

# The Privy Key of Heaven

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(A Discourse of Secret Prayer)

*This treatise was published during the awful plague of London in 1665. Brooks chose to stay in London during this time to tend to the members of his flock.*

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:6

Twenty arguments to persuade you  
to closet prayer

These words of our Savior are plain, and to be taken literally, and not allegorically, for he speaks of 'shutting the door' of the chamber. In this chapter there is a manifest opposition between the Pharisees praying in the synagogues and corners of the streets, and others praying in secret.

In the text you have a positive precept for every Christian to pray alone: "But you, when you pray, enter into your closet," etc., as speaking not so much of a joint duty of many praying together, as of a duty which each person is to do alone. The command in the text sends us as well to the closet as to the church; and he is a pious hypocrite, who chooses the one and neglects the other. He who puts on a religious demeanor abroad to gain himself a great name among men, and at the same time lives like an atheist at home, shall at the last be unmasked by God, and presented before all the world for a most detestable hypocrite.

Bellarmino and some others turn the text into an allegory. They say that in these words there are two allegories. First, the chamber door is the sense, "shut the door," that is, say they, your sense, lest vain imaginations and worldly thoughts distract your mind in praying. Secondly, the door, say they, is our mouth, "shut your door," that is, your lips, say they, and let your prayer be like the prayer of Hannah, conceived in your mind—but not uttered with your mouth. It is usual with papists and other monkish men who lie in wait to deceive, to turn the blessed Scriptures into a nose of wax, under

pretense of allegories and mysteries. Origen was a great admirer of allegories. By the strength of his mental abilities and wanton wit, he turned most of the Scriptures into allegories; and by the just judgment of God upon him, he foolishly understood and absurdly applied that Matt 19:12 literally, "Some have made themselves chaste for the kingdom of heaven," and so castrated himself. And indeed he might as well have plucked out one of his eyes upon the same account, because Christ says, "It is better to go to heaven with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire," Matt 18:9.

In all ages heretics have commonly defended their heresies by translating of scriptures into allegories. The apostle speaks of such as, denying the resurrection of the body, turn all the testimonies of the resurrection into an allegory, meaning thereby only the spiritual resurrection of the soul from sin, of which sort was Hymenaeus and Philetus, who destroyed the faith of some, saying "the resurrection was past already," 2 Tim 2:17-18. And are there not many among us who turn the whole history of the Bible into an allegory, and who turn Christ, and sin, and death, and the soul, and hell, and heaven, and all into an allegory? Many have and

many do miserably pervert the Scriptures by turning them into vain and groundless allegories. Some wanton wits have expounded paradise to be the soul, man to be the mind, the woman to be the sense, the serpent to be delight, the tree of knowledge of good and evil to be wisdom, and the rest of the trees to be the virtues and endowments of the mind. O friends! it is dangerous to bring in allegories where the Scripture does not clearly and plainly warrant them, and to take those words figuratively which should be taken properly.

The word which in the text is rendered closet, has only three most usual significations among Greek authors. First, it may be taken for a secret chamber, or close and locked parlor; secondly, for a safe or cupboard to lay victuals in; thirdly, for a locked chest or cupboard wherein treasure usually is reserved.

The best and most judicious interpreters that I have cast my eye upon, both of a former and later date, do all expound my text of private prayer in retired places; and with them I close; and so the main doctrine that I shall gather from the words is this:

Doctrine. That closet prayer or private prayer is an indispensable duty, which Christ himself has laid upon all who are not willing to lie under the woeful brand of being hypocrites.

I beseech you seriously to lay to heart these five things:

1. First, If any prayer is a duty, then secret prayer must needs be a duty; for secret prayer is as much prayer as any other prayer is prayer; and secret prayer prepares and fits the soul for family prayer, and for public prayer. Secret prayer sweetly inclines and strongly disposes a Christian to all other religious duties and services. But,

2. Secondly, If secret prayer is not an indispensable duty which lies upon you, by what authority does conscience so upbraid you, and so accuse you, and so condemn you, and so terrify you—as it often does for the neglect of this duty? But,

3. Thirdly, Was it ever the way or method of God to promise again and again a reward, an open reward for that work or service which himself never commanded? Surely not. Now, to this duty of secret prayer, the Lord has again and again promised an open reward, Matt 6:6,18. And

therefore without question, this is a duty incumbent upon all Christians.

4. Fourthly, Our Savior in the text takes it for granted that every child of God will be frequent in praying to his heavenly Father; and therefore he encourages them so much the more in the work of secret prayer. "When you pray;" as if he had said, I know you can as well hear without ears, and live without food, and fight without hands, and walk without feet, as you are able to live without prayer. And therefore when you go to wait on God, or to give your heavenly Father a visit, "Enter into your closet, and shut your doors," etc.

5. Fifthly, If closet prayer is not an indispensable duty that Christ has laid upon all his people, why does Satan so much oppose it? why does he so industriously and so unweariedly labor to discourage Christians in it, and to take off Christians from it? Certainly, Satan would never make such a fierce and constant war as he does upon private prayer, were it not a necessary duty, a real duty, and a soul-enriching duty. But more of this you will find in the following discourse; and therefore let this touch suffice for the present, etc.

Now, these five things do very clearly and evidently demonstrate that secretly and solitarily to hold fellowship with God is the undoubted duty of every Christian. But for a more full opening and confirmation of this great and important point, I shall lay down these twenty arguments or considerations to persuade you to closet prayer.

[1.] First, The most eminent saints, both in the Old and New Testament, have applied themselves to private prayer. Moses was alone in the mount with God forty days and forty nights, Exod 34:28. So Abraham fills his mouth with arguments, and reasons the case out alone with God in prayer, to prevent Sodom's desolation and destruction, and never leaves off pleading and praying until he had brought God down from fifty to ten, Gen 18:22-32; and in Gen 21:33, you have Abraham again at his private prayers: "And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." Why did Abraham plant a grove—but that he might have a most private place to pray and pour out his soul before the Lord in?

So Isaac: Gen 24:63, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide." The Hebrew

word that is here rendered meditate, signifies to pray as well as to meditate, and so it is often used. It is a comprehensive word, that takes in both prayer and meditation. So you shall find Jacob at his private prayer: Gen 32:24-28, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." When Jacob was all alone, and in a dark night, and when his joints were out of joint, he so wrestles and weeps, and weeps and wrestles in private prayer, that as a prince at last he prevails with God, Hos 12:3-4. So David, Psalm 55:16-17, "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice."

So Daniel was three times a day in private prayer: Dan 6:10, "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Daniel had accustomed himself to private prayer; he went to his closet before he went to his public employment and state affairs; and at his return to dinner, he turned first into his chamber to serve



his God and refresh his soul before he sat down to feast his body; and at the end of the day, when he had dispatched his business with men, he made it his business to wait upon God in his chamber. So Jonah keeps up private prayer when he was in the fish's belly, yes, when he was in the belly of hell, Jon 2:1-2, etc. So we have Elijah at prayer under the juniper tree, 1 Kings 19:4; so Hannah, 1 Sam 1:13. Now, Hannah she speaks in her heart; only her lips moved—but her voice was not heard. The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of the soul before God, as Hannah did, 1 Sam 1:15. Neither was Rebekah a stranger to this duty, who, upon the babe's struggling in her womb, went to inquire of the Lord, Gen 25:22; that is, she went to some secret place to pray, says Calvin, Musculus, Mercerus, and others.

So Saul is no sooner converted—but presently he falls upon private prayer: Acts 9:11, "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus for, behold, he prays." Though he was a strict Pharisee—yet he never prayed to purpose before, nor never prayed in private before. The Pharisees used to pray in the corners of the

streets, and not in the corners of their houses. And after his conversion he was frequently in private prayer, as you may see by comparing of these scriptures together, Rom 1:9; Eph 1:15-16; Phil 1:3-4; 2 Tim 1:3. So Epaphras was a warm man in closet prayer, Phil 4:12-13; so Cornelius had devoted himself to private prayer, Acts 10:2,4; and so Peter gets up to the housetop to pray: Acts 10:9, "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew near unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour." Peter got up upon the housetop, not only to avoid distraction—but that he might be the more secret in his private devotion.

Eusebius tells us of James called Justus, that his knees were grown hard and brawny with kneeling so much in private prayer. And Nazianzen reports of his sister Gorgonia, that her knees seemed to cleave to the earth by her often praying in private. And Gregory with of his aunt Trucilla, that her elbows became hard by often leaning upon her desk at private prayer. I have read of a devout person, who, when the set time for his private devotion was come, whatever company he was in, he would break from them with this neat and handsome come off, "I have a friend that waits for me; farewell." And there

was once a great lady of this land, who would frequently withdraw from the company of lords and ladies of great nobility, who came to visit her, rather than she would lose her set times of waiting upon God in her closet; she would, as they called it, rudely take her leave of them, that so she might in private attend the Lord of lords. She would spare what time she could to express her favors, civilities, and courtesies among her relations and friends; but she would never allow them to rob God of his time, nor her soul of that comfort and communion which she used to enjoy when she was with God in her closet.

Indeed, one hour's communion with God in one's closet, is to be preferred before the greatest and best company in the world. And there was a child of a Christian gentlewoman, that was so given to prayer from its infancy, that before it could well speak, it would use to get alone and go to prayer; and as it grew, it was more frequent in prayer and retiring of itself from company; and he would ask his mother very strange questions, far above the capacity of one of his years; but at last, when this child was but five years old, and whipping of his top, on a sudden he flung away his top, and ran to his mother, and with great joy said unto her, "Mother, I must go

to God; will you go with me?" She answered, "My dear child, how do you know you shall go to God?" He answered, "God has told me so, for I love God, and God loves me." She answered, "Dear child, I must go when God pleases. But why will you not stay with me?" The child answered, "I will not stay; I must go to God." And the child did not live above a month after—but never cared for play anymore; but falling sick, he would always be saying that he must go to God, he must go to God; and thus sometimes "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God has perfected praise," Matt 21:16. Certainly such people will be ripe for heaven early who begin early to seek God in a closet, in a corner.

And Eusebius reports of Constantine the emperor, that every day he used to shut up himself in some secret place in his palace, and there, on bended knees, did make his devout prayers and soliloquies to God. "My God and I are good company," said famous Dr Sibbes. A man whose soul is conversant with God in a closet, in a hole, behind the door, or in a desert, a den, a dungeon, shall find more real pleasure, more choice delight, and more full contentment, than in the palace of a prince. By all these famous instances, you see that the people of God

in all ages have addicted themselves to private prayer. O friends these pious examples should be very awakening, very convincing, and very encouraging to you. Certainly it is as much your duty as it is your glory, to follow these pious patterns which are now set before you.

Witness these following scriptures: Prov 2:20, "That you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous;" 1 Cor 11:1, "Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ;" Phil 3:17, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark those who walk so, as you have us for an example;" Phil 4:9, "Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you;" 1 Thess 1:6, "And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction;" Heb 6:12, "That you be not slothful—but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." So 2 Tim 3:10-12,14; Titus 2:7.

It was an excellent law that the Ephesians made, namely, that men should propound to themselves the best patterns, and ever bear in mind some eminent man. Bad men are wonderful in love with bad examples, Jer 44:16-17. The Indian, hearing that his ancestors were gone to hell, said

that then he would go there too. Some men have a mind to go to hell for company's sake. Oh that we were as much in love with the examples of good men as others are in love with the examples of bad men; and then we would be oftener in our closets than now we are! Oh that our eyes were more fixed on the pious examples of all that have in them 'anything of Christ,' as Bucer spoke! Shall we love to look upon the pictures of our friends; and shall we not love to look upon the pious examples of those who are the lively and lovely picture of Christ? The pious examples of others should be the looking-glasses by which we should dress ourselves. He is the best and wisest Christian, who writes after the fairest Scripture copy, that imitates those Christians that are most eminent in grace, and that have been most exercised in closet prayer, and in the most secret duties of religion.

Jerome having read the life and death of Hilarion, one who lived most Christianly, and died most comfortably, folded up the book, saying, Well, Hilarion shall be the champion that I will follow; his good life shall be my example, and his godly death my precedent. It is brave to live and die by the examples of the most eminent saints. But,

[2.] Secondly. Consider, when Christ was on earth, he did much exercise himself in secret prayer; he was often with God alone, as you may see in these famous scriptures: Matt 14:23, "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone." Christ's choosing solitudes for private prayer, does not only hint to us the danger of distraction and deviation of thoughts in prayer—but how necessary it is for us to choose the most convenient places we can for private prayers. Our own fickleness and Satan's restlessness calls upon us to get into such corners, where we may most freely pour out our souls into the bosom of God: Mark 1:35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." As the morning time is the fittest time for prayer, so solitary places are the fittest places for prayer: Mark 6:46, "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." He who would pray to purpose, had need be quiet when he is alone: Luke 5:16, "And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed." (Greek, He was departing and praying) to give us to understand that he did thus often. When Christ was neither exercised in teaching nor in working

of miracles, he was then very intent on private prayer: Luke 6:12, "And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." Did Christ spend whole nights in private prayer to save our souls; and shall we think it much to spend an hour or two in the day for the furtherance of the internal and eternal welfare of our souls?

Luke 21:37, "And in the daytime he was teaching in the temple, and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives." Christ frequently joins praying and preaching together, and that which Christ has joined together, let no man presume to put asunder: Luke 22:39,41,44-45, "And he came out, and went as he was accustomed to the mount of Olives, and his disciples also followed him. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood" (clotted or congealed blood) "falling down to the ground" (never was garden watered before or since with blood as this was). "And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow." Ah! what



sad pieces of vanity are the best of men in an hour of trial and temptation! These very men, who a little before did stoutly profess and promise that they would never leave him nor forsake him, and that they would go to prison for Christ, and die for Christ—yet when the day of trial came, they could not so much as watch with him one hour; they had neither eyes to see, nor hands to wipe off Christ's bloody sweat; so John 6:15-17. Thus you see, by all these famous instances, that Christ was frequent in private prayer.

Oh that we would daily propound to ourselves this noble pattern for our imitation, and make it our business, our work, our heaven, to write after this blessed copy that Christ has set us, namely, to be much with God alone. Certainly Christianity is nothing else but an imitation of the divine nature, a reducing of a man's self to the image of God, in which he was created "in righteousness and true holiness." A Christian's whole life should be nothing but a visible representation of Christ. The heathens had this notion among them, as Lactantius reports, that the way to honor their gods was to be like them. Sure I am that the highest way of honoring Christ is to be like to Christ: 1 John 2:6, "He

who says he abides in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked." 1 Peter 2:21, "Leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." Oh that this blessed Scripture might always lie warm upon our hearts. Christ is the sun, and all the watches of our lives should be set by the dial of his motion. Christ is a pattern of patterns; his example should be to us instead of a thousand examples. It is not only our liberty—but our duty and glory, to follow Christ inviolably in all his moral virtues. Other patterns be imperfect and defective—but Christ is a perfect pattern; and of all his children, they are the happiest, who come nearest to this perfect pattern.

Heliogabalus loved his children the better for resembling him in sin. But Christ loves his children the more for resembling him in sanctity. I have read of some springs that change the color of the cattle that drink of them into the color of their own waters. Certainly, Jesus Christ is such a fountain, in which whoever bathes, and of which whoever drinks, shall be changed into the same likeness, 2 Cor 3:18.

Question. But why was our Lord Jesus so much in private prayer? Why was he so often with God alone?

Answer 1. First, It was to put a very high honor and value upon private prayer; it was to enhance and raise the price of this duty. Men naturally are very apt and prone to have low and undervaluing thoughts of secret prayer. But Christ, by exercising himself so frequently in it, has put an everlasting honor and an inestimable value upon it. But,

Answer 2. Secondly, He was much in private prayer, he was often with God alone, that he might not be seen of men, and that he might avoid all shows and appearances of ostentation and popular applause. He who has commanded us to abstain from all appearances of evil, 1 Thess 5:22, would not himself, when he was in this world, venture upon the least appearance of evil. Christ was very shy of everything that did but look like sin; he was very shy of the very show and shadow of pride or vainglory.

Answer 3. Thirdly, To avoid interruptions in the duty. Secrecy is no small advantage to the serious and lively carrying on of a private duty. Interruptions and disturbances from without are oftentimes quenching to private prayer. The best Christians do but bungle when they meet with interruptions in their private devotions.

Answer 4. Fourthly, To set us such a blessed pattern and gracious example, that we should never please nor content ourselves with public prayers only, nor with family prayers only—but that we should also apply ourselves to secret prayer, to closet prayer. Christ was not always in public, nor always in his family—but he was often in private with God alone, that by his own example he might encourage us to be often with God in secret; and happy are those who tread in his steps, and that write after his copy.

Answer 5. Fifthly, That he might approve himself to our understandings and consciences to be a most just and faithful High Priest, Heb 2:17; John 17. Christ was wonderful faithful and careful in both parts of his priestly office, namely, redemption and intercession; he was his people's only spokesman. Ah! how earnest, how frequent was he in pouring out prayers, and tears, and sighs, and groans for his people in secret, when he was in this world, Heb 5:7. And now he is in heaven, he is still a-making intercession for them, Heb 7:25.

Answer 6. Sixthly, To convince us that his Father hears and observes our private prayers, and bottles up all our secret tears, and that he is

not a stranger to our closet desires, wrestlings, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings.

[3.] Thirdly, Consider that the ordinary exercising of yourselves in secret prayer, is that which will distinguish you from hypocrites, who do all they do to be seen of men: Matt 6:1-2, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." SELF is the only oil which makes the chariot-wheels of the hypocrite move in all religious concernments. Matt 6:5, "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Matt 6:16, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full." Thus you see that these hypocrites look more at men than at God in all their duties. When they give alms, the trumpet must sound;

when they pray, it must be in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets; and when they fasted, they disfigured their faces that they might appear unto men to fast. Hypocrites live upon the praises and applauses of men.

Naturalists report of the Chelydonian stone, that it will retain its virtue no longer than it is enclosed in gold. So hypocrites will keep up their duties no longer than they are fed, and encouraged, and enclosed with the golden praises and applauses of men. Hypocrites are like blazing stars, which, so long as they are fed with vapors, shine as if they were fixed stars; but let the vapors dry up, and presently they vanish and disappear.

Closet duty speaks out most sincerity. He prays with a witness, who prays without a witness. The more sincere the soul is, the more in closet duty the soul will be, Job 31:33. Where do you read in all the Scripture, that Pharaoh, or Saul, or Judas, or Demas, or Simon Magus, or the scribes and pharisees, were accustomed to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret? Secret prayer is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk, his ordinary work or trade. There is great cause to fear that his heart was never right with God, whose whole devotion is spent among men, or among many;

or else our Savior, in drawing the hypocrite's picture, would never have made this to be the very cast of his countenance, as he does in Matt 6:5. It is very observable, that Christ commands his disciples, that they should not be as the hypocrites. It is one thing to be hypocrites, and it is another thing to be as the hypocrites. Christ would not have his people to look like hypocrites, nor to be like to hypocrites. It is only sincerity that will enable a man to make a practice of private prayer. In praying with many, there are many things that may bribe and provoke a carnal heart—as pride, vainglory, love of applause, or to get a name. An hypocrite, in all his duties, trades more for a good name than for a good life, for a good report than for a good conscience; like fiddlers, who are more careful in tuning their instruments, than in composing their lives. But in private prayer there is no such trade to be driven. But,

[4.] Fourthly, Consider that in secret we may more freely, and fully, and safely unbosom our souls to God than we can in the presence of others. Hence the husband is to mourn apart, and the wife apart, Zech 12:12-14, not only to show the soundness of their sorrow—but also to show their sincerity by their secrecy. They must mourn

apart, that their sins may not be disclosed nor discovered one to another. Here they are severed to show that they wept not for company's sake—but for their own particular sins, by which they had pierced and crucified the Lord of glory. In secret, a Christian may descend into such particulars, as in public or before others he will not, he may not, he ought not, to mention. Ah! how many Christians are there who would blush and be ashamed to walk in the streets, and to converse with sinners or saints, should but those infirmities, enormities, and wickednesses be written in their foreheads, or known to others, which they freely and fully lay open to God in secret. There are many sins which many men have fallen into before conversion and since conversion, which, should they be known to the world, would make themselves to stench, and religion to stench, and their profession to stench in the nostrils of all who know them. Yes, should those weaknesses and wickednesses be published upon the housetops, which many are guilty of before grace received, or since grace received, how would weak Christians be staggered, young corners on in the ways of God discouraged, and many mouths of blasphemy opened, and many sinners' hearts hardened against the Lord, his ways, reproofs, and the



things of their own peace; yes, how would Satan's banner be displayed, and his kingdom strengthened, and himself infinitely pleased and delighted! It is an infinite mercy and condescension in God to lay a law of restraint upon Satan, who else would be the greatest blab in all the world. It would be mirth and music to him to be still a-laying open the follies and weaknesses of the saints.

Ambrose brings in the devil boasting against Christ, and challenging Judas as his own. "He is not yours, Lord Jesus, he is mine: his thoughts beat for me; he eats with you—but is fed by me; he takes bread from you—but money from me; he drinks with you, and sells your blood to me." There is not a sin that a saint commits—but Satan would trumpet it out to all the world, if God would but give him permission. No man who is in his right wits, will lay open to everyone his bodily infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc.—but to some near relation, or bosom friend, or able physician. So no man who is in his right wits will lay open to everyone his soul-infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc.—but to the Lord, or to some particular person who is wise, faithful, and able to contribute something to his

soul's relief. Should a Christian but lay open or exposing all his follies and vanities to the world, how sadly would some deride him and scorn him! and how severely and bitterly would others censure him and judge him! etc. When David was alone in the cave, then he poured out his complaint to God, and showed before him his trouble, Psalm 142:2. And when Job was all alone, then his eyes poured out tears to God, Job 16:20. There is no hazard, no danger, in exposing of all before God in private—but there may be a great deal of hazard and danger in exposing of all before men.

[5.] Fifthly, Secret duties shall have open rewards. [Eccles 12:14; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12; Psalm 126:5; Luke 14:14; Matt 25:34,37] Matt 6:6, "And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you openly." So, Matt 6:18, God will reward his people here in part, and hereafter in all perfection. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him in secret. Those who sow in tears secretly, shall reap in joy openly. Private prayer shall be rewarded before men and angels publicly. How openly did God reward Daniel for his secret prayer! Dan 6:10,23-28. Mordecai privately discovered a plot of treason against the person of king Ahasuerus, and he is rewarded

openly, Esther 2:21-23, with Esther 6. Darius, before he came to the kingdom, received privately a gift from one Syloson; and when he came to be a king, he rewarded him openly with the command of his country Samus. God, in the great day, will recompense his people before all the world, for every secret prayer, and secret tear, and secret sigh, and secret groan that has come from their heart. God, in the great day, will declare to men and angels, how often his people have been in pouring out their souls before him in such and such holes, corners, and secret places; and accordingly he will reward them.

Ah, Christians! did you really believe this, and seriously dwell on this, you would,

- (1.) Walk more thankfully.
  - (2.) Work more cheerfully.
  - (3.) Suffer more patiently.
  - (4.) Fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, more courageously.
  - (5.) Lay out yourselves for God, his interest and glory, more freely.
  - (6.) Live with whatever providence has cut out for your portion, more quietly and contentedly.
- And,

(7.) You would be in private prayer more frequently, more abundantly.

[6.] Sixthly, Consider that God has usually manifested himself most to his people when they have been in secret, when they have been alone at the throne of grace. Oh the sweet meltings, the heavenly warmings, the blessed cheerings, the glorious manifestations, and the choice communion with God—that Christians have found when they have been alone with God in a corner, in a closet, behind the door!

When did Daniel have that vision and comfortable message, that blessed news, by the angel, that he was "greatly beloved"—but when he was all alone at prayer? Dan 9:20-23, "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision."

While Daniel was at private prayer, God, by the angel Gabriel, reveals to him the secret of his counsel, concerning the restoration of Jerusalem, and the duration thereof, even to the Messiah; and while Daniel was at private prayer, the Lord appears to him, and in an extraordinary way assures him that he was "a man greatly beloved," or as the Hebrew has it, "a man of desires," that is, a man whom God's desires are towards, a man singularly beloved of God, and highly in favor with God, a man who are very pleasing and delightful to God.

God loves to lade the wings of private prayer with the sweetest, choicest, and chief blessings. Ah! how often has God kissed a poor Christian at the beginning of private prayer, and spoke peace to him in the midst of private prayer, and filled him with light and joy and assurance upon the close of private prayer?

And so Cornelius is highly commended and graciously rewarded upon the account of his private prayer: Acts 10:1-4, "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon

he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

Acts 10:30-31, "Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.'" Mark, as he was praying in his house, namely, by himself alone, a man in bright clothing—that was an angel in man's shape, Acts 10:3—appeared to him, and said, "Cornelius, your prayer is heard." [Acts 10:31] He does not mean only that prayer which he made when he fasted and humbled himself before the Lord, Acts 10:30-31; but, as Acts 10:2-4 show—his prayers which he made alone. For it seems none else were with him then, for he only saw that man in bright clothing; and to him alone the angel addressed his present speech, saying, "Cornelius, your prayers are heard, Acts 10:4,31. Here you see that Cornelius' private prayers are not only heard—but kindly remembered, and graciously accepted, and

gloriously rewarded. Praying Cornelius is not only remembered by God—but he is also visited, sensibly and evidently, by an angel, and assured that his private prayers and good deeds are an odor, a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God.

And so when had Peter his vision but when he was praying alone on the housetop? Acts 10:9-13, "About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." When Peter was upon the housetop at prayer alone, then he fell into a trance, and he saw heaven opened; and then he had his spirit raised, his mind elevated, and all the faculties of his soul filled with a divine revelation.

And so when Paul was at prayer alone, Acts 9:12, he saw in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Paul had not been long

at private prayer before it was revealed to him that he was a chosen vessel, and before he was filled with the gifts, graces, and comforts of the Holy Spirit.

And when John was alone in the isle of Patmos, "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ"—where he was banished by Domitian, a most cruel emperor—then he had a glorious sight of the Son of man, and then the Lord discovered to him most deep and profound mysteries, both concerning the present and future state of the church, to the end of the world. And when John was weeping, in private prayer doubtless, then the sealed book was opened to him.

So when Daniel was at private prayer, God dispatches a heavenly messenger to him, and his errand was to open more clearly and fully the blessed Scripture to him. Some comfortable and encouraging knowledge this holy man of God had attained unto before by his frequent and constant study in the word, and this eggs him on to private prayer, and private prayer sends an angel from heaven to give him a clearer and fuller light. Private prayer is a golden key to unlock the mysteries of the word unto us. The knowledge of many choice and blessed truths,



are but the returns of private prayer. The word most dwells richly in their hearts who are most in pouring out their hearts before God in their closets.

When Bonaventura, that seraphic doctor, as some call him, was asked by Aquinas from what books and helps he derived such holy and divine expressions and contemplations, he pointed to a crucifix, and said, "Prostrate in prayer at the feet of this image, my soul receives greater light from heaven than from all study and disputation." Though this be a monkish tradition and superstitious fiction—yet some improvement may be made of it. Certainly that Christian, who in private prayer lies most at the feet of Jesus Christ, he shall understand most of the mind of Christ in the gospel, and he shall have most of heaven and the things of his own peace brought down into his heart.

There is no service wherein Christians have such a near, familiar, and friendly fellowship with God as in this of private prayer; neither is there any service wherein God does more delight to make known his truth and faithfulness, his grace and goodness, his mercy and bounty, his beauty and glory to poor souls, than this of private prayer. Luther professes, "That he profited more

in the knowledge of the Scripture by private prayer in a short space, than he did by study in a longer space," as John by weeping in in seclusion, got the sealed book opened.

Private prayer crowns God with the honor and glory that is due to his name; and God crowns private prayer with a discovery of those blessed weighty truths to his servants, that are a sealed book to others. Certainly the soul usually enjoys most communion with God in secret. When a Christian is in a wilderness, which is a very solitary place, then God delights to speak friendly and comfortably to him: Hos 2:14, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak friendly or comfortably to her," or as the Hebrew has it, "I will speak to her heart." When I have her alone, says God, in a solitary wilderness, I will speak such things to her heart, as shall exceedingly cheer her, and comfort her, and even make her heart leap and dance within her.

A husband imparts his mind most freely and fully to his wife when she is alone; and so does Christ to the believing soul. Oh the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret visits, the secret whispers, the secret cheerings, the secret sealings, the secret discoveries, etc., that God

gives to his people when alone, when in a hole, when under the stairs, when behind the door, when in a dungeon! When Jeremiah was calling upon God alone in his dark dungeon, he had great and wonderful things showed him that he knew not of, Jer 33:1-3.

Ambrose was accustomed to say, "I am never less alone, than when I am alone; for then I can enjoy the presence of my God most freely, fully, and sweetly, without interruption." And it was a most sweet and divine saying of Bernard, "O saint, know you not," says he, "that your husband Christ is bashful, and will not be intimate in company? Retire yourself therefore by prayer and meditation into your closet or the fields, and there you shall have Christ's embraces."

A gentlewoman being at private prayer and meditation in her parlor, had such sweet, choice, and full enjoyments of God, that she cried out, "Oh that I might always enjoy this sweet communion with God!" etc.

Christ loves to embrace his spouse, not so much in the open street, as in secret; and certainly the gracious soul has never sweeter views of glory, than when it is most out of the view of the

world. Wise men give their best, their choicest, and their richest gifts in secret; and so does Christ give his the best of the best, when they are in a corner, when they are all alone. But as for such as cannot spare time to seek God in a closet, to commune with him in secret—they sufficiently manifest that they have little fellowship or friendship with God, whom they so seldom come at.

[7.] Seventhly, Consider the time of this life is the only time for private prayer. Heaven will admit of no secret prayer. In heaven there will be no secret sins to trouble us, nor no secret needs to pinch us, nor no secret temptations to betray us, nor no secret snares to entangle us, nor no secret enemies to supplant us. We had need live much in the practice of that duty here on earth, that we shall never be exercised in after death. Some duties that are incumbent upon us now, as praising of God, admiring of God, exalting and lifting up of God, joying and delighting in God, etc., will be forever incumbent upon us in heaven; but this duty of private prayer, we must take our leave of, when we come to lay our heads in the dust.

[8.] Eighthly, Consider the great prevalency of secret prayer. Private prayer is the gate of

heaven, a key to let us into paradise. Oh the great things that private prayer has done with God! Psalm 31:22. Oh the great mercies that have been obtained by private prayer! Psalm 38:8-9. And oh the great threatenings that have been diverted by private prayer! And oh the great judgments that have been removed by private prayer! And oh the great judgments that have been prevented by private prayer!

I have read of a malicious woman who gave herself to the devil, provided that he would do harm to such a neighbor, whom she mortally hated: the devil went again and again to do his errand—but at last he returns and tells her, that he could do no devilry to that man, for whenever he came, he found him either reading the Scriptures, or at private prayer.

Private prayers pierces the heavens, and are commonly blessed and loaded with gracious and glorious returns from thence. While Hezekiah was praying and weeping in private, God sent the prophet Isaiah to him, to assure him that his prayer was heard, and that his tears were seen, and that he would add unto his days fifteen years, Isa 38:5. So when Isaac was all alone meditating and praying, and asking God for a

good wife in the fields, he meets Rebekah, Gen 24:63-64.

So Jacob: Gen 32:24-28, "So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." In this scripture we have an elegant description of a duel fought between the Almighty and Jacob; and in it there are these things most observable:

(1.) First, We have the combatants or duelists, Jacob and God, who appeared in the shape or appearance of a man. He who is here said to be a man was the Son of God in human shape, as it appears by the whole narration, and by Hos 12:3-5. Now, that this man who wrestled with Jacob was indeed God, and not really man, is most evident by these reasons

[1.] First, Jacob desires a blessing from him, Gen 32:26. Now, it is God's prerogative-royal to bless, and not angels' nor men's. Consequently,

[2.] Secondly, He calls him by the name of God; "you have power with God," Gen 32:28. And says Jacob, "I have seen God face to face," Gen 32:30. Not that he saw the majesty and essence of God: for no man can see the essential glory of God and live, Exod 33:20,23; but he saw God more apparently, more manifestly, more gloriously than ever he had done before. Some created shape, some glimpse of glory, Jacob saw, whereby God was pleased for the present to testify his more immediate presence—but not himself.

[3.] Thirdly, The same person who here Jacob wrestles with is he whom Jacob remembers in his benediction as his deliverer from all evil, Gen 48:16. It was that God that appeared to him at Bethel when he fled from the face of his brother, Gen 35:7. Consequently,

[4.] Fourthly, Jacob is reprov'd for his curious inquiring or asking after the angel's name, Gen 32:29, which is a clear argument or demonstration of his majesty and glory, God being above all notion and name. God is a super-

substantial substance—an understanding not to be understood, a word never to be spoken. One being asked what God was, answered, "That he must be God himself, before he could know God fully." We are as well able to comprehend the sea in a cockle-shell, as we are able to comprehend the Almighty. "In searching after God," says Chrysostom, "I am like a man digging in a deep spring: I stand here, and the water rises upon me; and I stand there, and still the water rises upon me."

In this conflict you have not one man wrestling with another, nor one man wrestling with a created angel—but a poor, weak, mortal man wrestling with an immortal God; weakness wrestling with strength, and a finite being with an infinite being. Though Jacob was greatly overmatched—yet he wrestles and keeps his hold, and all in the strength of him, with whom he wrestles.

(2.) Secondly, You have the place where they combated, and that was beside the ford Jabbok, Gen 32:22. This is the name of a brook or river springing by Rabbah, the metropolis of the Ammonites, and flowing into Jordan beneath the Sea of Galilee, Num 21:24; Deut 2:37; Judg 11:13,15; Deut 3:16. Jacob did never enjoy so



much of the presence of God, as when he had left the company of men. Oh! the sweet communion that Jacob had with God when he was retired from his family, and was all alone with his God by the ford Jabbok! Certainly Jacob was never less alone than at this time, when he was so alone. Saints often meet with the best wine and with the strongest cordials—when they are all alone with God.

(3.) Thirdly, You have the time of the combat, and that was the night. At what time of the night this wrestling, this duel began, we nowhere read; but it lasted until break of day, it lasted until Jacob had the better of the angel. How many hours of the night this conflict lasted, no mortal man can tell. God's design was that none should be spectators nor witnesses of this combat but Jacob only; and therefore Jacob must be wrestling when others were sleeping.

(4.) Fourthly, You have the ground of the quarrel, and that was Jacob's fear of Esau, and his importunate desire for a blessing. Jacob flies to God, that he might not fall before man; he flies to God, that he might not fly before men. In a storm, there is no shelter like to the wing of God. He is safest, and happiest, and wisest, who lays himself under divine protection. This Jacob

knew, and therefore he runs to God, as to his only city of refuge. In this conflict God would have given out: "Let me go, for the day breaks," Gen 32:26; but Jacob keeps his hold, and tells him boldly to his very face that he would not let him go unless he would bless him. Oh the power of private prayer! It has a kind of omnipotency in it; it takes God captive; it holds him as a prisoner; it binds the hands of the Almighty; yes, it will wrench a mercy, a blessing, out of the hand of heaven itself! Oh the power of that prayer which makes a man victorious over the greatest, the highest power! Jacob, though a man, a single man, a traveling man, a tired man, yes, though a worm, which is easily crushed and trodden under foot, and no man, Isa 41:14—yet in private prayer he is so potent, that he overcomes the omnipotent God; he is so mighty, that he overcomes the Almighty!

(5.) Fifthly, You have the nature or manner of the combat, and that was both outward and inward, both physical and spiritual. It was as well by the strength of his body as it was by the force of his faith. He wrestled not only with spiritual strugglings, tears, and prayers, Hos 12:4—but with physical also, wherein God assailed him with one hand, and upheld him with the other. In

this, conflict, Jacob and the angel of the covenant did really wrestle arm to arm, and shoulder to shoulder, and foot to foot, and used all other sleights and ways as men do, who wrestle one with another. The Hebrew word which is here rendered wrestled, signifies the raising of the dust; because they cast dust one upon another, that so they might take more sure hold one of another. Some conclude that Jacob and the angel did tug, and strive, and turn each other, until they sweat again; for so much the word imports. Jacob and the angel did not wrestle in jest—but in good earnest; they wrestled with their might, as it were, for the garland; they strove for victory as for life.

But as this wrestling was physical, so it was spiritual also. Jacob's soul takes hold of God, and Jacob's faith takes hold of God, and Jacob's prayers takes hold of God, and Jacob's tears takes hold of God, Hos 12:4-5. Certainly Jacob's weapons in this warfare were mainly spiritual, and so "mighty through God." There is no overcoming of God but in his own strength. Jacob did more by his royal faith than he did by his noble hands, and more by weeping than he did by sweating, and more by praying than he did by all his bodily strivings.

(6.) Sixthly and lastly, You have the outcome of the combat, and that is, victory over the angel, Gen 32:28. Jacob wrestles in the angel's power, and so overcomes him. As a prince, he overpowers the angel by that very power he had from the angel. The angel was as freely and fully willing to be conquered by Jacob, as Jacob was willing to be conqueror. When lovers wrestle, the strongest is willing enough to take a fall of the weakest; and so it was here. The father, in wrestling with his child, is willing enough, for his child's comfort and encouragement, to take a fall now and then; and so it was between the angel and Jacob in the present case. Now in this blessed story, as in a crystal glass, you may see the great power and prevalency of private prayer; it conquers the great conqueror; it is so omnipotent that it overcomes an omnipotent God.

Now this you may see more fully and sweetly cleared up in Hos 12:4, "He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there." When Jacob was all alone and in a dark night, and but on one leg—yet then he played the prince with God, as the Hebrew has it. Jacob by prayers and tears did so prince it

with God as that he carried the blessing. Jacob's wrestling was by weeping, and his prevailing by praying. Prayers and tears are not only very pleasing to God—but also very prevalent with God. And thus you see that this great instance of Jacob speaks out aloud the prevalency of private prayer.

See another instance of this in David: Psalm 6:6, "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears." These are all excessive figurative speeches, to set forth the greatness of his sorrow, and the multitude of his tears. David in his retirement makes the place of his sin, namely, his bed, to be the place of his repentance. David sins privately upon his bed, and David mourns privately upon his bed. Every place which we have polluted by sin, we should sanctify and water with our tears: Psalm 6:8, "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping." As blood has a voice, and as the rod has a voice, so tears have a voice. Tears have tongues, and tears can speak. There is no prayer compared to those which secret tears make in the ears of God.

A prudent and indulgent father can better pick out the wants and necessities of his children by

their secret tears than by their loud complaints, by their weeping than by their words; and do you think that God can't do as much? Tears are not always mutes: Lam 2:18, "Cry aloud," says one, "not with your tongue—but with your eyes; not with, your words—but with your tears; for that is the prayer that makes the most forcible entry into the ears of the great God of heaven." Penitent tears are undeniable ambassadors that never return from the throne of grace without a gracious answer. Tears are a kind of silent prayers, which, though they say nothing—yet they obtain pardon; and though they plead not a man's cause—yet they obtain mercy at the hands of God. As you see in that great instance of Peter, who, though he said nothing that we read of—yet weeping bitterly, he obtained mercy, Matt 26:75.

I have read of Augustine, who, coming as a visitant to the house of a sick man, he saw the room full of friends and kindred, who were all silent—yet all weeping: the wife sobbing, the children sighing, the kinsfolk lamenting, all mourning; whereupon Augustine uttered this short prayer, "Lord, what prayer do you hear—if not these?"

Psalm 6:9, "The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer." God sometimes answers his people before they pray: Isa 65:24, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer." And sometimes while they are praying; so it follows in the same verse, "And while they are yet speaking I will hear." So Isa 30:19, "He will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry: when he shall hear it, he will answer you." And sometimes after they have prayed, as the experiences of all Christians can testify. Sometimes God neither hears nor receives a prayer; and this is the common case and lot of the wicked, Prov 1:28; Job 27:9; Isa 1:15. Sometimes God hears the prayers of his people—but does not presently answer them, as in that case of Paul, 2 Cor 12:7-9; and sometimes God both hears and receives the prayers of his people, as here he did David's. Now in this instance of David, as in a glass, you may run and read the prevalency of private prayer and of secret tears.

You may take another instance of this in Jonah: "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: 'In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to

my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Salvation comes from the Lord." And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land." Jonah 2. When Jonah was all alone, and in the midst of many dangers and deaths, when he was in the whale's belly, yes, in the belly of hell—so called because horrid and hideous, deep and dismal—yet then private prayer fetches him from thence. Let a man's dangers be ever so many, nor ever so great—yet secret prayer has a certain omnipotency in it that will deliver him out of them all. In multiplied afflictions, private prayer is most prevalent with God. In the very midst of drowning, secret prayer will keep both head and heart above water. Upon Jonah's private prayer, God sends



forth his mandate, and the fish serves Jonah for a ship to sail safe to shore. When the case is even desperate—yet then private prayer can do much with God. Private prayer is of that power that it can open the doors of leviathan, as you see in this great instance, which yet is reckoned as a thing not feasible, Job 41:14.

Another instance of the prevalency of private prayer you have in that 2 Kings 4:32-35, "When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them (Privacy is a good help to fervency in prayer) and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes." Oh the power, the prevalency, the omnipotency of private prayer, that raises the dead to life! And the same effect had the private prayer of Elijah in raising the widow's son of Zarephath to life, 1 Kings 17:18, et seq.

The great prevalency of Moses his private prayers you may read in the following scriptures:

Num 12:1-2, "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down." Moses by private prayer rules and overrules with God; he was so potent with God in private prayer that he could have what he would from God. So Num 21:7-9; Psalm 106:23; Exod 32:9-14; Exod 14:15-17. The same you may see in Nehemiah, Neh 1:11, compared with Neh 2:4-8.

Private prayer, like Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow, when duly qualified as to the person and act, never returns empty; it hits the mark, it carries the day with God; it pierces the walls of heaven, though, like those of Gaza, made of brass and iron, Isa 45:2. Oh, who can express the powerful oratory of private prayer! etc.

[9.] Ninthly, Consider, that secret duties are the most soul-enriching duties. Look! as secret meals make fat bodies, so secret duties make fat souls. And as secret trades brings in great earthly riches, so secret prayers makes many rich in spiritual blessings and in heavenly riches. Private prayer is that secret key of heaven that

unlocks all the treasures of glory to the soul. The best riches and the sweetest mercies God usually gives to his people when they are in their closets upon their knees. Look! as the warmth the chickens find by close sitting under the hen's wings nourishes them, so are the graces of the saints enlivened, and nourished, and strengthened by the sweet secret influences which their souls fall under when they are in their closet-communion with God. Private prayer conscientiously performed is the secret key of heaven, that has unlocked such treasures and such secrets as has passed the skill of the cunningest devil to find out. Private prayer midwives the choicest mercies and the chief riches in upon us. Certainly there are none so rich in gracious experiences as those who are most exercised in closet duties.

Psalm 34:6, "This poor man cried," says David, "and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles." David, pointing to himself, tells us that he "cried," that is, silently and secretly, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and as Nehemiah did in the presence of the king of Persia; "and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles," Exod 14:15; Neh 1:11; and Neh 2:4. And, oh, what additions were these deliverances to his experiences! O

my friends, look, as the tender dew that falls in the silent night makes the grass and herbs and flowers to flourish and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain that fall in the day, so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to grow and flourish in the soul, than all those more open, public, and visible duties of religion, which too, too often are mingled and mixed with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy.

Beloved! you know that many times a favorite at court gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to his prince, than a tradesman or a merchant gets in twenty years' labor and pains, etc. So a Christian many times gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to the King of kings, than many others do by trading long in the more public duties of religion. O sirs! remember that in private prayer we have a far greater advantage as to the exercise of our own gifts and graces and parts, than we have in public; for in public we only hear others exercise their parts and gifts, etc.; in public duties we are more passive—but in private duties we are more active. Now, the more our gifts and parts and graces are exercised, the more they are strengthened and increased. All acts strengthen

habits. The more sin is acted, the more it is strengthened. And so it is with our gifts and graces; the more they are acted, the more they are strengthened. But,

[10.] Tenthly, Take many things together. All Christians have their secret sins. Psalm 19:12, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse me from secret faults." Secret not only from other men—but from himself; even such secret sins as grew from errors which he understood not. It is but natural for every man to err, and then to be ignorant of his errors. 'Many sins I see in myself,' says he, 'and more there are which I cannot spot, which I cannot find out. Nay, I think that every man's sins are beyond his understanding.' There is not the best, the wisest, nor the holiest man in the world, who can give a full and entire list of his sins. "Who can understand his errors?" This interrogation has the force of an affirmation: "Who can?" No man! No, not the most perfect and innocent man in the world. O friends! who can reckon up the secret sinful imaginations, the secret sinful inclinations, or the secret pride, the secret blasphemies, the secret hypocrisies, the secret atheistical risings, the secret murmurings, the secret repinings, the secret discontents, the secret

insolencies, the secret filthinesses, the secret unbelievings, etc., that God might every day charge upon his soul? Should the best and holiest man on earth have but his secret sins every day written in his forehead, it would not only put him to a crimson blush—but it would make him pull his hat over his eyes, or cover his face with a double scarf!

So 1 Kings 8:38, "When a prayer or plea is made by any of your people Israel--each one aware of the plague of his own heart," etc. Sin is the greatest plague in the world—but never more dangerous than when it reaches the heart. Now, secret sins commonly lie nearest the heart, the fountain from whence they take a quick, immediate, and continual supply. Secret sins are as near to original sin as the first droppings are to the spring-head. And as every secret sin lies nearest the heart, so every secret sin is the plague of the heart. Now, as secret diseases are not to be laid open to everyone—but only to the prudent physician; so our secret sins, which are the secret plagues, the secret diseases of our souls, are not to be laid open to everyone—but only to the physician of souls, that is only able both to cure them and pardon them.

And as all Christians have their secret sins, so all Christians have their secret temptations, 2 Cor 12:8-9. And as they have their secret temptations, so they have their secret needs; yes, many times they have such particular and personal needs that there is not one in the congregation, nor one in the family, that has the like. And as they have their secret needs, so they have their secret fears, and secret snares, and secret straits, and secret troubles, and secret doubts, and secret jealousies, etc. And how do all these things call aloud upon every Christian to be frequent and constant in secret prayer!

[11.] Eleventhly, Consider, Christ is very much affected and delighted in the secret prayers of his people. Song 2:14, "O my dove who is in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is lovely." Christ observes his spouse when she is in the clefts of the rock; when she is gotten into a corner a-praying, he looks upon her with singular delight, and with special intimations of his love. Nothing is more sweet, delightful, and welcome to Christ than the secret services of his people. Their secret breathings are like lovely songs to him, Mal 3:4;

their secret prayers in the clefts of the rock, or under the stairs, are as sweet incense to Jesus. The spouse retires to the secret places of the stairs not only for security—but also for secrecy, that so she might the more freely, without suspicion of hypocrisy, pour out her soul into the bosom of her beloved. The great delight that parents take in the secret lispings and whisperings of their children, is no delight to that which Christ takes in the secret prayers of his people. And therefore, as you would be friends and furtherers of Christ's delight, be much in secret prayer.

[12.] Twelfthly, Consider you are the only people in all the world whom God has made choice of to reveal his secrets to. John 15:15, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord loth; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Everything that God the Father had communicated to Christ as mediator to be revealed to his servants, he made known to his disciples as to his bosom-friends. Christ loves his people as friends, and he uses them as friends, and he opens his heart to them as friends. There is nothing in the heart of Christ



that concerns the internal and eternal welfare of his friends—but he reveals it to them: he reveals himself, his love, his eternal good will, the mysteries of faith, and the secrets of his covenant—to his friends. [1 Cor 2:10-11; John 1:9; Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:3-4,9] Christ loves not to entertain his friends with things that are commonly and vulgarly known. Christ will reveal the secrets of his mind, the secrets of his love, the secrets of his thoughts, the secrets of his heart, and the secrets of his purposes—to all his bosom-friends. Samson could not hide his mind, his secrets, from Delilah, though it cost him his life, Judg 16:15-17; and do you think that Christ can hide his mind, his secrets, from them for whom he has laid down his life? Surely no. O sirs! Christ is,

- (1.) A universal friend.
- (2.) An omnipotent friend, an almighty friend. He is no less than thirty times called Almighty in that book of Job; he can do above all expressions and beyond all apprehensions.
- (3.) He is an omniscient friend.
- (4.) He is an omnipresent friend.
- (5.) He is an indeficient friend.

- (6.) He is an independent friend.
- (7.) He is an unchangeable friend.
- (8.) He is a watchful friend.
- (9.) He is a tender and compassionate friend.
- (10.) He is a close and faithful friend; and therefore he cannot but open and unbosom himself to all his bosom friends. To be reserved and close is against the very law of friendship. Faithful friends are very free in imparting their thoughts, their minds, their secrets, one to another. A real friend accounts nothing worth knowing unless he makes it known to his friends. He opens up his greatest and most inward secrets to his friends. Job calls his friends "inward friends," or the men of his secrets, Job 19:19. All Christ's friends are inward friends; they are the men of his secrets: Prov 3:32, "His secrets are with the righteous," that is, his covenant and fatherly affection, which is hidden and secret from the world. He who is righteous in secret, where no man sees him, he is the righteous man, to whom God will communicate his closest secrets, as to his dearest bosom-friend. It is only a bosom-friend to whom we will unbosom ourselves. So Psalm 25:14, The

secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant."

Now, there are three sorts of divine secrets:

(1.) First, There are secrets of providence, and these he reveals to the righteous, and to those who fear him, Psalm 107:43; Hos 14:9. The prophet Amos speaks of these secrets of providence: Amos 3:7, Surely the Lord God will do nothing—but he reveals his secrets unto his servants and prophets." Micah knew the secret of the Lord concerning Ahab, which neither Zedekiah nor any other of the false prophets knew. So Gen 18:17, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The destruction of Sodom was a secret that lay in the bosom of God; but Abraham being a bosom-friend, God communicates this secret to him, Gen 18:19-21. Abraham was a friend, a faithful friend, a special friend, James 2:23; and therefore God makes him both of his court and counsel. Oh how greatly does God condescend to his people. He speaks to them as a man would speak to his friend; and there is no secrets of providence, which may be for their advantage—but he will reveal them to his faithful servants. As all faithful friends have the same friends and the same enemies, so they are mutual in the

communication of their secrets one to another; and so it was between God and Abraham.

(2.) Secondly, There are the secrets of his kingdom; and these he reveals to his people: Matt 13:11, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven—but unto them it is not given." So Matt 11:25, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." "Let us not think," says Jerome, that the gospel is in the words of Scripture—but in the sense; not in the outside—but in the marrow; not in the leaves of words—but in the root of reason."

There are many choice, secret, hidden, and mysterious truths and doctrines in the gospel, which Christ reveals to his people, that this poor, blind, ignorant world are strangers to. [Joel 2:28; 1 Tim 3:9,16; Col 1:26-27; 1 Cor 2:9-12; Eph 4:21] There are many secrets wrapped up in the plainest truths and doctrines of the gospel, which none can effectually open and reveal but the Spirit of the Lord, who searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. There are many secrets and mysteries in the gospel, that all the learning and labor in the world can never give a man

insight into. There are many who know the doctrine of the gospel, the history of the gospel—who are utter strangers to the secrets of the gospel. There is a secret power, a secret authority, a secret efficacy, a secret prevalency, a secret goodness, a secret sweetness in the gospel—that none experience but those to whom the Lord is pleased to impart gospel secrets to: Isa 29:11-12, "Seal my law among my disciples." The law of God to wicked men is a sealed book that they cannot understand, Dan 12:9-10. It is as blotted paper that they cannot read.

Look! as a private letter to a friend contains secret matter that no other man may read because it is sealed; so the law of grace is sealed up under the secret-seal of heaven, so that no man can open it or read it—but Christ's faithful friends to whom it is sent. The whole Scripture, says Gregory, is but one entire letter despatched from the Lord Christ to his beloved spouse on earth. The Rabbis say that there are four keys that God has under his belt:

- 1, the key of the clouds;
- 2, the key of the womb;
- 3, the key of the grave;

4, the key of food;

and I may add a fifth key that is under his belt, and that is the key of the word, the key of the Scripture; which key none can turn but he who "has the key of David, who opens, and no man shuts; and who shuts, and no man opens," Rev 3:7.

O sirs! God reveals himself, and his mind, and will, and truth—to his people, in a more friendly and familiar way than he does to others: Mark 4:11, "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but unto those who are outside, all these things are done in parables:" Luke 8:10, "And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Though great doctors, and profound teachers, and deep-studied but unsanctified divines, may know much of the doctrines of the gospel, and commend much the doctrines of the gospel, and dispute much for the doctrines of the gospel, and glory much in the doctrines of the gospel, and take a great deal of pains to dress and trim up the doctrines of the gospel, with the flowers of rhetoric or eloquence; though it be much better to present

truth in her native plainness, than to hang her ears with counterfeit pearls. The word, without human adornments, is like the stone garamantides, that has drops of gold in itself, sufficient to enrich the believing soul. Yet the special, spiritual, powerful, and saving knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, is a secret, a mystery, yes, a hidden mystery to them, Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7.

Chrysostom compares the mysteries of Christ, in regard of the wicked, to a written book, that the ignorant can neither read nor spell; he sees the cover, the covers, and the letters—but he understands not the meaning of what he sees. He compares the mystery of grace to an indited epistle, which an unschooled man viewing, he cannot read it, he cannot understand it; he knows it is paper and ink—but the sense, the matter, he knows not, he understands not. So unsanctified people, though they are ever so learned, and though they may perceive the letter of the mystery of Christ—yet they perceive not, they understand not, the mystery of grace, the inward sense of the Spirit, in the blessed Scriptures. Though the devil is the greatest scholar in the world, and though he has more learning than all the men in the world have—yet there are many

thousand secrets and mysteries in the gospel of grace, that he knows not really, spiritually, feelingly, efficaciously, powerfully, thoroughly, savingly, etc.

Oh—but now Christ makes known himself, his mind, his grace, his truth, to his people, in a more clear, full, familiar, and friendly way: 2 Sam 7:27, "For you, O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, have revealed to your servant;" so you read it in your books; but in the Hebrew it is thus: "Lord, you have revealed this to the ear of your servant." Now, the emphasis lies in that word, to the ear, which is left out in your books. When God makes known himself to his people, he reveals things to their ears, as we use to do to a friend who is intimate with us: we speak a thing to his ear. There is many a secret which Jesus Christ speaks in the ears of his servants, which others never come to be acquainted with: 2 Cor 4:6, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The six several gradations that are in this scripture are worthy of our most serious consideration. Here is,



First, Knowledge; and,

Secondly, The knowledge of the glory of God;  
and,

Thirdly, The light of the knowledge of the glory  
of God; and,

Fourthly, Shining; and,

Fifthly, Shining into our hearts; and,

Sixthly, Shining into our hearts in the face of  
Jesus Christ.

And thus you see that the Lord reveals the  
secrets of himself, his kingdom, his truth, his  
grace, his glory, to the saints. But,

(3.) Thirdly, There are the secrets of his favor,  
the secrets of his special love, which he opens to  
them; the secret purposes of his heart to save  
them; and these are those great secrets, those  
"deep things of God," which none can reveal  
"but the Spirit of God." Now these great secrets,  
these deep things of God, God does reveal to his  
people by his Spirit: 1 Cor 2:9-12, "No eye has  
seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived  
what God has prepared for those who love  
him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.  
The Spirit searches all things, even the deep  
things of God. For who among men knows the

thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." Now what are the things that are freely given to us of God—but our election, effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification? And why has God given us his Spirit—but that we should know "the things that are freely given to us of God."

Some by secret in Psalm 25, understand a particular assurance of God's favors, whereby happiness is secured to us, both for the present and for the future. They understand by secret, the sealing of the Spirit, the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name in it, "which none knows but he who has it." And so much those words, "He will show them his covenant," seems to import: for what greater secret can God impart to his people, than that of opening the covenant of grace to them in its freeness, fullness, sureness, sweetness, suitableness, everlastingness, and in sealing up his good pleasure, and all the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant to them?

Such as love and serve the Lord shall be of his cabinet-council, they shall know his soul-secrets, and be admitted into a very gracious familiarity and friendship with himself: John 14:21-23, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." God and Christ will keep house with them, and manifest the secrets of their love to those who are observant of their commands.

And thus you see that the saints are the only people to whom God will reveal the secrets of his providence, the secrets of his kingdom, and the secrets of his love unto. Christ came out of the bosom of his Father, and he opens all the secrets of his Father only to his bosom-friends. Now what an exceeding high honor is it for God to open the secrets of his love, the secrets of his promises, the secrets of his providences, the secrets of his counsels, and the secrets of his covenant—to his people!

Tiberius Caesar thought no man fit to know his secrets. And among the Persians none but noblemen, lords, and dukes, might be made partakers of state secrets; they esteeming secrecy a divine thing. But now such honor God has put upon all his saints, as to make them lords and nobles, and the only privy statesmen in the court of heaven. The highest honor and glory that earthly princes can put upon their subjects is to communicate to them their greatest secrets. Now this high honor and glory the King of kings has put upon his people; "For his secrets are with those who fear him, and he will show them his covenant." It was a high honor to Elisha, 2 Kings 6:12, that he could tell the secrets that were spoken in the king's bedchamber. Oh! what an honor must it then be for the saints to know the secrets that are spoken in the presence-chamber of the King of kings!

Now I appeal to the very consciences of all who fear the Lord, whether it be not a just, equal, righteous, and necessary thing, that the people of God should freely and fully lay open all the secrets of their hearts before the Lord, who has thus highly honored them, as to reveal the secrets of his providence, kingdom, and favor to them? Yes, I appeal to all serious and sincere

Christians, whether it be not against the light and law of nature, and against the law of love, and law of friendship, to be reserved and close, yes, to hide our secrets from him who reveals his greatest and our choicest secrets to us? And if it is, why then do not you in secret lay open all your secret sins, and secret wants, and secret desires, secret fears, etc., to him who sees in secret? You know all secrets are to be communicated only in secret. None but fools will communicate secrets upon a stage, or before many. But,

[13.] Thirteenthly, Consider, that in times of great straits and trials, in times of great afflictions and persecutions, private prayer is the Christian's food and drink; it is his chief city of refuge; it is his shelter and hiding-place in a stormy day. When the saints have been driven by violent persecutions into holes, and caves, and dens, and deserts, and howling wildernesses, private prayer has been their food and drink, and Christ their only refuge. [Heb 11:37-38; Rev 12:6; Psalm 102:6-14]

When Esau came forth with hostile intentions against Jacob, secret prayer was Jacob's refuge: Gen 32, "Then Jacob prayed, 'O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord,

who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper.'" Promises in private must be prayed over. God loves to be pleaded with upon his own word, when he and his people are alone. "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children;" or upon the children, meaning he will put all to death. Some look upon the words to be a metaphor taken from fowling, who kill and take away the young and the mothers together, contrary to that old law, Deut 22:6. Others say it is a phrase that does most lively represent the tenderness of a mother, who, seeing her children in distress, spares not her own body nor life, to hazard it for her children's preservation, by interposing herself, even to be massacred together with and upon them, Hos 10:14. When Jacob, and all that was near and dear unto him, were in eminent danger of being cut off by Esau, and those men of blood that were with him, he betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge against the rage and malice of the mighty.

And so when Jeremiah was in a solitary and loathsome dungeon, private prayer was his food and drink, it was his only city of refuge: Jer

33:1-3, "While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him a second time: "This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it--the Lord is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'" When Jeremiah was in a lonesome, loathsome prison, God encourages him by private prayer, to seek for further discoveries and revelations of those choice and singular favors, which in future times he purposed to confer upon his people.

So 2 Chron 33:11-13, "So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God." When Manasseh was in fetters in his enemy's country, when he was stripped of all his princely glory, and led captive into Babylon, he

betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge; and by this means he prevails with God for his restoration to his crown and kingdom.

Private prayer is a city of refuge that no power nor policy, no craft nor cruelty, no violence nor force, is ever able to take by surprise. Though the joint prayers of the people of God together were often obstructed and hindered in the times of the ten persecutions—yet they were never able to obstruct or hinder secret prayer, private prayer. When men and devils have done their worst, every Christian will be able to maintain his private prayer with heaven. Private prayer will shelter a Christian against all the national, domestic, and personal storms and tempests that may threaten him. When a man is lying upon a sickbed alone, or when a man is in prison alone, or when a man is with Job left upon the ash-heap alone, or when a man is with John banished for the testimony of Jesus into this or that island alone—oh then private prayer will be his food and drink, his shelter, his hiding-place, his heaven. When all other trades fail, this trade of private prayer will hold good. But,

[14.] Fourteenthly, Consider that God is omnipresent. [Jer 16:17; Job 34:21; Prov 5:21;



Jer 32:19; Rev 2:23; Lam 3:66] We cannot get into any blind hole, or dark corner, or secret place—but the Lord has an eye there, the Lord will keep us company there: Matt 6:6, And your Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you openly." So Matt 6:18. There is not the darkest, dirtiest hole in the world into which a saint creeps—but God has a favorable eye there. God never lacks an eye to see our secret tears, nor an ear to hear our secret cries and groans, nor a heart to grant our secret requests; and therefore we ought to pour out our souls to him in secret: Psalm 38:9, "Lord! all my desire is before you; and my groaning is not hidden from you." Though our private desires are ever so confused, though our private requests are ever so broken, and though our private groanings are ever so much hidden from men—yet God eyes them all, God records them all, and God puts them all upon the record-file of heaven, and will one day crown them with glorious answers and returns.

We cannot sigh out a prayer in secret—but he sees us; we cannot lift up our eyes to him at midnight—but he observes us. The eye which God has upon his people when they are in secret, is such a special tender eye of love, as opens his ear, his heart, and his hand, for their good: 1 Pet

3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers;" or, as the Greek has it, "his ears are unto their prayers. If their prayers are so faint, that they cannot reach up as high as heaven, then God will bow the heavens and come down to their prayers." God's eye is upon every secret sigh, and every secret groan, and every secret tear, and every secret desire, and every secret pant of love, and every secret breathing of soul, and every secret melting and working of heart; all which should encourage us to be much in secret duties, in closet services. As a Christian is never out of the reach of God's hand, so he is never out of the view of God's eye.

If a Christian cannot hide himself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide himself from him whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun? In every private duty, a Christian is still under the eye of God's omniscience. When we are in the darkest hole, God has windows into our bosoms, and observes all the secret actings of our inward man, 1 Tim 2:8. The eye of God is not confined to this place or that, to this company or that; God has an eye upon his people as well when they are alone, as when they are among a multitude; as

well when they are in a corner, as when they are in a crowd. Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busy at Alexander's birth, and could not be at two places at one time. But God is present both in paradise and in the wilderness, both in the family and in the closet, both in public and in private at the same time. God is an omnipresent God. As he is not confined to one place, so he is excluded from no place: Jer 23:24, "Can any man hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, says the Lord?"

Prov 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," or, "contemplating the evil and the good," as the Hebrew may be read. Now, to contemplate, is more than simply to behold; for contemplation adds to a simple apprehension, a deeper degree of knowledge, entering into the very inside of a matter; and so indeed does God discern the very inward intentions of the heart, and the most secret motions of the spirit. God is an infinite and immense being, whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere. Now, if our God is omnipresent, then wherever we are, our God is present with us: if we are in prison alone with Joseph, our God is present with us there; or if we are in exile alone with David, our

God is present with us there; or if we are alone in our closets, our God is present with us there. God sees us in secret; and therefore let us seek his face in secret. Though heaven is God's palace—yet it is not his prison. But,

[15.] Fifteenthly, He who willingly neglects private prayer shall certainly be neglected in his public prayer; he who will not call upon God in secret shall find by sad experience that God will neither hear him nor regard him in public. Neglect of private duties is the great reason why the hearts of many are so dead and dull, so formal and carnal, so barren and unfruitful under public ordinances. Oh that Christians would seriously lay this to heart! Certainly, that man or woman's heart is best in public—who is most frequent in private. They make most yearnings in public ordinances—who are most conscientiously exercised in closet duties. No man's graces rise so high, nor any man's experiences rise so high, nor any man's communion with God rises so high, nor any man's divine enjoyments rise so high, nor any man's springs of comfort rise so high, nor any man's hopes rise so high, nor any man's parts and gifts rise so high, etc., as theirs do, who conscientiously wait upon God in their closets

before they wait upon him in the assembly of his people; and who when they return from public ordinances retire into their closets and look up to heaven for a blessing upon the public means.

It is certain that private duties fit the soul for public ordinances. He who makes conscience to wait upon God in private, shall find by experience that God will wonderfully bless public ordinances to him, Mic 2:7. My design is not to set up one ordinance of God above another, nor to cause one ordinance of God to clash with another—the public with the private, or the private with the public—but that every ordinance may have its proper place and right, the desires of my soul being to prize every ordinance, and to praise every ordinance, and to practice every ordinance, and to improve every ordinance, and to bless the Lord for every ordinance. But as ever you would see the beauty and glory of God in his sanctuary, as ever you would have public ordinances to be lovely and lively to your souls, as ever you would have your drooping spirits revived, and your languishing souls refreshed, and your weak graces strengthened, and your strong corruptions weakened under public ordinances—be more

careful and conscientious in the performance of closet duties, Psalm 63:1-3.

Oh how strong in grace! Oh how victorious over sin! Oh how dead to the world! Oh how alive to Christ! Oh how fit to live! Oh how prepared to die! might many a Christian have been, had they been but more frequent, serious, and conscientious in the discharge of closet-duties. Not but that I think there is a truth in that saying of Bede—the word church being rightly understood—namely, That he who comes not willingly to church shall one day go unwillingly to hell. But,

[16.] Sixteenthly, Consider, the times wherein we live call aloud for secret prayer. Hell seems to be broken loose, and men turned into incarnate devils; soul-damning wickednesses walk up and down the streets with a whore's forehead, without the least check or restraint: Jer 3:3, "You have a whore's forehead, you refuse to be ashamed!" Jer 6:15, "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush!" They had sinned away shame, instead of being ashamed of sin. Continuance in sin had quite banished all sense of sin and all shame for sin, so that they would not allow nature to draw

her veil of blushing before their great abominations. They were like to Caligula, a wicked emperor, who used to say of himself, that he loved nothing better about himself—than that he could not be ashamed. The same words are repeated in Jer 8:12. How applicable these scriptures are to the present time I will leave the prudent reader to judge.

But what does the prophet do, now that they were as bold in sin and as shameless as so many harlots? That you may see in Jer 13:17: "But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places," or secrecies, "for your pride; and my eye shall weep sore" (Hebrew, weeping weep, or shedding tears shed tears; the doubling of the verb notes the bitter and grievous lamentation that he should make for them), "and run down with tears." Now that they were grown up to that height of sin and wickedness, that that they were above all shame and blushing; now they were grown so proud, so hardened, so obstinate, so rebellious, so bent on self destruction; that no mercies could melt them or allure them, nor any threatenings nor judgments could in any way terrify them or stop them. The prophet goes into a corner, he retires himself into the most secret places, and there he weeps bitterly, there he

weeps as if he were resolved to drown himself in his own tears!

When the springs of sorrow rise high, a Christian turns his back upon company, and retires himself into places of greatest privacy, that so he may the more freely and the more fully vent his sorrow and grief before the Lord. Ah, England, England! what pride, luxury, lasciviousness, licentiousness, wantonness, drunkenness, cruelties, injustice, oppressions, fornications, adulteries, falsehoods, hypocrisy, bribery, atheism, horrid blasphemies, and hellish impieties, are now to be found rampant in the midst of you! Ah, England! England! how are the Lord's pure ordinances despised, Scriptures rejected, the Spirit resisted and derided, the righteous reviled, wickedness tolerated, and Christ many thousand times in a day by these cursed practices, afresh crucified! Ah, England! England! were our forefathers alive, how sadly would they blush to see such a horrid degenerate posterity as is to be found in the midst of you! How is our forefathers' generosity converted into riot and luxury, their frugality into pride and prodigality, their simplicity into subtlety, their sincerity into hypocrisy, their charity into cruelty, their chastity into fornication and



wantonness, their sobriety into drunkenness, their plain-dealing into fraud, their works of compassion into works of oppression, and their love to the people of God into an utter enmity against the people of God! etc.

And what is the voice of all these crying abominations—but every Christian to his closet, every Christian to his closet, and there weep, with weeping Jeremiah, bitterly, for all these great abominations whereby God is dishonored openly. Oh weep in secret for their sins who openly glory in their sins, which should be their greatest shame. Oh blush in secret for those who are past all blushing for their sins; for who knows but that the whole land may fare the better for the sakes of a few who are mourners in secret? But however it goes with the nation, such as mourn in secret for the abominations of the times, may be confident that when sweeping judgments shall come upon the land, the Lord will hide them in the secret chambers of his providence, he will set a secret mark of deliverance upon their foreheads, who mourn in secret for the crying sins of the present day, as he did upon theirs in Ezek 9:4-6.

[17.] Seventeenthly, Consider that the near and dear relations that you stand in to the Lord, calls aloud for secret prayer.

You are his friends. John 15:14-15. Now, a true friend loves to visit his friend when he may find him alone, and enjoy privacy with him. A true friend loves to pour out his heart into the bosom of his friend when he has him in a corner, or in the field, or under a hedge.

You are his favorites; and what favorite is there that hides his secret from his prince? Do not all favorites open their hearts to their princes when they are alone?

You are his children; and what sincere child is there, who does not delight to be much with his father when he is alone, when nobody is by? Oh, how free and open are children when they have their parents alone, beyond what they are when company is present.

You are the spouse of Christ; and what spouse, what wife is there that does not love to be much with her husband when he is alone? True lovers are always best when they are most alone: "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early

to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom—there I will give you my love." Song of Songs 7:10-12. The spouse of Christ is very desirous to enjoy his company in the fields, that so, having her beloved alone, she might the more freely and the more secretly open her heart to him. As wives, when they are walking alone with their husbands in the fields, are more free to open their minds and the secrets of their hearts, than they are when in their houses with their children and servants about them—so it was with the spouse.

They have very great cause to question whether they are Christ's real friends, favorites, children, spouse—who seldom or never converse with Christ in their closets, who are shy of Christ when they are alone, who never accustom themselves to give Christ secret visits. What Delilah said to Samson, Judg 16:15, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you have not told me wherein your great strength lies" (the discovery of which secret at last cost him his life).

That, Christ may say to very many in our days: "How can you say you love me, when you never acquaint me with your secrets? How can you say you love me—when you never bestow any

private visits upon me? How can you say that you are my friends, my faithful friends, my bosom-friends—when you never in private unbosom yourselves to me? How can you say that you are my favorites—when you can spend one week after another, and one month after another, and yet not let me know one of all your secrets; when every day you might have my ear in secret if you pleased? How can you say that you are my children—and yet be so closed and reserved as you are? How can you say you are my spouse—and yet never take any delight to open your hearts, your secrets, to me when I am alone?"

What Alexander said to one who was of his name—but a coward, 'Either lay down the name of Alexander—or fight like Alexander,' that I say to you, Either be frequent in closet duties, as becomes a Christian—or else lay down the name of a Christian; either unbosom yourselves in secret to Christ, as friends, favorites, children, spouses—or else lay down these names, etc. But, [18.] Eighteenthly, Consider that God has set a special mark of favor, honor, and observation, upon those who have prayed in secret. As you may see in Moses, Exod 34:28; and in Abraham, Gen 21:33; and in Isaac, Gen 24:63; and in

Jacob, Gen 32:24-29; and in David, Psalm 55:16-17; and in Daniel, Dan 6:10; and in Paul, Acts 9:11; and in Cornelius, Acts 10:2,4; and in Peter, Acts 10:9-12; and in Manasseh, 2 Chron 33:18-19. God has put all these worthies who have exercised themselves in secret prayer upon record, to their everlasting fame and honor. The Persians seldom write their king's name but in letters of gold. God has written, as I may say, their names in letters of gold—who have made conscience of exercising themselves in secret prayer. The precious names of those who have addicted themselves to closet-duties are as statues of gold, which the polluted breath of men can no ways stain; they are like so many shining suns which no clouds can darken; they are like so many sparkling diamonds which shine brightest in the darkest night.

A Christian can never get into a hole, a corner, a closet, to pour out his soul before the Lord—but the Lord makes an honorable observation of him, and sets a secret mark of favor upon him, Ezek 9:4-6. And how should this provoke all Christians to be much with God alone! The Romans were very ambitious of obtaining a great name, a great report, in this world; and why should not Christians be as divinely

ambitious of obtaining a good name, a good report, in the eternal world? Heb 11:39. A good name is always better than a great name, and a name in heaven is infinitely better than a thousand names on earth; and the way to both these is to be much with God in secret. But,

[19.] Nineteenthly, Consider that Satan is a very great enemy to secret prayer. Secret prayer is a scourge, a hell to Satan. Every secret prayer adds to the devil's torment, and every secret sigh adds to his torment, and every secret groan adds to his torment, and every secret tear adds to his torment. When a child of God is on his knees in his secret addresses to God, oh the strange thoughts, the earthly thoughts, the wandering thoughts, the distracted thoughts, the hideous thoughts, the blasphemous thoughts—which Satan often injects into his soul! and all to draw him off from secret prayer. Sometimes he tells the soul, that it is in vain to seek God in secret; and at other times he tells the soul it is too late to seek God in secret; for the door of mercy is shut, and there is no hope, no help for the soul. Sometimes he tells the soul that it is enough to seek God in public; and at other times he tells the soul, that it is futile to seek the Lord in private. Sometimes he tells the soul, that it is not

elected, and therefore all his secret prayers shall be rejected; and at other times he tells the soul, that it is sealed up unto the day of wrath, and therefore a secret prayer can never reverse that seal; and all this to dishearten and discourage a poor Christian in his secret retirements.

Sometimes Satan will object to a poor Christian the greatness of his sins; and at other times he will object against a Christian the greatness of his unworthiness. Sometimes he will object against a Christian his lack of grace; and at other times he will object against a Christian his lack of gifts to manage such a duty as it should be managed. Sometimes he will object against a Christian his former straitenedness in secret prayer; and at other times he will object against a Christian the small yearnings that he makes of secret prayer; and all to work the soul out of love with secret prayer; yes, to work the soul to loathe secret prayer! So deadly an enemy is Satan to secret prayer. Oh, the strange fears, fancies, and conceits, that Satan often raises in the spirits of Christians, when they are alone with God in a corner; and all to work them to cast off private prayer. It is none of Satan's least designs to interrupt a Christian in his private communion with God.

Satan watches all a Christian's motions; so that he cannot turn into his closet, nor creep into any hole to converse privately with his God—but he follows him hard at heels, and will be still injecting one thing or another into the soul, or else objecting one thing or another against the soul. A Christian is as well able to count the stars of heaven, and to number the sands of the sea—as he is able to number up the various devices and sleights which Satan uses to obstruct the soul's private addresses to God. Now from that great opposition that Satan makes against private prayer, a Christian may safely conclude these five things:

(1.) First, The excellency of private prayer. Certainly if it were not an excellent thing for a man to be in secret with God, Satan would never make such head against it.

(2.) Secondly, The necessity of private prayer. The more necessary any duty is to the internal and eternal welfare of a Christian, the more Satan will bestir himself to blunt a Christian's spirit in that duty.

(3.) Thirdly, The utility or profit that attends a conscientious discharge of private prayer. Where



we are likely to gain most, there Satan loves to oppose most.

(4.) Fourthly, The prevalency of private prayer. If there were not a kind of omnipotency in it, if it were not able to do wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, and wonders in the hearts and lives and ways of men—Satan would never have such an aching tooth against it as he has.

(5.) Fifthly, That God is highly honored by private prayer, or else Satan would never be so greatly enraged against it. This is certain. The more glory God has from any service we do, the more Satan will strive by all his wiles and sleights to take us, either off from that service, or so to interrupt us in that service—that God may have no honor, nor we no good, nor himself no hurt, by our private retirements. But, in the

[20.] Twentieth and last place, Consider, that you alone are the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and therefore if you do not apply yourselves to private prayer, and to your secret retirements, that you may enjoy God in a corner—none will. It is only God's hidden ones, his secret ones—who are spirited, principled, and prepared to wait on God in secret: Exod 19:5, "Then shall you be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people."

The Hebrew word signifies God's special jewels, God's proper ones, or God's secret ones—that he keeps in store for himself, and for his own special service and use. Princes lock up with their own hands in secret their most precious and costly jewels; and so does God his: Psalm 135:4, "For the Lord has chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure," or for his secret gem. Psalm 83:3, "They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted against your hidden ones," or your secret ones; so called partly because God hides them in the secret of his tabernacle, Psalm 31:20, and partly because God sets as high a value upon them as men do upon their hidden treasure, their secret treasure; yes, he makes more reckoning of them than he does of all the world besides!

And so the world shall know, when God shall arise to revenge the wrongs and injuries that has been done to his secret ones. Neither are there any on earth who know so much of the secrets of his love, of the secrets of his counsels, of the secrets of his purposes, of the secrets of his heart—as his secret ones do. Neither are there any in all the world, who are under those secret influences, those secret assistances, those secret blessings, those secret anointings of the Spirit—

as his secret ones are under. And therefore, no wonder if God calls them again, and again, and again, his secret ones.

Now, what can be more lovely or more desirable than to see their natures and their practices to answer to their names? They are the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and therefore how highly does it concern them to be much with God in secret, and to hide themselves with God in a corner! Shall Nabal's nature and practice answer to his name? 1 Sam 25:25, "I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests." Nabal signifies a fool, a sot, a churl; it notes one that is void of wisdom and goodness; it signifies one whose mind, reason, judgment, and understanding is withered and decayed. Now, if you look into the story, you shall find that as face answers to face, so Nabal's nature and practice did echo and answer to his name. And why then, should not our natures and practices answer to our names also? We are called the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and how highly therefore does it concern us to be much with God in secret! Why should there be any jarring or discord between our names and our practices?

It is observable that the practice and conduct of other saints have been answerable to their names. Isaac signifies laughter, and Isaac was a gracious son, a dutiful son, a son who kept clear of those abominations with which many of the patriarchs had defiled themselves, a son who proved matter of joy and laughter to his father and mother all their days. So Josiah signifies "the fire of the Lord;" and his practice did answer to his name. Witness the pulling down of Jeroboam's altar, and his burning of the vessels that were made for Baal, and his pulling down the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had set up, and his burning the grove at the brook Kedron, and his grinding it to powder, and his breaking down the houses of the Sodomites, and his defiling of the high places where the priests had burnt incense, and his breaking in pieces the images, and cutting down the groves, and filling their places with the bones of men, etc., 1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:4-21. So Joshua signifies "a Savior;" and his practice was answerable to his name. Though he could not save his people from their sins—yet he often saved them from their sufferings. Great and many were the deliverances, the salvations, that were instrumentally brought about by Joshua, as all know who have read the book of Joshua. So

John signifies "gracious," and his practice was answerable to his name. He was so gracious in his teachings and in his walkings that he gained favor in the very eyes of his enemies.

By all these instances, and by many more that might be given, you see that other saints' practices have answered to their names. Therefore, let everyone of us see that our practices do also answer to our names, that as we are called the Lord's secret ones, so we may be much with God in secret, that so there may be a blessed harmony between our names and our practices; and we may never repent another day that we have been called God's secret ones, his "hidden ones," but yet never made conscience of maintaining secret communion with God in our closets. And thus you see that there are no less than twenty arguments to persuade you to closet prayer—and to maintain private communion with God in a corner.