by them that have tried it, they have all witnessed for God, and attested his unspotted faithfulness to

the generations that were to come. So did Joshua, chap. 23:14. "All is come to pass," and so did Daniel, chap. 9:4. "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him:" with which David's testimony concurs, Psal. 146:6. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, which made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is, which keepeth truth for ever." Thus his people have been witnesses in all generations, unto the faithfulness of God in his promises; the consideration whereof leaves no doubt or objection behind it.

Sect. II. And if we enquire into the grounds and reasons why God is, and ever must be most faithful in performing his promises, we shall find it is built upon stable and unshaken pillars: viz.

1. The holiness of his nature.
2. The all-sufficiency of his power.
3. The honour of his name.
4. the unchangeableness of his nature.

1. The faithfulness of God is built upon the perfect holiness of his nature, by reason whereof it is impossible for God to lie, Tit. 1:2. Heb. 6:11. The deceitfulness of a man flows from the corruption of the human nature, but "God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numb 33:19. If there be no defect in his being, there can be none in his working; if his nature be pure holiness, all his ways must be perfect faithfulness.

2. It is built upon the all-sufficiency of his power; whatsoever he hath promised to his people, he is able to perform it; men sometimes falsify their promises through the defects of ability to perform them; but God never out-promised himself; if he will work, none can let,

Isa. 43:13. He can do whatsoever he pleaseth to do, Psal. 135:6. The holiness of his nature engageth, and the Almightyness of his power enables him to be faithful.

3. The glory and honour of his name may assure us of his faithfulness, in making good the promises, and all that good which is in the promises, to a tittle; for wherever you find a promise of God, you also find the name and honour of God given as a security for the performance of it; and so his name hath ever been pleaded with him by his people, as a mighty argument to work for them, Josh. 7:9. What wilt thou do for thy great name, q. d. Lord, thine honour is a thousand times more than our lives, it is no such great matter what becomes of us; but ah, Lord, it is of infinite concernment that the glory of thy name be secured, and thy faithfulness kept pure and unspotted in the world. So again, Exod. 32:11, 12. "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." q. d. It will be sad enough for the hands of the Egyptians to fall upon thy people, but infinitely worse for the tongues of the Egyptians to fall upon thy name.

4. The unchangeableness of his nature gives us the fullest assurance of his faithfulness in the promises, Mal. 3:6. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." God's unchangeableness is his people's indemnity, and best security in the midst of dangers; as there is not yea and nay with God, neither should it be so with our faith; that which gives steadiness to the promises should give steadiness also to our expectations for the performance of them: and so much, briefly, of the faithfulness of God, absolutely considered in the nature and grounds of it.

2. Next let us view the faithfulness of God, as it relates to the many great and precious promises made unto his people for their security, both in their

1. Temporal Concernments.

2. Spiritual Concernments

1. We find the faithfulness of God pledged for the security of his people, in their spiritual and eternal concernments against all their dangers and fears, threatening them on that account, and that more especially in these three respects.

1. It is given them as their great and best security for the pardon of their sins, 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Our greatest danger comes from sin; guilt is a fountain of tears, a pardoned soul only can look other troubles in the face boldly: as guilt begets fear, so pardon produces courage, and God's faithfulness in the covenant is, as it were, that pardon-office from whence we fetch our discharges and acquittances, Isa. 43:25. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake." The promises of remission are made for Christ's sake, and when made, they must be fulfilled for his own, that is, his faithfulness sake.

2. It is engaged for the perseverance of the saints, and their continuance in the ways of God in the most hazardous and difficult times; this was the encouragement given them. 1 Cor. 1:8, 9. "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Ah Lord! might those Corinthians say, the powers of the world are against us, suffering and death are before us, a treacherous and fearful heart within us. Ay, but yet fear not, Christ shall confirm you whosoever opposes you; though the world and your own hearts be deceitful, yet comfort yourselves with this, your God is faithful.

3. The faithfulness of God is given by promise for his people's security in, and encouragement against all their sufferings and afflictions in this world, 2 Thess. 3:2, 3. "That we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all men have not faith; but the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil." He prays they may be delivered from absurd, treacherous, and unfaithful men, who would trepan and betray them to ruin; but this is proposed as their relief, that when the treachery of men shall bring them into troubles, the faithfulness of God shall support them under, and deliver them out of those troubles; they shall have spiritual supports from God under their deepest sufferings from men, 1 Pet. 4:19.

2. God's faithfulness is engaged for his people's indemnity and security, amidst the temporal and outward evils whereunto they are liable in this world; and that, either to preserve them from troubles, Psal. 91:1, 2, 3, 4. or to open a seasonable door of deliverance out of trouble, 1 Cor. 10:13. In both, or either of which, the hearts of Christians may be at rest in this troublesome world; for what need those troubles fright us, which either shall never touch us, or if they do, shall never hurt, much less ruin us?

Sect. III. Having taken a short view of God's faithfulness in the promises, it will be a lovely sight to take one view of it more, as it is actuated, and exerted in his providences over his people. Believe it, Christians, the faithfulness of God runs through all his works of providence, whenever he goes forth to work in the world. "Faithfulness is the girdle of his loins," Isa. 11:5. It is an allusion to workmen who going forth in the morning to their labour, gird their loins or reins with a girdle; now there is no work wrought by God in this world, but his faithfulness is as the girdle of his loins: The consideration whereof should make the most despondent believer, Gird up the loins of his mind, that is, encourage and strengthen his drooping and discouraged heart. Those works of God which are wrought in faithfulness, and in pursuit of his eternal purposes and gracious promises, should rather delight than affright us, in



beholding them. It pluckt out the sting of David's affliction, when he considered it was in very faithfulness that God had afflicted him, Psal. 119:89, 90. But more particularly, let us behold with delight the faithfulness of God, making good six sorts of promises to his people, in the days of their affliction and trouble, viz.

1. The promises of preservation.
2. The promises of support.
3. The promises of direction.
4. The promises of provision.
5. The promises of deliverance.
6. The promises of ordering and directing the event to their advantage.

1. There are promises in the word for your preservation from ruin, and what you read in those promises, you daily see the same fulfilled in your own experiences. You have a promise in Psal. 57:3. "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and truth." Say now, have you not found it so? When hell hath sent forth its temptations to defile you, the world its persecutions to destroy you, your own heart its unbelieving fears to distract and sink you, hath not your God sent forth all his mercy and his truth to save you? Hath not his truth been your shield and buckler? Psal. 91:4. May you not say with the church, it is of his mercy you are not consumed, his mercies are new every morning, and great is his faithfulness, Lam. 3:23.

2. As you have seen it actually fulfilling the promises for your preservation, so you may see it making good all the promises in his word for your support in troubles. That is a sweet promise, Psal. 91:15. "I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him." You have also

a very supporting promise in Isa. 41:10. "Fear not thou, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Oh! how evidently hath the faithfulness of God shone forth in the performance of his word to you in this respect? you are his witnesses, you would have sunk in the deep waters of trouble if it had not been so. So speaks David, Psal. 73:26. "My heart and my flesh faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Have you not found it so with you as it is in 2 Cor. 12:10. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong." God's strength hath been made perfect in your weakness, by this you have been carried through all your troubles: hitherto hath he helped you.

3. As you have seen it faithfully fulfilling the promises for your preservation and support; so you have seen it in the direction of your ways. So runs that promise, Psal. 32:8. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Certain it is "that the way of man is not in himself," Jer. 10:23. O how faithfully hath your God guided you, and stood by you in all the difficult cases of your life! Is not that promise, Heb. 13:5. faithfully fulfilled to a tittle, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" Surely you can set your seal to that in John 17:17. "Thy word is truth;" had you been left to your own counsels you had certainly perished; as it is said of them in Psal. 81:12. "I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts: and they walked in their own counsels."

4. As there are promises in the word for your preservation, support, and direction; so in the fourth place, there are promises for your provision, as in Psal. 34:9 the Lord hath promised that they that fear him shall not want. When they are driven to extremity, he will provide, Isa. 41:17. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, when their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." And is not this faithfully performed? "He hath given meat unto them that fear him;

he will ever be mindful of his covenant," Psal. 111:5. In all the exigencies of your lives you have found him faithful to this day; you are his witnesses that his providences never failed you, his care hath been renewed every morning for you; how great is his faithfulness!

5. You also find in the word some reviving promises for your deliverances. You have a very sweet promise in Psal. 91:14. "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him:" and again, Psal. 50:15. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee:" you have done so, and he hath made a way to escape. Our lives are so many monuments of mercy; we have lived among lions, yet preserved, Psal. 57:4. The burning bush was an emblem of the church miraculously preserved.

6. There are promises in the world for the ordering and directing all the occurrences of providence to your great advantage; so it is promised, Rom. 8:28. "That all things shall work together for good to them that love God." Fear not, Christians, however you find it now; whilst you are tossing to and fro upon the unstable waves of this world; you shall find, to be sure, when you come to heaven, that all the troubles of your lives were guided as steadily by this promise as ever any ship at sea was directed to its port, by the compass or north-star.

And now what remains but that I press you as before,

1. To enter into this chamber of Divine faithfulness.
2. To shut the door after you.
3. And then to live comfortably on it in evil days.

1. Enter into this chamber of God's faithfulness by faith, and hide yourselves there. Every man is a lie, but God is true, eternally and unchangeably faithful. Oh! exercise your faith upon it, be at rest in it.

Now there are two great and weighty arguments to press you to enter into this chamber of Divine faithfulness.

## Arguments

Arg. 1. Is fetched from the nature of God, who cannot lie, Tit. 1:2. "He is not a man, that he should lie." Numb. 23:19. "Neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Remember upon what everlasting, steady grounds the faithfulness of God is built. These are immutable things, Heb. 6:18. "This Abraham built upon, Rom. 4:21 being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." He accounted him faithful that promised. What would you expect or require in the person that you are to trust? You would,

1. Expect a clear promise; and lo! you have a thousand all the scripture over, fitted to all the cases of your souls and bodies, Thus you may plead with God, as David, Psal. 119:49. "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." So Jacob pleaded, Gen. 32:12 "Thou saidst I will surely do thee good." These are God's bonds and obligations.

2. You would expect sufficient power to make good what he promiseth. This is in God as a fair foundation of faith, Is. 26:4. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength:" Because of thy strength we will wait upon thee: creatures cannot, but God can do what he will.

3. You would expect infinite goodness and mercy inclining him to help and save you. Why, so it is here, Psal. 130:7. "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." So Moses, Exod. 33:18. "I beseech thee shew me thy glory." The request was, a view of God's glory: The answer is, my goodness shall pass before thee; which hints to us, that though all

God's attributes be glorious, yet that which he most glories in, is his goodness. And then,

4. You would expect that none of his promises were ever blotted or stained by his unfaithfulness at any time; and so it is here, Josh 23:14. Not one thing hath failed: all are come to pass, all ages have sealed this conclusion, Thy word is truth, thy word is truth.

Arg. 2. Besides all this, you have the encouragement of all former experiences, both of others and of your own, as a second argument to press you to enter into this chamber of safety, the faithfulness of God.

1. You have the experiences of others. Saints have reckoned the experiences of others that lived a thousand years before them, as excellent arguments to quicken their faith: So Hos. 12:4. he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us. Remember there was a Joseph with us in prison, a Jeremiah in the dungeon, a Daniel in the den, a Peter in chains, an Hezekiah upon the brink of the grave; and they all found the help of God most faithfully protecting them, and saving them in all their troubles. Suitable to this is that in Psal. 22:4, 5. "Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou deliveredst them; they cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

2. Your own experiences may encourage your faith: So David's did, 1 Sam. 17:37. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." So did Paul's experience encourage his faith, in 2 Cor. 1:10. "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." Thus enter into the faithfulness of God by faith.

3. Let me beg you to be sure to shut the doors after you, against all unbelieving doubts, jealousies, and suspicions of the faithfulness of

God; the best men may find temptations of that nature; so did good Asaph, though an eminent saint, Psal. 77, 78. "Will the "Lord cast off for ever: and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for ever-more?" These jealousies are apt to creep in upon the minds of men, especially when,

1. God delays to answer our prayers as soon as we expect the return of them; we are all in haste for a speedy answer, forgetting that seasons of prayer are our seed-times; and when we have sown that precious seed, we must wait for the harvest as the husbandman doth. Even a precious Heman may find a faint qualm of unbelief and despondency seizing him by the long suspension of God's answers, Psal. 88:9, 10, 11.

2. It will be hard to shut the door upon unbelief, when all things in the eye of our sense and reason seem to work against the promise; it will require an Abraham's faith at such a time to glorify God by believing in hope against hope, Rom. 4:18. If ever thou hopest to enjoy the sweet repose and rest of a Christian in evil times, thou must resolve, whatever thine eyes do see, or thy senses report, to hold fast this as a most sure conclusion; God is faithful and his word is sure; and that although "clouds and darkness be round about him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," Psal. 97:2.

Oh! that you would once learn firmly to depend on God's faithfulness, and fetch your daily reliefs and supports thence, whensoever you are oppressed and assaulted, either,

1. By spiritual troubles. When you walk in darkness and have no light, then you are to live by acts of trust and recumbency upon the most faithful one, Isa. 50:10. Or,

2. By temporal distresses; so did the people of God of old, Heb. 3:17, 18. He lived by faith on this attribute, when all visible comforts and supplies were out of sight.

But especially, let me warn and caution you against five principal enemies to your repose upon the faithfulness of God, viz.

1. Distracting cares, which divide the mind, and eat out the peace and comfort of the heart, and which is worst of all, they reflect very dishonourably upon God who hath pledged his faithfulness and truth for our security; against which, I pray you bar the door by those two scriptures, Phil. 4:6. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And that in 1 Pet. 5:7. "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."

2. Bar the door against unchristian despondency, another enemy to the sweet repose of your souls in this comfortable and quiet chamber of Divine faithfulness: you will find this unbecoming and uncomfortable distemper of mind insinuating and creeping in upon you, except you believe and reason it out, as David did, Psal. 42:11. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him."

3. Bar the door of your heart against carnal policies and sinful shifts, which war against your own faith, and God's faithfulness, as much as any other enemy whatsoever. This was the fault of good David in a day of trouble, 1 Sam. 27:1. "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." Alas, poor David! nothing better than this? Time was when thou couldst think on a better way, when thou couldst say, at what time I am afraid I will trust in thee. How dost thou forget thyself in this strait! doth thy old refuge in God fail thee now? can the Philistines secure thee better than the promises? wilt thou fly from thy best friend to thy worst enemies? but what need we wonder at David, who find the same distemper almost unavoidable to ourselves in like cases.

4. Shut the door against discontents at, and murmurings against the dispositions of providence, whatever you feel or fear: I persuade you not to a stoical apathy, and senselessness of the evils of the times; that would preclude the exercise of patience. If the martyrs had all had the dead palsy before they came to the fire, their faith and patience had not triumphed so gloriously as they did; but on the contrary, beware of grudgings against the ways and will of God, than which, nothing militates more against your faith, and the peace and quietness of your hearts.

5. To conclude, shut the door against all suspicions and jealousies of the firmness and stability of the promises, when you find all sensible comforts shaking and trembling under your feet; have a care of such dangerous questions as that, Psal. 77:8. Doth his promise fail? These are the things which undermine the foundation both of your faith and comfort.

6. In a word, having sheltered your souls in this chamber of rest, and thus shut the doors behind you, all that you have to do is to take your rest in God, and enjoy the pleasure of a soul resigned into the hands of a faithful Creator, by opposing the faithfulness of God to all the fickleness and unfaithfulness you will daily find in men, Micah 7:6, 7. yea, to the weakness and fading of your own natural strength and ability; Psal. 73:26. "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." And so much of the third chamber prepared for believers in the name of their God.

## **CHAPTER IX**

Opening to believers the unchangeableness of God, as a fourth chamber of refuge and rest in times of trouble



Sect. I. IT is said, Prov 9:1. Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars, i.e. She hath raised her whole building upon solid and stable foundations; for, indeed, the strength of every building is according to the ground-work upon which it is erected. *Debile fundamentum fallit opus.* The wisdom and love of God have built an house for a refuge and sanctuary to believers in tempestuous and evil times, containing many pleasant and comfortable chambers prepared for their lodgings, till the calamities be over-past; three of them have been already opened, viz. the power, wisdom, and faithfulness of God.

The last of which leads into a fourth, much like unto it, namely, the unchangeableness of God; wherein his people may find as much rest and comfort amidst the vicissitudes of this unstable world, as in any of the former. This world is compared, Rev. 15:2 to a sea of glass mingled with fire. A sea for its turbulency and instability; a sea of glass for the brittleness and frailty of every thing in it; and a sea of glass mingled with fire, to represent the sharp sufferings and fiery trials with which the saints are exercised here below. The only support and comfort we have against the fickleness and instability of the creature, is the unchangeableness of God.

There is a twofold changeableness in the creature;

1. Natural, the effect of sin.

2. Sinful in its own nature.

1. Natural, let in by the fall upon all the creation, by reason whereof the sweetest creature is but a fading flower, Psal. 102:26. Time, like a moth, frets out the best wrought garment with which we clothe and deck ourselves in this world, *temporalia rapit tempus.* Our most pleasant enjoyments, wives, children, estates, like the gourd in which Jonas so delighted himself, may wither in a night; sin rings these changes all the world over.

2. Sinful, from the falseness, inconstancy, and deceitfulness of the creature: Solomon puts a hard question which may pose the whole world to answer it, Prov. 20:6. A faithful man who can find? The meaning is, a man of perfect and universal faithfulness is a phoenix, seldom or never to be found in this world; for when a question in scripture is moved and let fall again without any answer, then the sense is negative; but though the believer despair of finding an unchangeable man, it is his happiness and comfort to find an unchangeable God.

The unchangeableness of God will appear three ways.

1. By scripture emblems.
2. By scripture assertions.
3. By convincing arguments.

1. By scripture emblems. Remarkable to this purpose is that place, Jam. 1:17. where God is called "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" no variableness. The word is, παραλλαγη, an astronomical term commonly applied to the heavenly bodies, which have their parallaxes, i.e. their declinations, revolutions, vicissitudes, eclipses, increases and decreases: but God is a Sun that never rises nor sets, but is everlastingly and unchangeably one and the same; with him is no variableness nor shadow of turning, τροπης αποσκιασμα. The sun in its zenith casts no shadow, it is the tropic or turning of its course that causes the shadow; the very substance of turning is with man; but not the least shadow of turning with God. And in Deut. 32:4. Moses tells us, God is a rock, and his work is perfect. And indeed perfect working necessarily follows a perfect being. Now there is nothing found in nature more solid, fixed, and immutable than a rock; the firmest buildings will decay; a few ages will make them a ruinous heap; but though one age pass away, and another come, the rocks abide where, and what they were; Our God is the rock of ages; and yet one step

higher, in Zech. 6:1. his decrees and purposes are called mountains of brass, that is, most firm, durable, and unchangeable purposes. Thus the immutability of God is shadowed forth to us in scripture emblems.

2. The same also you will find in plain, positive scripture assertions: such as these that follow, Mal. 3:6. "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." And Job 23:13. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" Men are in one mind to-day, and another to-morrow; the winds are not more variable than the minds of men; but God is in one mind, the purposes of his heart never change. Thou art the same, or as some translate, Thou art thyself for ever, Psal. 102:27. Thus when Moses desired to know his name, that he might tell Pharaoh from whom he came; the answer is, I AM hath sent me, Exod. 3:14. not I was, or I will be, but I AM THAT I AM, noting the absolute unchangeableness of his nature.

3. The unchangeableness of God is fully proved by convincing arguments which Divines commonly draw from such topics as these, viz.

1. The perfection of his goodness.
2. The purity of his nature.
3. The glory of his name.

#### Arguments

Arg. 1. From the perfection of his goodness and blessedness; God is *optimus maximus*, the best and chiefest good, and in that sense, "There is none good but one, which is God," Mark 10:18. From whence it is thus argued, If there be any change in God, that change must either be for the better, or for the worse, or into a state equal with that he possessed before.

But not for the better, for then he could not be the chief good; nor for the worse, for then he must cease to be God, the perfection of whose nature is perfectly exclusive of all defects; nor into an equal state of goodness with that he possessed before; that notion would involve Polytheism, and suppose two first and equal beings; besides the vanity of such a change would be absolutely repugnant to the wisdom of God.

Therefore with the Father of lights can be no variableness nor shadow of turning.

Arg. 2. The unchangeableness of God may be evinced from the purity, sincerity, and uncompoundedness of his being, in which there neither is, nor can be the least mixture, he being a pure act. From whence it is thus argued;

If there be any change in God, that change must be made either by something without himself, or by something within himself, or by both together.

But it cannot be by any thing without himself; for in him all created dependent beings live and move, and enjoy the beings they have; and all the changes that are among them, are from the pleasure of this unchangeable Being, he changeth them, but it is not possible for him, upon whose pleasure they so entirely and absolutely depend, both as to their beings and workings, to suffer any changes himself from, or by them.

Nor can any such change be made upon God by any thing within himself: for that would suppose action and passion, *movens et motum*, a mixture and composition in his nature, which is absolutely rejected and excluded by the simplicity and purity thereof; seeing therefore it can neither be from any power without him, nor any mixture within him, there can be no change at all made on him.

Arg. 3. That is by no means to be ascribed to God, which at once eclipses the glory of his name, and overthrows the hopes and

comforts of all his people.

But so would the supposition of mutability in God do, this would level him with the vain changeable creature; whereas it is a principal part of his glory, that "He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent," Numb 23:19. This also would overthrow the hopes and comforts of all his people, which are built upon this attribute as upon their stable and solid foundation: Among divers others we find three principal privileges of the people of God, built upon his immutability, viz.

1. Their perseverance in grace.
2. Their comfort in the promises.
3. Their hopes of eternal life.

1. Their perseverance in grace is built upon the foundation of God's unchangeableness; one main reason why Christians never repent of their choice of Christ, and the ways of godliness, is, because the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, Rom. 11:29. Should God but once repent of the gifts of his grace he hath bestowed on us, and alter in his love towards us, how soon would our love to God, and delight in God vanish, as the image in the glass doth, when the man that looked upon it hath once turned away his face?

2. All their comfort in the promises is built upon God's unchangeableness. The promises are the springs of consolation; should they fail and dry up, the whole world could not afford them one drop of spiritual comfort to refresh their thirsty souls; the strength of our consolation immediately results from the stability and firmness of the scripture promises, Heb. 6:18.

3. Their hope of eternal life depends upon the unchangeableness of God that hath promised, Tit. 1:2. "In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began." Take away the immutability of God, and you at once darken and eclipse his glory,

and overturn the perseverance, consolations, and hopes of all his people; but blessed be God, these things are built upon firm foundations.

1. His nature is unchangeable, "Thou art the same for ever." Psal. 102:27. The heavens, though they be the purest, and therefore the most durable and unchangeable part of the creation, yet they shall perish and wax old, and be changed as a vesture; but our God is the same for ever.

2. His power is unchangeable; Isa. 59:1. "The Lord's hand is not shortened." Time will enfeeble the strongest creature, and cut short the power of the hands of the mighty, they cannot do in their decrepit age as they were wont to do in their youthful and vigorous age; but the Lord's hand never is, nor can be shortened.

3. The counsels and purposes of his heart are unchangeable, Psal. 33:11. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

4. The goodness, truth, and mercy of God are unchangeable, Psal. 100:5. "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations."

5. The word of God is unchangeable. Though all flesh be as grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field, yet the word of our God shall stand for ever; all the promises contained therein are sure and stedfast: Not yea and nay, but yea and Amen for ever, 2 Cor 1:20.

6. The love of God is an unchangeable love, Jer. 31:3. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

7. In a word, all the gracious pardons of God are unchangeable; as they are full without exceptions, so they are final pardons without any revocation. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities and sins will I remember no more," Heb. 8:12. And thus

much briefly of God's unchangeableness absolutely considered in itself.

Sect. II. Let us next consider, and briefly view the unchangeableness of God in its respect and relation,

1. To his promises,

2. To his providences.

1. The immutability of God gives down its comforts to believers through the promises, there is no other way by which they can have a comfortable admission into this chamber or attribute of God; and there are six sorts of promises in the word, by which it is highly improveable to their support and comfort in an evil day. For,

1. The unchangeable God hath engaged himself by promise to be with his people at all times and in all straits, Heb. 13:5. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The life, joy, and comfort of a believer lies in the bosom of that promise, the conclusion of faith from thence is sweet and sure: If I shall never be forsaken of my God, let hell and earth do their worst, I can never be miserable.

2. The unchangeable God hath promised to maintain their graces, and thereby his interest in them for ever, Jer. 32:40. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good: But I will put my "fear in their hearts, that they shall not turn away from me." Where the Lord undertakes for both parts in the covenant, his own and theirs: I will not turn away from them; Oh inexpressible mercy! Yea, but Lord, may the poor believer say, that is not so much my fear, as that my treacherous heart will turn away from thee. No, saith God, I will take care for that also: I will put my fear into thy heart, and thou shalt never depart from me.

3. The unchangeable God hath promised to establish the covenant with them for ever; so that those who are once taken into that

gracious covenant shall never be turned out of it again, Isa. 54:10. "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

4. The unchangeable God hath secured his loving kindness to his people, by promise, under all the trials and smarting rods of affliction with which he chastens them in this world; he hath reserved to himself the liberty of afflicting them, but bound himself by promise never to remove his favour from them, Psal. 89:33, 34. "I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail."

5. The promises of a joyful resurrection from the dead are grounded upon the immutability of God, Matt. 22:32. "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the "living." Death hath made a great change upon them, but none upon their God; though they be not, he is still the same: therefore they are not lost in death, but shall assuredly be found again in the resurrection.

6. To conclude, the promises of the saints' eternal happiness with God in heaven are founded on his immutability, 1 Cor. 1:8, 9. Tit. 1:2. By all which you see what a pleasant lodging is prepared for the saints in the unchangeable promises of God, amidst all the changes and alterations here below.

2. Once more let us view the unchangeableness of God in his providence towards his people, whatever changes it makes upon us, or whatever changes we seem to discern in it, nothing is more certain than this, that it holds one and the same tenor, pursues one and the same design, in all that it doth upon us, or about us. Providences indeed are very variable, but the designs and ends of God in them all, are invariable, and the same for ever. It is noted in Ezek. 1:12. "That the wheels went straight forward; whither the spirit was to go, they



went; and they turned not when they went." As it is in nature, so in providence, you have one day fair, halcyon, and bright, another dark and full of storms; one season hot, another cold; but all these serve to one and the same end and design to make the earth fruitful; and the end of all providences is to make you holy and happy. That is a sweet promise, Rom. 8:28. "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." This is the compass by which all providences steer their course, as a ship at sea doth by the chart: but more particularly let us note the unchangeableness of God in his providences of all kinds, effective and permissive, and see in them all his unchangeable righteousness and goodness.

1. It must needs be so, considering the unchangeableness of his decree, 2 Tim. 2:19. "The foundation of God standeth sure." Providences serve, but never frustrate; execute, but cannot make void the decree; so that you may say of the most afflicting providences, as David doth of the stormy winds, Psal. 148:8. They all fulfil his word.

2. The wisdom of God proves it; he will not suffer his works or permissions to clash with his designs and purposes: Divine wisdom shews itself in the steady direction of all things to their ultimate end. To open this in some particulars, consider,

1. Doth the Lord permit wicked men to rage and insult, persecute and vex his people? Yet all this while providence is in its right way, it walks in as direct a line to your good, as when it is in a more pleasant path of peace, Jer. 24:5. "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." Israel was sent to Babylon for their good. This improves your faith and patience, Rev. 13:10. Here is the patience and faith of the saints. So Rom. 5:2, 3. "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulations

also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience." By this you are weaned from, and mortified to this world.

2. Doth the Lord in his providence order many and frequent, close and smarting afflictions for you? Why, lo! here is the same design managing as effectually, as if all the peace and prosperity in the world were ordered for you; the face of providence indeed is not the same, but the love of God is still the same; he loves you as much when he smites, as when he smiles on you: for what are his ends in afflicting you, and what the sanctified fruits of your afflictions? Is it not,

1. To purge your iniquities? Isa. 27:9. "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin."

2. To reduce your hearts to God? Psal. 119:67. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word."

3. To quicken you to your duties? Let the best man be without afflictions, and he will quickly grow dull in the way of his duty.

3. Doth God let loose the chain of Satan to tempt and buffet you! Yet is he still the same God to you as before; for do but observe his ends in that permission, and you will find, that, by these things, the Lord is leading you towards that desired assurance of his love which your souls long after. Few Christians attain to any considerable settlement of soul, but by such shakings and combats, the end of these permissions is to put you to your knees, and blow up a greater flame and fervour of spirit in prayer, 2 Cor. 12:8. So that, eventually, these permissions of providence prove singular advantages and blessings to you.

Sect III. What remains then, seeing God is unchangeable in his love to his people, pursuing the great ends of all his gracious promises in a steady course of providence, wherein he will never effect, or permit any thing that is really repugnant to his own glory, or their good; but

that we enter also into this chamber of rest, shut the doors about us, and comfortably improve the unchangeableness of God, while we see nothing but changes and troubles here below.

(1.) Enter into God's unchangeableness by faith, take up your lodging in this sweet attribute also; and to encourage your faith thereunto, seriously consider a few particulars.

1. Consider how constant, firm, and unchangeable God hath been to his people in all times and straits; not one among the many thousands of his people, that are passed on before you, but by frequent and certain experience have found him so. What a singular encouragement is this to our faith in the case before us? Psal. 9:13. "They that know thy name, will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." So Isa. 25:4. "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as the storm against the wall." Neither is there any thing in your experience contradictory to the encouraging reports others have made of God: you must acknowledge, that notwithstanding your own changeableness, who have hardly been able to maintain your hearts in any spiritual frame towards God for one day together, yet his mercies towards you have been new every morning, and great hath been his faithfulness. You have often turned aside from the way of your duty, and have not followed God in a steady course of obedience; and yet, for all that, his goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life, as it is Psal. 23:6.

2. Consider how often you have doubted and mistrusted the unchangeableness of God, and been forced with shame and sorrow, to retract your folly therein; God hath many times convinced you, that his love to you is an unchangeable love, how many changes soever, in the course of his providence, have passed over you; consult Isa. 49:14. and Psal. 77, 78 and see how the cases are parallel, both in respect of God's constancy to them and you, and the inconstancy of his people's faith then, and yours now; your fears and doubts are the

same with theirs, though his goodness and love have been as unchangeable to you as ever they were to them.

3. Consider the advocateship and intercession of Jesus Christ in heaven for you, by virtue whereof the favour and love of God become unalterable towards his people. If any thing can be supposed to cool or quench the love of God towards you, nothing in the world is more like to do it than your sin; and this, indeed, is that which you fear will estrange and alienate the heart of your God from you. But, reader, if thou be one that sincerely mournest for all the grief and dishonour of God by thy sin, appliest the blood of sprinkling to thy soul by faith, and makest mortification and watchfulness thy daily business; comfort thyself against that fear from that singular encouragement given thee in this case, 1 John 2:1, 2. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the Propitiation for our sins." Look as the death of Christ healed the great breach betwixt God and the soul, by thy reconciliation at first; so the powerful intercession of Christ in heaven effectually prevents all new breaches betwixt God and thy soul afterwards, so that he will never totally and finally cast thee off again.

(2.) Shut the door behind you against all objections, scruples, and questionings of God's immutability, and, by a resolved and steady faith, maintain the honour of God in this point, by thy constant adherence to it, and dependence upon it: and especially see that you give him the glory of his unchangeableness.

1. When thou shalt see the greatest alterations and changes made by his providence in the world. What though thou shouldst live to see all things turned upside down, the foundations out of course, all things drawing into a sea of confusion and trouble? yet in the midst of those public distractions and distress of nations, encourage thou thyself in this: Thy God, and his love to his people, are the same for ever. Psal. 46:1, 2, 3, 4, 5. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and

the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea: God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

2. Live by faith upon God's unchangeableness under the greatest changes of your own condition in this world. Providence may make great alterations upon all your outward comforts: it may cast you down, how dear soever you be to God, from riches into poverty, from health into sickness, from honour into reproach, from liberty into bondage; thou mayest overlive all thy comfortable relations, and of a Naomi become a Marah. Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down, said as good a man as you, Psal. 103:10. Yet still it is your duty, and will be your great privilege in the midst of all these changes, to act your faith upon the never-changing God, as that holy man did, Hab. 3:17. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail; and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation;" q. d. Suppose a thousand disappointments of my earthly hopes, yet will I maintain my hope in God. O Christian! with how many yet, notwithstanding, and nevertheless, must thy faith bear up in times of trouble, or thou wilt sink.

3. See thou live upon God's unchangeableness, when age and sickness shall inform thee that thy great change is at hand; though thy heart and thy flesh fail, comfort thyself with this, thy God will never fail thee, Psal. 73:16. "O God (saith David) thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works, now also when I am old and gray-headed, forsake me not," Psal. 71:17, 18.

4. Live upon the unchangeableness of God under the greatest and saddest changes of your spiritual condition; God may cloud the light of his countenance over thy soul, he may fill thee with fears and troubles, and the Comforter that should relieve thee may seem to be far off; yet still maintain thy faith in the unchangeableness of his love; trust in the name of the Lord, stay thyself upon thy God, when

thou walkest in darkness, and hast no light, Isa. 50:10 Thus shut thy door.

(3.) Improve the unchangeableness of God to thy best advantage in the worst times, by drawing thence such comfortable conclusions as these.

1. If God be an unchangeable God in his promises, and in his love to his people, what should hinder but the people of God may live happily and comfortably in the saddest times, and greatest troubles upon earth. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich, as having nothing, yet possessing all things," 2 Cor. 6:10. "Certainly nothing ought to quench a Christian's mirth, that is not able to separate him from the love of Christ," Rom. 8:35.

2. If God be an unchangeable God in his love to his people, then it becomes all that have special interest in this God, to be unchangeable and immoveable in the ways of their obedience towards him: God will not cast you off, see that you cast not off your duties, no, not when they are surrounded with difficulties; he loves you, though you often grieve him by sin; see that you still love him, though he often grieve and burden you by affliction: he will own you for his people under the greatest contempts and reproaches of the world; see that you own and honour his ways and truths when you are under most reproach from a vile world.

## **CHAPTER X**

Opening the care of God for his people in times of trouble, as the fifth chamber of rest to believers.

Sect. I. CARE, in the general notion of it, as it is applied to the creature, imports the studiousness and solicitousness of our thoughts, for the safety and welfare of ourselves, or those we love and

highly value. Now, though there be no such thing properly in God, at whose dispose and pleasure all events are, and to whose counsels and appointments all difficulties must give way; yet he is pleased to accommodate himself to our weakness, and express his regard and love to his people, by such things as one creature doth to another, to which it is endeared by relation or affection. To this purpose we may find many significant synonymous expressions in scripture, all importing the care of God over his people, in a pleasant variety of notion and expression, as Nah. 1:7. "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him."

He knoweth them, i.e. he hath a special, tender, and careful eye upon them, to see their wants supplied, and to protect them in all their dangers; for in the common and general sense he knoweth them that trust not in him, as well as those that do; and farther to clear this sense of the place, it is said, Psal. 40:17. "The Lord thinketh on them." Importing not only simple cogitation, but the immoration or abiding of his thoughts upon them, as our thoughts are wont to do upon that which we highly esteem, especially when any danger is near it. And yet farther, to clear this sense, it is said, Job 36:7. "He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous." As when Moses was exposed in the ark of bulrushes, where his life was in imminent hazard by the waters of Nilus on one side, and the Egyptian cut-throats on the other: his sister Miriam kept watch at a distance, to see what would be done to him. Her eye was never off that ark wherein her dear brother lay; fear and care engaged her eye to keep a true watch for him. Thus the Lord withdraweth not his eye from the righteous. To the same purpose is that expression, Deut. 33:3. "Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand." That which we dearly love and prize above ordinary, we keep in our own hands for its security, as not thinking it safe enough in any other hand or place. And once more, Isa. 49:16. God is said to engrave them upon the palms of his hands, alluding to what is customary among men, who, when they would charge their memories with something of special concernment, use to change a ring, or bind a thread about the finger, to put them in mind of it. Thus is the care of our God expressed to us

in scripture-notions. The amount of all which is given to us in that one proper and full expression of the apostle, 1 Pet. 1:7. He careth for you. To open this chamber of Divine care as a place of sweetest rest to our anxious and perplexed minds, in times of difficulty and hazard, it will be necessary that you seriously ponder,

1. The grounds and reasons of the care of God.
2. The extent and compass of the care of God.
3. The lovely properties of the care of God.

(1.) The grounds and reasons of God's care for his people, which are,

1. The strict and dear relations in which he is pleased to own them. Believers are his children, and you know how naturally children engage and draw forth the father's care for them. This is the argument Christ uses, Mat. 6:31, 32. "Therefore, take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all those things." Children, especially when young, disquiet not themselves about provision for back or belly, but leave that to the care of their parents, from whom, by the tie and bonds of nature and love, they expect provision for all those wants: Every one takes care for his own; much more doth God for his own children; and, indeed, he expects his children should live upon his care as our children in their minority do upon ours.

2. God's precious estimation and value of them engage his constant care for them. Believers are his jewels, Mal. 3:17 his peculiar people, 1 Pet. 2:6 his special portion or treasure in this world, Deut. 32:9 and as such he prizes and esteems them above all the people of the earth, and accordingly exercised his special care in all the dangers they are exposed to. Special love engageth peculiar care.

3. The dangers and fears of the people of God in this world are many and great; and were it not for the Lord's assiduous and tender care



over them, they must necessarily be ruined both in soul and body by them. The church is God's vineyard, its enemies as so many wild boars to root it up: Upon this account he saith, Isa. 27:3. "I the Lord do keep it; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." And, indeed, it is well for Israel that he who keepeth it, never slumbereth nor sleepeth, Psal. 121:4. That our houses are in peace, that we and our dear relations fall not as a prey into cruel and bloody hands skilful to destroy, that we find any rest and comfort in so evil and dangerous a world, is wholly and only to be ascribed to the care of God over us and ours.

4. Jesus Christ hath solemnly recommended all the people of God to his particular care. It was one of the last expressions of Christ's love to them at the parting hour, John 17:11. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world; and I come to thee: Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." q. d. While I have been personally present with them, I took the same care of them as a shepherd doth of his flock, or a tender father of his children: but now I must leave them in the world, and in the midst of a world of dangers, fears, and troubles, against which they can make no provision or defence themselves. Father, remember them, look after them when I shall be removed from them, they are thine as well as mine; and I recommend them, with my last breath, to thy care and protection. This is a special ground also, of God's care for them.

5. Believers daily cast themselves upon the care of God, and resign themselves unto it in their daily prayers, and by their often-renewed acts of faith, than which no act is found more engaging from the creature upon its God; though there be nothing of merit, yet there is much engaging efficacy in it, Isa. 26:3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." We find it so among ourselves, the more firmly and entirely any one trusteth in us, and dependeth upon us, the more he engageth us to protect and relieve him. Now this is the daily work of Christians to trust God over all, and put all their concernments into his hand,

which very trust and dependence draw forth the care of God for them.

6. In a word, the many promises God hath made to his people to preserve, support, and supply them in all the times of need, engage the care of God for them, as often as such wants or dangers befall them; for indeed, herein he at once takes care for their necessity, and for his own honour and glory. They trust to his word, and rely upon his promises, which therefore he will be careful to make good. This was the argument which the church pleaded in the time of imminent danger to engage the care of God for them, Psal. 74:20. Have respect unto the covenant: for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty, q. d. O Lord, thy people are in the midst of cruel enemies, take care for their protection, and though there be no worth in them to which thou shouldest have respect, yet have respect unto thine own covenant: let the glory of thy name draw forth thy care to thy people.

Sect. II. We have seen the grounds and reasons of God's care over his people, let us next view (2.) The extent and compass of this divine care; and here methinks the Lord saith to his people as he said to Abraham, Gen. 13:14, 15. Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward, for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed for ever. So here, poor timorous, dejected believer, lift up thine eyes from the place where thou art, and take a view of all the promises in the scriptures of truth; promises of supports under all burthens, supplies of all wants, deliverances out of all dangers, assistances in all distresses; to thee have I given them, all as a portion for ever. This care of God walks around, and encompasseth the souls and bodies of them that fear him day and night. There is no interest or concern of either found without the line of his all-surrounding care, and every one of his children are enfolded in his fatherly arms, Deut. 33:3. All his saints are in thy hand. All, and every one of their wants and straits are observed by this care, in order to their supply, Phil. 4:19. My God shall supply all your need.

1. Great is the care of God over the bodies of his people, and all the dangers and necessities of them as they daily grow; your meat and drink are daily provided for you by your Father's care, Psal. 111:2–4. He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will be ever mindful of his covenant. It is from this care of thy heavenly Father, that necessary provisions have been made for thee, of which, it may be, thou hast had no foresight: this is the God that hath fed thee all thy life long, Gen. 48:15. It is from the same care thy body hath been clothed, Matth. 6:28. How much more shall he clothe you, O ye of little faith? It is through this care you sleep in peace, and your rest is made sweet unto you, Prov. 3:24 'When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.' In a word, thou owest all thy recoveries from dangerous diseases, and narrow escapes from the grave, to this care of thy God over thee, He is the Lord that healeth thee, Exod. 15:26. That the incensed humours of thy body had not overflowed their banks, like an inundation of the sea, when they raged in thy dangerous diseases, is only because thy God took the care of thee, and set them their bounds.

2. Divine care extends itself to the souls of all that fear God, and to all the concernments of their souls; and manifestly discovers itself in all the gracious provisions it hath made for them. More particularly, it is from this tender, fatherly care that,

1. A Saviour was provided to redeem them, when they were ruined and lost by sin, John 3:16 Rom. 8:32.

2. That spiritual cordials are provided to refresh them in all their sinking sorrows and inward distresses, Psal. 94:19.

3. That a door of deliverance is opened to them, when they are sorely pressed upon by temptations, and ready to be overwhelmed, 1 Cor. 10:13.

4. That a strength above their own comes seasonably to support them, when they are almost over-weighed with inward troubles; when great weights are upon them, the everlasting arms are underneath them, Psal. 138:3. Isa. 57:16.

5. That their ruin is prevented, when they are upon the dangerous and slippery brink of temptations, and their feet almost gone, Psal. 73:2. Hos. 2:6. 2 Cor. 12:7.

6. That they are recovered again after dangerous falls by sin, and not left a prey and trophy to their enemy, Hos. 14:4.

7. That they are guided and directed in the light way, when they are at a loss, and know not what course to take, Psal. 16:11. 73:24.

8. That they are established and confirmed in Christ, in the most shaking and overturning times of trouble and persecution; so that neither their hearts turn back, nor their steps decline from his ways, Jer. 32:40. John 4:14.

9. That they are upheld under spiritual desertions, and recovered again out of that dismal darkness, into the cheerful light of God's countenance, Isa. 57:16.

10. That they are at last brought safe to heaven, through the innumerable hazards and dangers all along their way thither, Heb. 11:19. In all these things the care of their God eminently discovers itself for their souls.

(3.) Once more let us consider the care of God for his people in the lovely properties thereof. As,

1. It is a fatherly care, than which none is greater or more tender, Matth. 7:8. "Your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." And indeed the greatest and tenderest care of an earthly father is but a faint shadow of that tender care which is in the heart of God over his children; for to that end we find them compared,

Matth. 7:11. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them which ask him." The care of parents is carelessness itself, compared with that care which God takes of his.

2. The care of God is an universal care, watching over all his people, in all ages, places, and dangers, 2 Chron. 16:9. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him." This was applied by way of reproof to Asa, who out of a sinful distrust of the care of God, relied upon the help of Syria, as if there had not been a God in heaven to take care of him and the people.

3. God's care over his, is assiduous and continual; "his mercies are new every morning, great is his faithfulness," Lam. 3:22, 23. "He keeps his people night and day," Isa. 27:3. Could Satan, or his instruments find such an hour, wherein the seven eyes of providence should be all asleep, that would be the fatal hour to our souls and bodies; but he that keepeth Israel slumbereth not.

4. God's care over his, is exceeding tender, far beyond the tenderness that the most affectionate mother ever felt in her heart towards the child that hanged on her breast, Isa. 49:15. "Can a mother forget her sucking child, &c. they may, yet will not I forget thee." The birds of the air are not so tender of their young in the nest, as God is of his people in the world, Isa. 31:5. Mercy fills the heart of God, yea, tender mercy, yea, multitudes of tender mercies, Psal. 51:1.

5. The care of God is a seasonable care, which is always sure to take the opportunity and proper season of relieving his people; in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen; the beauty of providence is much seen in this thing, wherever you feel a want, this care finds a supply; and thus much briefly of the care of God absolutely considered in itself.

Sect. III. It remains that we also consider the care of God in its twofold respect, viz.

1. To his promises.

2. To his providences.

(1.) There are multitudes of promises found in the scriptures, exactly fitted as so many keys to open the door of this comfortable chamber, to receive and secure all that fear God, whatever their wants, fears, or distresses are. These are reducible into two classes, or ranks, viz.

1. More general and comprehensive.

2. More particular promises.

The general and more comprehensive promises are found in the general expression of the covenant, as that to Abraham, Gen. 17:1. "I am God Almighty, walk thou before me, and be perfect." q. d. Let it be thy care to walk exactly in the paths of obedience before me, and I will take care to supply all thy wants from the never-failing fountain of my all-sufficiency; and of the same tenor is that, 2 Cor. 6:18. "I will be to them a Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters," i.e. Expect your provisions and protections from my care, as children do from their father. More particularly, there are six sorts of promises wherein the care of God is particularly made over to his people in the greatest hazards and difficulties in this life, viz.

1. It is assigned and made over to them to supply all their needs, so far as the glory of God, and the advancement of their spiritual and eternal good shall require it, Psal. 34:9. "They that fear "the Lord shall not want any good thing." All your livelihood is in that promise; thence comes your daily bread; your own and your family's meat is contained therein.

2. It is made over to the church and people of God for their defence against all dangers, Isa. 54:17. "No weapon that is formed against

thee shall prosper." This promise wards off all the deadly blows, and puts by all the mortal thrusts that are made at you; here the care of God forms itself into a shield for your defence.

3. The care of God is engaged by promise for the moderation and mitigation of your afflictions, that they may not exceed your abilities to bear them, Isa. 27:8, 9. "In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayed the rough wind in the day of the east wind." If the wind blow from a cold corner, this promise moderates it, that it blow not a storm; all the sparing mercies and sweetening circumstances, which gracious souls thankfully note, in the sharpest trials, come from this promise, wherein the care of God is engaged for that purpose.

4. Divine care is put under the bond of a promise, for the direction and guidance of all their troubles and trials to an happy issue, Rom. 8:28. "All things shall work together for good." From what quarter soever the wind bloweth, God will take care that it shall be useful to drive you to your port; the very providences that cast you down, by virtue of this promise, prove as serviceable and beneficial as those that lift you up.

5. The care of God stands engaged in the promise, for the help and aid of his people in all the extremities and exigencies of their lives, Psal. 46:1. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Never is the care of God more visible and conspicuous, than in such times of need.

6. Lastly, The care of God is engaged to carry his people safe through all the dangers of the way, and bring them all home to glory at last, John 10:28. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This care of God, thus engaged for you, is your convoy to accompany and secure you, till it set you safe into your harbour of eternal rest.

(2.) You have heard how the care of God is engaged for you by promise; now see how it actuates and exerts itself for the people of God in the various methods of providence; and here, O here is the sweetest pleasure of the Christian life, a delight far transcending all the delights of this life. Sit down Christian in this chamber also, and make but such observations upon the care of thy God as follow; and then tell me whether the world, with all its pleasures and delights, can give thee such another entertainment.

1. Reflect upon the constant, sweet, and suitable provisions, that from time to time have been prepared for thee and thine, by this care of thy God; for whensoever thy wants did come, I am sure from hence came thy supplies, it hath enabled thee to return the same answer the disciples did to that question, Luke 22:35. "Lacked ye any thing?" And they said, Nothing.

2. Reflect with admiration upon the various difficulties of your lives, wherein your thoughts have been entangled, and out of which you have been extricated and delivered by the care of God over you; how oft have your thoughts been like a ravelled skaine of silk, so entangled and perplexed with the difficulties and fears before you, that you could find no end, but the longer you thought, the more you were puzzled, till you have left thinking and fell to praying; and there you have found the right end to wind up all your thoughts upon the bottom of peace and sweet contentment, according to that direction, Psal. 37:5. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

3. Observe with a melting heart, how the care of thy God hath disposed and directed thy way to unforeseen advantages: Had he not ordered thy steps when, and as he did, thou hadst not been in possession of those temporal and spiritual mercies that sweeten thy life at this day. Surely the steps of good men are ordered by the Lord: and as for thee, Christian, what reason hast thou, with an heart overflowing with love and thankfulness, to look up and say, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth? It is sweet to live by faith



upon Divine care. O what a serene life might we live, careful for nothing, but making known our requests unto God in every thing, Phil. 4:6. casting all our care on him that careth for us, 1 Pet. 5:7. perplexing our thoughts about nothing, but rolling every burden upon God by faith. Thus lived holy Musculus, when reduced to extreme poverty, and danger at the same time; then it was that he solaced his soul with that comfortable distich, a good lesson for others;

Est Deus in cælis, qui providus omnia curat.

Credientes nusquam deseruisse potest.

That is, There is a God above, who, as he provides for, and takes care of all, can never forsake those that believe in him.

The provident care of his heavenly Father made his heart as quiet as the child at the breast. Christian, thou knowest not what distressful days are coming upon the earth, nor what personal trials shall befall thee in this world; but I advise thee, as thou valuest the tranquillity and comfort of thy life, shut up thyself by faith in this chamber of Divine care; it is thy best security in this world: Reflect frequently and thankfully upon the manifold supports, supplies, and salvations thou hast already had from this fountain of mercies, and be not discouraged at new difficulties. When an eminent Christian was told of some that way-laid him to destroy him, his answer was, Si Deus mei curam non habet, quid vivo? In like manner thou mayest say, if God had not taken care for thee; how couldst thou have lived till now? how couldst thou have over-lived so many troubles, fears, and dangers as thou hast done?

## CHAPTER XI

Opening the sixth and last chamber, viz. The love of God, as a resting-place to believing souls in evil times.

Sect. I. THOUGH all the attributes in the name or chambers of this house of God are glorious and excellent, yet this of love is transcendently glorious: Of this room it may be said as it was of Solomon's royal chariot, Cant. 3:10. "The midst thereof is paved with love." In this attribute the glory of God is signally and eminently manifested, 1 John 4:9, 10. And upon this foundation the hopes and comforts of all believers are built and founded, Rom. 8:35. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" He defies and despises them all, because neither of them alone, nor altogether by their united strength, can unclasp the arms of Divine love, in which believers are safely enfolded. In this attribute God's people, by faith, entrench themselves, and of it a believer saith, *Hic murus aheneus esto*, this shall be my stronghold and fortress in the day of trouble. And well may we so esteem and reckon it, if we consider,

1. That wherever the special love of God goes, there the special presence of God goes also, John 14:23. "He shall be loved of my Father, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And O how secure and safe must those be (however times govern) with whom God himself maketh his abode? For as the Psalmist speaks, Psal. 91:1. "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." And he that is over-shadowed by an Almighty power, need not fear how many mighty enemies combine against him.

2. Wherever the special love of God is placed, that person becomes precious and highly valuable in the eyes of God; he appreciates and estimates such a man as his peculiar treasure, which naturally and necessarily draws and spreads the wing of Divine care over him for his protection, Deut. 23:12. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in

safety by him, and the Lord shall cover him all the day long." Things of greatest value are always kept in safest custody.

3. Upon whomsoever the special love of God is set, there all events and issues of troubles are sure to be over-ruled to the eternal advantage of that soul, Rom. 8:28. Which consideration alone is sufficient to unsting all the troubles in the world, and make the beloved of the Lord shout and triumph in the midst of tribulations.

But let us enter yet farther into this glorious chamber of Divine love, and more particularly view the admirable properties thereof; though, when all is done, it will be found a love passing knowledge; our thoughts may admire, but can never measure it.

1. And first, you will find it an ancient love whose spring is in eternity itself. Believer, God is thine ancient friend, who foresaw and loved thee before thou wast, yea, before this world was in being; the fruits and effects thereof thou gatherest in time, but the root that produces them was before all time, Prov. 8:22, 23. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." Thus was the love of God contriving, and providing the best of mercies in Christ for us; while, as yet, there were no such creatures in the world, nor a world prepared to receive us.

2. The love of God to his people is a free, and altogether undeserved love. It must needs be so, seeing it preceded our very being; which had it not done, yet no motives had been found in us to allure it to us more than others, Deut. 7:7. "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor chuse you, because ye were more in number than any people (for ye were the fewest of all people) but because the Lord loved you." So that we cannot find one stone of our merit in the foundation of this love; for those whom it embraces in its arms are immerentes & malemerentes, ill-deserving, as well as undeserving. We were loved of God before we were lovely in ourselves; it was freely pitched upon us, not purchased by us, Isa. 43:24.

3. The love, of God to believers is a bountiful love, streaming forth continually mercies both innumerable and invaluable to their souls and bodies, 2 Pet. 1:3. Christian, it would quickly weary thine arm, yea, let me say, the arm of an angel, but to write down the thousandth part of the mercies which have already flowed out of this precious fountain to thee; though all thou hast received or shalt receive in this world, are but the beginnings of mercy, and. first-fruits of the love of God to thee: it is the love of God which daily loads thee with benefits, as the expression is, Psal. 68:19. And if thou art daily loaded with mercies, what an heap of mercies will the mercies of thy whole life be?

4. The love of God to believers is a distinguishing love; not the portion of all, no, nor yet of many besides thee, 1 Cor. 1:26. The generality of the world dwell in the room of common providence, not in the chamber of special love, into which God hath admitted thee: this consideration should make thee break out in admiration, as it is, John 19:22. "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to me, and not to the world?"

5. The love of God to believers is a love transcendent to all creature-love; it moves in an higher sphere than the love of any creature doth, Rom. 5:6, 7, 8. We read of Jacob's love to Rachel, which is so celebrated in the sacred story for the fervour of it; and yet all that it enabled him to suffer was but the summer's heat and the winter's cold; a trifle to what the love of Christ engaged, and enabled him to suffer for thy sake. We read also of the love of David to Absalom, which made him wish, Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! This love was only manifested in a wish, which, haply might have been retracted too, had there been an exchange to be made indeed: but the life of Christ, worth millions of his life, was actually and willingly staked down for thy soul. We read of the love of one disciple manifested to another disciple in a cup of cold water; but Christ hath manifested his love to thee in pouring out his warmest heart-blood for thy redemption. O what a transcendent love is the Divine love!

6. To conclude, (though alas, little is said of the love of God) it is an everlasting and unchangeable love. Hills and mountains shall sooner start from their basis, than his loving-kindness depart from his people, Isa. 54:10. Though he afflict us, still he loves us, Psal. 89:32, 33. Nay, though we grieve him, yet still he loves us, Mark 16:7. Tell the disciples, and tell Peter. Peter had grieved Christ, denied Christ, yet will he not renounce nor cast off Peter.

Sect. II. Well then, if God hath opened to your souls such a chamber of love, where your souls may be ravished with daily delights, as well as secured from danger and ruin; O that you would enter into it by faith, and dwell for ever in the love of God! I mean, clear up your interest in it, and then solace your souls in the delights of it. Need I to use an argument, or spend one motive to press you to enter into such an heaven upon earth? If the deadness of thy heart doth need it, take into consideration, reader, these few that follow.

### Motives

Motive 1. Ponder with thyself how sad and miserable the case will be with thee in the days of calamity and distress, if the love of God shall be clouded to thy soul. In those days such as love thee, will either be absent from thee, or impotent to help thee; all thy friends and familiars may be removed far off, and whither then wilt thou turn, should God be far off too? This was that evil which Jeremiah so vehemently deprecated, chap. 17. ver. 17. Be not a terror unto me, thou art my hope in the day of evil; q. d. O Lord, my soul depends upon refreshment and comfort from thee, when all the springs of earthly comfort are dried up. Shouldst thou be a terror to me in the day of evil, it will be the most terrible disappointment that ever befel my soul; if thou be kind, I care not who be cruel; if I have the love of God, I value not the hatred of men; but if God be a terror, who, or what can be a comforter? The love of God is the alone refuge to which the gracious soul retreats, upon all creature disappointments and failings. This, therefore, is the main thing to be feared against the evil day.

Motive 2. The knowledge and assurance of the love of God is a mercy attainable by a gracious soul, notwithstanding the imperfections of grace. Peter had his falls and failings as well as other Christians, yet when Christ puts the question home to him, John 21:15. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" he was able to return a clear positive answer, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Study thy heart, Christian, and study the scriptures; if thou canst find the sincere love of God in thy heart, that scripture will clear the love of God to thy soul, John 4:19. "We love him, because he first loved us." If thou lay thine hand upon a stone-wall, and feel it warm, thou mayest conclude the sun-beams have shone upon it; for warmth is not naturally in dead stones. Our love to God is but a reflex beam of his love to us; and we know there can be no reflex without a direct beam. Thousands of Christians do, at this day, actually possess the ravishing sense of Divine love, whose fears and complaints have been the same that thine now are; that God who indulged this favour to them, can do as much for thee.

Motive 3. Think how well thou wilt be provided for the worst and difficultest times, when the love of God shall be well secured to thy soul; when the love of God, i.e. the sense of his love, is once shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, which for that end, among others, is given unto us; we shall then be able to glory in tribulation, Rom. 5:3, 5. We may then bid defiance to all the adverse powers of hell and earth, and say, now do your worst; we are out of your reach, and above all your terrors and affrights. Be advised then to sit close to this work; clear but this point once, and the worst is past. Oh lie at the feet of God night and day, give him no rest, take no denial from him, fill thy mouth with pleas and arguments: Tell him, Lord, it is neither for corn, nor wine, that I seek thee, but only for thy love; bestow any other gifts upon whom thou wilt, only seal up thy love to my soul.

And, Lastly, I advise thee, reader, to be exceeding careful, when God admits thee into the sense of his love, to shut the door behind thee, lest thy soul be soon expelled thence by the subtilty of Satan, who

envies nothing more, than such an happiness as this: That envious spirit totally despairs of the least drop of such a mercy, and therefore swells with envy at thy enjoyment of it. But if ever thou fasten thy hand of faith upon this mercy, loose not thy hold by every objection with which he will rap thy fingers.

1. If he object the many sharp afflictions, and manifold rods of God upon thee, call not the love of God in question for that; but remember what he saith, Heb. 12:6. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Fatherly corrections are so far from being inconsistent with the love of God, that his love is rather questionable without them, than for them; they are love tokens, not marks of hatred.

2. Yield not up thy claim and title to the love of God, because he sometimes hides his face from thee; thou knowest the sun is up, and going on in its regular course, in the darkest and closest day. My God, my God, saith Christ himself, Why hast thou forsaken me? Believe he is still thy God, and his love is immutable, when the sense and manifestations thereof do fail.

3. Call not the love of God in question, because of thy great vileness and unworthiness. Say not, when thou most loatest thyself, God must needs loath thee too; he can love where thou loatest. "Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon thee: What will ye see in the Shulamite? as it were the company of two armies" The spouse was exceeding beautiful in the eyes of others, when most base and vile in her own: What would you see in the Shulamite? Alas, there is nothing in me, at the best, but conflicts and wars betwixt grace and corruption, as it were betwixt two armies, Cant. 6:13.

3. Quit not thy claim to the love of God, because he seems to shut out thy prayers, and delays to answer thy long continued desires and importunities of thy soul in some cases. David would neither censure his God, no, nor call in question his interest in him, because of such a

delay and silence, Psal. 22:1, 2. My God my God, The claim is doubled, ver. 1. and yet in the next breath he saith, "I cry in the day time but thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent."

Thus I have offered you some advice and assistance, how to secure yourselves in these Divine attributes, viz. the power, wisdom, faithfulness, unchangeableness, care, and love of God, as in so many sanctuaries, and comfortable refuges in the days of common calamity. It is noted, even of the Egyptians, when the storm of hail was coming upon the land, Exod. 9:20. "He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh, made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses." Let not an Egyptian take more care of his beasts than Christians of their souls. Stormy days are coming, God hath provided you a refuge, and given you seasonable premonitions, and calls from heaven, to hasten into them before the times of desolations come. The Lord help us to hear his calls and comply with them, which will be as much our privilege, as it is our duty. And so much for the fifth proposition, viz. That God's attributes, promises, and providences are prepared for the security of his people in the greatest distresses that befall them in the world.

## PROPOSITION VI

That none but God's own people are taken into these chambers of security, or can expect his special protection in evil times.

Sect I. THIS proposition describes and clears the qualified subject of this privilege. God's own people, and none but such, can warrantably claim special protection in evil times, and this is consonant to the current account of scripture, Isa. 3:10, 11. "Say ye unto the righteous, it shall be well with him. Wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him." He speaks concerning the day of Jerusalem's ruin, and Judah's fall, as appears ver. 8. So great a difference will God make, even in this



world, betwixt the righteous and the wicked. In Nah. 1 you have also a terrible day described, wherein Bashan, Carmel, and Lebanon, the most pleasant and fruitful places of the land shall languish, ver. 4. The mountains shall quake, the hills melt, the earth, and those that dwell therein, burnt up, ver. 5. The indignation and fury of God poured out like fire, ver. 6. The privileged people in this terrible day are God's own people, they only are taken into security, ver. 7. The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him, i.e. he so knoweth them, as to care and provide for them in that evil day; and so throughout the whole scripture, you shall find the promises of protection still made to the people of God. When the Chaldean army, like a devouring fire, was ready to seize upon the land, the sinners in Zion were afraid, fearfulness surprized the hypocrites; for who among us (say they) shall dwell with devouring fire, and everlasting burnings? Yes, saith God, some there are that shall abide that day, viz. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks;" i.e. God will be a sanctuary to them, when others shall be as stubble before the flames, Isa. 33:14, 15, 16.

But for the right stating of this proposition, three things must be heedfully regarded.

1. That all good men are not always exempted from the stroke of outward calamities. In that sense the righteous may perish, and merciful men be taken away; yea, they may perish in love, and be taken away in mercy from the evil to come, Isa. 57:1, 2. Micah 7:1, 2.
2. That all wicked men are not always exposed to eternal miseries; but "a just man may perish in his righteousness, and a wicked man prolong his life in his wickedness," Eccles. 7:15.
3. But in this sense we are to understand the proposition, That none but the people of God have right, by promise, to his special protection in evil days, that all such shall either be preserved from

the stroke of calamities, or from the deadly sting, namely, eternal ruin by them: though they should fall by the hands of enemies, yet they die as Josiah did, in peace, 2 Kings 22:19, 20. If they be taken away, it is but out of the way of greater mischiefs: Death doth but lay the saints in their beds of rest, when it hurries away others into everlasting miseries: If they be not excused from troubles, yet their troubles are sure to be sanctified to their eternal good, Rom. 8:28. And the Lord will be with them in their troubles, Psal. 91:15. Isa. 41:10.

Two things remain to be considered, before we finish this last proposition: viz.

1. Who the people of God are?

2. Why this privilege is peculiar to them?

1. Who are the people of God? the scripture describes them two ways; negatively and positively. Negatively, in opposition to those who are not the people of God, but are, (1.) The servants of sin, obeying it in the lusts of it, which the people of God neither are, nor dare to do, Rom. 6:11, 12, &c. (2.) The men of this world have their portion in this life, savouring and minding the things of the world only, whereas the people of God are called out of the world, John 17:16. and principally study and labour after the higher concerns of the world to come, Rom. 8:5. (3.) The vassals of Satan, do his lusts, and are in subjection to his power, Acts 26:18. Eph. 2:2. from which bondage the people of God are made free. (4.) Nor yet are they their own, living wholly to themselves, and seeking only their own ends, as others do, 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. These, all these are not the people of God, God will not own them for such; they but deceive themselves in thinking and calling themselves so. But then positively, they are (1.) A people regenerated, and born again, John 1:13. Their regeneration gives them both the essence and denomination of the people of God: It is as impossible to be the children of God without regeneration, as it is to be the children of men without generation. (2.) They are a

people in covenant with God, Ezek. 16:8. "I entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine." For in this covenant they give themselves to the Lord, 2 Cor. 8:5. They avouch the Lord to be their God, and make over themselves to him to be his people, Jer. 31:33. devoting unto God all that they are, their souls and bodies, with every faculty and member inclusively, Rom. 12:1. Luke 10:27. All that they have, Rom. 11:36. all is dedicated and devoted to the Lord's use and service, and these only are the people of God.

2. The last thing to be cleared is, Why the people of God, and none beside them, have this peculiar privilege of an hiding place in the day of trouble, and the grounds of it are,

1. Because they only have special interest in God, and propriety is the ground on which they claim and expect protection: I am thine, save me, Psal. 119:94. Upon this very ground it was that David encouraged himself in one of his greatest plunges and distresses of his whole life, 1 Sam. 30:6. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

2. The people of God only are at peace with God; and where there is no peace there can be no protection: The harbours and garrisons of one kingdom never receive into their protection the subjects of another kingdom that are in open hostility against them, Now there is open war betwixt God and the wicked, Psal. 7:11. Zech. 11:8. Till they have peace with God they can claim no protection from God.

3. The promises of protection are made only to God's people; and where there is no promise, there can be no warrantable claim to protection, 2 Cor. 1:20. 2 Pet. 1:4. Common providences may shelter them for a time, but the saints only have the keys of the promises, which open the chambers or attributes of God to them.

4. None but the people of God walk in the ways of God, and none but those that walk in his way can, groundedly, expect his protection; for so runs the promise, 2 Chron. 15:2. "I am with you whilst you are

with me," i.e. I am with you, by way of protection, direction, support, and salvation, whilst you are with me in the duties of obedience, and exercises of your graces; see that you love, fear, and obey me, and then, depend upon it, I will look after and take care of you.

5. To conclude, The people of God only flee to God for sanctuary, and cast themselves upon him for protection, Psal. 56:3. "At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." Psal. 18:2. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." This their confidence in God, and reliance upon him, engage him to protect them in their dangers, Isa. 26:3. All others put themselves out of God's protection by making flesh their arm, and so giving the honour of God to the creature, Jer. 17:5. And thus much for clearing this last proposition also. All that remains will be dispatched in a brief and close application of the point thus opened and confirmed.

## CHAPTER XII

Containing the first use of the point in several informing consecretaries and deductions of truth from it.

### Consecretaries

Consect. I. FROM the whole of this discourse we may be informed what a miserable and shiftless people all those will be in times of trouble who have no special interest in God, or the promises. Sad and lamentable was the case of Saul, as it is by himself expressed, 1 Sam. 28:15. "I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more." It is a wonderful and unaccountable thing, how carnal men and women subsist and bear up, when their earthly props and hopes sink under and fail them; so long as any creature-coin fort is left, thither they

will retreat for relief and succour: but if all fail, as quickly they may, whither will they turn for comfort, having not a God nor a promise to flee to? which the people of God can do when all things else fail them, Heb. 3:17. Their different conditions in the day of trouble is clearly expressed in Zeph. 2:3, 4. "Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the earth which have wrought his judgment, seek righteousness, seek meekness, it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." There is God's may-be, which is better security than man's shall-be for their temporal deliverance: But what shall become of others that have no refuge but in the creature? Why, the misery and shiftlessness of their condition follows in the next words: "Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at noon-day, and Ekron shall be rooted up;" i.e. All their earthly securities shall fail them; their strong-holds shall not secure them; they shall find no shelter in the scorching heat of the day of trouble. Moab, Ashdod, and Ekron have no more benefit by the promises made to Zion, than the inhabitants of Rome can claim by the charter of London. If a wicked or hypocritical person cry to God in his distress, he will not hear him, Prov. 1:25, 26. Job 27:9. but will bid him go to his earthly refuges which he hath chosen. If he go to the promises, knock at those doors of hope, they cannot relieve him, being all made in Christ to believers; if to the name and attributes of God all the doors are shut against them, Psal. 34:16. There are seven dreadful aggravations of a wicked man's troubles.

(1.) When troubles come upon him, the curse of God follows him into his carnal refuges; Jer. 17:5. Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Trouble is the arrow, and this curse the venom of the arrow, which makes the wound incurable.

(2.) When troubles fall upon him from without, a guilty conscience will terrify him from within; so that the mind can give no relief to the body, but both sink under their own weights. It is not so with the people of God, they have inward relief under outward pressures, 2 Cor. 4:16.

(3.) The gusts and storms of wicked men's troubles may blow them into hell, and hurry them into eternal destruction: if death march towards them upon the pale horse, hell always follows him, Rev. 6:8.

(4.) If troubles and distresses overwhelm their hearts, they can give them no vent or ease by prayer, faith, and resignation to God, as his people use to do, 1 Sam. 1:18.

(5.) When their troubles and distresses come, then come the hour and power of their temptations; and, to shun sorrow, they will fall into sin, having no promise to be kept in the hour of temptation, as the saints have, Rev. 3:10.

(6.) When their troubles come, they will be left alone in the midst of them: these are their burdens, and they alone must bear them. God's gracious, comfortable, supporting presence is only with his own people.

(7.) If trouble or death come upon them as a storm, they have no anchor of hope to drop in the storm; the wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death, Prov. 14:32. By all which it appears, that a christless person is a most helpless and shiftless creature in the day of trouble.

Consect. 2. Secondly, Hence it follows, That Christians ought not to drop like other men in the day of trouble. A wicked man's boldness, and a Christian's cowardliness, in times of affliction, are alike ungrounded and uncomely. Why should thy heart, Christian, despond and sink at this rate, upon the prospect of approaching troubles? Are there not safe and comfortable chambers taken up, and provided for thee against that day? Is not the name of the Lord a strong tower, into which thou mayest run and be safe? The heart of a good man, saith Chrysostom, should at all times be like the higher heavens, serene, tranquil, and clear, whatever thunders and lightnings, storms and tempests trouble and terrify the lower world. If a man have a good roof over his head, where he can sit dry and

warm, what need he trouble himself to hear the winds roar, see the lightnings flash, and the rains pour down without doors? Why this is thy privilege, Christian; "A man (to wit the man Christ Jesus) shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," Isa. 32:2. Art thou in Christ, and in the covenant? give me then one good reason for thy dejections in a day of trouble; or if thou hast none to give, hearken to these reasons against it.

1. If thou be in Christ, thy sins are forgiven thee; and why should not a pardoned soul be a cheerful soul in adversity? Afflictions may buzz and hum about thee, like bees that have lost their sting, but they can never hurt thee.

2. If thou be in Christ, thy God is with thee in all thy troubles; and how can thy heart sink or faint in such a presence? Let them that are alone in troubles fail under them: but do not thou do so, who art surrounded with Almighty power, grace, and love, Isa. 43:1, 2.

3. If thou be in Christ, thy greatest afflictions shall prove thy best friends and benefactors, Rom. 8:28. Sure then thou art more afraid than hurt; thou mistakest thy best friends for thy worst enemies; thou and thy afflictions shall part more comfortably than you met.

4. If thou be in Christ, thy treasure is safe, thy eternal happiness is out of the reach of all thine enemies, Luke 12:4. Luke 10:42. And if that be safe, thou hast no cause to be sad; to droop and tremble at the hazard of earthly comforts, whilst heavenly and eternal things are safe, is as if a man that had gotten his pardon from the king, and had it safe in his bosom, should be found weeping upon the way home, because he hath lost his staff or glove. These reasons are strong against the dejections of God's people under outward troubles; but yet I am sensible that all the reasoning in the world will not prevent their dejections, except they will take pains to clear up their interest in God against such a day, Psal. 18:2. and will act their faith by way of adherence and dependence upon God, in the want of former light

and evidence, Isa. 50:10. And lastly, that they keep their consciences pure and inviolate, which will be a spring of comfort in the midst of troubles, 2 Cor. 1:12.

3. Consect. Thirdly, It hence appears to be the greatest folly and vanity in the world, to make any thing but God our refuge in the day of trouble. This practice, as you heard but now, is under God's curse; and that which is cursed of God can never be comfortable to us. It is an honour peculiar to God, the right of heaven, and therefore cursed sacrilege to bestow it on the creature. We read of some that make lies their refuge, and hide themselves under falsehood, thinking when the overflowing scourge comes, it shall not come nigh unto them, Isa. 28:15. They will trust to their wits and policies, they will fawn and flatter, lie and dissemble, cast themselves into a thousand shapes and forms to save themselves; but all in vain; the flood shall sweep away their refuge of lies. Others make riches their trust and confidence, Prov. 10:15. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city." If enemies come, their money shall be their ransom: But oh! what a poor refuge will this be! it may betray, but cannot secure them. Behold, saith God, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it," Isa. 13:17. Riches profit not in the day of wrath, Prov. 11:4. Job blessed God in the day of his adversity, that he had not made gold his hope, or the fine gold his confidence, Job 31:24. Bless, not thou thyself, that thou hast such things to bestow thy hope and trust upon. Others make men their refuge, especially great and powerful men: But to how little purpose is it! Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help," Psal. 146:3, 4. They cannot keep their crowns upon their heads, no, nor their heads upon their shoulders; the greatest men are but dust, and what can dust do to dust? Three things aggravate their misery, who misplace their confidence by bestowing it on any creature, (1.) That creature will certainly deceive them; men are deceitful men, Psal. 62:9. Riches are deceitful riches, 1 Tim. 6:17. Every thing you lean on beside God will start aside like a deceitful bow, Psal. 78:57. (2.) The disappointment of your hopes from the creature will enflame your affliction, and greatly aggravate your



sorrow, 2 Kings 18:21. The broken reeds of Egypt will not only fail, but pierce you. (3.) In a word, God will take none into his protection, who make anything besides himself their hope and confidence; if we fly from God to the creature, God will say, To the creature thou shalt go; except I have thy dependence, thou shalt never have my protection; where I have no honour, thou shalt have no comfort.

Consect. 4. Fourthly, The former discourse yields us also this comfortable conclusion, That whatever confusions, desolations and troubles be in the earth, the church and people of God can never be wholly exterminated and destroyed, seeing such a secure refuge is prepared for them of God, Psal. 102:28. "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee." Which is assigned as the true reason of its perpetuity and safety, Psal. 48:3. "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." The church's enemies have tried the utmost of their policies and powers in all ages against it, but to no purpose: whilst they have been plotting and persecuting, the preserved remnant have been singing their songs upon Alamo, even praises to their great Preserver; though they have no external, visible defence, yet are they as safe as salvation itself can make them, "for salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks," Isa. 26:1, 2. Four things are exceeding remarkable in the church's preservation: (1.) No people were ever so fiercely opposed by the powers of this world, "The kings of the earth have set themselves, and the rulers have taken counsel together," Psal. 2:2. All methods and artifices have been tried, sometimes to jeer and scoff them out of their religion, so did the apostate Julian; and sometimes by cruel tortures to affright them from their religion; the variety, and more than barbarous inhumanity whereof the church-histories gives us a sad and amazing account. (2.) Under these cruel persecutions they have seemed to be utterly lost, to the eye of sense and reason; "I am left alone, said Elijah, and they seek my life," 1 Kings 19:10. "By whom, Lord, shall Jacob arise, (said Amos) for he is very small?" Amos 7:2. (3.) Notwithstanding all which, the church hath out-lived all its dangers; it is the true Phoenix which hath out-lived the deluge. (4.) Such deliverances are proper and peculiar to

the church alone; no people, besides the people of God, have such salvations upon record. The great and famous monarchies of the world have dashed one another to pieces, like earthen potsheards\*. And all this by virtue of that promise, Jer. 30:11. "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee; though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee."

Consect. 5. Fifthly, to conclude, If this be so, then it is a deep and dangerous policy of Satan to shut up our refuge in God against us, as much as may be, in times of trouble. Satan, like a cunning fowler, despairs of getting the birds in his net, except he can beat them out of their coverts; it is therefore his great design, to estrange and alienate the saints from their God, as much as he can, thereby to cut off their retreat to him in times of trouble; a mischief which the people of God have always vehemently deprecated, Psal. 102:2. Jer. 17:17. and oh that we would beware of it, and shun this mischief by our seasonable preventing watchfulness. There are, among others, three special projects of Satan, whereby he manages this mischievous design against the people of God.

1. By drawing their consciences under guilt, on purpose to destroy the liberty, freedom, and child-like confidence of their souls in their addresses to God. This, if any thing in the world, will do it, Job 11:14, 15. What a loss will that poor soul be at, in times of trouble, whose grumbling and condemning conscience will not suffer him to look up cheerfully and believingly in the face of its God and father, having lost its ancient freedom at the throne of grace?

2. By prevailing with them to neglect and intermit the course of their daily duties, and thereby to let down their communion with God, and, in a great measure, lose their acquaintance with, him. This is a dangerous policy of the devil, and an unspeakable prejudice to the soul. Oh Christian! take heed of a lazy, slothful spirit, or a vain and earthly heart, which will easily suffer the duties of religion to be jostled aside and put by for every trivial occasion; especially beware of slight, formal, and dead-hearted performances of duty, which is

little better than the intermission of them; it may, indeed, prevent the scandal, but can never give thee the comfort of religion.

3. By beclouding their interest in God, and darkening their titles and evidences, by thick clouds of doubts and fears. This is the sad case of many a poor Christian in a day of trouble; without are fightings, and within are fears. Brethren, I beseech you, think often what those things are, which usually put men into such frights and straits, when imminent dangers stare them in the face; what it is that daunts and damps the hearts of Christians at such times; and as you value the peace and freedom of your souls with God, give not matter for your consciences to reproach you of mis-spent time, indulged sins, neglected duties, formality or hypocrisy in duties, sinister and by-ends in your transactions with God or man: preserve the purity and peace of your consciences, as you would preserve your two eyes; if by such wiles the devil cannot bar you from your God, or shut up your refuge in him, your outward troubles can do you no hurt.

The second use, of direction and advice.

Sect. II. The providences of God, in these days, giving us such loud warnings of approaching judgment; how are all that are wise in heart, and understanding of the times, now more especially concerned to clear their interest in these blessed attributes of God, which have here been opened, as their only refuge in the evil day. Let me therefore persuade and press you to betake yourselves to God, your refuge and strong-hold in trouble, and that more especially in these two great duties, viz.

1. Of fervent supplication.

2. Of universal resignation.

1. Betake yourselves to God by fervent prayer and supplication. Let me say of these times, as holy Mr. Perkins did of his\*; "These are no times for Christians to contend and strive one with another, but with their united cries to strive with God;" and among other requests,

strongly to enforce and follow home that of David, Psal. 71:2, 3. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline thine ear unto me, and save me; be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." That is a true and weighty observation of Austin<sup>†</sup>, "A refuge is not to be found in trouble, except it be provided before-hand in peace." "For this (saith the Psalmist) shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found; surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him," Psal. 22:6. Had not Noah prepared and secured himself in the ark, before the floods of great waters came, he had not sat, as he did, *mediis tranquillus in undis*; sleeping quietly, when others were perishing in the waters. Gather yourselves therefore together, before the decree bring forth; seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth; be more frequent and more fervent in prayer, now than ever; you have all the encouragements in the world to incite you to this duty: the nature of your God is exceeding pitiful, tender, and compassionate, James 5:11. The endeared relations betwixt God and you give singular encouragement of success: shall not God hear his own elect, which cry unto him day and night? Luke 18:7. The sweet returns and answers of former prayers are so many motives and encouragements to follow close that profitable duty, Psal. 51:1, 2, 3. And above all, your prevalent Advocate in the heavens should encourage you to come frequently and boldly to the throne of grace, "that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need," Heb. 4:16. In two things I shall briefly offer a few directions here, viz.

1. As to the matter of prayer.

2. As to the manner of prayer.

1. As to the matter of prayer, I mean such as the state and condition of the times, now more especially, suggest.

- (1.) Unite your prayers, and cry mightily to the Lord, that if it be his good pleasure, this cup of wrath, which seems to be mingled and

prepared, may pass from his people. Now cry to God, as they are directed to do, Joel 2:17. "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them, wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God, O pray, that England may not be delivered into the hands of blood-thirsty Papists, that the golden candlestick may not be removed, that idolatry may not return into those places where God hath been so sweetly worshipped; that a land so peculiarly blessed with gospel-light, wherein so many thousand sons and daughters have been born to God, may not, at last, become an Aeldama, a great shambles, to quarter out the limbs of his dear saints: that the pleasant plant of reformation, planted with his own right-hand, and watered with so many tears, yea, with so much blood, may not, at last, be rooted up by the wild boar of the forest!

(2.) Pray indefinitely, that you may be kept from the sins and temptations of the times. O watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation; if you cannot prevail with God to turn away his anger, yet be importunate with him that you may be kept from sin; that if you lose your outward peace, you may be able to keep inward peace; that you may never sacrifice your consciences, to save your flesh; that you may never fall under the displeasure of God, to avoid the rage of men. Ah friends! we little think what a fearful havock an hour of temptation will make in such a professing nation as this is; then shall many be offended, Mat. 24:10. O pray, that you may never give offence to others, by scandal, or take offence yourselves at the ways of God, whatever sufferings and sharp trials shall come.

(3.) Pray earnestly for the sanctification of all your troubles to your eternal good; an unsanctified comfort never did any man good, and a sanctified trouble never did any man hurt; be more earnest therefore with God, rather to have your troubles sanctified than prevented; to get the blessing than to avoid the smart of them; if they cannot be turned away from you, pray they may be turned to your salvation.

2. Betake yourselves to God, your refuge, by faith, resigning and committing all into his hands, "Now the just shall live by faith," Heb. 10:38. The more you can trust God, the more you secure yourselves from danger; he that can live by faith shall never die by fear; and be sure to inform yourselves well in two things, viz.

1. What it is to trust God over all.

2. What grounds you have so to do.

1. Be well instructed in the nature of this duty; there are six things imported in such acts of resignation.

1. An awakened sense of our dangers and hazards. "At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee," Psal. 56:3. Suffering times are resigning times, 1 Pet. 4:19 "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.". And the greater and nearer our dangers are, the more frequent and vigorous should the actings of our faith this way be: Be not far from me, for trouble is near.

2. Resignation to God necessarily implies our renunciation and disclaiming of all other refuges. "Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods, for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy," Hos. 14:3. He that relies upon God must cease from man; resignation to God excludes not the use of lawful means, but it doth exclude dependence upon them.

3. Resignation to God is always grounded upon an interest in God; we have no warrant nor encouragement to expect protection from him in time of trouble, except we can come to him as children to a father: It is the filial relation that gives encouragement to this fiducial resignation; and the clearer that relation and interest is, the more bold and confident those acts of faith will be; Psal. 86:2. "Preserve my soul, for I am holy: O thou, my "God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee." And again, Psal. 119:94. "I am thine, save me."

I speak not here of the first act of faith which flows not from an interest, but gives the soul an interest in God. Nor do I say, that poor, doubting, and timorous believers, whose interest in him is dark and dubious, have no warrant to resign themselves and their concernments into his hands; for it is both their right and duty to do it: but certainly the clearer our interest is, the more facile and comfortable will those acts be.

4. The committing acts of faith imply a full acknowledgment and owning of God's power to protect us, be the danger never so imminent; Psal. 31:15. "My times are in thy hand, deliver me from the hands of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me;" q. d. O Lord, I am fully satisfied, my life is not at the disposal of mine enemies; it is not in their hands, but in thine; all the traps and snares they lay for it shall not shorten one minute of my time; I know thine hand is fully able to protect me, and therefore into thine hands I resign myself and all I have.

5. Resignation involves in it an expectation of help and safety from God, when we see no way of security from men. "O Lord, saith Jehoshaphat, We have no might, nor strength, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are unto thee," 2 Chron. 20:12. So David, Psal. 62:5, 6. "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him: he only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be moved."

6. Resignation to God implies the leaving of ourselves, and our concernments with him, to be disposed of according to his good pleasure; the resigning soul desires the Lord to do with him what he will, and is content to take what lot Divine pleasure shall cast for him: 2 Sam. 15:25. "And the king said unto Zadok, carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." And so much of the nature of this duty, that we may understand what to do.

2. Next, let me shew you what encouragements you that are the people of God have to this duty; and they will appear to be great and many.

1. The sovereignty and absolute dominion of God over all creatures is a singular encouragement to commit ourselves into his hands, and trust him over all, Psal. 59:9. "Because of his strength will I wait upon thee; for God is my defence." If a man were in danger amidst a great army of rude and insolent soldiers, and were to put himself under the protection of any one, it would be his wisdom to chuse to do it under the general, who had all the soldiers of his army at his beck. Christian, thy God, into whose hands thou committest thyself is Lord-general of all the hosts and armies in heaven and earth; how safe must thou then be in his hands?

2. The unsearchable and perfect wisdom of God is a mighty encouragement to commit ourselves into his hands; With him is plenteous redemption, Psal. 130 ult. i.e. Choice and variety of ways and methods to save his people; we are, but God never is, at a loss to find a door for our escape, 2 Pet. 2:9. "The Lord knoweth "how to deliver the godly out of temptation."

3. The infinite tenderness and compassionateness of our God, is a sweet encouragement to resign and commit ourselves and all we have into his hands; his mercy is incomparably tender towards his people, infinitely beyond whatever any creature felt stirring in its own bowels towards another that came out of its bowels, Isa. 49:15. This compassion of God engageth the two fore-mentioned attributes, viz. his power and wisdom for the preservation and relief of his people, as often as distresses befall them. Yea,

4. The very distresses his people are in, do, as it were, awake the Almighty power of God for their defence and rescue; our distresses are not only proper seasons, but powerful motives to his saving power, Deut. 32:36. "For the Lord shall judge his people, "and repent himself for his servants when he seeth that their power is gone, and



there is none shut up or left." God makes it an argument to himself, and his people plead it as an argument with him, "be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help."

5. We have already committed greater and weightier concernments into his hand than the dearest interest we have in this world; we have entrusted our souls with him, 1 Pet. 4:19. 2 Tim. 1:12. Well therefore may we commit the lesser, who have entrusted the greater with him: What are our lives, liberties, estates, and relations, compared with our souls, and the eternal safety and happiness of them!

6. The committing act of faith is the great and only expedient to procure and secure the peace and tranquillity of our minds, amidst all the distractions and troubles of the present world; the greatest part of our affliction and trouble in such days is from the working of our own thoughts; these torments from within are worse than any from without; and the resignation of all to God by faith is their best and only cure, Prov. 16:3. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." A blessed calmness of mind, a sweet tranquillity and settlement of thoughts follow immediately hereupon, Psal. 94:19. Oh then leave all with God, and quietly expect a comfortable issue: and for the better settlement and security of thy peace in times of distraction and trouble, I beseech thee, reader, carefully to watch and guard against these two evils.

### Cautions

Caution 1. Beware of infidelity or distrustfulness of God and his promises which secretly lurks in thy heart, and is very apt to bewry itself when great distresses and troubles befall thee. Thou wilt know it by such symptoms as these: 1. In an over-hasty and eager desire after present deliverance, Isa. 51:14. "The captive exiles hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail." The less faith, always the more impatience; and the more ability to believe, the more patience to wait. 2. It will discover itself in our readiness to close with, and catch at sinful

mediums and methods of deliverance, Isa. 30:15, 16. And this is the handle of temptation, and occasion of apostasy. But lie that believeth will not make haste, Isa. 26:18. No more haste than good speed. 3. It will shew itself in distracting cares and fears about events, which will rack the mind with various and endless tortures.

Caution 2. Beware of dejection and despondency of mind in evil times; take heed of a poor low spirit that will presently sink and give up its hope upon every appearance and face of trouble; it is a promise made unto the righteous, Psal. 112:7. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." The trusting of God fixes the heart, and the fixing of the heart fortifies it against fear: But I know what many poor Christians will say in this case; their timorousness and despondency arise not so much from the greatness of outward evils, as from the darkness and doubtfulness of their spiritual and inward condition, which, doubtless, is the very truth of the case; which brings me to the last use of this point.

Use the third.

Search and examine your hearts, Christians, whether those graces and qualifications, to which God hath promised protection in evil times, may not be found upon an impartial search in your hearts; amongst which, I will single out three principal ones, as the proper matters of your self-examination, viz.

1. Uprightness of heart and way.
2. Humiliation for your own and other's sins.
3. Righteousness in doing, and meekness in suffering the will of God.

1. Uprightness and integrity of heart and way. To this qualification belong many sweet promises of protection; such is that, Prov. 2:7. "He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly," Psal 7:10. "My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart." If your hearts be true to God, these promises shall be truly performed to you? but beware you

deceive not yourselves in so great a point as this is. Thy heart cannot be an upright heart, except, (1.) It be a renewed heart; the natural heart is always a false heart; it is only regeneration that gives the heart a right temper and frame; all the duties and labours in the world can never keep the heart right in its course, which is not first set right for God, by a principle of renovation. (2.) We cannot judge ourselves upright, except uprightness be the settled frame and standing bent of our hearts, Psal. 119:112, 117. It is not our integrity in one or two single actions, but in the general course, and complex frame of our lives and ways, that will prove our integrity to God. (3.) Then may we reckon ourselves upright, when the dread and awe of God's all-seeing eye keeps our hearts and steps from turning aside to iniquity, Gen. 39:9. 2 Chron. 2:17. That is a sincere and upright heart indeed, that finds itself at all times, and in all places, overawed from sin, by the eye of God upon him. (4.) That man's heart also is upright with God, who purely aims at, and designs the glory of God, as the scope and end of his life and actions, who lives not up to himself, neither acts ultimately and principally for himself, but lives to God, as a person dedicated and devoted to him, Rom. 14:7. (5.) That heart also is upright with God, which governs itself, and its ways, by the directions and rules of the word, Psal. 119:11, 24, 133. Happy is that soul that finds such evidences of integrity in itself, when it is brought to the trial of it at the bar of the word, Heb. 4:12. at the bar of conscience, 2 Cor. 1:12. at the bar of affliction, Psal. 119:87. and at the bar of strong temptations, Gen. 39:9. The eyes of the Lord shall run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of such whose hearts are thus perfect towards him.

2. Another gracious qualification, clearing the soul's title to God's special protection in the worst and most dangerous times, is true humiliation for our own and other men's sins: "Go, set a mark, saith God, upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof," Ezek. 9:4. These that thus mourn, when others laugh, shall laugh when others mourn. Lot was the only mourner in Sodom, and he was the only person exempted from destruction in the ruin and overthrow thereof. 2 Pet.

2:7. That is a sweet and blessed privilege mentioned in Isa. 66:10. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her; that ye may suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory." Be contented, Christians, to bear your part in Sion's groans and sorrows; you may live to bear your part in her triumphs and songs of deliverance: It is an argument of the true publicness and tenderness of your spirits for the present, and as sweet a sign as can appear upon your souls, that you are reserved for better days.

3. Righteousness in doing, and meekness in suffering the will of God, is another mark or note, distinguishing and describing those persons whom God will preserve in the evil day. You have both these together in Zeph. 2:3. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgments; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers, 1 Pet. 3:12. If righteousness brings you into danger, the righteous God will take care of you in that danger, and bring you out of it. Oh! it is a singular comfort, when a man can say, It was not my sin, but my duty, that brought me into trouble; this affliction met me in the path and way of my duty; it is for thy sake, O Lord, that I am in trouble; as the martyr that held up the bible at the stake, saying, This hath brought me hither.

To conclude: Manage all your sufferings for Christ, with christian meekness: As righteousness must bring you into them, so meekness must carry you through them; if you avenge yourselves, you take the cause out of God's hand into your own; but the meek Christian leaves it to the Lord, and shall never have cause to repent of his so doing. If thou have an upright heart with God, a tender and mournful heart for sin, and thou suffer with meekness for righteousness sake, thou art one of those souls to whom that sweet voice is directed in my text,

—

Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

-----

## MONERGISM BOOKS

The Righteous Man's Refuge, by John Flavel, Copyright © 2020

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 July 2020. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068