

JOHN FLAVEL

CHRIST
KNOCKING

AT THE DOOR OF SINNERS HEARTS



ENGLAND'S DUTY, UNDER THE
PRESENT GOSPEL-LIBERTY FROM
REVELATION 3:20

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by John Flavel

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AN EPISTLE TO THE READER

Candid Reader,

THE following discourse comes to thy hand in that native plainness wherein it was preached. I was conscientiously unwilling to alter it, because I found by experience, the Lord had blessed and prospered it in that dress, far beyond any other composures on which I had bestowed more pains. Let it not be censured as vanity or ostentation, that I here acknowledge the goodness of God in leading me to, and blessing my poor labours upon this subject. Who, and what am I that I should be continued, and again employed in the Lord's harvest, and that with success and encouragement, when so many of my brethren, with their much richer furnitures of gifts and graces, have in my time been called out of the vineyard, and are now silent in the grave! It is true, they enjoy what I do not; and it is as true, I am capable of doing some service for God which they are not. In preaching these sermons, I had many occasions to reflect upon the mystical sense of that scripture, Amos 9:13. "The plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed." Sowing and reaping times trode so close upon one another, that (in all humility I speak it to the praise of God) it was the busiest and blessedest time I ever saw since I first preached the gospel.

England hath now a day of special mercy: there is a wide door of opportunity opened to it; O that it might prove an effectual door! It is transporting and astonishing, that after all the high and horrid provocations, the atheism, profaneness, and bitter enmity against light and reformation: this sweet voice is still heard in England, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. The mercies and liberties of this day are a

new trial obtained for us by our potentate Advocate in the heavens; if we bring forth fruit, well; if not, the ax lieth at the root of the tree. Let us not be secure. Jerusalem was the city of the great King; the seat of his worship, and the symbols of his presence were fixed there; it was the joy of the whole earth, the house of prayer for all nations; thither the tribes went up to worship, the tribes of the Lord unto the testimony of Israel. For there were set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David, Psal. 122:4, 5. These privileges she enjoyed through the successions of many ages, and she had remained the glory of all nations to this day, had she known and improved in that day, the things that belonged to her peace; but they neglected their season, rejected their mercies, and miserably perished in their sins: for there ever was, and will be found an inseparable connexion betwixt the final rejection of Christ, and the destruction of the rejecters, Matth. 22:5, 6, 7. The contemplation whereof drew those compassionate tears from the Redeemer's eyes, when he beheld it in his descent from the mount of Olives, Luke 19:41, 42.

Let all that are wise in heart henceforth depose their animosities, sadly reflect on their follies, encourage and assist the labours of their brethren in the Lord's harvest; and rejoice that God hath set them at liberty by law, whose assistance in so great an opportunity is necessary and desirable. It is against the laws of wisdom and charity to envy the liberty, and much more the success of our brethren, 1 Cor. 13:4. If the workmen contend and scuffle in a catching harvest, who but the owners suffers damage by it? If, after so miraculous, recent, and common salvation as this, we still retain our old prejudices and bitter envyings; if we smite with the tongue and pen, when we cannot with the hand; and study to blast the reputation and labours of our brethren; and still hate those we cannot hurt: In a word, if we still bite and devour one another, we shall be devoured one of another. Let us not lay the fault upon others, we ourselves have been the authors and instruments of our own ruin; and this must be the inscription upon our tombstone, O England, thou hast destroyed thyself. I am more afraid of the rooted enmity and fixed prejudices that are to be found in many against holiness and the serious professors of it, and the inflexible obstinacy and dead formality in many others, (the tokens of a tremendous infatuation) than I am of all the whispered fears from other hands, or common enemies upon our borders.

To prevent these mischiefs, and promote zeal and unanimity among the ministers of the gospel, I have presumed to address them in the following epistles. I am conscious of my own unworthiness to be their monitor, and of the defects their judicious eyes will easily discern in the stile it is written; and yet can promise myself a becoming reception of what is so faithfully, seasonably, and honestly designed for their good. I am satisfied that no candid and ingenuous person will put words upon the rack, quarrel at a similitude, or expose a trifle, when he finds the design honest, and the matter good and necessary.

As to the treatise itself, thou wilt find it a persuasive to open thy heart to Christ. Thy soul, reader, is a magnificent structure built by Christ; such stately rooms as thy understanding, will, conscience and affections, are too good for any other to inhabit. If thou be in thy unregenerate state, then he solemnly demands in this text admission into the soul he made, by the consent of the will; which, if thou refuse to give him, then witness is taken, that Christ once more demanded entrance into thy soul which he made, and was denied it. If thou hast opened thy heart to him, thou wilt, I hope, meet somewhat in this treatise that will clear thy evidences, and cheer thy heart: Pray read, ponder, and apply. I am

Thine and the

Church's Servant,

JOHN FLAVEL.

A LETTER*

To the dearly beloved Ministers of the Gospel, (much to be revered in Christ) now at length, by the wonderful Providence of GOD, restored to Liberty: Addressed as a humble Supplication to the more aged, and as an Exhortation to younger Ministers and Candidates.

Reverend Fathers, and Brethren in Christy,

THOUGH it is not fit for us to coin metaphors according to our fancy, yet we ought to have a great liking to those which the Spirit himself hath authorised in scripture. There he hath represented and painted to the life the deliverance of his suffering church, by the sweet delights of the advancing spring, Cant. 2:12.

In the spring, the earth, like a most bountiful parent, opens her bosom, produces variety of herbs, adorns the meadows with abundance of flowers; the trees which had been stript of their former green leaves are clothed with new ones; the cold being now driven away, the air becomes warm, and the cattle bring home udders full of milk;

Then joyous birds frequent the lonely groves.

DRYDEN's Virgil.

All nature is renewed and smiles; the season is kindly favourable, and admirably well adapted to the benefit of all things, chiefly of those endued with life. All which things have been, in a very elaborate and ingenuous manner, applied by our learned countryman, Brightman, to that remarkable period, when Cyrus published that edict of his, (which can never be sufficiently commended) for setting God's people at liberty. The enlivening beams of a like providential interposition, like the sun entering the sign of Aries, have made us who were half dead to revive.

We are not insensible, as our wounds are yet green, what great and sharp afflictions we have suffered for many years by-past, for conscience sake. Alas, what sad things have we not seen! what oppressions have we not unjustly endured, during this rough, dismal, and every-way destructive winter? We have seen the sea swelling with dreadful storms, by reason of which, some, being amazed and confounded, have hoisted sail to any wind whatsoever: we have seen trees that excelled others, both in fruitfulness and comeliness, beat down and laid low by the stormy winds; others which bare neither fruit nor leaves, have been, as it were, blasted. Mountains have we seen become white with hoar-frost, rivers locked up in ice, lands covered, yea, buried in snow; flocks of fowls, and herds of

cattle starved with hunger, wandering up and down in great want; cunning fowlers spreading their nets, and ensnaring many: In a word, we have seen Christ's church (alas!) pierced with arrows winged with her own feathers; the civil state founded on laws, almost subverted by laws; every thing having a bad aspect, and growing daily worse and worse.

Long and sore have we been tossed in the sea of trouble; in our youth we were plunged into it, we are come out of it in old age; our case has been the same with what happened at the siege of Tyre, Ezek. 29:18. Every head is made bald, and every shoulder is peeled; but yet all these things seem troublesome rather than wonderful, to any one who seriously considers the thing prophesied by the great apostle, 2 Tim. 3:1. In the last days perilous times shall come. Of which perilous times,* Lactantius writes thus; 'When the end of this world is approaching, the state of human affairs must needs be greatly changed, and grow worse, through the prevalency of wickedness; in so much that this present age, wherein sin and wickedness have arrived to the greatest pitch, may, when compared with that abandoned and incorrigible age, be justly deemed the happy and golden one. For then righteousness shall decrease, and ungodliness, avarice, ambition, and lust increase: so that whosoever shall happen then to be sober and religious, shall become a prey to the wicked, and be greatly harassed by the unrighteous; the vicious alone shall be prosperous and happy, while the people of God shall meet with every kind of bad treatment, and be reduced to extreme poverty. All right shall be confounded, laws shall perish; then no body shall possess any thing but what is ill got, or what he is obliged to defend by force; rapine and violence shall carry every thing before them: there shall be no fidelity among men, no peace, no humanity, no shame, no truth, and neither safety nor order, nor any rest from trouble; for the whole earth shall be in confusion, and the noise of din and war heard every where; all nations shall be up in arms, and attack one another; neighbouring states shall war among themselves; destruction shall run over the face of the earth, cutting down every thing, and laying it along, as corn-fields are in harvest. The reason of which dreadful calamity and strange confusion, will be this, That the Roman Name, which has subdued the whole world, shall then (I tremble to utter it, but, since it is certain, utter it I must) be quite extinct.'

What think you, reader, is not this a description of our own times, or must we wait longer, till that pernicious and wicked race of men shall appear upon the stage? That this hath been fulfilled in our late troubles, none sure can hesitate that hath any discernment.

But God at length, pitying our distresses, hath raised up a man*, both zealous for the truth, and a lover of godliness, boldly to assert his cause in the face of danger and toil, and to put a new face on things. Concerning this time it shall be said, What wonderful things hath God done? Now every impediment being removed, and the dreadful storm calmed, (which scatters up and down like stubble) our gracious God doth in this manner bespeak us, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. As if he had said, You have been long enough confined at home, come now (for you may safely come) abroad. There is the greatest appearance of safety and incitement to labour every where. Thus, the severity of the Winter recommends to us the pleasures of the Spring.

For my part, I had no sooner heard the joyful news of Liberty, than presently I began to prepare myself for my proper and much longed for work; for if so much pleasure is found in the study of the mathematics, that when one has tasted of it, he is so ravished and bewitched with it, that he cannot be taken off from the study of them; it will certainly be the sweetest pleasure of all, to employ our labours, however much we are exhausted, for the glory of Christ, and good of souls: it gives me therefore no small pleasure that at length I may put in my sickle, which hath been long in disuse, into the Lord's harvest, together with the rest of my fellow-labourers. Thanks to my God, who hath not only seasonably opened a door of opportunity, but hath also (which I earnestly supplicated for) given me to see the happy effects of sound doctrine, and hath long ago blessed it unto many.

These first-fruits of Restored Liberty, and which many have importuned me to publish, I now most humbly offer unto you. Indulge a brother, the weakest of all, and one who reckons himself justly inferior to all the servants of Christ; if, on this signal and most extraordinary occasion, Christian zeal should break forth a little more freely than may be suitable

to either my small share of learning or experience.

Here your preacher hath not sought after the pomp of eloquence. Through the whole I have used a popular, not polite, stile; pithy, not showy; for I thought it might be justly said concerning Theology, what Cicero says of Philosophy, That to talk upon subjects of that nature in an elaborate stile, is childish; but to be capable of delivering with plainness and perspicuity, is the part of a learned and knowing man. I should be justly displeased with myself, if I preached the doctrine of a crucified Christ, in a stile unbecoming his cross; which surely is the character of a stile pompous and swelling.

These things being premised,

I. Let us rejoice in our liberty, with a joy duly moderated; I mean, with a joy equally balanced, and guarded on all hands by grief for past sins, and dread of future ones. We read in Jeremiah, of the voice of sighing and weeping, with which the faithful would, about the time of their deliverance, confess their sins, by which they had provoked God, and would sincerely bewail them with contrite hearts. And how suitable was the song of the church, even at the laying of the foundation of the second temple; a song equally composed of joyful shouting, and abundant weeping, Ezra 3:10. "Many weeped with a loud voice, many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people." Nor are the saints ashamed to confess their falls and shameful deeds to the glory of God, for nothing is a loss to us which redounds to his glory. Our countenance must in his sight be comely and amiable, when he sees penitential tears mixed with those of joy and thanksgiving. It is the character of a true penitent to lament his faults, that he may not again commit things to be lamented.

Asaph hath set before us an illustrious example of penitence, Psal. 74:8. Remember not (says he) against us our former iniquities. God is said to remember iniquities when calling sins to an account, and judging of their greatness and number, he resolves to punish. Asaph speaks of God after the manner of men; for they, when greatly offended, and about to punish their children, do then call to mind all their former faults: let us, in like manner, reflect on ours, and sincerely bewail our past slothful conduct,

an unhappy concomitant of liberty: Thus we have neither flamed with ardent love on the one hand, nor grieved with that degree of sorrow which was requisite on the other: we have oftentimes spoken more from the head than from the heart. We have both prayed and preached too too coldly about matters the most awful and important. We have not followed the footsteps of those worthies that went before us in the last age, so as to come up with them. We have been at small pains to support the majesty of religion, by the gravity of our conversation, and the usefulness of our discourses, For which cause our God has conceived just anger against us, and hath manifested that by the past calamities; and by so manifesting it, hath plainly admonished us to be on our guard for the time to come.

II. Therefore brethren, I earnestly beg of you, in the bowels of Christ, that you will not forget these words of the apostle, If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men, Rom. 12:8. There is added a twofold imitation, first, If it be possible, that is, consistently with justice, piety, and truth: Such a regard is not to be had to truth, as that the study of peace be entirely neglected; nor is such unity to be sought after as destroys truth; but speak the truth in love, as the same apostle exhorts, Eph. 4:15. For, as our countryman Mr. Davenant justly observes, they love neither from the heart, who love not both. Christians therefore, when they both live peaceably in owning the truth, and speak the truth in love, are a great ornament to their profession. The other limitation is, As much as lieth in you, that is, live in friendship with all, if it be possible; and if they will not be friendly on their part, be sure you be so on yours. Truth begets hatred among the wicked, and godliness is ever despised by them; of which Lactantius* assigns this reason, "That he who sins wants to have a free opportunity of sinning, and thinks he can no otherwise enjoy securely the pleasure of his ill deeds, than when there are many who delight in the same faults. Hence they study to destroy and cut off root and branch those who are witnesses of their wickedness, and they cannot endure that good men's lives should be a reproof, as it were, of theirs. Therefore by the friendship of the wicked, piety is endangered."

We have some amongst us that put on a form of godliness, but have denied the power thereof: of such[†] Bernard in his time thus complained: 'Woe to this generation which hath the leaven of the Pharisees, which is

hypocrisy: If indeed that should be called hypocrisy, which now through its prevalency cannot be hid, and through its impudency seeks not to be hid. At present, rottenness and corruption affects the whole body of the church, and the wider it spreads, the more desperate; and the more inwardly it spreads, the more dangerous: for if an heretic, an open enemy, should rise up, he would be cast out; if a violent enemy, she, (i.e. the church) would perhaps conceal herself from him. But now, whom shall the church cast out? or whom shall she hide herself from? All are friends, and all are enemies: all are in mutual connexions, as relations, yet in mutual contests, as adversaries: all are fellow-members of one family, yet none are promoters of peace: all are neighbours, yet all are seekers of their own things: by profession servants of Christ, in reality they serve Antichrist: they make an honourable figure by the good things they have received from the Lord, while, at the same time, they give no honour to the Lord.' I will say of these men, My soul, come not into their council; my glory, be not in their assembly.

But there are many others, zealous of peace and truth, agreeing in fundamentals, and standing equally against the common enemies of the reformed religion, who, notwithstanding, differ (alas!) about matters not necessary to salvation, and split into opposite parties, and cause strife: while this fierce contention spreads itself among the brethren, it affords a continual occasion to their enemies to insult and molest them. Could any one find out a remedy for this epidemical distemper, he would deserve well of the church; but since the experience of so many years has put it beyond doubt that it is difficult, or indeed impracticable to accomplish this by scholastic disputes, or by oppressing the conscience with penalties; it were more advisable to sopite all their debates, than by fruitless strife to tear asunder the church; and in fine, to have recourse to that which is the most useful, if not the only rule for promoting peace, Phil. 3:16. Wherein we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule: with which agrees well that most wholesome advice given by Tossanus to the college of Tubing, in the following words: 'All bitter railings and accusations ought justly to be laid aside, and the judgments of these matters in debate left wholly to the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to our own posterity, who, not being authors, but spectators of the debate, will judge more impartially about it. Our adversaries still

live and become bolder every day; they make it their business night and day to plot and contrive how they may extinguish the light of the gospel that has arisen, and bring back ancient darkness; in the mean time, we who at first with one accord, by God's grace, preached the gospel, do now, with weapons of death turned against one another, rush mutually on destruction; thereby exhibiting a delightful spectacle to our enemies, who place more of their safety and confidence in our contentions, than the weak foundation of their own cause.'

Let us therefore frequently consider that of the apostle, Gal. 5:15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. What Cicero said of the discords of great men, our countryman Davenant scruples not to affirm concerning those of the churches, That they commonly end either in the ruin of both parties, or in the unjust tyranny of that side which overcomes. It is greatly to be feared, that every one, by these continual and fierce debates, is hastening (may God prevent it) his own ruin: yet I doubt not but that all discords amongst the godly might be extinguished, whatever some may allege to the contrary, if the minds of some were freed from the violent emotions of suspicion, anger, and envy. Behold, brethren, what a seasonable and proper softening plaister our skilful Physician hath applied to us all at this time. God grant it the desired effect; lest the scar not being rightly closed up, the wound should break out again.

The godly in every place lament the present deplorable state of the church; and, from the destruction of some, do conjecture what danger hangs over all.

*Hence let contending nations know,

What direful mischiefs from their discords flow.

Certain it is, that all wise and good men on both sides, (however they differ among themselves) are unanimous in this at least, That these are not times for strife, but times that call for prayer and reformation; for, such are the prayers they every where offer up: 'May God turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest he come and smite the earth with a curse. These do not well consult

their own interest, who, because of disputes among the learned, perhaps never to be ended, will needs be tearing the church by perpetual divisions. Our brethren, that seriously profess they differ from us in smaller matters of religion, for no other reason than a fear of offending, these ought to be embraced with the greatest affection. Let all causes of offence be presently removed, that we may not stumble twice on the same stone. If we fall upon it again, we are broken in pieces. We will not grant them this praise, that they are more studious of peace and concord than ourselves. You may re-exact a conformity in fundamentals and things necessary in religion; but in matters of indifference, and not absolutely necessary, you may give a larger liberty. No body should assume to himself a liberty of dividing the church, and dissolving brotherly unity on such a ground as neither Christ, nor the apostles, nor the primitive church in its purest state would ever have approved.'

It must be confessed, that all kinds of controversy will never be at an end; nevertheless we can bid farewell to all discord; for variety of opinions, and unity among those that hold them, are not things inconsistent. Why should there dwell in the breast of a Christian, the fierceness of wolves, the madness of dogs, the deadly poison of serpents, the cruel savageness of beasts? as Cyprian long since complained. That is (saith Gregory) a new and unheard of manner of preaching, that forces a belief, with stripes: therefore let all bitter railing and accusation be gone. May the God of peace bring all into order and peace.

III. Especially and above all, I humbly beseech you, that, having laid aside all designs of smaller importance, you would mind this one thing how you may gain to Christ the souls committed to you, to which all earthly things are to be postponed. This is the labour, this the work incumbent on us.

Put far from you a vile, niggardly sparing of your gifts, an immoderate care for worldly things, an excessive indulgence of the vile body. Let it not seem much to us to spend a little sweat for the sake of those souls for which Christ so willingly and plentifully poured out his own most precious blood. If we hide the Lord's talent in a napkin, where shall we find a napkin to dry up our tears of blood for so base a crime?

Remember, brethren, that it will be required at our hands, how we have

spent every portion of that time which is given us; how much of it have we already lost in unprofitable silence! But among all the oppressions under which you have long groaned, I persuade myself there is none you have more sorrowed for than that of being so long withholden from feeding poor hungry souls. The present opportunity is slippery, and may be lost, as to what concerns futurity, the clouds return after the rain. Up then ye servants of God, mind this your business, and the Lord shall be with you: do not regard the usual murmurings of the flesh. Look forward to that heavenly crown: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

With the hopes of this, let us rouse up and fortify our drooping hearts against the mockings and troubles we may expect for the sake of the gospel. What bowels of compassion ought we to put on, when we speak to such men of saving their souls, and shunning perdition, into which they may quickly fall, but who, in the mean time, have not the least thought about these things themselves? A famous author in Amesius* complains, 'That the words of life in some preachers and teachers lips die away, as to any power or efficacy: For so coldly and unconcernedly do they deliver the word of God, that it seems to die in their lips. Hence, as they themselves are cold and dead preachers, so they leave their hearers in a cold and dead frame. I knew one who left Paris for this reason, because he said, he was more and more benumbed with the lectures and sermons he heard from day to day in that city; and was afraid, that if he staid much longer there, his soul would have perished with spiritual cold: wherefore he joined himself to lively ministers, as unto live-coals, that so by conversing with them, he might nourish and increase an holy flame in his heart.'

Lift up your eyes and behold the fields white, and ready to harvest; see how you are on every side surrounded with crowds of poor hungry souls, with open mouth and earnest looks begging spiritual bread from you. If we have the bowels of the chief Shepherd in us, let us feed his sheep. Some are almost worn out with old age and various troubles: others lessen the majesty of scripture by insisting much on things of little moment, and fill the ears of the multitude with a vain noise of words, or

tickle them with smooth speeches. In such a situation, if you, who are furnished with all kinds of gifts, and have so full and fair opportunity, do not burn with zeal to God, and love to souls, I tremble to look forward to the dreadful end of you all.

IV. Lastly, I will conclude with a few things which I thought necessary for students of Theology, and candidates for the ministry, who have at this needful time willingly devoted themselves to this service, or are about to do it: We have long borne the burden and heat of the day; we are veteran soldiers almost worn out. The next age will possibly produce more tractable minds, and men of gentler dispositions than our times afford.

I congratulate you on account of your birth, especially if your natural birth be, or shall be ennobled and sanctified by regeneration; and this is the more reasonable, because all our famous chronologers and searchers into times, who have bestowed much time and pains in that study, are big with expectation, like a woman big with child, past the time of her reckoning, who therefore expects her pains to come upon her every hour. It is very probable, that the day which all the prophets foretold, and all good men have, as it were, with outstretched neck, been eagerly looking for, is now at hand.

Do you, therefore, ye brave youths, the hope and desire of the reviving church, with eagerness lay hold on this favourable opportunity of enriching your minds with all necessary gifts and endowments. Keep yourselves close night and day at your studies and most fervent prayers: He will make the best divine, that studies on his knees. And how shall we contend for the truth, or defend it against the adversaries, if we are destitute of gifts? Neither a good disposition, nor the charms of eloquence, nor a graceful gesture, nor good manners, can compensate for the want of gifts.

But on the other hand, beware, brethren, lest while the tree of knowledge every day thrives and prospers, the tree of life alone should languish and become barren, as an excellent divine* speaks very pertinently. Take care you put not that last, which should be first; and that, again, first, which should be last. Measures so perniciously preposterous will be fatal to the whole work of conversion. A head well instructed is much to be desired;

but a sanctified heart is absolutely necessary. "Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way," 1 Cor. 12:31. For gifts, let them increase; but grace, let it outshine them all. Let these words of the great apostle take deep root in your hearts, 1 Cor. 9:27. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached unto others, I myself should be a cast-a-way." For what will it profit, to be learned and damned? It is one thing to be learned in the truths of Christ, another to be taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.

Continually bear in mind this serious warning of our learned countryman Reynolds†, 'Let us not think much of ourselves, though God should have adorned us with the finest gifts of nature, with a lively genius, with an elegant diction, much reading, long experience of things, skill in the arts, languages and sciences, solidity of judgment, quickness of understanding, almost like that of angels, unless at the same time he add to all, the gift of his Spirit to help us to know and delight in the heavenly mystery. For though by the exercise of those shining accomplishments, we may procure to ourselves the favour and esteem of men, though from thence great advantage may redound to the learned world, and to the church of Christ, yet do they not all tend to obtain for us either the favour of God, or the reward of heavenly happiness.' May God give you ministerial and sanctifying gifts, that you may approve yourselves to be defenders of Christ and his religion, and firm opposers of his enemies.

But it is time to close this unpolished and homely letter, which, however, I hope you will favourably accept as a testimony of that respect due to you from

Your fellow-servant in

the gospel of Christ,

JOHN FLAVEL.

TO THE READER

THE worthy author of the discourse emitted herewith, is one whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the churches. His other books have made his name precious and famous in both Englands. Nor can my testimony add any thing to one every way greater than myself. Nevertheless, a singular providence having cast my lot to be at present in this great city; I could not withstand the importunity of them who desired a few Prefatory lines to manifest the respect I owe to this renowned and learned man.

It was a wise reproof which a grave divine administered to a young preacher, who entertained his auditory with an elaborate discourse: after he had commended his parts and pains, there was (said he) one thing wanting in the sermon; I could not perceive that the Spirit of God was in it. And though morality is good, and necessary to be taught and practised, yet it is much to be lamented, that many preachers in these days have hardly any other discourses in their pulpit than what we find in Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, or some such heathen moralist. Christ, the Holy Spirit, and (in a word) the gospel is not in their sermons. But blessed be God, that there are some (and great is their company in this land of light) who preach the truth as it is in Jesus: and he who has taken the book out of the right hand of him that sits on the throne, and is worthy to open the seals thereof, has been pleased in wonderful ways to set open, and keep open a door of liberty to the gospel, that they, unto whom he has given a heart to preach Christ, may do it. This is the Lord's doing; this is a Spirit of life from God. When Cyrus proclaimed liberty for the free exercise of religion, the Lord's servants, who for some years had lain dead, were brought out of their graves, Ezek. 37:12, 13.

This treatise is a word in season: God has made the author to be a wise master-builder in his house, and according to the wisdom given him of God, he has enlarged on a gospel subject very proper to be insisted on at such a day as this. I am informed by unquestionable hands, that there was a remarkable pouring out of the Spirit when these sermons were viva voce delivered, a great number of souls having been brought home to Christ thereby. The Lord grant that the second preaching of them to far greater multitudes by this way of the press, may, by the same Spirit, be made abundantly successful for the conversion and salvation of God's

elect. The fruit brought forth by the holy apostles in respect of the writings of some (as well as the doctrine preached by all) of them, does still remain. The fruitful labours of this faithful servant of Christ will promote the glory of God, and the good of souls, when he himself shall cease from his labours, and his works shall follow him. Let the Lord's people be thankful to him for that he has sent such a labourer into the harvest, and pray that he may be continued long therein, and that many such (for there are but few such) may be raised up, and be made eminently successful in their holy endeavours, to the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ, and of God; and let him reign in this land for ever and ever, which is the heart's desire and prayer of one who is

Less than the least of all saints,

London, 1689.

INCREASE MATHER.

SERMON I - REV. 3:20

[Behold] I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.

THIS day hath our compassionate Redeemer opened unto us a door of liberty; liberty to us to preach, and liberty for you to hear the glad tidings of the gospel. This is a day few looked for: how often have I said in the years that are past, God hath no more work for me to do, and I shall have no more strength and opportunities to work for God? And how often have you said in your hearts, we have sinned our ministers out of their pulpits, and our eyes shall no more behold those our teachers? But lo, beyond the thoughts of most hearts, a wide and (I hope) an effectual door is now opened in the midst of us. Oh! that it might be to us as the valley of Achor was to Israel, for a door of hope, Hos. 2:15, i.e. not only making the troubles they meet with in that valley an inlet to their mercies, as ours have been to us; but giving them that valley pignoris nomine, as a pledge of greater mercies intended for them. Upon the first appearance of this mercy, my next thoughts were how to make the most fruitful improvement of it amongst you, lest we should twice stumble at the same stone, and sin ourselves back again into our old bondage.

In the contemplation of this matter, the Lord directed me to this scripture, wherein the same hand that opened to you the door of liberty, knocks importunately at the doors of your hearts for entrance into them, for union and communion with them. It will be sad indeed if he that hath let you into all these mercies, should himself be shut out of your hearts: but if the Lord should help you to open your hearts now to Christ, I doubt not but this door of liberty will be kept open to you, how many soever the adversaries be that envy it, and will do their utmost to shut it up, Ezek. 39:29. The mercies you enjoy this day, are the fruits of Christ's intercession with the Father for one trial more: if we bring forth fruit, well; if not, "the ax lieth at the root of the tree." Under this consideration I desire to preach, and even so the Lord help you to hear what shall be spoken from this precious scripture, Behold, I stand at the door, and

knock, &c.

These words are a branch of that excellent epistle dictated by Christ, and sent by his servant John to the church of Laodicea, the most formal, hypocritical, and degenerate of all the seven churches; yet the great Physician will try his skill upon them, both by the rebukes of the rod, verse 19 and by the persuasive power of the word; verse 20, Behold I stand at the door, and knock, &c.

This text is Christ's wooing voice, full of heavenly rhetoric to win and gain the hearts of sinners to himself; wherein we have these two general parts.

1. Christ's suit for a sinner's heart.
2. The powerful arguments enforcing his suit.

First, Christ's suit for a sinner's heart, wherein we have (1.) The solemn preface, ushering it in, behold: (2.) The suit itself. The preface is exceeding solemn: for beside the common use of this word, behold, in other places, to excite attention, or exaggerate and put weight into an affirmation; it stands here, as a judicious expositor* notes, as a term of notification or public record, wherein Christ takes witnesses of the most gracious offer he was now about to make to their souls, and will have it stand in perpetuum rei memoriam, as a testimony for or against their souls to all eternity, to cut off all excuses and pretences for time to come.

2. The suit itself, wherein we have,

1. The Suitor, Jesus Christ.
2. His posture and action; I stand at the door and knock.
3. The suit itself, which is for opening, if any man open.

1. The suitor, Christ himself, I stand; I that have a right of sovereignty over you; I that have shed my invaluable blood to purchase you, and might justly condemn you upon the first denial or demur: behold I stand: this is the suitor.

2. His posture and action, I stand at the door, and knock; the word is in the[†] preter tense, I have stood, but being here joined with another verb of the present tense, it is fitly translated, I stand, yet so as that it notes a Continual action. I have stood, and do still stand with unwearied patience; I once stood personally and bodily among you in the days of my flesh, and I still stand spiritually and representatively in my ambassadors at the door, i.e. the mind and conscience, the faculties and powers which are introductive into the whole soul.

The word door is here properly put to signify those introductive faculties of the soul, which are of a like use to it, as the door is to the house. This is the Redeemer's posture, his action is knocking, i.e. his[‡] powerful essay and gracious attempts to open the heart to give him admission. The word knock signifies a strong and powerful knock; he stands patiently, and knocks powerfully by the word outwardly, by the convictions, motions, impulses, strivings, and instigations of his Spirit inwardly.

3. The design and end of the suit; it is for opening, i.e. consenting, receiving, embracing, and hearty accepting of him by faith. Acts 16:14. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia, i.e. persuaded her soul to believe; implying, that the heart by nature is strongly barred and locked up against Christ, and that nothing but a power from him can open it.

Secondly, The powerful arguments and motives used by Christ to obtain his suit, and get a grant from the sinner's heart; and they are drawn from two inestimable benefits accruing to the opening or believing soul, viz.

1. Union.

2. Communion with Christ.

1. Union; I will come in to him, that is, I will unite myself with the opening, believing soul; he shall be mystically one with me, and I with him.

2. Communion; I will sup with him, and he with me; that is, I will feast the believing soul with the delicacies of heaven: such comforts, such joys, such pleasures, as none in the world but believers are capable of.

And, to set home all, these special benefits are proposed by Christ to all sorts of sinners, great and small, old and young; If any man hear my voice and open the door: That so no soul might be discouraged from believing, by the greatness or multitude of his sins, but the vilest of sinners may see free grace triumphing over all their unworthiness, upon their consent to take Christ according to the gracious offers of the gospel.

The words thus opened, afford many great and useful points of doctrine, comprehending in them the very sum and substance of the gospel. The first which ariseth from the solemn and remarkable preface, Behold, will be this,

Doct. 1. That every offer of Christ to the souls of sinners is recorded and witnessed with respect to the day of account and reckoning.

Here we shall enquire into three things.

1. Who are God's witnesses to all gospel tenders.
2. What are the object-matters they witness to.
3. Why God records every offer of Christ, and takes a witness thereof.

The first Use

I. Who are God's witnesses to all the tenders and offers made of Christ by the gospel, and they will be found to be more than a strict legal number; for,

1. His ministers, by whom he makes them, are all witnesses as well as officers of Christ to the people. Acts 26:16. "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness." Here you see ministers have a double office, to propose and offer Christ, and then to bear witness for or against those to whom he is thus offered: they are expressly called God's witnesses, Rev. 11:6, 7. Their labours witness, their sufferings witness, their solemn appeals to God witness; yea, the very dust of their feet shaken off against the refusers of Christ, turns to a testimony against them, Mark 6:11. Every groan and sigh, every drop of sweat, much more of blood, are placed in God's book of marginal notes by

all their sermons and prayers, and will be produced and read in the great day against all the refusers and despisers of Christ.

2. The gospel itself, which is preached to you, is a testimony or witness for God, or against every one that hears it; John 12:48. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." And this is the sense of Christ's word, Matth. 24:14. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come." Ah, Lord, what a solemn record is here! every sermon you hear, yea, every reproof, persuasion, and conviction, is a witness for God to cast and condemn every soul in judgment that complies not immediately with the calls of the gospel: so many sermons, so many witnesses.

3. Every man's conscience is a witness for God, that he hath a fair offer once made him: the very consciences of the Heathens that never saw a Bible, that had no other preachers but the sun, moon, and stars, and other works of nature; yet of them the apostle saith, Rom. 2:15. "That they shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing them witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." Certainly if such vigour and activity was put into the consciences of Heathens, who could only read the will of God by the dim moon-light of natural reason; how much more vigorous and active will conscience be in its accusing office against all that live under the bright beams of gospel-light? Their consciences will be swift witnesses, and will ring sad peals in their ears another day, Ezek. 2:5. "You shall know that there hath been a prophet among you." This single witness is instead of a thousand witnesses for God.

4. The examples of all those that do believe and obey the gospel, are so many witnesses for God against the despisers and neglecters of the great salvation. Every mourning, trembling soul among you is a witness against all the dead-hearted, unbelieving, disobedient ones, that sit with them under the same ordinances. Hence it is said, 1 Cor. 6:2. "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" They shall be assessors with Christ in the great day, and condemn the world for their examples, as Noah did the old world. Thus John, Matth. 21:32 came unto you in the way of

righteousness, and ye believed him not, but the publicans and harlots believed him; and ye when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards that ye might believe him, q. d. What shift do you make to quiet your consciences, and stifle your convictions, when you saw publicans, the worst of men, and harlots, the worst of women, repenting, believing, and hungering after Christ! their examples shall be your judges. These are God's witnesses.

II. Next let us consider what are the object matter unto which they give their testimony, and that will be found two-fold, according to the two-fold event the gospel hath upon them that hear it: of both which the apostle gives this account, 2 Cor. 2:16. "Unto some we are the savour of life unto life, and unto others the savour of death unto death." Accordingly a double record is made.

1. Of the obedience and faith of some, which record will be produced to their joy and comfort in the day of the Lord; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe; because our testimony among you was believed in that day. Ministers are instruments of espousing souls to Christ, and witnesses to those espousals and contracts made betwixt him and them, 2 Cor. 11:2. Both these offices are exceeding grateful and pleasant to every faithful minister.

2. A record is made, and witness taken of all the refusals, disobedience and slightings of Christ by others. Thus Moses will be the accuser of the Jews, John 5:45. "Do not think I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom you trust." This is the saddest part of a minister's work; the fore-thoughts of it are more afflictive than all our labours and sufferings. There is a three-fold record made in this case: (1.) Of the time men have enjoyed under the means of salvation; how many years they have sat barren and dead-hearted under the labours of God's faithful ministers; Luke 13:7. "Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none." Behold, the same term of notification with that in the text, applied to the time of God's patience towards them. And again, Jer. 25:3. "From the thirteenth year of Josiah, even unto this day, (that is, the three and twentieth year) the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you

rising early, and speaking, but ye have not hearkened." O consider, all the years and days you have spent under the gospel, are upon your doomsday book. (2.) Records are also made of all the instruments that ever God employed for the conversion and salvation of your souls. So many ministers, whether fixed or transient, as have spent their labours upon you, are upon the book of your account. Jer. 25:4. "The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants, the prophets, rising early, and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear." They have wasted their lungs, dropt their compassionate tears, and burnt down one after another, as candles to direct you to Christ and salvation, but all in vain. (3.) Every call, persuasion and argument, used by them to espouse you to Christ, is likewise upon the book of account. Prov. 1:24, 25. "Because I have called and ye refused, "I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproof." These calls and counsels are of too great value with God (though of none with you) to be lost and left out of your account.

III. We shall, in the last place, inquire into the grounds and reasons of these judicial procedures of God, why he will have every man's obedience and disobedience registered, and witnessed for or against him, under gospel administrations; and there are two weighty reasons thereof.

1. That wherever the end of the gospel is attained in the conversion of any soul, that soul, and all that were instrumentally employed about the salvation of it, may have the proper reward and comfort in the great day, 2 Cor. 1:14. "As also you have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." This will be matter of joy unspeakable, both to you that shall receive, and to them that shall give such a comfortable testimony for you. O the joyful congratulations that will be in that day between laborious, faithful ministers, and their believing, obedient hearers! Lord, this was the blessed instrument of my happy illumination and conversion; though I might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers; for by the blessing of thy Spirit upon this man's ministry, my soul was begotten to Christ. And, on the other side; Lord, these are the souls for whom I travailed, as in birth, until Christ was formed in them. It is a glorious thing to say, as the prophet, "Here am I, and the children God

hath given me."

Nay, those that were but collaterally useful to help on the work of God begun by others, must not lose their reward in that day. John 4:36. "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto eternal life, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

2. Records are now made, and witnesses taken, that thereby the judicial sentence of Jesus Christ in the last day may be made clear and perspicuous to all the world; that every mouth may be stopped, and no plea, or apology left in the mouth of any condemned sinner. For Christ, in that day cometh, Jude 15 to convince all that are ungodly; to convince by demonstration, that all that are Christless now, may be found speechless then, Matth. 22:12. Hence it is said, Psal. 1:5 That the wicked shall not stand, or rise up in judgment. And no wonder, when so many full testimonies, and unexceptionable witnesses shall come point blank against them, the ministers that preached, the word they preached, their own consciences, and the examples of all believers will be produced against them.

Inferences

1st Inference. The undoubted certainty of a day of judgment is hence evinced. To what purpose else are records made, and witnesses taken, but with respect to an audit-day? This is a truth sealed upon the conscience of the very heathens, Rom. 2:15 Their consciences bear witness. But in vain are all these records made, unless there be a day to produce and plead them; and of that day the prophet Daniel speaks, Dan. 7:10. "The judgment was set, and the books were opened." And again, Rev. 20:12. "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the book, according to their works."

Believe it, friends, these are no devised fables, but most awful and infallible truths; according to the saving effects the gospel now hath, it will be a time of refreshing to our souls, Acts 3:19 to all others a day of terror, wrath, and amazement, 2 Thess. 1:7, 8. "The day in which the Lord

Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2d Infer. What a spur is here to ministerial diligence and faithfulness? It is an awful work that is under our hands; the effects of the gospel which we preach, will be the savour of life or death to them that hear us. If the Lord prosper it in our hands, we shall be witnesses for you, it will be an addition to our glory in heaven; Dan. 12:3. "They that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever." But if we be ignorant, lazy, men-pleasers, our people will come in as swift witnesses against us, and their blood will be required at our hands; it will be an intolerable aggravation to our misery in hell, to have any that sat under our ministry thus upbraiding us! O cruel man! thou sawest my soul in danger, and never dealtst faithfully and plainly with me; the same time and breath that was spent in idle and worldly discourse, might have been instrumental to have saved me from this place of torment. Let ministers consider themselves as witnesses for God, and their people as witnesses for or against them; and under that consideration, so study, preach and pray, that they may with Paul take God to record, that they are free from the blood of all men; no sort of men upon earth have more spurs to diligence and faithfulness than we have.

3d Infer. What a pill is this to purge formality out of all that hear us; Every sabbath, every sermon, is recorded in heaven for or against your souls; at what rate soever you attend to the word, all that you hear is set down in the book of your account: think not you shall return as you came, the word will have its effect and end, it shall not return in vain, Isa. 55:11 but shall accomplish the end for which it is sent. The decrees of heaven are executed by the gospel, some souls shall be quickened, and others shall be slain by the word of God's mouth. The gospel is a river of the waters of life, which quickens and refreshes every thing that lives; but the miry and marshy places shall not be healed. How weighty therefore is that caution of our Lord, Luke 8:18. Take heed how you hear! When you come under an ordinance, you are sowing seed for eternity, which will spring up in the world to come. Preaching and hearing may be considered two ways, physically or morally; in the former respect, these acts are

quickly over and pass away. I shall by and by have done preaching, and you hearing; this sermon will be ended in a little time, but the consequences thereof will abide for ever! Therefore, for the Lord's sake, away with formality; no more drowsy eyes or wandering thoughts. Oh, when you come to attend upon the ministry of the gospel, that such thoughts as these might prepare your minds! The word I am going to hear will quicken or kill, save or damn my soul; if I sit dead under it, and return barren from it, I shall wish one day that I had never seen the face of that minister, nor heard his voice that preached it.

4th Infer. What a dreadful condition are all those in that are real and professed enemies to the gospel, and them that preach it! That instead of embracing and obeying the message of the gospel, reject and despise it; instead of opening their hearts to receive it, open their blasphemous mouths against it, to deride it, and hiss it (if it were possible) out of the world. Ah! what a book of remembrance is written for such men? I fear there never was an age, since Christianity blessed this nation, that was more deeply drenched in the guilt of this sin than the present age. How are the messengers of the gospel slighted and rejected? What have we done to deserve it? Is not our case this day much like that of the prophet? "Shall evil be recompensed for good? For they have digged a pit for my soul; remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them," Jer. 18:20. What brutish madness hath possessed the souls of these men? But alas! it is not so much they, as Satan acting in them; he is a jealous prince, the gospel alarms him, his subjects are in, danger of revolting from him: no wonder therefore he makes an outcry at the liberty of the gospel, as is used to be made when an enemy invades a kingdom. In this case Christ directs his ministers to shake off the dust of their feet for a testimony against them, Mark 6:11. The signification and meaning whereof is this, that look as you shake off the dust of your feet, even so Jesus Christ will shake of those men that despise the gospel, and abuse his messengers.

5th Infer. Hence it likewise follows, That the case of the Pagan world will be easier in the day of judgment, than theirs that live and die unregenerate and disobedient under the gospel of Christ. There are more witnesses prepared, and records filled against the day of your account,

than can possibly be against them; they have abused but one talent, the light of nature; but we thousands, even as many thousands as we have had opportunities and calls under the gospel. Upon this account Christ saith, "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city," Mat. 10:14, 15.

Ah, what a fearful aggravation doth it put upon our sin and misery, that we are not only accountable for all the light we had, but for all that we might have had in the gospel-day! Capernaum was lifted up to heaven in the enjoyment of means and precious opportunities, Mat. 11:23 and had an answerable downfall into the depth of misery from that height of mercy; as the higher any one is lifted up upon a rack, the more terrible is the jerk he receives by the fall.

6th Infer. Lastly, Hence it appears, That the day of judgment must certainly take up a vast space of time: For if God will bring every thing into judgment, Eccl. 12:14 not only sinful actions, but words, Matth. 12:36 not only words, but heart-secrets, Rom. 2:16. If all the records and registers now made, shall then be opened and read; all the witnesses for or against every man examined and heard; judge then what a vast space of time will that great day take up. Some divines are of opinion it may last as long as the world hath lasted; but this is sure, things will not be hudled up, nor shuffled over in haste: you have taken your time for sinning, and God will take his time for judging.

Consider the multitudes, multitudes without number, that are to be judged in that day, even all the posterity of Adam, which are as the sand upon the sea-shore; that not only so many persons, but all that they have done, must come into judgment, even the very thoughts of their hearts, which never came to the knowledge of men: their consciences to be interrogated, all other witnesses fully heard and examined: how great a day must this day of the Lord then be?

The second Use

But the main use of this point will be for exhortation, that seeing all the

offers of Christ are recorded, and witnessed, with respect to a day of account, every one of you would therefore immediately embrace the present gracious tender of Christ in the gospel, as ever you expect to be acquitted and cleared in that great day: take heed of denials, nay of delays and demurs. "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Heb. 2:2, 3. The question is put, but no answer made; How shall we escape? The wisdom of men and angels cannot tell how. To enforce this exhortation, I shall present you with ten weighty considerations upon the matter, which the Lord follow home, by the blessing of his spirit upon all your hearts.

1. Consider how invaluable a mercy it is that you are yet within the reach of offered grace. The mercies that stand in offer before you this day, were never set before the angels that fell; no mediator was ever appointed for them. O astonishing mercy! that those vessels of gold should be cast into everlasting fire, and such clay vessels as we are, thus put into a capacity of greater happiness than ever they fell from; nay, the mercy that stands before you is not only denied to the angels that fell, but to the greatest part of your fellow-creatures of the same rank and dignity with you: "He sheweth his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel, he hath not dealt so with any other nation, and as for his judgments they have not known them: Praise ye the Lord," Psal. 147:19, 20. A mercy deservedly celebrated with a joyful Allelujah. What vast tracts are there in the habitable world, where the name of Christ is unknown! it is your special mercy to be born in a land of bibles and ministers, where it is as difficult for you to avoid and shun the light, as it is for others to behold and enjoy it.

2. Consider the nature, weight, and worth of the mercies which are this day freely offered you. Certainly they are mercies of the first rank, the most ponderous, precious, and necessary among all the mercies of God. Christ the first-born of mercies, and in him pardon, peace, and eternal salvation are set before you: it were astonishing to see a starving man refusing offered bread, or a condemned man a gracious pardon. Lord! what a composition of sloth and stupidity are we, that we should need so many entreaties to be happy.

3. Consider who it is that makes these gracious tenders of pardon, peace, and salvation, to you; even that God whom you have so deeply wronged, whose laws you have violated, whose mercies you have spurned, and whose wrath you have justly incensed. His patience groans under the burden of your daily provocations; he loses nothing if you be damned, and receives no benefit if you be saved; yet the first motions of mercy and salvation to you freely arise out of his grace and good pleasure. God intreats you to be reconciled, 2 Cor. 5:20. The blessed Lord Jesus, whose blood thy sins have shed, now freely offers that blood for thy reconciliation, justification, and salvation, if thou wilt but sincerely accept him ere it be too late.

4. Reflect seriously upon your own vileness, to whom such gracious offers of peace and mercy are made. Thy sins have set thee at as great a distance from the hopes and expectations of pardon, as any sinner in the world. Consider man, what thou hast been, what thou hast done, and what vast heaps of guilt thou hast contracted by a life of sin: and yet that unto thee pardon and peace should be offered in Christ after such a life of rebellion, how astonishing is the mercy! the Lord is contented to pass by all thy former rebellions, thy deep-dyed transgressions, and to sign an act of oblivion for all that is past, if now at last thy heart relent for sin, and thy will bow in obedience to the great commands and calls of the gospel, Isa. 55:2, &c. and 1:18.

5. Consider how many offers of mercy you have already refused, and that every refusal is recorded against you: how long have you tried, and even tried the patience of God already, and that this may be the last overture of grace that ever God will make to your souls. Certainly there is an offer that will be the last offer, a striving of the Spirit which will be his last striving; and after that no more offers without you, no more motions or strivings within you for evermore. The treaty is then ended, and your last neglect or rejection of Christ recorded against the day of your account; and what if this should prove to be that last tender of grace which must conclude the treaty betwixt Christ and you! What undone wretches must you then be, with whom so gracious a treaty breaks off upon such dreadful terms.

6. Consider well the reasonable, mild, and gracious nature of the gospel-

terms, on which life and pardon are offered to you, Acts 20:21. The gospel requires nothing of you but repentance and faith. Can you think it hard when a prince pardons a rebel, to require him to fall upon his knees, and stretch forth a willing and thankful hand to receive his pardon? Your repentance and faith are much of the same nature. Here is no legal satisfaction required at your hands, no reparation of the injured law by your doings or sufferings, but a hearty sorrow for sins committed, sincere purposes and endeavours after new obedience, and a hearty, thankful acceptance of Christ your Saviour; and for your encouragement herein, his Spirit stands ready to furnish you with powers and abilities; "Turn ye at my reproof; behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you," Prov. 1:23. And Isa. 26:12. "Lord, thou hast wrought all our works in us."

7. Again, Consider how your way to Christ, by repentance and faith, is beaten before you, by thousands of sinners for your encouragement. You are not the first that ever adventured your souls in this path multitudes are gone before you, and that under as much guilt, fear, and discouragement as you that come after can pretend unto; and not a man among them repulsed or discouraged: here they have found rest and peace to their weary souls, Heb. 4:3. Acts 13:39. Here the greatest of sinners have been set forth for an ensample to you that should afterwards believe on his name, 1 Tim. 1:16. You see if you will not, others will joyfully accept the offers of Christ; what discouragements have you that they had not? Or what greater encouragements had they which God hath not given you this day? therefore they shall be your judges.

8. Consider the great hazard of these precious seasons you now enjoy. Opportunity is the golden spot of time, but it is *tempus labile*, a very slippery and uncertain thing: great and manifold are the hazards and contingencies attending it. Your life is immediately uncertain, your breath continually going in your nostrils; and that which is every moment going, will be gone at last. The gospel is as uncertain as your life; God hath made no such settlement of it, but that he may at pleasure remove it, and will certainly do so if we thus trifle under it; it is but a candlestick, though a golden one, Rev. 2:5 and that you all know is a moveable thing; and not only your life, and the means of your eternal life, I mean the

gospel, are uncertain things; but even the motions and strivings of the Spirit with your souls are as uncertain as either. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Phil. 2:12, 13. That God now works with you is matter of great encouragement to your work: but that he works at his own pleasure, as a free arbitrary agent, who can cease when he pleases, and never give but one knock at your hearts more, should make you work with fear and trembling.

9. Think what a fearful aggravation it will be both of your sin and misery, to perish in the sight and presence of an offered remedy; to sink into hell betwixt the out-stretched arms of a compassionate Redeemer, that would have gathered you, but you would not.

Heathens, yea devils will upbraid you in hell for such unaccountable folly and desperate madness; heathens will say, Alas, we had but the dim moon-light of nature, which did indeed discover sin, but not Christ the remedy. Ah, had your preachers and your bibles been sent among us, how gladly would we have embraced them! surely saith God to Ezekiel, "had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee," Ezek. 3:5, 6. Matth. 11:21. The very devils will upbraid you; O if God had sent a Mediator in our nature, we had never rejected him as you have done; but he took not on him the nature of angels.

10. Lastly, How clear as well as sure, will your condemnation be in the great day, against whom such a cloud of witnesses will appear! O how manifest will the righteousness of God be! men and angels shall applaud the sentence, and your own consciences shall acknowledge the equity of it. You that are christless now, will be speechless then, Matth. 22:11. "Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men," 2 Cor. 5:11 as one that trembles to think of being summoned as a witness against any of your souls. O that I might be your rejoicing, and you mine in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON II - REV. 3:20 Behold I stand at the

door, &c.

HAVING, in the former sermon, pondered Christ's solemn preface to his earnest suit; the next thing that comes under our consideration, is the person soliciting and pleading for admission into the hearts of sinners, which is Christ himself.

Behold [I] stand. The only difficulty here is rightly to apprehend the manner of Christ's presence in gospel administrations; for it is manifest the person of Christ was at this time in heaven: his bodily presence was removed from this lower world above sixty years before this epistle was written to the Laodiceans. John's banishment into Patmos is by Eusebius, out of Irenæus and Clemens Alexandrinus, placed in the fourteenth year of the emperor Domitian, and under his second persecution, which was about the ninety seventh year from the birth of Christ.

Yet here he saith, Behold I stand; not my messengers and ministers only, but I by my spiritual presence among you, I your sovereign Lord and owner, who have all right and authority by creation and redemption to possess and dispose of your souls: it is I that stands at the door and knocks, I by my Spirit, soliciting and moving by the ministry of men. You see none but men; but believe it, I am really and truly, though spiritually and invisibly, present in all those administrations; all those knocks, motions, and solicitations, are truly mine, they are my acts, and I own them, and so I would have you to conceive and apprehend them. Hence the second Note is this,

Doct. 2. That Jesus Christ is truly present with men in his ordinances, and hath to do with them, and they with him; though he be not visible to their carnal eyes.

Thus runs the promise; "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Mat. 18:20. The middle place was the seat of the president in the Jewish assemblies, where he might equally hear and be heard of all. So will I be in the midst of the assemblies of the faithful, met together in my name and by my authority, to bless, guide, and protect them. Hence the church is called the place of his feet, Isaiah

16:13 a manifest allusion to the ark, called God's footstool, Psal. 99:5. And agreeably hereunto, Christ is said to walk among the seven golden candlesticks, Rev. 2:1. There are the spiritual walks of Christ, there his converses and communion with men: and this presence of Christ was not the peculiar privilege of the first churches, but is common to all the churches of the saints to the end of the world, as appears by that glorious promise so comfortably extended to the church from first to last; "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the world," Mat. 22 ult. This promise is the ground and reason of all our faith, and expectations of benefit from ordinances; and the subjects of it are not here considered personally but officially; to you, and all that succeed you in the same work and office; not to you only as extraordinary, but to all the succeeding ordinary standing officers in my church. As for the apostles, neither their persons nor extraordinary office was to continue long, but this promise was to continue to the end of the world.

Nor is this promise made absolutely, but conditionally; the connection of the promise with the command, enforces this qualified sense; as 2 Chron. 15:2 "The Lord is with you, whilst you are with him." Ignorant, idle, unqualified persons cannot claim the benefit of this gracious grant.

Once more, this promise is made to every hour and minute of time. I am with you, all the days, as it is in the Greek text; in dark and dangerous, as well as peaceable and encouraging days: and it is closed up with a solemn Amen, So be it, or, So it shall be.

To open this point distinctly, we are to consider that there is a threefold presence of Christ.

1. Corporeal.

2. Represented.

3. Spiritual.

1. There is a corporeal presence of Christ, which the church once enjoyed on earth, when he went in and out amongst his people, Acts 1:21 when their eyes saw him, and their hands handled him, 1 John 1:1. This

presence was a singular consolation to the disciples, and therefore they were greatly dejected when it was to be removed from them. But after redemption-work was finished on earth, this bodily presence was no longer necessary to be continued in this world, but more expedient to be removed to heaven, John 16:7 as indeed it was, and must there abide until the time of the restitution of all things, Acts 3:21. And in this respect he tells the disciples, John 16:28. "I leave the world, and go to my Father."

2. There is a represented presence of Christ in ordinances. As the person of a king is represented in another country by his Ambassadors, so is Christ in this world by his ministers: "We then are ambassadors for God; as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God," 2 Cor. 5:20. Christ is about other work for us in heaven, but we stand in his stead on earth. And this speaks the great dignity of the ministerial office; whatever abuses or contempts are cast on them, they reflect upon Christ: "He that despiseth you despiseth me," Luke 10:16. It also teacheth us whence the validity of gospel-administrations is; Christ ratifies and confirms them with his own authority. It also instructs us how wise, spiritual, and holy ministers should be, who represent Christ to the world. A drunkard, a persecutor, a sensual worldling, is but an ill representative of the blessed and holy Jesus.

3. Besides, and above the two former, there is a spiritual presence of Christ in the churches, and ordinances; and this presence of Christ by his Spirit, who is his Vicegerent, is to be considered as that from which all gospel-ordinances derive,

1. Their beauty and glory.
2. Their power and efficacy.
3. Their awful solemnity.
4. Their continuance and stability.

1. From the presence of Christ by his Spirit, the ordinances and churches

derive their beauty and glory: "To see thy power and thy glory, as I have seen thee in the sanctuary," Psal. 27:4. Look as the beauty of the body is a result from the soul that animates it: and when the soul is gone, the beauty of the body is gone also; so the beauty and glory of all ordinances come and go with the Spirit of Christ, which is the very soul of them. The churches are indeed golden candlesticks, but the candlestick hath no light but what the candle gives it; hence that magnificent description of the new temple is closed up in this expression, "The name of that city shall be, The Lord is there," Ezek. 48 ult.

2. From this spiritual presence of Christ, all gospel-ordinances derive all that power and efficacy which is by them exerted upon the souls of men, either in their conversion or edification. This power is not inherent in them, nor do they act as natural, necessary agents, but as instituted means, which are successful, or unsuccessful according as Christ by his Spirit co-operates with them: "He that planteth is nothing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase," 1 Cor. 3:7. That is, they are nothing to the purpose, nothing to the accomplishment of men's salvation, without the concurrence of the Spirit of Christ. For when the apostle makes himself and Apollos, with all other ministers, nothing, we must understand him speaking not absolutely, but comparatively, and relatively; they are necessary in their places, and sufficient in their kind, for what they are appointed to, else it would be a reflection upon the wisdom of God that instituted them: But singly in themselves, and disjunctively considered, they are nothing; as a trumpet or wind-instrument is nothing, as to its end and use, except breath be inspired into it, and that breath modulated by the art and skill of the inspirer; like Ezekiel's wheels that moved not but as the Spirit that was in them moved, and directed their motions. If ordinances wrought upon souls naturally and necessarily, as the fire burneth, then they could not fail of success upon all that come under them: But it is with them as it was with the waters of the pool at Bethesda, whose healing virtue was only found at that season when the angel descended and troubled them.

3. This spiritual presence of Christ gives the ordinances of the gospel that awful solemnity which is due, upon that account, to them. The presence of Christ in them commands reverence from all that are about him. "God

is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him:" hence is that solemn caution or threatening, Lev. 26:23, 24. "If you walk contrary unto me, then will I also walk contrary unto you." The Hebrew word in that text signifies to walk rashly, or at an adventure with God, sine personæ discrimine, without considering with whom we have to do, and what an awful majesty we stand before. And the punishment is suitable to the sin; I also will walk at an adventure with you, making no discrimination in my judgments betwixt your persons and the persons of the worst of men. O that this were duly considered by all that have to do with God in gospel-institutions!

4. It is the spiritual presence of Christ in his churches and ordinances that gives them their continuance and stability: whenever the Spirit of Christ departs from them, it will not be long before they depart from us; or if they should not, their continuance will be little to our advantage. When the glory of the Lord descended from betwixt the cherubims, when that sad voice was heard in the temple, migremus hinc, Let us go hence, how soon was both city and temple made a desolation! and truly Christ's presence is not so fixed to any place, or any ordinances, but the sins of the people may banish it away, Rev. 2:5. Who will tarry in any place longer than he is welcome, if he have any where else to go?

But more particularly, let us here discuss these two points.

I. How it appears Christ is thus spiritually present with his churches and ordinances.

II. Why it is necessary he should be so.

First, By what evidence doth it manifestly appear that there is such a presence of Christ with his churches and ordinances. And this will appear by two undeniable evidences thereof.

1. By their wonderful preservations.

2. From their supernatural effects.

1. From their wonderful preservations: For it is wholly unaccountable, and inconceivable, how the churches, ministers and ordinances should be supported and preserved without it, amidst such hosts of potent and enraged enemies. If Christ were not among them, they had certainly been swallowed up long ago. It is he that holds the stars in his right-hand, Rev. 2:1. His walking among the seven golden candlesticks is their best security. The burning bush, Exod. 3:3 is a rare emblem to open this mystery; the bush burned with fire, but was not consumed. The bush was a resemblance of the church of God in Egypt, the flames upon it were their terrible persecution; the wonder, that no ashes appeared as the effects of those terrible flames; the reason whereof was, God was in the bush, Jesus Christ was in the midst of his people.

By virtue of this presence we are here this day, in the enjoyment of gospel liberties; no society of men in the world have such security as the church hath upon this account. The mightiest monarchies have been overturned, no policies nor human power could preserve them; but the church and ordinances are still preserved, and shall ever be, by virtue of that gracious promise, Jer. 30:11. "For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee."

The Babylonian, Persian, Grecian monarchies, have destroyed and ruined one another:

— Sic Medus ademit

Assyrio Syroque tulit moderamina Perses, &c.

but still the church of Christ lifts up its head, and beholds their ruins.

2. This presence of Christ in and with his ordinances is undeniably evinced from their supernatural effects upon the souls of men, 2 Cor. 10:4. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." It is the Spirit of Christ that gives them their success and efficacy; the sword of the gospel hath its point and edge, but it is impossible the heart of a stupid, hardened sinner should ever be pricked or wounded by it, if the Spirit of Christ did not

manage it. When sinners fall down convinced under the authority of the word, they feel, and readily acknowledge that God is in it of a truth, 1 Cor. 14:25. Ruffinus reports, that at the council of Nice, a godly man of no great learning, was the instrument of converting a learned philosopher, whom the bishops with all their arguments could not persuade: of which the philosopher himself gave this remarkable account, 'Whilst you reasoned with me (said he) against words, I opposed words, and what was spoken I overthrew by the art of speaking; but when instead of words power came out of the mouth of the speaker, words could no longer withstand truth, nor man resist the power of God.'

And this, indeed, is the true and just account of all those marvellous and gracious changes made upon the souls of men by the preaching of the gospel: can the vanishing breath of a dying man, think you, inspire spiritual and eternal life into the souls of other men? Can he search the conscience, break the heart, and bow the will at this rate? No, this is the power and operation of Christ; and of that presence we must say, saith a reverend author*, as Martha did to her Saviour concerning the death of her brother Lazarus, John 11:21. "Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." So say I, If that presence and power of Christ were felt by all, which hath been certainly experienced and felt by many, they would not remain in the state of spiritual death as they do. But though there be thousands under ordinances that never felt this power of Christ upon them, yet blessed be God there are also multitudes of witnesses and evidences of this truth, that there is a real, spiritual, energetical presence of Christ in his own appointments; which was the first thing to be evinced.

Secondly, The second thing requiring explication, is the uses and ends which make such a presence of Christ necessary. And they are,

1. To preserve and support his ministers and churches amidst such hosts of potent and enraged enemies: this presence of Christ, is as a wall of fire round about them. It was the Divine presence with Jeremiah that was as a life-guard to him against the rage of the princes and nobles of Israel; Jer. 15:20, 21. "I will make thee to this people a fenced brazen wall, and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord: and I will

deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible."

It was easier for the Roman army to seale the walls, and batter down the towers of Jerusalem, than for all the enemies in Jerusalem to destroy this prophet of God, thus immured by the Divine presence. Athanasius and Luther had the power of the empire engaged against them, yet the presence of Christ was their security. The witnesses could not be slain till they had finished their testimony, Rev. 11:7. To this presence alone the faithful witnesses of Christ owe their marvellous preservation at this day; had not Christ said, Lo, I am with you, you had not said at this day, behold our ministers are still with us.

2. The presence of Christ is necessary to assist and enable his ministers in their work, for it is a work quite above their own strength; it is well we are workers together with God, else we should soon faint under our labours. When Moses objected, I am not eloquent, the Lord told him, I will be with thy mouth, Exod. 4:10. When God guides the tongue, how powerful and persuasive must the language be! when the apostles, illiterate men, were sent out to convert the world, Christ promised to give them a mouth and wisdom, Luke 21:15 a mouth to speak, and wisdom to guide that mouth; and then their words were demonstrations; all their adversaries could not resist that Spirit and power by which they spake. Empires, and kingdoms full of enemies, received the gospel; but the reason of this wonderful success is given us in Mark 16:20. "They went out and preached every where, the Lord working with them." It is sweet and prosperous working in fellowship with Christ; the Spirit of Christ gives a manifold assistance to his ministers in their work; it is he that guides and directs their mind in the choice of those subjects wherein they labour with such success to their hearers. He dictates the matter, influences their affections, guides their lips, follows home their doctrine with success. And this is a special use and end of Christ's presence with his ministers and ordinances.

3. The spiritual presence of Christ is necessary for the preparation and opening of the people's heart to receive and embrace the gospel to salvation; not a heart will open to receive Christ till the spirit of Christ unlock them. Paul and Timothy were extraordinarily called to preach the gospel at Macedonia, there Lydia was converted; but how? Not by their

skill or eloquence, but by the Spirit's influence; "The Lord opened the heart of Lydia," Acts 16:14. The church could not be propagated without conversion; conversion could never be wrought without Christ's influence and spiritual presence. So that this presence is of absolute necessity; the church cannot subsist, nor the great ends of ordinances be attained without it.

Inferences

Inference 1. 'Is Christ really present in all gospel administrations, how awfully solemn then is every part of gospel worship? we having to do with Christ himself; and not with men only, in gospel ordinances.' Happy were it, if under this consideration, all our people did receive the word we preach, as the Thessalonians did, 1 Thess. 2:13 not as the word of man, but as the word of God; then it would work effectually in us as it did in them. But alas! we have loose and low apprehensions of the word; we come to judge the gifts of the speaker, not to have our minds informed, our consciences searched, our lusts mortified, and our lives regulated. But oh! that men would realize the presence of Christ in ordinances, and seriously consider that word of his, Rev. 2:23. "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give every one of you according to your works."

How would it compose Vain and wandering hearts unto holy seriousness? O if men would but consider that they are before the Lord Jesus Christ, as Cornelius and his family did, Acts 10:33. "We are all here present before God; to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." If they would consider the word, as the executioner of God's eternal decrees, which returns not in vain, but accomplishes that whereunto God sends it, Isa. 55:11 and eventually proves the savour of life or death eternal to them that sit under it, 2 Cor. 2:16. In a word, were it but considered as the rule by which its hearers shall be judged in the great day, John 12:48 then how would men tremble at the word? What mighty effects would it have upon their hearts? How would it run and be glorified? But, alas, as Job speaks; Job 9:11. "He goeth by me, and I see him not; he passeth on also, but I perceive him not." Few realize the spiritual presence of Christ in ordinances.

Inf. 2. If Christ be really present with his churches and ordinances, 'How vain are all attempts of enemies to subvert and destroy them?' That promise, Mat. 28 ult supposes the continuance of a gospel and church-ministry to the end of the world, else there would be a promise without a subject; as de Jure, there ought to be a church, so de Facto, there shall be a church with ministers and ordinances, let Satan and antichrist do their worst. I do not say this promise secures this or that particular church or nation, for the presence of Christ is moveable from one place to another, but still the church is safe. And there are three things that secure it against all hazards.

1. The invaluable treasures God hath lodged in the church, viz. his Truths, his Worship, and his Elect; such a precious cargo secures the vessel that carries it, whatever storms or tempests may befall it.

2. The covenant and promise of God with the church is its abundant security, Mat. 16:18. "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The faithfulness of God is pawned for his people's security. If the church fail, God's faithfulness must fail with it.

3. But above all, the presence of Christ in the midst of it, puts it out of all danger of miscarrying. In that promise, Lo, I am with you always, are found all munitions and fortifications whatsoever: here we have his eye of providence, his hand of power, and whatsoever else is needful to support and secure it. God accounts his presence our safety, Isa. 61:10. The enemies of God and his people account it so too, Exod. 14:25 and shall it not be so in our account? Provoke not the Lord Jesus to withdraw his presence, and fear not the consultations and oppositions of hell or earth.

Inf. 3. From this spiritual presence of Christ all his faithful ministers should draw encouragement, amidst the manifold difficulties and discouragements they daily encounter in his work and service. Christ is with them, they work in fellowship with him, let them not be dismayed.

The difficulties and discouragements the ministers of Christ meet with are great and many; and the more faithful and successful any of them are in their Master's work, the fiercer opposition they must expect: besides,

all the discouragements rising out of their own hearts, which are not a few, they must encounter,

First, The opposition of enemies from abroad. Secondly, The obstinacy and stubbornness of the hearts they work upon. Satan is a jealous prince, and will raise all manner of outcries and opposition against those heavenly Heralds, that come to proclaim a new prince in his dominions, and withdraw his miserable subjects from their cursed allegiance to him. What is it to preach the gospel (saith Luther) but to drive the fury of the world upon the head of that preacher? But this would be easily supportable, did our work but prosper upon the hearts of our hearers. But this, alas; is the killing consideration of all; we know the worth of souls, and how great a service it is to save them from death, James 5:20. We also know the terrors of the Lord, which excite our utmost endeavours to persuade men, 2 Cor. 5:11. We feel the compassions of Christ stirring in our bowels, which makes us long after their salvation, Phil. 1:8. We preach, we pray, yea, we travail again, as it were, in birth until Christ be formed in them, Gal. 4:19. And when we have done all, we find their hearts as iron and brass, Jer. 6:28. We mourn in secret when we cannot prevail, and oft times our hands hang down with discouragement, and we are ready to say with the prophet, Jer. 20:9. We will speak no more in his name. But here is our relief, under all discouragements from abroad and at home; the work is Christ's, the power is his, he is with us, and we are workers together with him. There was a time when three thousand souls were born to Christ, at one sermon, it may be now three thousand sermons may be preached and not a soul converted: yet let us not be discouraged, a time of eminent conversion is promised, and to be expected in these latter days, Ezek. 47:9 when the living waters of the gospel shall make every thing to live whither they come; and when the fishers, i.e. the ministers of Christ, shall not fish with angles as now they do, taking now one, then another single convert, but shall spread forth their nets, and inclose multitudes at a draught; "when they shall fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows." God now opens a door of opportunity beyond expectation; O that the hearts of ministers and people were suitably enlarged, and the people made willing in the day of his power.

Infer. 4. Hence we also infer the great dignity of the ministerial office, and the suitable respect and honour due to all Christ's faithful ministers. The Lord Jesus himself is represented by them, they stand in his stead, 2 Cor. 5:20 his authority is clothed upon them; the honour and dishonour given them redound to the person of Christ. The Galatians received Paul as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus, Gal. 4:14.

Yet how have their persons and office been vilified and despised in this degenerate age! how many learned, pious, laborious, peaceful ministers of Christ have, in this age, been hunted up and down in the world as wild beasts, been made the filth and off-scouring of all things unto this day? 1 Cor. 4:13. The word signifies that dirt and filth which scavengers rake together in the streets, to be carried to the dunghill. No doubt but Satan drives a great design in this to invalidate their ministry, discourage their labours, and break their hearts: but Jesus Christ will support us under all these abuses, wipe off the dirt thrown at us for his name's sake, and reserve some of us for better days.

Infer. 5. Is Christ present in his ordinances, what a strong engagement then lies upon you all to attend and wait assiduously upon the ministry of the word, and to bring all yours that are capable, there to wait upon Christ with you? We read in the days of Christ's flesh, when he performed his miraculous cures upon the sick, what thronging there was after him; how parents brought their children, masters their servants, pressing in multitudes, untiling the house to let down their sick to him, Luke 12:1. Ah, shall men be so earnest for a cure for their bodies, and so indifferent for their souls? It is true, the Spirit of Christ is not tied by any necessity to act always with the word; he acts as an arbitrary agent, John 3:8. The wind bloweth where it listeth: but it is engagement enough to wait continually upon his ordinances, that he sometimes graciously and effectually concurrereth with them. It is good to lie in the way of the Spirit; and there is a blessing pronounced upon them that wait continually at his gates, Prov. 8:34. O therefore neglect no season within our reach; for who knows but it may be the season of life to thy soul!

Infer. 6. What an unspeakable loss is the loss of the gospel, seeing the presence of Christ comes and goes with it? When the gospel departs, the Spirit of Christ departs with it from among men; no more conversions in

God's ordinary way, are then to be expected: well therefore might the Lord say, Hosea 9:12. Woe to them when I depart from them. The Spirit may, in some sense, depart, whilst the ordinances are left standing for a time among the people; but then expect no such blessings or benefits from them. But when God takes away ordinances and the Spirit too, woe indeed to that people; and are there not sins amongst us presaging such a judgment? O England! reflect upon thy barrenness under it; where be the fruits answerable to such precious means? The gospel is a golden lamp, the graces of the Spirit communicated by it are golden oil; as in that stately vision, Zech. 4. Will God maintain such a lamp, fed with such precious oil, for men to trifle and play by?

And no less ominous and portentous is that bitter enmity to the gospel, and the serious professors of it, which (I cannot speak without horror) is every where found among us; this great hatred brings on the days of visitation, and the days of recompence, with a swift and dreadful motion upon any people, Hosea 9:7.

Infer. 7. If Christ be present, by way of spirit and energy in his ordinances, then there is no reason to despair of the conversion and salvation of the greatest sinners that yet lie dead under the gospel. What though their hearts be hard, their understandings dark, and their wills never so perverse and obstinate? all must give way, and open in the day of Christ's power, when his Spirit joins himself with the word. This makes it an irresistible word; it is glorious to observe the hearts of publicans and harlots opening and yielding to the voice of Christ, Matth. 21:31. What were those three thousand persons, pricked at the heart by Peter's sermon, Acts 2:36 but the very men that, with wicked hands, had crucified the Lord Jesus? And what were the converted Corinthians but idolaters, turned from dumb idols, whoremongers, adulterers, effeminate? &c. 1 Cor. 12:2 and 6:11. God hath his elect among the vilest of men: the gospel will find them out, and draw them home to Christ, when the Spirit animates and blesseth it. Well might the apostle therefore say, that the gospel preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, is an object worthy for angels to behold with admiration, 1 Pet. 1:12. What though Satan has strongly fortified their souls against Christ, with ignorance, prejudice, and enmity; yet the weapons of our warfare are

mighty through God, to pull down these strong holds. Despair not therefore of your carnal and dead-hearted relations; bring them to the gospel upon the encouragement of these words of Christ, John 5:25. "The hour cometh, yea, and now is, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear it shall live."

Infer. 8. Is Christ spiritually present in his ordinances? O then what an endeared affection should every gracious soul bear to the ordinances of God! They are the walks of Christ and of his Spirit, the appointed times and places for your meeting and communion with him; there your souls first met with Christ; there you began your acquaintance with him; there you have had many sweet converses with him since that day; they were the seed of your regeneration, 1 Pet. 1:23 the bread of life by which your souls have been sustained ever since, and therefore to be more esteemed by you than your necessary food, Job 23:12. Here you have found the richest cordials to revive and recover your drooping spirits, when ready to sink away in a faint fit under sin within you, and afflictions upon you. No wonder David's soul even fainted for the courts of God, Psal. 119:50 and that Hezekiah desired a sign on his sick-bed, that he should go up to the house of the Lord. Here are the choicest comforts of the saints upon earth; all our fresh springs are in Zion, Psal. 88:7. What a dungeon, what a barren wilderness were this world without them! Prize the ordinances, love the ordinances, wait assiduously upon the ordinances, and pray for the liberty and efficacy of the gospel, that it may set no more in your days, nor in the days of your posterity.

SERMON III - REV. 3:20

Behold I [stand] at the door, and knock, &c.

HAVING finished Christ's solemn preface, and cleared the manner of his presence in his churches and ordinances; I now come to a third observation which is necessarily implied in these words, "Behold I stand at the door and knock;" and that sad truth therein implied is this,

Doct. That the hearts of men are naturally locked up, and fast barred against Jesus Christ, their only Saviour.

If it were not so, what need were there of all that pains and patience used and exercised by Christ, in waiting patiently, and knocking importunately for entrance into the hearts of men? To keep a clear method in this point, three things must be stated in the doctrinal part.

1. How it appears the hearts of men are thus shut up.
2. What are those locks and bars that shut them up.
3. That no power of man can remove these bars.

First, That all hearts are naturally shut and made fast against Christ, is a sad but certain truth; we read, John 1:11, 12. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," &c. He came unto his own people, from whose stock he sprung up; a people to whom he had been prefigured in all the sacrifices and types of the law, and in whom they might all clearly discern the accomplishment of them all. His doctrines and his miracles plainly told them who he was, and whence he came; yet few discerned or received him as the Son of God. Christ found the doors of men's hearts generally shut against him, save only a few whose hearts were opened by the Almighty power of God, in the way of faith, ver. 12. These indeed received him, but all the rest excluded and denied entrance to the Son of God. So again, John 5 from ver. 33 to 40. Christ reasons with them, and gives undeniable demonstrations, that he was the Messiah come to save them; proves it from the testimony of John, ver. 33. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth:" Tells them, the design of his coming among them was their salvation, ver. 34. shews them the great seal of heaven, his uncontrollable miracles, ver. 36. "The works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me:" And if that were not enough, he reminds them of the immediate testimony given of him from heaven, ver. 37. "The Father himself which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me." He did so at his baptism, Matth. 3:17. "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And so again at his transfiguration, upon the holy mount, Matth. 17:5. "While he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and

behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." He bids them search the scriptures, and critically examine his perfect correspondence to them, John 5:39. Enough, one would think, to open the door of every man's understanding and heart, to receive him with fullest satisfaction; and yet, after all, behold the unreasonable obstinacy and resistance of their hearts against him, ver. 40. "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."

Not a soul will open, with all the reasons and demonstrations in the world, till the Almighty Power of God be put forth to that end. If another come down in his own name (saith he, ver. 43) him will ye receive; any body rather than the Son of God: Every cheat can impose upon you easily; it is to me only your hearts have such strong aversions. Now there is a twofold shutting up of the heart against Jesus Christ.

1. Natural.

2. Judicial.

1. Natural. Every soul comes into this world shut up and fast closed against the Lord Jesus. The very will of man, which is the freest and most arbitrary faculty, comes into the world barred and bolted against Christ, Rom. 8:7 "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject unto the law of God, neither indeed can be," Phil. 2:13. "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure." This is a dismal effect of the fall. Who feels not strong aversions, violent rebellions, and obstinate resistances in his own heart, when moving towards Christ in the first weak and trembling acts of faith?

2. There is a judicial shutting up of the heart against Christ. This is a sore and tremendous stroke of God, punishing former rebellions: Psal. 86:11, 12. "Israel would have none of me, so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts." This looks like a prelude of damnation, a very near preparation to ruin. Israel would have none of me; there is the natural shutting up of the heart; so I gave them up; there is the judicial shutting up of the heart; they would not hear, they shall not hear. O fearful judgment! Thus the Lord gave up the Heathens, Rom. 1:26 they had abused their natural light, and now their minds are judicially darkened; given up to a sottish

and injudicious mind, not able to distinguish duty from sin, safety from danger; a mind that should elect the worst things, and reprobate the best. This was the reprobate mind unto which God gave them up; what sadder word can the Lord speak than this, unless it be, Take him, devil! It is true, those that God shuts up he can open, and those whom justice shuts up, mercy can set free; but it is beyond all the power of angels and men to do it: Job 12:14. "He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." These two closures of the heart are not always found together in the same subject; and blessed be God they are not. Christ meets with many a repulse, and endures with much patience the gainsaying of sinners, before he pronounces that dreadful sentence upon them, Isa. 6:9, 10. "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not: make the heart of this people fat," &c.

But when it comes to this once, dreadful is the case of such souls; and none are in greater danger of this spiritual judicial stroke of God, than those that have sat long under the light, rebelling against it. That is the first thing, the hearts of men by nature are locked and shut up against Christ.

Secondly, In the next place, let us examine what those locks and bars are which oppose and forbid's Christ's entrance into the hearts of poor sinners. And they will be found to be,

1. Ignorance.
2. Unbelief.
3. Pride.
4. Custom in sin.
5. Presumption.
6. Prejudices against the ways of holiness.

Bars enough to secure the soul in Satan's possession, and frustrate all the designs of mercy, except an Almighty Power from heaven break them asunder.

1. The first bar making fast the soul of man against Christ, is ignorance, that obex infernalis, that hellish bolt, which effectually keeps Christ out of the soul.

If knowledge be the key that opens the heart to Christ, as it is plain it is from Luke 11:52 where Christ denounceth a woe to them that took away the key of knowledge; then ignorance must needs be the shutter that makes fast the door of the heart against Christ. Upon this ground Christ told the woman of Samaria, that her infidelity grew upon the root of her ignorance; John 4:10. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Ah, sinners, did you but know what a Christ he is that is offered to your souls in the gospel; did you see his beauty, fulness, suitableness, and feel your own necessities of him, all the world could not keep you from him: you would break through all reproaches, all sufferings, all self-denials, to come unto the enjoyment of him. But alas! it is with you, as it was with those, Cant. 5:9. "What is thy beloved (say they to the spouse) more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" Unknown excellencies attract not: ignorance is Satan's sceptre which he sways over all his kingdom of darkness, and holds his vassals in miserable bondage to him: hence the devils are called, Eph. 6:12. "The rulers of the darkness of this world." Alas, were the eyes of sinners but opened to see their woful state, and their remedy in Christ, he could never hold them in subjection one day longer: they would break away from under his cruel government, and run over by thousands to Christ; for so they do as soon as ever God opens their eyes; in the same hour they are turned from darkness to light, they are also turned from the power of Satan to God, Acts 28:16. O that you did but know the worth of your souls, the dreadful danger they are in, and the fearful wrath that hangs over them, the willingness and ability of Christ to save them, you could not sleep one night longer in the state you are: the next cry would be, What shall I do to be saved? Who will shew me the way to Christ? Help ministers, help Christians, yea, help Lord; these would be the laments and cries of them that are now secure and quiet. But the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not: no cries for a physician, because no sense how their souls are stabbed by sins of

commission, and stabbed by sins of omission. O that the great Physician would once apply his excellent eye-salve to your understandings, which are yet darkened with gross ignorance both of your misery and remedy.

2. The second bar or lock, that shuts Christ out of men's souls, is the sin of unbelief. This is one of the strongest holds of Satan wherein he trusteth; this is a sin that not only locks up the heart of a sinner, but also binds up the hand of a Saviour; Mat. 13:58. "He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

It obstructed his miraculous works when he was on earth, and it obstructs his gracious work, now he is in heaven. A Saviour is come into the world, but poor unbeliever, thy soul can neither have union nor communion with him till this bar of thy unbelief be removed. The gospel is come among us with mighty arguments to convince, and powerful motives to persuade, but little saving effect follows: its main design is to many frustrated, and all this through unbelief, shutting up, and hardening men's hearts under it. The word preached did not profit them because of their unbelief. Ah cursed bar! which shuts up thy hearts, shuts out thy Saviour, and will effectually shut thee out of heaven, except the Almighty Power of God break it asunder. "They could not enter in because of unbelief," Heb. 4:2. The ruin of souls is laid at the door of unbelief; it is the damning sin, Mark 16:16 and truly called so, because no other sin could damn but in virtue of this sin. That is the second bar to Christ.

3. The third bar denying entrance to Christ into the hearts of sinners, is pride and stoutness of spirit. The natural heart is a proud heart; it lives upon its own stock, it cannot stoop to a sincere and universal renunciation of its own righteousness: "Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and going about to establish their own righteousness, ουχ' υπεταγησαν, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God," Rom. 10:3. Pride stiffens the will that it cannot stoop or condescend to declare their own emptiness, discover their own shame, and live wholly upon the righteousness of another. Proud nature had as live be damned, as deny itself in such a point as this is: This makes faith so exceeding difficult, because it involves such deep points of self-denial in it: To give up all to Christ, to draw all from Christ, and to be willing to part with all for Christ. What will can be brought to a deliberate

consent to such things as these, unless an Omnipotent Power bow it? It is natural to men rather to eat a brown crust, or wear a coarse ragged garment which they can call their own, than to feed upon the richest dainties, or wear the costliest garments which they must receive as an alms or gift from another. O how hard is it to subdue this pride of the heart, even after light and convictions are come into the soul; to convince men of their undone condition, and the absolute necessity of another and higher righteousness than their own? When souls are in a treaty with Christ, and the match is almost made; this is the sin that makes the last opposition. Fain would they come to Christ, ten thousand worlds for a Christ; but yet they think they must not approach him without some qualifications which are yet wanting. But soul, if ever Christ and thou conclude the match, thou must deny self even in this, the most refined form and interest of it, and come as Abraham did, naked and empty-handed to him that justifieth the ungodly. Down with this house-idol, thy self, thy righteous self, trimmed up, like another Agag, with such precious pretences of humility.

4. The fourth bar, forbidding Christ's entrance into the soul, is custom in sin. Sin hath so fixed itself by long continuance in the soul, the soul is so settled and confirmed in its course, that all arguments and persuasions to change our way are swept away by the power of custom, as straws and feathers are by the rapid course of a mighty torrent; Jer. 13:23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Soap and nitre may as soon make a blackmoor white, or fetch the spots out of the leopard's skin (which are not accidental, but connate) as the reasonings of men can prevail to remove the mighty power of customary sin. Physicians find it a hard thing to cure a cachexia or ill habit of body. It is a grave and serious note of Seneca, a teneris assuescere, multum est. It is a great matter to be accustomed this way or that from our childhood; every repeated act of sin confirms and strengthens the habit; and hence it is that we see so few conversions in old age. It was a wonder in the primitive times, that Marcus Caius Victorius embraced Christianity in the sixtieth year of his age. Take an habituated drunkard, a self-righteous moralist, lay before them the necessity of a change, and you shall find it as easy to stop the course of a river with the breath of your mouth, as to stop them in a

customed course of sinning. That is the fourth bar to Christ.

5. The fifth bar, opposing and resisting Christ's entrance into the soul, is the sin of presumption; this is the sin that parts Christ and thousands of souls in the world; presuming they hope; and hoping they perish. When men presume their condition is safe already, their souls never make out after a Saviour. This was the ruin of Laodicea, Rev. 3:17. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This damning presumption is discovered in three things, (1.) Many think they have that grace which they have not, mistaking the similar for the saving works of the Spirit; a fatal mistake never rectified with many thousands till it be too late. (2.) They presume to find that mercy in God, which they will never find; for all the saving mercies of God are dispensed to men through Christ, in the way of regeneration and faith, Jude, ver. 21. (3.) They presume upon that time for repentance and faith hereafter, which their eyes shall never see. And thus presumption doth lock up the heart against Christ, and leaves sinners perishing even in the presence of a Saviour. They make a bridge of their own shadow, and so perish in the waters.

6. The sixth and last sin, barring up the heart against Christ, is a strong prejudice against holiness, and the strict duties of religion. Thus, in the very infancy of Christianity, the world was scared and driven off from religion by the common prejudices that lay upon the professors of it; As concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against, Acts 27:22.

Thus Justin Martyr complains, that Christians were every where condemned *δία την φημην*, by common fame; and upon this account Christ pronounces a woe upon the world because of offences, Mat. 18:7. Alas! it will be the ruin of thousands; some have sucked in such prejudicate opinions and vile notions of religion, and its professors, as make them irreconcilable enemies to it. Satan hath dressed it up in their fancies in such an odious form and representation, that make them lothe both name and thing. These prejudices are drawn from various things; sometimes from the necessary duties of Christianity, which are laid as crimes upon the people of God; when I wept, and chastened my soul with

fasting, that "was to my reproach," Psal. 69:10. Sometimes the groundless and malicious slanders and inventions of the enemies of Christianity are the occasions of real prejudices to the world; "Come, let us devise devices against Jeremiah, and let us smite him with the tongue," Jer. 18:18. Sometimes the innocent and serious professors of godliness are censured and condemned for hypocritical professors sakes, who never heartily espoused religion. And lastly, The ways of holiness suffer for the slips and infirmities of weak Christians, who commonly give too many occasions to disgust the world against the ways of God.

By these things multitudes are kept off from attendance upon the means of grace, and multitudes more have their hearts shut up from receiving any saving benefit under them.

These are the common bars and locks by which the strong man armed secures his possession in the souls of sinners; and these bars are too strong for any power beneath the Almighty Power and arm of God to remove or break. It is said, that the Lord opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, Acts 14:27. The arm of the Lord must be revealed, or none will open to Christ by faith, Isa. 53:1.

1. The iron bar of the law, that thundering terrible law, cannot force open the heart of an unbeliever; all the dreadful curses flying out of its fiery mouth, make no more impression than a tennis-ball against a wall of marble. You read of them that hear the words of this curse, yet bless themselves in their heart, saying, They shall have peace, though they walk in the imaginations of their hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst, Deut. 29:18.

They play with hell and eternal torments, rush into iniquity as the horse rusheth into the battle, act as men in love with their own death, as those that are at an agreement with hell. O the besotting, hardening, infatuating power of sin!

2. The golden key of free grace cannot, in itself, remove these bars, and open men's hearts to Christ; "We have piped unto you, but you have not danced," Matth. 11:17. The melodious and delicious airs of grace, mercy, peace, and pardon, affect not the dead hearts of unbelievers: like deaf

adders they stop their ears at the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. These gospel-melodies only dispose them to a more quiet sleep in sin.

3. No works of providence are, in themselves, sufficient to open the hearts of men to Christ. (1.) The judgments of God cannot do it; thousands have been sick with smiting, that yet cannot be made sick for sin. "I have consumed them, but they refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return," Jer. 5:3. Messengers of judgment are abroad, smiting some in their estates, scattering in one day the labour of many years; and therein giving a warning-blow at the conscience to make sure of Christ, and the world to come, since their comfort and happiness is scattered in this world. Some are smitten in their dearest relations; death knocks at their doors, and carries out the delight of their eyes, and with the same admonisheth their souls to place their happiness in more durable comforts: some are smitten in their bodies with diseases, giving warning of the near approach of their latter end, and bidding them prepare for another habitation; but all in vain. (2.) No mercies of God are in themselves sufficient to open the obstinate hearts of sinners to Christ. God hath heaped up mercies by multitudes upon many of you; all these mercies of God lead you to repentance, Rom. 2:4, 5. They take you in a friendly way by the hand, and thus walk with you: Ah sinner! how canst thou grieve and dishonour that God that thus feedeth, clotheth, and comforteth thee on every side? Do you thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Yet all will not do, neither judgments nor mercies can fright or allure the carnal heart to Jesus Christ. It is his Spirit, his Almighty Power alone, that opens these everlasting gates, and makes these strong bars give way and fly at his voice.

Inferences

Infer. 1. Behold here the dismal state of nature, the woful condition of all unregenerate souls; Christ the Redeemer shut out, sin and Satan shut in. This is the horrid state of nature shut up in unbelief, Rom. 11:32. Ah Lord, what a condition is this! we should certainly account it an unspeakable misery to be shut into a house haunted by the devil, where we should be continually scared and frightened with dreadful noises and

apparitions; but alas, what is an apparition of the devil without us, to the inhabitation of the devil within us? Nay, what is the possession of a body, to Satan's possession of the soul? Yet this is the very case of the unregenerate, Luke 11:21. The strong man armed keepeth the palace, till Christ dispossesses him by sovereign victorious grace. Poor wretch, canst thou start at a supposed vision of a spirit, and not tremble to think that thy soul is the habitation of devils? There is a twofold misery lying upon all christless, unregenerated persons; Satan is,

1. Their ruler in this world.

2. Their tormentor in that to come.

1. He is their ruler in this world, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, Eph. 2:3. Look as the holy Spirit of God dwells and rules in sanctified souls, walks in them as in hallowed temples, guiding and comforting the souls of the saints; so Satan dwells in unregenerate hearts, actuating their lusts, inflaming them with his temptations, using their faculties and members as instruments of unrighteousness. And then,

2. He will be their tormentor in the world to come: He that tempts now, will torment then, Matth. 25:41. "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Flee therefore, and escape for your lives, sleep not quietly another night in so dismal and dreadful an estate. "If the Son make you free, then are you free indeed."

Infer. 2. What a glorious and admirable effect of sovereign, omnipotent grace is the effectual conversion of a sinner unto God!

If every heart by nature be secured for Satan under so many locks and bars, then the opening of any heart to Christ is deservedly marvellous in our eyes. You all acknowledge that the opening of the graves at the resurrection will be a glorious display of Almighty Power, and so it will: it will be a wonderful thing to behold the graves opened, and the dead raised at the voice of the Arch-Angel, and the trump of God; but yet give me leave to say, that the opening of thy heart, poor sinner, to receive Christ, is a more glorious work than that of raising the dead; it is

therefore deservedly put into the first rank of the great mysteries of godliness, that Christ is believed on in the world, 1 Tim. 3:16. He that well views and considers Christ, may justly wonder that all the hearts in the enlightened world do not stand wide open to embrace him; and he that shall consider the frame and temper of the natural heart, and how strongly Satan hath entrenched and fortified himself in it, may justly wonder to hear of a work of conversion in an age. O brethren, consider the marvels of conversion, the wonderful works of God upon the soul that opens unto Christ by faith.

1. There is a new eye created in the mind: "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true," 1 John 5:20. O that eye, that precious eye of faith, which shews the soul, as it were a new world, of new and ravishing objects, Eph. 5:8. All the angels in heaven, ministers, and Libraries upon earth, cannot create such an eye, give such an illumination; it is only he that "commanded the light to shine out of darkness, that thus shineth in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," 2 Cor. 4:6.

2. And what a glorious supernatural work is the conviction of the conscience by the powerful stroke of the saving beams of light upon it? Now the conscience, that lay in a dead sleep, begins to startle and look about it with fear and horror. Life and sense is got into it, and now it cries, Ah, sick, sick, sick at the heart for sin, sick for a Saviour.

3. And no less marvellous an effect of the Almighty Power is the bowing of the stubborn will so efficaciously, so congruously, and so determinately and fixedly to the Lord Jesus.

The will is efficaciously determined, so as no power of hell or nature can resist or frustrate that mighty power which worketh effectually in all them that believe, 1 Thes. 2:13. Yet it works not by way of compulsion, but in a way congruous and agreeable to the nature of the will, Hosea 11:4. "I drew them with the cords of a man, with the bands of love." Satan bids for the soul, Christ infinitely out-bids all his offers; eternal, spiritual, and unsearchable riches, instead of sensitive, perishing enjoyments, which determine the choice of the will in its own natural method, by the sight of the excelling glory of spiritual things. And thus the mighty, supernatural

power of God opens that heart which Satan had secured so many ways against Christ.

Infer. 3. Hence it also follows, that man hath no free-will of his own to supernatural good. The will cannot, by its own power, open itself to receive Christ by faith. When it doth open to him, it is not virtute innata, sed illata, not by its natural power, but by the power of God upon it. The admirers of nature talk much of the sovereignty, virginity, and liberty of the will, as if it alone had escaped the fall, and that no more but a moral suasion is needed to open it to Christ; that is, that God doth need no more to save men than the devil doth to damn them. But if ever God make you sensible what the work of saving conversion is, you will quickly find that your will is lame, its freedom to spiritual things gone; you will cry out of a wounded will, as well as of a dark head, and a hard heart. You will quickly find, "That it is God alone that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure," Phil. 2:13. That the birth of the new creature is not of the will of man, but of God, John 1:13.

Infer. 4. Learn hence the necessity of conversion, in order to salvation. Christ and heaven are shut up against you till your hearts be savingly opened unto him. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, you must be born again," John 3:5. O sinner, that hard heart of thine must be humbled; thy stubborn and refractory will must be bowed; all the powers of thy soul must be unlocked and opened unto Christ; he must come into thy soul, or thou canst never see the face of God in peace. "It is Christ in you that is the hope of glory," Col. 1:27. Till thy heart be opened, Christ, with all the hopes of glory, stand without thee. And if hopes from the death of Christ without us, without the application of his person, be enough so save men, then why are any damned? Consult 1 Cor. 1:30. Adam's sin damns none but only such as are in him; and Christ's righteousness saves none but those only that are by faith in him; the eternal purpose of the Father, the meritorious death of the Son, put no man into the state of salvation and happiness till both be brought home by the Spirit's powerful application in the work of saving conversion. It is good news, good indeed, that Christ died for sinners; it is good news that Christ is brought to our very doors in the tenders of the gospel, and that the Spirit knocks at the door of our hearts, by many convictions and persuasions, to open to him, and enjoy

the unspeakable benefits of his death; these things bring us nigh to Christ, the next door to salvation; and yet all this may be, eventually, but a dreadful aggravation of our damnation, and will certainly be so to them whose hearts are but almost opened to Christ.

Infer. 5. See hence the necessity of fervent prayer to accompany the preaching of the gospel. Without the Spirit and power of God accompanying the word, no heart can ever be opened to Christ: alas, such bars as these are too strong for the breath of man to break! let ministers pray, and the people pray that the gospel may be preached "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," 1 Pet. 1:12. It greatly concerns us that preach the gospel to wrestle with God upon our knees, to accompany us in the dispensation of it unto the people; to steep that seed we sow among you in tears and prayers before you hear it; and I beseech you, brethren, let us not strive alone, join your cries to heaven with ours, for the blessing of the Spirit upon the word. How doth Paul beg of the people, as a beggar would beg for an alms at the door, for their assistance in prayer, Rom. 15:30. "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

For want of such wrestlings with God in prayer, there is so little efficacy in ordinances. Martha told her Saviour, John 11:21. "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died;" and I may tell you, that if the Spirit had been here, your souls had not remained dead under the word as they do this day. O when the sabbath draws near, let fervent cries ascend from every family to heaven. Lord, pour out thy Spirit with thy word; make it mighty through thy power to open these gates of iron, and break asunder these bars of brass.

Second Use of Exhortation

Seeing the case stands thus, that all hearts by nature are barred and shut up against Christ; let every soul do what it can, and strive to its uttermost to get the heart and will opened to Christ: Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Christ is at the door, O strive with yourselves as well as with God now to get it opened, now that salvation is come so near your souls.

Object. But have you not told us, that no sinner can open his own heart, nor bow his own will to Christ?

Ans. True, he cannot convert himself, but yet he may do many things in order to it, and which have a remote tendency to it, which he doth not do; and so he perisheth not, though he cannot, but because he will not.

Divers things may be done by poor sinners with their own hearts, which are not done; and though in themselves they are insufficient, yet being the way and method in and by which the Spirit of God usually works, we are bound to do them. As for example, (1.) Though it be not in your power to open your hearts to Christ, yet it is in your power to forbear the external acts of sin, which fasten your hearts the more against Christ; who forces thine hands to steal, thy tongue to swear or lie? Who forces the cup of excess down your throat? (2.) Though you cannot open your hearts under the word, yet it is in your power to wait and attend upon the external duties and ordinances of the gospel: why cannot those feet carry thee to the assemblies of the saints, as well as to an ale-house? (3.) And though you cannot let the word effectually into your hearts, yet certainly you can apply your minds with more attention and consideration to it than you do. Who forces thine eyes to wander, or closes them with sleep, when the awful matters of eternal life and death are sounding in thine ears? (4.) Though you cannot open your hearts to embrace Christ, yet certainly you can reflect upon yourselves when the obvious characters of a christless state are plainly held forth before your eyes: God hath given you a self-reflecting power; "The spirit of man knoweth the things of a man," 1 Cor. 2:11. When you hear of convictions of sin, compunction of heart for sin, deep concernments of the soul about its eternal state, hungerings and thirstings after Christ; restless and anxious days and nights about salvation, which others have felt; you can certainly turn in upon yourselves and examine whether ever it were so with you: and if not, methinks it might conduce to the prevention of your misery, to take your poor souls aside, and bemoan them, saying, Ah, my poor soul, canst thou endure everlasting burnings? What will become of thee if Christ pass thee by, and his Spirit strive no more with thee? Why cannot you throw yourselves at the feet of God, and cry for mercy? Prayer is a part of natural worship, distress usually puts men upon it that yet have no grace,

Jonah 1:5. Do but this towards the opening and saving of your own souls, which though it be not in itself sufficient, nor puts God under any meritorious obligation or necessity to add the rest; yet it puts you into the way of the Spirit. And is not thy soul, sinner, worth as much as this comes to? Have you not taken a great deal more pains than this for the trifles of this world? And will it not be a dreadful aggravation of sin and misery to all eternity, that you are perished so easily. Do not you see many striving round about you for Christ and salvation, whilst you sit still with folded arms as if you had nothing to do for another world? "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," Mat. 11:12.

Why should other men's souls be dearer to them than yours unto you? What discouragements have you which other men have not? Or what encouragements have they which you have not!

Object. Say not, We have no assurance that our pains shall prosper, or our strivings be made effectual to conversion; if there were any promise in the gospel that such endeavours should be seconded from heaven, and made available to salvation, then we would strive, as long as breath and life should last; but all this may be to no purpose, we may be christless, and hopeless when all is done.

Sol. But yet remember it is possible God may bless these weak endeavours, and come in by his Almighty Spirit with them: nay, it is highly probable that he will do so: and is a strong probability nothing with you? Do you use to do no actions about your civil callings without an assurance of success? When the merchant adventures his life or estate at sea, is he sure of a good return? Or doth he not adventure upon the mere hopes and probabilities of a gainful voyage? When the husbandman plows his land, empties both his bags and purse upon it, is he sure of a good harvest? May not a blast come that shall defeat all his hopes? Yet he ploweth and soweth in hope, and ordinarily God maketh him partake of his hope: but without such industry his expectations would be vain. Away then with vain excuses; up and be doing in the use of all appointed means, and the Lord be with you.

Third Use for Trial

Before I dismiss this point, let us try ourselves by it, whether God hath opened our hearts to Christ, broken these bars of ignorance, unbelief, custom, prejudice, &c. and the will stand wide open to receive Christ Jesus the Lord.

This is a solemn use, the consequence of it great; O that our faithfulness and seriousness in the trial might be answerable. Try yourselves by these following marks:

Mark 1. If your eyes be not opened to see sin in its vileness, and Christ in his glory, suitableness, and necessity; then sure your hearts were never yet effectually opened by the gospel. I confess men's eyes may be opened to see sin, and yet their hearts at the same time shut up by unbelief against Christ; but no man's heart can be opened to Christ whilst his eyes are shut: John 4:40. "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life." The work of faith is always wrought in the light of conviction; the cure of the heart begins at the eye of the mind, Acts 26:18. "to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and; from the power of Satan to God." God opens men's hearts by shining into them, 2 Cor. 4:6. If therefore any man's eyes be still blinded with ignorance, prejudice, &c. so that he apprehends not his own guilt and misery, nor sees the worth and necessity of a Saviour; that man's heart is still under Satan's lock and bar, sin is shut in, and Christ is shut out of that man's soul.

Mark 2. No heart opens to Christ by faith till it be first pricked and wounded by compunction and humiliation; this heart-wounding work is always antecedent to the work of faith. I doubt not but your thoughts fore-run my discourse to that famous scripture, Acts 2:37 where Peter preaching to those that had crucified Christ, and bringing up his discourse close to their consciences, in the application of that sermon, convincing them not only what a horrid and atrocious crime the crucifying the Son of God was in itself; but also charging it home upon them, "Whom ye have taken with wicked hands have crucified and slain; when they heard this they were pricked at the heart; and cried out, men and brethren what shall we do?" Upon this out-cry three thousand souls opened in one hour to Christ. Now consider whether your hearts have been thus pricked and wounded; hath sorrow for sin pierced thy soul?

Vain sinner, that frothy heart of thine must be made to bleed under compunctions for sin, or there will be no room for Christ in it. Come souls, it is in vain to flatter yourselves in your own eyes: reflect upon the frames of your hearts, call back the days that are past, and say, when was the time, and where was the place when thou layest at the foot of God, sobbing and mourning upon the account of thy sins? Did ever God hear such a cry as this from thy soul! Ah Lord, my soul is distressed, I roll hither and thither for ease and comfort, but find none: O the insupportable weight of guilt! O the bitterness of sin! My soul fails under it, Lord undertake for me. I do not say, the degrees of compunction and humiliation are equal in all converts; neither their sins nor abilities to bear sorrows for them, are equal; but this I say, thy heart must ache for sin, or it will never open to Christ; he binds up none but broken hearts, Isa. 16:1.

Mark 3. If Christ be come into thy heart, then the love and delight of every sin is gone out of thy heart. Christ and the love of sin cannot dwell together: what Christ said to the soldiers that apprehended him in the garden, the like he saith to every soul that comes to apprehend him by faith, If you seek me, let these go their way; away with the sin that thou most delightest in: Christ cannot come in till these be gone, Isa. 55:6, 7, 8. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Here be the terms of your acceptation and salvation plainly laid down, forsake thy ways and thoughts; the way notes the external acts of sin; and the thoughts the internal acts, both of contrivance and delight in sin; both these must be forsaken; and that is not all, for this makes but a negative holiness. Let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy. It is in vain for men to make the door of salvation wider than God hath made it; we cannot bring down Christ's terms lower than he hath set them; if we will not come up to them, Christ and we must part. And this makes the great struggle, the sharp debate in the souls of converts. O! it is hard to give up pleasant and profitable lusts; but away they must go, a bill of divorce must be signed for them, or you cannot be espoused to the Lord Jesus. This will be found to be much harder than to part with all externals for Christ's sake.

Mark 4. No heart can open truly to Christ, that it is not made willing upon due deliberation to receive him, with his cross of sufferings, and his yoke of obedience, Mat. 16:24 and 11:29.

An exception against either of these is an effectual bar to thy union with Christ; he looks upon that soul as not worthy of him, that puts in such an exception, Mat. 10:38. If thou judgest not Christ worth all sufferings, all losses, all reproaches, he judges thee unworthy to bear the name of his disciple. So for the duties of obedience, called his yoke; he that will not receive Christ's yoke can never receive his person, nor any benefit by his blood.

Mark 5. Every heart that opens sincerely and evangelically to Christ, opens to him in deep humility and sense of its emptiness and unworthiness; all self-righteousness is given up as dung and dross: Thus Abraham came unto him as to one that justifieth the ungodly, Rom. 4:5. "Now to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness," Yea, here is the true way of justification indeed; where the imputed righteousness of Christ comes, all self-righteousness vanishes before it. By him that worketh not, understand not an idle, lazy believer, that takes no care of the duties of obedience; no, an idle faith can never be a saying faith: But the meaning is, he worketh not in a law sense, to the ends and intentions of the first covenant; to make up a righteousness to himself by his own working, to cover himself with a robe of righteousness of his own spinning and weaving, a home-made cloth; no, not a rag of that: Thou must receive Christ into an empty, naked, unworthy, soul, or not receive him at all. Blessed Paul heartily rejected all his own righteousness, cast down that house-idol to the ground, that he might be found in the imputed righteousness of Christ, Phil. 3:18. Cast that idol out of doors, it stands in the way of a better righteousness. There be divers ways wherein sinners maintain their own righteousness to their own ruin: There is a gross and a more refined self-righteousness; the one more palpable and easily liable to conviction, the other much harder to be discovered and cured. Ask some men upon what their hopes of salvation are grounded? and they will tell you, they are just in their dealings with men, and constant in their prayers to God, that is all, and therefore they doubt not of their salvation:

Thus they substitute a righteousness of their own, in the room of Christ's blood, and are their own destroyers by seeking this way to be their own saviours. But then there is a more refined way of self-righteousness, drest up with such pretences of humility, that men are hardly to be convinced of it. I pity many poor souls upon this account, who stand off from Christ, dare not believe because they want such and such qualifications to fit them for Christ. O saith one, could I find so much brokenness of heart for sin, so much reformation and power over corruptions, then I could come to Christ; the meaning of which is this, if I could bring a price in my hand to purchase him, then I should be encouraged to go unto him. Here now lies horrible pride covered over with a veil of great humility: Poor sinner, either come naked and empty-handed, according to Isa. 55:1, Rom 4:5 or expect a repulse; for Christ is not the sale, but the gift of God.

Mark 6. Lastly, whatever soul opens savingly to Christ, it opens finally and everlastingly to him; the heart once opened to Christ, must stand open for ever to him, never to shut out Christ any more. And here is a very observable difference betwixt a man that comes to Christ, in a sudden fright of conscience, and parts with him again when that fright is over; and a man that receiveth Christ not to sojourn, but to dwell in his heart by faith, Eph. 3:17. When Christ comes into the heart, he saith, Here will I dwell for ever; and Lord, saith the soul, so I receive thee; this is the day of union, O let me never know a day of separation; let it never be in the power of life or death, angels, principalities, or powers, things present or to come, to make a separation betwixt thee and me. Soul, saith Christ, thou shalt be mine whilst I am in heaven; and Lord, saith the soul, I will be thine whilst I am on earth. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, saith Christ: O my Lord, saith the soul, hold me fast in thy hand, that I may never leave nor forsake thee; my estate, liberty, and life, may, and must go; but it is in the fixed purpose of my heart never, never to let thee go. The espousals betwixt Christ and the soul are for ever, Hos. 2:19. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, for ever." And here lies another great difference betwixt the hypocrite that takes Christ with a politic reserve, that will venture with Christ at sea no farther than he can see the shore; and the upright heart that embarks itself with Christ without reserves, come what will; that saith to him, as Ittai to David, when persuaded to go back in a time of danger; nay, saith he, where my Lord

Jesus Christ is, whether it be in liberty or in prison, in life or in death, there also will I be. Flesh may persuade to a retreat, nay, saith the soul, I cannot retreat; but wherever the truths of Christ, the interest and glory of Christ are, there also must I be; for upon these terms I first received him, and opened the door of my heart to him. These things are no surprises to me, Christ and I have debated them long ago; he dealt fairly with me, and I must deal faithfully with him.

Now, brethren, view over these six trials: Have your eyes been opened to see sin in its vileness, Christ in his beauty and necessity? Have your hearts been pricked and wounded with compunction and sorrow for sin? Are the loves and delights of sin gone out of your souls? Have you no exceptions either to the cross or yoke of Christ? Have you given up all your own righteousness, whether gross or refined, for dung and dross, and received Christ for ever? Then thy heart is savingly opened to him.

Fourth Use

The last use that closeth this point, will be consolation to all those whose hearts the Lord hath thus opened to receive Christ at his knocks and calls of the gospel.

Hath God indeed opened any of your hearts, and made you sincerely willing to receive Christ? then there are ten sweet consolations, like so many boxes of precious ointment to be poured forth, in the close of this discourse, upon every such soul. And the

First Consolation shall be this: The opening of any man's heart to receive Christ, is a clear, solid scripture-evidence of the Lord's eternal love to, and setting apart that man for himself from all eternity. I do not say, that every man, whose heart is opened by faith, is thereupon immediately assured and satisfied that God hath chosen him to salvation: But whether he apprehend it or not, the thing in itself is certain and real: Consult 1 Thes. 1:4, 5. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God; for our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost," &c. Their election of God was the thing to be proved; but alas, might they say, who can know that but God alone? It is among the divine secrets; yes, saith the apostle, we know it, and by this we know it: for our

gospel came not unto you in an empty sound, but in mighty efficacy, effectually opening your hearts to believe. A more clear and certain evidence of your election cannot be given in this world. Look again into Rom. 8:30. "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

There are two great and ravishing truths cleared in this scripture; the one is this, that the whole number of the called, upon earth, is taken out of such as were predestinated to life before the world was. The other is this, that as the whole number of the glorified saints in heaven, is made up of souls called and justified upon earth; so the called soul, that is, the soul that savingly opens to Christ by faith, may, from that work of the spirit upon him, solidly reason backward to God's electing love before all time; and forward to his glorification with God, when time shall be no more.

O how strong is the consolation flowing out of this glorious work of the Spirit upon our hearts! that is one thing.

II. Consolation. The opening of the heart to receive Christ, is the peculiar effect of the divine and Almighty Power of God; the arm of an angel is too weak to break those strong bars before-mentioned. Therefore the exceeding greatness of his power is applied unto this work of believing, Eph. 1:19. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead." Here is power, the power of God, the greatness of his power, the exceeding greatness of his power, the very same power which wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead; and all this no more than needs to make the heart of man open by faith to receive Christ. The only key that fits the cross wards of man's will, and effectually opens his heart, is in the hand of Christ, Rev. 3:7. "He hath the key of David, he openeth and no man shutteth."

How long have some of you sat under able ministers, searching sermons, and rousing providences? yet all to no purpose, till this Almighty Power came with the word, and then the work was done. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," Psal. 110:3. What a glorious power was that which opened Christ's grave when he lay in the heart of the earth,

with a weighty stone rolled upon his sepulchre? And how mighty a power is that which breaks asunder all those bars which kept thy soul in the state of sin and death? None feel this power, but only those whom God intendeth for salvation; and having once wrought this, it is engaged to go through with all the rest, which yet remaineth to be done, to perfect thy salvation.

III. Consolation. The opening of thy heart to Christ, is not only an effect of Almighty Power, but such an effect of it, without which, all that Christ hath done and suffered had been of no avail to thy salvation; neither the eternal decrees of God, nor the meritorious sufferings of Christ, are effectual to any man's salvation, until this work of the Spirit be wrought upon his heart. The offering up of Christ is, in its kind and place, sufficient to purchase our redemption; but it is the receiving of Christ by faith that brings home salvation to our souls; where there may be many concauses to produce one effect, that effect is not produced until the last cause have wrought. Thus it is here; the moving cause, viz. the free-grace of God hath wrought; and the meritorious cause, the death of Christ, hath also wrought; but still the heart, even of an elect man, remaineth under guilt and condemnation, until the Spirit, who is the applying cause, have also wrought this blessed effect we now speak of. It is Christ in us, i.e. in union with our souls, which is to us the hope of glory, Col. 1:27, 1 Cor. 1:30. Behold then the last stroke given in this opening of the heart by faith; herein electing love hath brought home Christ, with all the purchases and benefits of his death, into the actual possession of thy soul. O how transporting and ravishing a consideration is this!

IV. Consolation. In this work, the opening of the heart by faith, the great design and main intention of the gospel is also answered and accomplished. You behold in the church a glorious frame of ordinances set up by Divine institution, ministers appointed to preach sermons, sacraments, prayers, singing, variety of ordinances set up, excellent gifts given to men, as the fruit of Christ's ascension into heaven. Now, what was the design of God in the institution of all these things, but that by them, as instruments in his hand, our ignorant, dead, unbelieving hearts might be opened to Christ, in acts of repentance and faith, and built up to a perfect man? Ministers are sent "to open your eyes, turn you from

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God," Acts 26:18. They are not sent by Christ into this world to get a living, to drive so poor a trade as that for themselves, but to bring you to faith, 1 Cor. 3:5. When God's elect are thus brought in and built up in Christ, you shall see this glorious frame of ordinances taken down; there will be no more preaching nor hearing, the end of all these things being accomplished; 1 Cor. 15:24. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father," &c. Now the consideration of the accomplishment of the great and principal design of the gospel thus far upon thy heart, is matter of transporting joy. Ministers may, and must die, ordinances may be removed, but this blessed effect of them upon thy soul shall never die: God will perfect what he hath begun. That is the fourth consolation.

V. Consolation. And then, 5thly, That day wherein thy heart is savingly opened to receive Christ, that, very day is salvation come to thy soul. When Zaccheus' heart was opened to Christ, he tells him, Luke 19:9. "This day is salvation come to thy house." Salvation was come into the world before thou wast born; yea, salvation was come to thy doors in the tenders of the gospel before, but it never came into thy soul till the day wherein thy heart opened to Christ by faith. And is not this matter of singular consolation? If salvation be not, what is? no wonder that the eunuch went home rejoicing when he had received Christ by faith, Acts 8:39 that the jailor rejoiced with all his house, Acts 16:34. Neither blame nor wonder at men for rejoicing, for it is the day of their salvation. It is true, their salvation is not finished that day, there may be many things yet to be done and suffered by them before the completing of it; but it is begun that day, the foundation is laid in the soul that day, and the top-stone shall be set up with shouting in due time, crying, grace, grace, unto it.

VI. Consolation. The opening of a sinner's heart to Christ makes joy in heaven a triumph in the city of our God above; Luke 15:7. "I say unto you, likewise, that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just persons which need no repentance." As when a young prince is born, all the kingdom rejoices, the conduits run with wine, and there is all demonstration of joy and thankfulness in every city

and town: It is much more so in heaven, when a soul is born to Christ under the gospel. It is a satisfaction to the heart of the Lord Jesus, who now beholds more of the travail of his soul; and to all the angels and saints that another soul is espoused to him.

Beloved, when the gospel is effectually brought home by the Spirit to the heart of a sinner, and wounds him for sin, sends him home, crying, O sick, sick of sin, and sick for Christ; the news thereof is presently in heaven, and sets the whole city of God a rejoicing. Christ never rejoiced over thee before; thou hast wounded him and grieved him a thousand times, but he never rejoiced in thee till now; and that which gives joy to Christ may well be matter of joy to thee. And that is the sixth consolation.

VII. Consolation, And then 7thly, That day thy heart is unlocked, unbarred, and savingly opened by faith, that very day an intimate, spiritual, and everlasting union is made betwixt Christ and thy soul; from that day Christ is thine, and thou art his. Christ is a great and glorious person, but how great and glorious soever he be, the small and feeble arms of thy faith may surround and embrace him; and thou mayest say with the church, "My beloved is mine, and I am his:" For mark what he saith in the text, "If any man open to me, I will come unto him." That soul shall be my habitation, there will I dwell for ever. Thus will Christ dwell in your hearts by faith. What soul feels not itself advanced by this union with the Son of God? Hereby the believer becomes a member of his body, flesh and bones; this is an honour bestowed upon thy soul, above, and beyond all that honour that ever God bestowed upon any angel in heaven; to them Christ is an head by way of dominion, but to thee by way of vital influence. Angels are as the barons and nobles of his kingdom, but the believer his spouse, and all the angels of heaven ministering spirits unto such. That is the seventh consolation.

VII. Consolation. And then, 8thly, The opening of thy heart to Christ brings thee not only into union with his person, but into the state of sweet, soul-enriching communion with him. So he speaketh in the text, "If any man open the door, I will sup with him, and he with me." Poor soul, thou hast lived many years in the world, and never hadst any communion with God till this day. Christ and thy soul hath been strangers till now. It is true, thou hast had communion with ordinances,

and communion with saints, but for communion with Christ thou couldest know nothing of it, till thou receivedst him into thy soul by faith. Now thou mayest say, "Truly my fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John 1:3.

And thenceforth thy communion with men is pleasant and desirable.

IX. Consolation. The opening of a man's soul to Christ by faith is a special and peculiar mercy, which falls to the share, but of a very few. God hath done that for thee which he hath denied to millions; "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" i.e. to how small a remnant in the world, Isa. 53:1. And the apostle puts the work of faith among the great mysteries of godliness, among the wonders of religion, 1 Tim. 3:16. "Preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world."

The sound of the gospel is gone forth into the world; "Many are called, but few are chosen. There were many widows in Israel, in the days of Elias, but to none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow," Luke 4:25, 26. To allude to this, there were many hundreds that sat under the same sermon which opened thy heart to Christ, but it may be unto none of them was the Spirit of God sent that day, to open their hearts by faith, but unto thee; thou wilt freely acknowledge thyself as unlikely and unworthy as the vilest sinner there. O astonishing mercy!

X. Consolation. And then lastly, in the same day thy heart opens by faith to Christ, all the treasures of Christ are unlocked and opened to thee. In the same hour God turns the key of regeneration to open thy soul, the key of free-grace is also turned to open unto thee the unsearchable riches of Christ; then the righteousness of Christ becomes thine to justify thee, the wisdom of Christ to guide thee, the holiness of Christ to sanctify thee; in a word, he is that day made of God to thee, "Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. 1:30. "All is yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," 1 Cor. 3 ult. And thus I have shewed you some of those great things God doth for those souls that will but do this one thing for him, viz. open their hearts to receive Christ upon the tenders and terms of the gospel.

SERMON IV - REV. 3:20

Behold I [stand] at the door and knock, &c.

THE verb εστηκα here rendered I stand, is of the preter tense, and would strictly be rendered I have stood; but being joined with a verb of the present tense, is here rendered I do stand, a frequent Hebraism in scripture: And it notes the continued patience and long-suffering of Christ; I have stood and still do stand, exercising wonderful patience towards obstinate sinners. Which gives us this fourth observation.

Doct. 4. That great and admirable is the patience of Christ, in waiting upon trifling and obstinate sinners.

Thus wisdom, i.e. Christ expresses himself, Prov. 1:24. "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded." Here you have not only Christ's earnest calls, but suitable gestures also, to gain attention. The stretching out of the hand was a signal given to procure attention, Acts 21:40. Yet none regards; and this the Lord doth not once or twice, but all the day long, Isa. 65:2 shewing forth all long-suffering, as the apostle speaks, 1 Tim. 1:16. In the opening of this point I will shew you,

1. What Divine patience is.
2. Wherein it is evidenced.
3. Why it is exercised towards sinners.

First, Of the nature of Divine patience; it is an ability in God not only to delay the execution of his wrath for a time towards some, but to delay it in order to the eternal salvation of others. Let me speak to the parts of this description of Divine patience.

1. It is an ability of power in God, not the effect of impotence, or want of opportunity: All sinners are continually within the reach of the arm of his justice, and he can strike when and where he will. Esau had a revengeful

mind against Jacob, but wanted opportunity, and therefore was forced to delay the execution of his conceived wrath, until the days of mourning for his father were come; and then saith he, "I will slay my brother Jacob," Gen. 27:41. But in God it is a glorious effect of power, Nah. 1:3. "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power."

The greatness of his patience flows from the greatness of his power: So the apostle speaks, Rom. 9:22. "What, if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted, or made up to destruction?" And therefore when Moses prays for the exercise of Divine patience towards the provoking Israelites, he doth it in this form, Num. 14:17, 18. "And now I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, the Lord is long-suffering," &c. He could exercise this Almighty power upon thee, and crush thee by it as a moth is crushed: but behold he exercises it upon himself in stopping the propensions of his own justice, which daily solicit him to cut thee off; it is the power of God over his wrath, bridling and restraining it from day to day.

2. This patience is exercised toward such as perish, in a temporary delay of their damnation; and though this be but a mere suspension of his wrath for a time, yet it is a glorious act of patience in him; as that forecited text, Rom. 9:22 shews. It is nothing for a sinner condemned as soon as born, to be reprieved so many years out of hell? Thou hast been provoking him daily and hourly to cut thee off, and send thee to thy own place; and yet to be on this side the everlasting burnings, this is wholly owing to the riches of his forbearance. Ah, how is God to be admired in this his glorious power over his own wrath! when we look abroad into the world, and see every where sinners ripe for destruction, daring the God of heaven to his face, yet forborne, how admirable is this power of God!

3. God doth not only exercise this power in a temporary suspension of his wrath against some, who, alas, must feel it at last; but he delays the execution of his wrath in a design of mercy towards others, that they may never feel it, Isa. 48:8, 9. Thus he bears with his own elect all the years of their lives wherein they lay in the state of nature, and went on in a course of rebellion against God; and this long-suffering of God towards them proves their salvation, as you have it in 2 Pet. 3:15. "And account that the

long-suffering of our Lord is salvation." What is the meaning of that? Ah, Christian thou mayest easily know the meaning of it, without turning over many Commentaries: thou art now in Christ, Safely escaped out of the danger of wrath to come; but thou owest this thy salvation to the patience and long-suffering of God towards thee. For what if he had cut thee off in the days of thy ignorance and rebellion against him (and thou knowest thou didst give him millions of provocations so to do) where hadst thou now been? Thou hadst never seen Christ, nor the least dawning hope of salvation by him. Remember how oft you lay in those days upon beds of sickness, upon the brink of the grave; what was it that saved thee from eternal wrath but this admirable patience of Christ? Well, therefore, may the apostle say, "Account the long-suffering of God to be salvation."

This patience of God seems to be a branch springing out of his mercy and goodness; only it differs from mercy in this, that man as miserable is the object of mercy, but man as criminal is the object of patience. Thus briefly of the nature of Divine patience, a power of God over his own wrath, not only to suspend it for a time towards them that perish, but to delay the execution of it in a design of salvation towards others.

Secondly, Next we come to shew the various evidences of this Divine patience, or wherein it appears in its glorious manifestations towards provoking sinners; and there are seven full evidences and discoveries of it, which should make the hearts of sinners melt within them, whilst they are sounding in their ears. Ah, methinks, such as these should melt down your hard hearts before the Lord!

Evidences

1. And the first evidence of the riches of his patience shall be taken from the multitude of sins that men and women are guilty of before him, the least of which is a burden too heavy for any creature to bear; the Psalmist saith, Psal. 40:12. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about." It was true, as applied to the person of David; and though it be there applied to the person of Christ, yet not one of them were his own sins, but ours; called his, by God's reckoning or imputing them to him. Men can number vast sums, millions of millions, but no man can number his own sins, they pass all account. There is not a member of the body, though never so

small, but hath been the instrument of innumerable evils. For instance, the tongue, the apostle tells us, is a world of iniquity, Jam. 3:6. And if there be a world of sin in one member, what then are the sins of all? How many idle, frothy, vain words, hath thy tongue uttered? And yet for them, Christ saith, "Men shall give an account in the day of judgment," Mat. 12:36. And what have the sins of thy thoughts been? "The thoughts of foolishness is sin," (saith Solomon,) Prov. 24:9. O who can understand his errors? Yet the patience of God hath not failed under such innumerable evils. O glorious patience! well may it be ushered in, in the text with a term of admiration, Behold, I stand!

2. The second evidence of the Divine patience shall be taken from the heinous nature of some sins above others, whereby sinners fly, as it were, in the very face of God; and yet he bears with long-suffering, lets not loose his hands to cut them off. All sins are not of one size; some have a slighter tincture, and some are deeper; called upon that account scarlet and crimson sins, Isa. 1:18 double-dyed abominations, sins in grain; such are sins against knowledge, sins committed after convictions, and covenants, and rebukes of providence. I do not only speak of outward gross acts of sin; for as the schoolmen well determine, though outward sins are sins of greater infamy, yet inward sins may be sins of greater guilt; even those sins that never took air to defame thee in the world: but whatever they be, reader, whether outward or inward, thy conscience is privy to them, and thy soul may stand amazed at the patience of God in forbearing thee all this while under such provocations and horrid rebellions against him; especially, considering how many there be this day in hell that never provoked God by sinning with such an high hand as thou hast done.

3. It is yet a greater evidence of the patience of God in bearing with, and forbearing us under the guilt of that special sin, viz. The slighting and neglecting of Jesus Christ: here is a sin that goes to the very heart of Jesus Christ; he can bear any other sin rather than that; and yet this hath Christ borne from every soul of you. You are the men and women that have spurned at the yearning bowels of his mercies, slighted his grace, trampled his precious blood under foot, and yet he hath forborne you unto this day; read Matth. 22:5 and let thy conscience answer, whether

thou art not equally deep in the guilt of making light of Christ with those wretches upon whom it is there charged. Christ hath suffered the wrath of God in thy room, brought home salvation in gospel-offers to thy door: and then to be slighted! no patience but his own could bear it. Every sermon and prayer you have sat under with a dead heart; every motion of his Spirit which you have quenched, what is this but the making light of Christ, and the great salvation! here the deepest project of infinite wisdom, and the richest gift of free-grace, wherein God commends his love to men, are vilely undervalued as small things: and thus have you done days without number; and yet his hand is not stretched out, to cut thee off in thy rebellion: Who is a God like unto thee! What patience like the patience of Christ!

4. The length of time the patience of Christ hath endured thee, speaks the perfection and riches of patience towards thee.

Consider sinner, what age thou art of, how many years thou canst number, and that all this hath been a time of patience, for thou wast a transgressor from the womb, Isa. 48:8, 9 yet for his name sake hath he deferred his anger, and hath not cut thee off. How soon did the wrath of God break forth upon the angels when they sinned in heaven! And how long hath it borne with thee, whilst thou hast been provoking him on earth? Was there ever patience like the patience of God! Many thousands have been sent away to hell since thy day, but thou art yet spared: O that the long-suffering of God might be salvation to thee!

5. It is a great evidence of the power of divine patience that may be drawn from the grievousness of our sins to God, during the whole time of his forbearance; it is true, there is no proper passion in the Divine nature, no real perturbation, his anger is a mild and holy flame; yet the contrariety of sin to the holiness of his nature is what makes his patience miraculous in the eyes of men. The scripture speaking in a condescending language to the understanding of the creature, represents God as wounded to the heart by the sins of men; so in Ezek. 6:9. "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me;" and Amos 2:13. "Behold I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves," when the axle-tree is ready to crack under the load; and 2 Chron. 36:16 it is said, "The wrath of the Lord arose against his people till there was no remedy;"

his patience would bear no longer, and therefore when he executes his wrath upon provoking sinners, that execution is represented in the nature of an ease or relief to his burdened patience and justice, Isa. 1:24. "Ah, saith he, I will ease me of my enemies, and avenge me of my adversaries." Yet, observe, it comes in with an (ah) with a kind of regret and reluctancy; so in Isa. 10:25. "Yet a very little while and the indignation shall cease, and my anger is in their destruction," God could have given ease and rest this way to his anger long ago, but he chuses rather still to bear with thee, than on these terms to ease himself of thee.

Evidence 6. The vast expences of his riches and bounty upon us, during the whole time of his forbearance and patience towards us, speak him inconceivable and infinite in his long-suffering towards us, Rom. 2:4, 5 "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" q. d. Vile sinner, canst thou compute the treasures of bounty and goodness, thou hast been riotously spending and wasting all this while? Dost thou know what vast sums Christ hath spent upon thee to preserve thee so long out of hell? There be two treasures spending upon sinners all the time of God's forbearance of them; there is the precious treasure of thy time wasted, and the invaluable streams of gospel-grace running all this while at the waste spout: thy time is precious; the whole of thy time, which is betwixt thee and eternity, is but little, and the most thereof hast been wasted in sin, and cast away upon vanity: but that is not all, the treasures of gospel-grace have been wasting all this while upon thee. In Zech. 4:12 it is compared to golden oil, maintaining the lamps of ordinances; so it is set forth to us in that stately emblem. Who would maintain a lamp with golden oil for wanton children to play by? Yet this hath God done while thy soul hath dallied and trifled with him. The witnesses and ministers of Christ, in Rev. 11:3, 4 are compared to those olive-trees that drop their precious oil, their gifts, graces, yea, and their natural spirits with them, into this lamp, to keep it burning; all this while the blood of Christ hath been running in vain, the ministers of Christ preaching and beseeching in vain, the Spirit of Christ striving with you in vain. You burn away golden oil, and yet your lamp is not gone out. O marvellous patience! O the riches of God's forbearance!

7. Lastly, The riches of divine patience towards you, are greatly heightened and aggravated by the quick dispatch the Lord hath made of other sinners, whilst he hath spared and past over you. This comparative consideration calls upon you in the apostle's language, Rom. 11:22. "Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness, otherwise thou shalt be cut off." Some sinners have been cut off in the beginning of their days, many in the very acts of sin, and those not greater than thy sins; they are gone to their own place, and thou still left for a monument of the patience and forbearance of God. The sin of Achan was not a greater sin than thy covetousness, and the earthliness of thy heart is; the sin of Nadab and Abihu, in offering up strange fire, than thy superstition, and offering up uncommanded services to God: yet the hand of God fell upon them, and smote them dead in the place; in the day and place wherein they sinned, they perished; they were taken away in their iniquities, but thou reserved. O that it might be for an instance and example of the riches of Divine patience, which may at last lead thee to repentance!

Thus I have given you seven evidences of the wonderful patience of Christ, who hath stood, and still doth stand at the door and knock. Next we will enquire into the grounds and reasons of this marvellous patience of Christ, this astonishing long-suffering of God towards sinners; and there are divers obvious reasons of the long-suffering of God towards men.

Reasons

Reason 1. The exercise of his patience is a standing testimony of his reconcilable and merciful nature towards sinful man. This he shewed forth in his patience toward Paul, a great example of his merciful nature, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him, 1 Tim. 1:16. The long-suffering of God is a special part of his manifestative glory; and therefore when Moses desired a sight of his glory, Exod. 34:6 he proclaims his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." He would have poor sinners look towards him as an atoneable Deity, a God willing to be reconciled, a God that retaineth not his anger for ever; but if poor sinners

will take hold of his strength, and make peace with him, they may have peace, Isa. 27:4. This long-suffering is an attribute very expressive of the Divine nature; he is willing sinners should know, whatever their provocations have been, there is room for pardon and peace, if they will yet come in to accept the terms. This patience is a diadem belonging to the imperial crown of heaven; the Lord glories in it, as what is peculiar to himself, Hos. 11:9. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger; for I am "God and not man;" q. d. Had I been as man, the holiest, meekest, and mortifiedst man upon earth, I had consumed them long ago; but I am God and not man, my patience is above all created patience; no husband can bear with his wife, no parent with his child, as God hath borne with you. That is one reason of Christ's waiting upon trifling sinners, to give proof of his gracious, merciful, and reconcilable nature towards the worst of sinners.

Reason 2. The Lord exercises this admirable patience towards sinners, with design thereby to lead them to repentance; that is the direct aim and intention of it. The Lord desires, and delights to see ingenuous relentings and brokenness of heart for sin; and there is nothing like his forbearance and patience for promoting such an evangelical repentance. All the terrors of the law will not break the heart of a sinner, as the patience and long-suffering of God will do; therefore it is said, Rom. 2:4. "That the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God lead men to repentance:" these are fitted to work upon all those principles of humanity which incline men to repentance; reason, conscience, gratitude, feel the influences of the goodness of God herein, and melt under it; Saul's heart relented in this case, 1 Sam. 24:17. "Is this thy voice, my Son David? and Saul lift up his voice and wept: and he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." Thus the goodness and forbearance of God doth, as it were, take a sinner by the hand, leads him into a corner, and saith, come, let thee and me talk together, thus and thus vile hast thou been, and thus and thus long-suffering and merciful have I been to thee; thy heart hath been full of sin, the heart of thy God hath been full of pity and mercy: This puts the sinner into tears, breaks his heart in pieces; if any thing in the world will melt a hard heart, this will do it. O how good hath God been to me! How have I tried his patience to the uttermost, and still he

waiteth to be gracious, and is exalted that he may have compassion; the sobs and tears, the ingenuous thaws and relentings of a sinner's heart, under the apprehensions of the sparing mercy and goodness of God, is the music of heaven.

Reason 3. The Lord exercises this long-suffering towards sinners, to clear his justice in the damnation of all the obstinate refusers, of Christ and mercy. Christ waits at our doors now, that he may be clear in his sentence against us hereafter. This patience of Christ takes away all apologies and pleas out of the mouths of impenitent sinners; the more Christ's patience hath been, the less defence or plea they will have for themselves.

Think with thyself, sinner, what wilt thou answer in the great day, when Christ shall say, Did I not stand at thy door from day to day, from sabbath to sabbath, from year to year, calling, wooing, persuading thee to be reconciled, and accept pardon and mercy in the proper season of them, and thou wouldest not? Rev. 2:21. "I gave her space to repent, and she repented not." Well, the Lord gives you time now, a space for repentance, such a space as millions of souls, gone out of time into a miserable eternity, never had. With whomsoever Christ hath been quick and severe, to be sure he hath not been so with you. This time of Christ's patience will be evidence enough to clear Christ and condemn you; men and angels shall applaud the sentence as dreadful as it is, and say, righteous art thou, O Lord, in judging thus.

Reason 4. The Lord draws forth and exercises his admirable patience towards sinners for the continuation and propagation of the church. The church must be continued and propagated from age to age; and if God should be quick in cutting off sinners as soon as ever they provoke him, Whence should the elect of God rise in this world? There are thousands of God's elect in the loins of God's enemies. Many that will heartily embrace Christ, must rise from such as reject him.

Now if God should cut off these in the beginning of their provocations, How should the church be continued? Where had good Abijah and Hezekiah been, if wicked Jeroboam and Ahaz had been cut off in their first transgressions? The Lord suffers many a wicked parent to stand for a time under his patience; because children are to spring from them who

will obey and embrace that Christ whom their wicked parents rejected: yea, the wicked do not only propagate the church, but are useful to preserve and defend it: as the useless chaff is a defence to the wheat, Rev. 12:16. "The earth shall help the woman."

Reason 5. To conclude, The Lord exerciseth this long-suffering toward sinners, in a gracious condescension to the prayers of his people. "Were it not that the Lord had left a small remnant, we had been as Sodom, we had been like unto Gomorrhah," Isa. 1:9.

The prayers and intercessions of the saints are a skreen betwixt wicked men and the wrath of God for a time, Job 22:30. The innocent preserve the island. The world stands by the prayers of the saints; what multitudes of rebellious Christ-despising sinners swarm this day in every part of this nation? Such as declare, by their open practice, they will not have Christ to reign over them, now contemn his offers, despise his messengers; but blessed be God, yea, and let them bless him too, that there are others mourning to the Lord for them, beseeching his forbearance towards them. Little do the wicked know how much they are beholden to the prayers of the saints. These and such like reasons prevail with the Lord Jesus to stand in a waiting, patient posture, at the doors of sinners. Ah, how loth is he to give them up! We now proceed to the uses of this point by way of,

1. Information.
2. Exhortation.
3. Consolation.

Uses

Use. And First, This point will be very fruitful for information of our understandings in divers great and useful points, both doctrinal and practical, wherein every soul among you is deeply concerned; and therefore, I beseech you, let them be heard and pondered with an answerable attention and seriousness of Spirit; And the first inference shall be this.

Inferences

Infer. 1. If the Lord Jesus do exercise such admirable patience towards sinners, Then how much better is it for poor sinners to be in the hands of Christ, than in the hands of the best and holiest man in the world? O sinner, it is better for thee to fall into the hands of the meek and merciful Jesus, than into the hands of the dearest friend thou hast upon earth; no creature can bear what Christ bears: no patience like the patience of Christ: It is said of Moses, Numb. 11:12. "Now the man Moses was meek above all men upon the face of the earth." There was never such a man born into the world, for patience, meekness, and-long-suffering as Moses was; and yet for all that, this mirror of meekness could not bear the provocations of Israel: You rebels, saith he, must I draw water for you out of the rock? Thus was his spirit ruffled with the provocations of Israel, and this lost him the land of Canaan. Jonah was a good man, a prophet of the Lord; yet because the Lord would not be so quick and severe with Nineveh, as Jonah would have had him, in what uncomely language doth his angry soul return upon his God? Jonah 4:2. "O Lord, (saith he) was not this my saying when I was yet in my country; Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew thou wert a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil; therefore, now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live;" q. d. Ah, Lord, I knew it would come to this, I knew thy gracious nature, how inclinable thou art to mercy, and that upon the first appearance of their repentance, thou wouldst repent of the evil, and so free-grace would make me as a liar among them.

Nay, give me leave to speak a higher word than all this, and let it not seem strange, that the patience of the glorified saints in heaven is nothing to the patience of Christ towards provoking sinners upon earth. Those glorified souls that be above, though they have patience among other graces, perfected in its kind, yet still it is but created, finite patience, and it cannot bear what Christ's patience bears: Take an instance of it out of Rev. 6:9, 10, 11. "I saw under the altar the souls of those that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost not thou judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth: And it

was said unto them, That they should rest for a little season." Here you see glorified souls less able to bear the slow pace of justice towards their enemies, than Christ was. It is true, here was no sinful impatience, but yet a patience short of Christ's infinite patience. Ah, if you were to depend upon the patience of any creature in heaven or earth, you had worn it out long ago. I will not execute the fierceness of me in anger, for I am God and not man, Ah, it is well we have to do with God; if a man find his enemy, will he let him go away? 1 Sam. 24:19. No, he will reckon before he part with him. Sinner, the Lord finds thee daily in thy sins, and yet lets thee go; yet beware thou try not his patience too far, lest vengeance overtake thee at last, and pay the justice of God with all the arrears due to patience.

Infer. 2. Hence it follows, that convinced and broken-hearted sinners need not be discouraged in going to Jesus Christ for mercy, seeing he exercises such wonderful patience towards obstinate and refusing sinners.

This inference breathes pure gospel; it is a cordial to cheer the heart that is moving towards Christ with fear and trembling. It is a great artifice of the devil to daunt and discourage poor convinced sinners, by telling them there is no hope of mercy for them; that they shall find the arms of mercy closed, the bowels of compassion shut up; that the time of mercy is now past, they come too late. O how busy is Satan with such suggestions as these in many of your souls! But I am come to tell you this day, that these are but the artifices of the enemy, you are going to the fountain of mercy, patience, goodness, and long-suffering; go on, and you shall find abundantly more than you expect. He will not cast off a soul that comes mourning and panting towards him, and is willing to subscribe the gospel-articles of reconciliation: No, he will not shut out such a soul, whatever its rebellions and provocations have been. Sinner, thou art going to the meek and merciful Jesus, Matth. 11:28. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly." You are going to meekness and mercy itself; he is the Lamb of God, that is his name: Go on then, poor trembling sinner, do not stand any longer at, shall I, shall I? with Christ; but make a bold but necessary adventure of faith; try him

once, and then report what you find him to be: Certainly if he exercise such patience towards the vessels of wrath, whilst they are fitting to destruction, as he doth, Rom. 9:22 he will not want patience for a vessel of mercy, preparing by humiliation and faith for Christ and glory. Doth he forbear those that stand in defiance, and will he fall upon those that are mourning to him upon the knee of submission? Shall a damned wretch, that is preparing for hell, find so much forbearance, and a poor broken-hearted sinner none? It cannot be. If Jesus Christ forbore thee when thy heart was hard as a rock, and could not yield one tear, one sigh for sin, will he execute his wrath upon thee, will he shew thee no mercy, when thy heart is broken all to pieces with sorrow, and filled with loathing and detestation against sin, and thyself for sin? Did he forbear thee when sin was thy delight? And will he destroy thee now it is thy burden? It cannot be.

Moreover, if the Lord Jesus had not a mind to shew mercy to thy poor soul, now that thine eyes are opened, and thine heart touched to the quick, why hath he forborne the execution of his wrath so long? He might have taken his own time to cut you off when he would, he might have made any day the execution-day: But sure, among all the days of thy life, the day of thy humiliation, the day of thy faith, is not like to prove that day.

Again, as great and vile sinners as thyself have adventured upon the grace of Christ, and found it infinitely beyond their expectation. These the Lord Jesus hath set forth as encouraging examples to all the broken-hearted sinners that are coming after; that they, seeing how it hath fared with their fore-runners to Christ, might be encouraged to come on with the more confidence, 1 Tim. 1:16. "But I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should here after believe on him to life everlasting." Well then, shut your ears against all the whispers of Satan, entertain no evil reports of Christ; the devil loves to draw a false picture of Christ, and represent him in the most discouraging form to poor trembling sinners; but you will not find him so. What can Christ say more to convince and satisfy souls than he hath done? He hath left the bosom of the Father, he hath taken union with thy nature, he hath poured out his soul unto death; he hath told us,

"Those that come unto him, he will in no wise cast out." Thousands are gone before us in the paths of repentance and faith, and found it according to his word: you have been spared all your life to this day of mercy. O do not stand off now upon such weak objections.

Infer. 3. The long-suffering of Christ towards sinners instructeth and teacheth his ministers to imitate their Lord in a christlike patience and long-suffering. Christ is our pattern of patience; if he wait, much more may we: We think it much to stand from sabbath to sabbath, wooing, pleading, and inviting, and are apt to be discouraged when we see no fruit follow. The want of success is apt to cast us under Jeremiah's temptation, "To speak no more in his name;" and to lament with Isaiah, "That we have laboured in vain." It is a hard case to study, pray, and preach, and see all our labours return in vain. It is not so much the expending as the returning of our labours upon, us in vain, that discourageth our hearts. Ministers would not die so fast, saith Mr. Lockier on Colossians, nor be grey-headed so soon, did they see the fruits of their labours upon their people. But let us look to our pattern in the text, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." If the master wait, let not the servant be weary: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be patient toward all; waiting, if at any time God will give them repentance," 2 Tim. 2:24.

Though the beginnings be small, our latter end may greatly increase: Though we now fish with angles, and take but now one, and then another, the time may come, and we hope it is at the door, when we shall spread our nets, and inclose multitudes, Aretius, a pious Divine, comforteth himself thus, under the unsuccessfulness of his labours, *Dabit posterior ætas tractabiliores fortasse animos, mitiora pectora quam nostra habent tempora.* 'Perhaps, future days will afford more tractable spirits, and easier tempers of mind, than our present times afford.' Beside, the fruit of our labours may spring up to a blessed harvest when we are gone, John 4:37. One man soweth, and another reapeth; but if not, our reward will not be measured by the success, but the sincerity of our designs and labours. Our zeal for conversion of souls to Christ will be accepted, but our discouragement in his service will certainly displease him. If Israel be not gathered, yet shall we be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. However, let this be a caution to you that hear us, that you cast not our souls under

such discouragements. If I may speak the sense of others from my own experience, then I can assure you that the fixedness of your hearts in the ways of sin, and your untractableness to the calls of God, are a greater burden and discouragement to us than all the sufferings we have met withal from the world; yet are we contented to pray in hope, and preach in hope, encouraging ourselves (the Lord grant it be not without ground) that a crop shall yet spring up, which shall make the harvest-men laugh.

Infer. 4. From the patience and long suffering of Christ, we may learn the invaluable preciousness of souls, and the high esteem Christ hath for them.

Though your souls be cheap in your own eyes, and you are contented to sell them for a trifle, for a little sensual pleasure and ease, (some of you will hazard them for a shilling;) yet certainly Jesus Christ hath an high esteem of them, else he would never stand knocking with such importunity, and waiting with such wonderful patience for the salvation of them. Christ knows their worth, though you do not; he accounts, and so should you, one of your souls more worth than the whole world, Mat. 16:26. The soul of the poorest child or meanest servant that hears me this day, is of greater value in Christ's eye than the whole world; and he hath given three great evidences of it, (1.) That he thought it worth his heart-blood to redeem and save it: 1 Pet. 1:19. "you were not redeemed with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God." Had they not been precious in his eyes, he would never have shed his most precious blood to ransom them. (2.) Were they not highly valuable in his eyes, he would never wait with such unwearied patience to save them as he doth. He hath borne thousands of repulses and unreasonable denials from you: Sinner, Christ hath knocked at thy door in many a sermon, in many a prayer, in many a sickness, in all which thou hast put him off, denied him, or delayed him; yet still he continues knocking and waiting. Thou couldst not have made the poorest beggar in the world wait at thy door so long as thy Redeemer hath been made to wait, and yet he is not gone; at this day his voice sounds in thine ears, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Here is clear demonstration of the preciousness of thy soul in the Redeemer's eyes. And then, lastly, when Christ ends the treaty, and gives up the souls of men for lost and unpersuadable, with what regret and

sorrow doth he part with them! Never did one friend part from another with such demonstrations of sorrow as Christ parteth with the souls of sinners. The bowels of his compassion roll together; for he knows what is coming upon them, and what that eternal misery is into which their wilful rejection of him will cost them: In Luke 19:42 you find the Redeemer's tears wept over obstinate Jerusalem; "And when he came nigh to the city, he wept over it, and said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes." Like unto this is that expression, Isa. 1:24. "Ah, I will ease me of mine enemies," &c. Though it be an ease to his justice, yet he cannot give them up without an Ah, an interjection of sorrow; so in Hos. 11:8. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Judah?" I must do it, but how shall I go about it? All these expressions shew the great value God hath for your souls; and did you know it also, certainly you would not make Christ wait one hour longer.

Infer. 5. Hence it follows, That greater is the sin, and severer will be the condemnation of them that perish under the gospel, than of all other people in the world. Let me speak freely to you that hear me this day. Jesus Christ hath spent more of the riches of his patience upon you in one year, yea, in this very day, than he hath spent upon the heathen world in all the days of their lives; they never heard of Christ, and the great salvation; they have had no calls to faith and repentance, as you have had; do not think God hath dealt at this rate with other nations. You have his sabbaths, ministers, calls; he hath not dealt so with other nations, and as for these things they have not known them, Psal. 147:19. God hath dealt in a peculiar way with us, and these special favours will make dreadful accounts. He told the Jews, among whom he had preached and wrought his miracles, "It would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for them;" and in his name I will tell you this day, that barbarous Indians and Americans will have a milder hell than you; Mitius ardent: And as the Lord told Ezekiel, chap. 3:5, 6. "Thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand; surely had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee: But the house of Israel would not hearken unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me: For all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted."

Ah, brethren, it is a sad truth, that the ministers of Christ have found more fruit of their labours among the savage Americans than in England, people born and bred up under the gospel. Had a heathen people your sabbaths, your ministers, and bibles, they would not deal by Christ as you have done: But look you to it, for certainly the severity of his justice will at last recompense the expence of his patience: There are two glasses turned up this day, and both almost run down; the glass of the gospel running down on earth, and the glass of Christ's patience running down in heaven. Be sure of it, that for every sand of mercy, every drop of love that runs down in vain in this world, a drop of wrath runs into the vial of wrath which is fitting in heaven.

Infer. 6. If Christ hath exercised such admirable patience and long-suffering towards you, before he could gain entrance into your hearts; then you have all the reason in the world to exercise your patience for Christ, and account all long-suffering to be your unquestionable duty. Christ was not weary in waiting upon you, be not you weary in waiting upon him, or for him. Now, there are three things wherein the people of God will have much occasion to exercise their patience with respect to Christ.

(1.) You will need a great deal of patience to wait for the returns and answers of your prayers; you knock and wait at the door of mercy, and no answer comes; hereupon discouragement and weariness seizeth your spirits. Possibly some of you have prayers many years gone upon the file in heaven, some upon spiritual accounts, and some upon temporal; and because the answer is not dispatched, your eyes are ready to fail with waiting: For the Lord may bear long with his own elect, Luke 18:7. The seed of prayer lies under the clods, and will at last spring up, "For he never said to the seed of Jacob, seek me in vain:" None seek God in vain, but those that seek him vainly. Now, you should not be too quick and short-breathed in waiting upon God for the returns of prayer, considering how long you made Christ wait upon you.

(2.) You will have occasion to exercise your patience in bearing the burden of reproaches, and sufferings for Christ; "For to you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake," Phil. 1:29. Sufferings, you see, are the gifts of Christ, the comfort of

suffering is his gift, and so are the abilities to suffer also; and that which will increase your suffering ability, will be the consideration of Christ's long suffering towards you, and the hard things he endured for you and from you.

(3.) You will have occasion to exercise your patience for the day of your complete redemption and salvation. If you love Christ fervently, the time of your separation from him will be borne difficultly; vehement love needs the allay of patience, 2 Thes. 3:5. "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." Others need much patience to die, but such will need as much patience to live; but wherever the exercises of your patience shall be, whether in waiting for the returns of your prayers, in bearing the cross and sufferings of Christ, or in waiting for the day of your complete redemption and enjoyment of Christ: This single consideration, that Christ stood and waited so long upon you, is enough to fortify your patience against all the difficulties it shall encounter.

Infer. 7. Lastly, If Christ thus patiently wait upon trifling and obstinate sinners; then let no godly person be discouraged, because their unregenerate relations have not yet made their first step towards Christ, in the way of repentance and saving faith.

It may be you have laid up a great stock of prayers for them, the believing husband hath prayed for his unbelieving wife, and the believing wife for her unbelieving husband; godly parents for their ungodly children, and the gracious child for his ungodly parents; and yet no returns of prayer appear. Many cries are gone up to heaven like that of Abraham, Gen. 17:18. "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Well, be not discouraged, Christ is contented to wait, and therefore well may you. Those cries of parents, Lord, my poor child is in the state of nature, look in mercy upon him, open his eyes, break his heart for sin, draw his will to Christ; these cries may not be lost, though the fruit of them yet appear not: Consider how long Christ waited upon you. There be three things that encourage hope: (1.) That your hearts and theirs were of the same natural complexion and temper; and the same power which opened your hearts can open theirs; thy understanding was once as dark, thy heart as hard, and thy will as inflexible as thy carnal relations now are. The same hand

that opened thy heart can open theirs. Do not think Christ had an easier task to win thy heart, than he will have to win theirs. Almighty power wrought upon you, and the same power can work effectually upon them; the Lord's hand is not shortened. (2.) You have reason to wait, for as much as it is probable you yourselves have put stumbling-blocks in the way of their souls to Christ, and hindered the returns of your own prayers for the conversion of your carnal relatives. O Christians; there is more due to them than your prayers, prayers must be backed with examples; had they not only heard your cries to God for them, but seen your suitable encouraging pattern set before them also, you and yours might have rejoiced together long ago. But (3.) consider that God many times makes the fruit of such prayers to spring up after those that sowed them are dead and gone. The Lord may give life to your prayers when you are dead: certainly your prayers die not with you. It is the opinion of some, that Paul's conversion was the return of Stephen's prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Stephen died, but his prayers lived, and were answered upon one that stood by and consented to his death. But however it be, wait on; if your prayers come not into their bosoms, they will certainly return into your own. Here is duty discharged, love to Christ and their souls manifested; which will be your comfort, however God dispose the event.

II. Use

Secondly, The doctrine of Christ's patience puts a great and serious exhortation into my mouth this day, to press one of the greatest duties upon you that ever I pressed in the whole course of my ministry among you: And could I deliver this exhortation to you upon my knees, with tears of blood mingled with my words, might that prevail, I would surely do it. My exhortation is to all that are in an unregenerate state, that they presume not to try the patience of Christ any longer. If you have any regard to your eternal happiness, exercise not his patience beyond this hour. O that this hour might put an end to Christ's waiting, and your danger! Hitherto you have wearied men, but will you weary God also? Christ hath called but you have refused; he hath stretched out his hands, but you have not regarded. Your thoughts have been wandering after vanity, whilst the voice of the gospel hath been sounding in your eyes;

some of you have been sottish, and incapable to apprehend spiritual truths, others of you sensual, given up to the pleasures of the world, and abandoning all serious thoughts about the world to come. Some of you have been buried alive in the cares of the world, and others settled upon a dead formality in religion: And to this day Christ hath called upon you in vain. Now that which I exhort you to is, that you venture not to try the patience of Christ one day longer; if you have any regard to the everlasting happiness of your souls, come not under the guilt and danger of one denial or delay more. If you ask me why? Why may we not venture a little longer? Christ hath borne all this while, and will he not bear a little longer? May we not take a little more pleasure in sin? May we not hazard one sermon or sabbath more, and yet not perish? I answer, No! If your souls be precious in your eyes, let there be no more denials, nor delays to Christ's suit. For,

Exhortations

1. How patient, and long-suffering soever Christ hath been, yet there will be an end of the day of his patience; a time when he will wait no longer, when his Spirit shall strive no more with you. There is a knock of Christ at the heart, which will be the last knock that ever he will give; and after that no more knocks: a time when the master of the house will rise up, and the door be shut. You have had to do with a meek and patient Christ hitherto; but believe it, sinners, there is a day called the day of the wrath of the Lamb, and that day is dreadful, Rev. 6:16 where you find sinners crying to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. O if this wrath be once kindled, though but a little; blessed are they that trust in him, that have finished their agreement with him. The day of Christ's patience towards Jerusalem, was a long day, but it had an end, Mat. 23:37 and it ended in their desolation: therefore try the patience of Christ no further; you know not the limits of it, it may end with your next refusal, and then where are you? 2. The longer Christ hath exercised his patience already towards you, the more terribly will he avenge the abuse of it in hell upon you. It is past doubt with me, that there are different degrees of torment in hell; the scriptures are plainly, and clearly for it. Now among all the aggravations of the torments of hell, none can be greater than the reflections of damned souls upon the abused

patience and grace of Christ: those that had the best means, the loudest calls, and the longest day under the gospel, will certainly have the hottest place in hell, if the goodness and long-suffering of Christ do not now lead them to repentance; the cries of such souls will be heard above the cries of all other miserable wretches that are cast away. "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for Capernaum," Mat. 11:23. O friends, you little know the smart reflections of conscience in hell, upon such hours as you now enjoy; such wooing, charming voices and allurements to Christ as you now hear. There are many thousands of souls in hell, that came thither out of the dark, heathenish parts of the world, where they never heard of Christ; but your misery will be far beyond theirs, your reflections more sharp and bitter: therefore delay no longer, lest you perish with peculiar aggravation of misery. 3. Try the patience of Christ no further. I beseech you, for as much as you see every day the patience of Christ ending towards others; patience coming down, and justice ascending the stage, to triumph over the abusers of mercy. You do not only read in Scripture the finishing and ending of God's patience with men, but you may see it every day with your own eyes. If you look into Scripture, you may find the patience of God ended towards multitudes of sinners, who possibly had the same presumptions, and vain hopes, for the continuance of it, that you now have; if you look into 1 Pet. 3:19, 20 you shall there find, that Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison, which sometimes were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah. The meaning of it is this, that in the days before the flood, Christ by his Spirit strove with the disobedient and rebellious sinners in the ministry of Noah, who then were living men and women, as now we are, but now are spirits in prison, i.e. damned souls in hell, for their disobedience: and truly, brethren, you may frequently behold the glass of patience run down, the very last sand in it spent upon others. Whenever you see a wicked, christless man or woman die, you see the end of God's patience with that man or woman; and all this for a warning to you, that you adventure not to trifle and dally with it as they did. 4. Lastly, Do not try God's patience any longer (if you love your souls) for this reason, because when men grow bold, and encourage themselves in sin, upon the account of God's forbearance and long-suffering towards them, there cannot be a more certain sign that his patience is very near its end towards that soul. It is time for God to put an

end to his patience, when it is made an encouragement to sin; God cannot suffer so vile an abuse of his glorious patience, nor endure to see it turned into wantonness: this quickly brings up sin to its finishing act and perfection, and then patience is just upon finishing also. That patience is thus abused, appears from Eccl. 8:11 and when it is so abused, look for a sudden change. O, therefore, beware of provoking God, for now the day of patience is certainly near its end with sinners, Prov. 1:24, 25, 26. "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regardeth; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your feareth cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind." Ah, when sinners scoff and mock at the threatenings of God, and bear themselves up upon his patience, as that which will never crack under them; then look out for a whirlwind, a sudden tempest of wrath, which will hurry such souls into hell. Then misery comes like a storm blowing furiously from all quarters. Well, the heavens are yet clear over you, but a storm is nigh, and may certainly be presaged from such vile abuses of the glorious patience of Christ towards you. This is the first exhortation, try not the patience of Christ, by any further delays.

Exhort. 2. Admire Christ's patience and forbearance of you until now, that he hath not cut you off in your sin, but lengthened out his patience unto this day, and brought about your salvation by his long-suffering towards you. Here now I must change my voice, and turn it unto those whose hearts the Lord hath opened. Stand amazed at the riches of his grace towards you, and see that you account this long-suffering of God to be your salvation; for in plain truth it is so: your salvation was bound up in Christ's forbearance. If Christ had not borne as he did, you had not been where you are. I could heartily wish, that all the time you can redeem from the necessary employments you have in the world, may now be spent in an humble, thankful admiration of this admirable grace and patience of Christ, and answerable duties to the intentions and ends thereof. To this end I shall subjoin divers weighty considerations, which, methinks, should melt every heart wherein the least dram of saving grace is found.

Considerations

Consideration 1. Bethink yourselves of the great and manifold provocations you have given the Lord to put an end to all further patience towards you; not only in the days of your vanity and unregeneracy, but even since your reconciliation to him. Do you not believe thousands of sinners are now in the depths of hell, who never provoked the Lord at a higher rate than you have done? Were you not herded once among the vilest of sinners? 1 Cor. 6:11. "And such were some of you;" as vile as the vilest among them: yet you are washed in the blood of Christ, and your companions roaring in the lowest hell; or if your lives were more clean, sure your hearts and natures were as filthy as theirs. And certainly, your sins, since the time of reconciliation have had special aggravations in them, enough to put an end to all further mercies towards you. Light and love have aggravated these sins, and yet the Lord will not cast you off.

Consid. 2. How often have you been upon the very brink of hell, in the days of your unregeneracy? Every sickness, and every danger of life which you have escaped in those days, was a marvellous escape from the everlasting wrath of God. Had thy disease prevailed one degree further, thou hadst been past hope, and out of the reach of mercy's arm now. Doubtless some of you can remember, when in such and such a disease, you were like a ship riding in a furious storm by one cable, and two or three of the strands of that cable were snapt asunder. So it hath been with you, the thread of life, how weak soever, hath held till the bonds of union betwixt Christ and your souls were fastened, and the eternal hazard over. This is admirable grace.

Consideration 3. How often hath death come up into your windows, entered into your houses, fetched off your nearest relations; but had no commission to carry you out with them, because the Lord had a design of mercy upon your souls?

This cannot but affect a gracious heart, that God should smite so near, and yet spare you.

Consid. 4. Lastly, This is affecting, yea, very transporting, that God hath not only given you time beyond others, but in that time the precious

opportunities and means of your salvation, both external and internal; there is the very marrow and kernel of the mercy. Had God lengthened out his patience for a while, but given you no means of salvation, or afforded you the means, but denied you the blessing and efficacy of them; at the most it could have been but a reprieve from hell: But for the Lord to give you the gospel, and with the gospel to send down his Spirit, to persuade and open thy heart to Christ; here is the riches of his goodness, as well as forbearance.

Exhort. 3. This doctrine of the patience of Christ exhorts all that have felt it, to exercise a Christ-like patience towards others; as you have found the benefit of divine patience yourselves, see that you exercise the meekness and long-suffering of Christians towards those that have wronged and injured you. Who should shew patience more than those that have found it? Do not be severe, short, and quick with others, who have lived yourselves so many years upon the long-suffering of God. We are poor, short-spirited creatures, quick to revenge injuries; but oh, had God been so to us, miserable had our condition been. Christ hath made this duty the very scope of that excellent parable, Mat. 18 from ver. 25. onward, where the king takes an account of his servants, reckoning with them one by one, and amongst them finds one which owed him ten thousand talents, and having not to pay, commands him, his wife and children, and all he had, to be sold, and payment to be made; but the servant falling down, and begging patience, his Lord was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and not only forbore, but forgave the debt. One would think the heart of this man should have been a fountain of compassion towards others; but see the deep corruption of nature; the same servant finding one of his fellow-servants which owed him but an hundred pence, laid hands on him, and took him by the throat. Alas, the wrongs done to us are but trifles, compared with our injuries done to God; where others have wronged you once, you have wronged God a thousand times. Methinks the patience of Christ towards you, should melt your hearts into an ingenuous easiness to forgive others, especially, considering that an unforgiving spirit is a dreadful sign of an unforgiven person.

Exhort. 4. Burden not the patience of Christ after your admission of him and reconciliation to him; let it suffice that you tried his patience long

enough before; give him no new exercises now he is come to dwell in, and with you for ever. There are two ways wherein God's own people do greatly provoke him after their reconciliation.

1. By sluggishness in duty.

2. By sinning against light.

1. By sluggishness and deadness of spirit in the ways of duty and obedience, turning a deaf ear to the calls and motions of Christ's Spirit exciting them to the sweet and pleasant duties of religion. We have a sad instance of this in the spouse, Cant. 5:2, 3. "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." One would think that Christ might have opened the heart of his own spouse with less sollicitation and importunate arguments than he here useth; what wife could shut the door upon her own dear husband, and bar him out of his own house? And yet see the lazy excuse she makes, ver. 3. "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

Oh the sluggishness of the flesh, even in regenerate persons! those that have opened the door to Christ by regeneration, even they do often shut the door against Christ in the hours and seasons of communion with him. Strange, that such a suitor as Christ should be put by, moving and calling to such heavenly, pleasant exercises, as communion with him is; but flesh will be flesh, even in the most spiritual Christians: Little do we know what a grief this is to Christ, and loss to us.

2. Many grieve Christ's Spirit, and sorely try his patience, even after reconciliation, by sinning against light and love. That caution, Eph. 4:30 is not without weighty cause. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by which you are sealed to the day of redemption."

Do we thus requite the Lord? Is this the return we make him for all his admirable kindness, and unparalleled love towards us? Certainly Christ can put up a thousand injuries from his enemies, easier than such affronts from his own people. Did you not promise him better obedience?

Did you not engage to more holiness and watchfulness, in the day that you sued out your pardon, and made up your peace with him? Are all those vows and covenants forgotten? If you have forgotten them, God hath not.

Exhort. 5. Improve the time that remains in this world with double diligence, because you made Christ wait so long, and cast away so great a part of your life, before you opened your hearts to receive him. The morning of your life, which was certainly the freshest and freest part of it, was no better than time lost with many of us; all the days of your unregeneracy Christ was shut out, and vanity shut into your hearts; you never began to live till Christ gave you life, and that was late in the day with many of you. How should this provoke to extraordinary diligence in those few remains of time we have yet to enjoy? It was Austin's lamentation, O Lord it repents me, (saith he) that I loved thee so late. This consideration excited Paul to extraordinary diligence for Christ. It made him fly up and down the world, as a Seraphim in a flame of holy zeal for Christ. Those that have much to write, and are almost come to the end of their paper, had need write close. Friends, you have something to do for God on earth, which you cannot do for him in heaven, Isa. 38:18, 19. You that have carnal relations, have something to do for them here, which you cannot do in heaven. You can now counsel, exhort and pray, in order to their conversion and salvation; but when you are gone down to the grave, these opportunities of service are cut off.

Exhort. 6. Let us all be ashamed and humbled for the baseness of our hearts and natures, which made Christ wait at the door so long, before we opened to him. O what wretched hearts have we! that are no more affected with the groans of Christ's heart, than with the groans of a beast, nor so much neither, if that beast were our own. O the vileness of nature, to make the Prince of the kings of the earth, bringing pardon and salvation with him, to stand so long unanswered! Let who will cry up the goodness of nature I am sure we have reason to look upon the vileness of it with amazement and horror. You could not have found in your hearts to make the poorest beggar wait so long at your door, as you have made Christ wait upon you.

Exhort. 7. Lastly, Let us all bless and admire the Lord Jesus for the

continuation of his patience, not to ourselves only, but to that whole sinful nation in which we live. We thought the treaty of peace had been ended with us; many good men looking upon the iniquities and abominations of these times, considering the vanities and backslidings of professors, the heaven-daring provocations of this atheistical age, concluded in their own hearts, that God would make England another Shiloh. Many faithful ministers of Christ said within themselves, God hath no more work for us to do, and we shall have no more opportunities to work for God: when lo, beyond the thoughts of all hearts, the merciful and long-suffering Redeemer makes one return more to these nations, renews the treaty, and with compassions rolled together, speaks to us this day, as to Ephraim of old, how shall I deliver thee? Look upon this day, this unexpected day of mercy, as the fruit and acquisition of the intercession of your great Advocate in heaven, answerable to that, Luke 13:7, 8, 9. Well, God hath put us upon one trial more; if now we bring forth fruit, well; if not, the axe lies at the root of the tree. Once more Christ knocks at our doors, the voice of the bridegroom is heard; those sweet voices, Come unto me, open to me: your opening to Christ now, will be unto you as the valley of Achor, for a door of hope. But what if all this should be turned into wantonness and formality? What if your obstinacy and infidelity should wear out the remains of that little strength and time left you, and that former labours and sorrows have left your ministers? Then actum est de nobis, we are gone for ever: then farewell gospel, ministers, reformation, and all, because we knew not the time of our visitation. What was the dismal doom of God upon the fruitless vineyard? Isa. 5:5. "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: I will also command the clouds that they rain not upon it." The hedge and the wall are the spiritual and providential presence of God; these are the defence and safety of his people; the clouds and the rain are the sweet influences of gospel-ordinances. If the hedge be broken down, God's pleasant plants will soon be eaten up; and if the clouds rain not upon them, their root will be rottenness, and their blossom go up as dust; our churches will soon become as the mountains of Gilboa: therefore see that you know and improve the time of your visitation.

III. Use of Consolation

I shall wind up this fourth doctrine, in two or three words of consolation, to those that have answered, and are now preparing to answer the design and end of Jesus Christ in all his patience towards them, by their compliance with his great design and end therein. O blessed be God, and let his high praises be for ever in our mouths, that at last Christ is like to obtain his end upon some of us, and that all do not receive the grace of God in vain. And there be three considerations able to wind up your hearts to the height of praise, if the Lord hath now made them indeed willing to open to the Lord Jesus.

Considerations

Consideration 1. The faith and obedience of your hearts make it evident, that the Lord's waiting upon you hitherto hath been in pursuance of his design of electing love. What was the reason God would not take you away by death, though you passed so often upon the very brink of it, in the days of your unregeneracy? And what think you, was the very reason of the revocation of your gospel-liberties when they were quite out of sight, and almost out of hope? why surely this was the reason, that you, and such as you are, might be brought to Christ at last. Therefore though the Lord let you run on so long in sin, yet still he continued your lives, and the means of your salvation, because he had a design of mercy and grace upon you. And now the time of mercy, even the set time is come, Praise ye the Lord.

Consid. 2. You may also see the sovereignty and freeness of divine grace in your vocation: your hearts resisted all along the most powerful means, and importunate calls of Christ; and would have resisted still, had not free and sovereign grace overpowered them when the time of love was come. Ah, it was not the tractableness of thine own will, the easy temper of thy heart to be wrought upon; the Lord let thee stand long enough in the state of nature to discover that; there was nothing in nature but obstinacy and enmity. Thou didst hear as many powerful sermons, melting prayers, and didst see as many awakening providences before thy heart was opened to Christ, as thou hast since: yet thy heart never opened till now; and why did it open now? Because now the Spirit of God joined himself to the word; victorious grace went forth in the word to break the hardness, and conquer the rebellions of thy heart. The gospel was now

preached (as the apostle speaks, 1 Pet. 1:12) "with the holy Ghost sent down from heaven, which things, (saith he) the angels desire to look into." Ah friends, it is a glorious sight, worthy of angelical observation and admiration, to behold the effects of the gospel preached, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; to see when the Spirit comes along with the word, the blind eyes of sinners opened, and they brought into a new world of ravishing objects; to behold fountains of tears flowing for sin, out of hearts lately as hard as the rocks; to see all the bars of ignorance, prejudice, custom, and unbelief, fly open at the voice of the gospel; to see rebels against Christ laying down their arms at his feet, come upon the knee of submission, crying, "Lord, I will rebel no more;" to see the proud heart centered and wrapt up in its own righteousness, now stripping itself naked, loading itself with all shame and reproach, and made willing that its own shame should go to the Redeemer's glory. These, I say, are sights which angels desire to look into.

Certainly your hearts were more tender, and your wills more apt to yield and bend in the days of your youth, than they were now, when sin had so hardened them, and long continued-custom riveted and fixed them, yet then they did not, and now they do yield to the calls and invitations of the gospel. Ascribe all to sovereign grace, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but to thy name give the glory." The observation and experience of our own hearts will furnish us with arguments enough to resist all temptations to self-glorifying and conceit.

Certainly you were born not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Consid. 3. Lastly, This is a comfortable consideration, that he that waited upon you so long, and won your hearts at last; that hath gained you at the expence of so much pains and patience, will not now forsake you. Poor souls, I question not but there are many fears and jealousies within you, that all this will come to nothing, and you shall perish at last. Divers things foment these jealousies within your hearts: The weakness of your own graces, which alas, are but in their infancy; the sense you have of your own corruptions, and the great strength they still retain: The subtilty of Satan, who employs all his policies to reduce you; sometimes roaring after his escaped prey with hideous injections, which make your souls to

tremble; sometimes the discouraging apprehensions of the difficulties of religion, how far the spirituality of active obedience, and the difficulty of passive obedience is above your strength; sometimes feeling within yourselves sad alterations, by the hiding of God's face, and withdrawment of sweet and sensible communion with him. These, and such like things as these, cause many a qualm to come over your hearts; but cheer up, Christ will not lose at last what he pursued so long; he that waited so many years for thy soul, will never cast it away now that he hath seated himself in the possession of it.

SERMON V - REV. 3:20

Behold I stand at the door [and knock] &c.

IN the former point we have seen the Redeemer's posture, a posture of condescending humility, rather the posture of a servant than the Lord of all; Behold I stand at the door. We now come to consider his action or motion for entrance, I stand and knock: This metaphorical action of knocking, signifies nothing else but the motions made by Christ for entrance into the souls of sinners; and affords us this fifth observation,

Doct. 5. That every conviction of conscience, and motion upon the affections of sinners, is a knock of Christ from heaven for entrance into their souls.

This action of knocking is ascribed sometimes to the soul, and is expressive of its desires to come into the gracious presence and communion of God; so Mat. 7:7. "To him that knocks, it shall be opened," i.e. to him that seeks by importunate prayer, fellowship and communion with the Lord. But here it is applied to Christ, and is expressive of his importunate desire to come into union and communion with the souls of

sinners. Here I shall open to you the following particulars.

1. What are the doors of the soul at which Christ knocks.
2. What his knocking at these doors implies.
3. By what instruments he knocks at them.
4. In what manner he performs this action.

First, What are the doors of the soul at which Christ knocks. You all know that term Christ here used, cannot be proper but metaphorical; it is a figurative speech, the door is that part which is introductive into the house, and whatever is introductive into the soul, that is the door of the soul. Now in the soul of man there are many powers and faculties that have this use, and are of an introductive nature to let things into the soul of man. Some are more outward, as we may speak comparatively; and some more inward, as the doors of our houses are.

Christ knocks orderly at them all, one after another, for the operations of the Spirit disturb not the order of nature.

1. The first door that opens and lets into the soul is the understanding; nothing passes into the soul, but it must first come through this door of the understanding; nothing can touch the heart or move the affections, but what hath first touched the understanding. Hence we read so often in scripture of the opening of the understanding, that being, as it were, the fore-door of the soul.

2. Within this is the royal gate of the soul, viz. The will of man, that noble and imperial power. Many things may pass into the mind, or understanding of a man, and yet be able to get no further; the door of the will may be shut against them. There were many precious truths of God let into the understandings of the Heathens, by the light of nature, but could never get further, their hearts and wills were locked and shut up against them; as you may see, Rom. 1:18. "They held the truths of God in unrighteousness;" that is, they bound and imprisoned those common notices the law of nature impressed upon their minds, concerning the

being and nature of God, and the duties of both tables. These truths could get no further into their souls, and, which is of sad and dreadful consideration, Christ himself stands betwixt these two doors, in the souls of many persons; he is got into their understandings and consciences, they are convinced of the possibility and necessity of obtaining Jesus Christ, but still the door of their will is barred against him, which drew from him that sad complaint, John 5:40. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." When this door of the will is once effectually opened, then all the inner doors of the affections are quickly set open to receive, and welcome him; desire, joy, delight, and all the rest, stand open to him. These are the doors at which the Redeemer knocks.

Secondly, Next we must consider what is meant by Christ's knocking at the doors, and what that action implies. In the general, knocking is nothing else but an action significative of the desires of one that is without, to come in; it is a sign appointed to that end: And what is Christ's knocking, but a signification to the soul of his earnest desires to come into it; a notice given to the soul of Christ's willingness to possess it for his own habitation? And it is as much as if Christ should say, Soul, thou art the house that was built by my hand, purchased and redeemed by my blood; I have an unquestionable right to it, and now demand entrance, More particularly, there are divers great things implied in this gracious act of Christ's knocking at the door of the soul.

1. It implies the special favour and distinguishing grace and goodness of Jesus Christ, that he will stand and knock at our doors when he passes by so great a part of the world, never giving one such knock or call at other men's doors; it is certainly a most glorious and admirable condescension and favour of heaven, and wherever it is successful, it speaks a man highly favoured of God. O amazing! when Christ passes by the souls of thousands and millions, that would certainly afford him as comfortable an habitation as our souls can do, and will not give one effectual knock or call at their doors all the days of their life; that he will please to turn aside to thy soul, and wait and knock there for entrance: I say, here is one of the greatest acts of favour that can be shewn to the soul of a sinner. How many souls be there in the world equal in natural dignity to yours, and of sweeter natural tempers, whom yet the Lord Jesus lets alone in the quiet

possession of Satan, Luke 11:21. There is a deep silence and stillness in their consciences, no stirrings nor disturbances by convictions, but, through a dreadful judgment of God, they are left in a deep sleep; and if their consciences at any time begin to grumble, how soon are they hushed and quieted again by Satan? What the condition of the world was in former ages, we may see in Acts 14:16. "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own way." O! it is the greatest mercy in the world for the sleepy conscience of a sinner to be roused by convictions, because it is introductive to all other spiritual mercies. I confess this act of grace is little apprehended by the sons and daughters of men; much rather would poor sinners be let alone, than be thus disturbed by troublesome convictions; and when Christ disturbs their rest, how do they startle at the knocks of his Word and Spirit? How angry are they that they cannot be let alone to enjoy their quiet sleep in sin till the flames of hell awaken them? Mr. Fenner, that great and eminent instrument of God in this work, tells us, in one of his sermons, how it fared with a certain man that came to hear him preach: It seems the word had got entrance into his conscience, and gave it a terrible alarm, and as he was going home, some that followed him, heard him thus blaming and bemoaning himself: 'O what a fool, what a beast was I to come under this sermon to-day? I shall never have peace and quietness any more.' And what is the reason that smooth and general preaching is so much applauded and affected in the world, and close convincing doctrine so much shunned and hated, but this, that sinners are very loth to be disquieted, and have their consciences thoroughly awakened? Well, whatever your apprehensions be, certainly it is an unspeakable mercy for Christ to knock, and disquiet the souls of sinners by his calls. That is the first thing.

2. The next thing implied in this action of Christ is this, That the first motions towards the recovery and salvation of sinners begin not in themselves, but in Christ: We never knock at heaven's door by prayer till Christ hath first knocked at our doors by his Spirit: Did not Christ move first, there would be no motions after him in our hearts; we move towards him, because he hath first moved upon our souls. Christ might sit long enough unsought and undesired, did he not make the first motion. All our motions are secondary and consequential motions, Isa. 65:1. "I am found of them that sought me not." As we love him because he first loved us, so

we seek after him because he first sought us. Alas! poor sinners are as well satisfied as any people in the world can be to lie fast asleep in the devil's arms. When the Spirit of God goes forth with the word of conviction, he finds the souls of men in the very same posture which the angels that had surveyed the world reported the whole earth to be in, Zech. 1:11. "Behold all the earth sitteth still and is at rest." Every man settled and satisfied in his own way. What a strange stillness and midnight silence is there amongst sinners? Not a sigh, not a cry to be heard for sin: So the Psalmist, Psal. 14:2 represents the case of sinners, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside," &c. There is one thing that is admirably strange in this case, that even those men and women, whose rattles of earthly pleasures and delights, which brought them into this sleep and security, are taken away from them by the hand of Providence, I mean their estates, health, children, &c. yet they awake not; there are no stirrings after God. O what a dead sleep hath sin cast the souls of sinners into! You have a notable scripture to this purpose, in Job 35:9, 10 they are the words of Elihu, concerning men and women under grievous oppression, persons squeezed and ground by the cruel hands of wicked men: "By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry; they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty: But none saith, where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" i.e. Succour, comfort, and refreshment to the afflicted. Here are men turned out of their estates, thrown into prisons, cast upon all extremities and miseries; and what do these poor creatures do? Why, saith he, they cry by reason of their oppression: O my father, or my mother, my wife, my child, my estate, my liberty; but none saith, where is my God? O my sin, or my misery by reason of sin! "Where is he that giveth songs in the night?" The people of God when they be musing upon their beds under affliction, they have their "songs in the night;" in the midst of the multitude of their troubled thoughts within them, the comforts of God delight their souls. These are their songs in the night, but no such word or thought in carnal men. How plain is it, that all the first motions of salvation have their first spring and rise in God, and not in us? That is the second thing implied in Christ's knocking.

3. Christ's knocking at the door of the heart implies the method of the

Spirit in conversion to be congruous and agreeable to the nature of man's soul. Mark Christ's expression in the text; he doth not say, "Behold I come to the door," and break it open by violence; no, Christ makes no forcible entries, whether sinners will or not; he will come in by consent of the will, or not at all. I stand and knock; if any man open the door I will come in to him. There is a great difference between a friendly admission by consent, and a forcible entrance: In a forcible entrance bars of iron are brought to break open the door; but in a friendly admission one knocks, and the other opens. Forcible actions are unsuitable to the nature of the will, whose motions are free and spontaneous; therefore it is said, Psalm 110:3. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." It is true, the power of God is upon the will of man in the day of his conversion, or else it would never open to Christ; but yet that power of God doth not act against the freedom of man's will, by co-action and force; no, but of unwilling he makes it willing; taking away the obstinacy and reluctancy of the will by the efficacy of his grace, which some Divines call *victrix delectatio*, a sweet and pleasant victory; and so the door of the will still opens freely, Hos. 11:4. "I drew them with the cords of a man, with the bands of love." I drew them, there is Almighty Power; but how did this power draw them? with the cords of a man, i.e. with rational arguments convincing the judgment. Beasts are driven and forced, but men are drawn by reason, and will not move without it, if they act like themselves. It must be confessed, that when the day of God's power is come for the bringing home of a poor sinner to Christ, he cannot resist the power of God's Spirit, that draws him effectually: "Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me;" yet still the soul comes freely by the consent of his will; for this is the method of Christ in drawing souls to him. There is in the day of a sinner's conversion a kid, an offer made for the will, both by Satan and Christ; Satan bids riches, honours, and pleasures, with ease and quietness to the flesh in the enjoyment of them: Abide where thou art, saith Satan, remain with me, and thou shalt escape all the persecutions, losses, and troubles of the world, which conscience entangles other men in; thou shalt draw thy life through peace and pleasure to thy dying day. O, saith the flesh, this is a good motion, what can be better for me? But then, saith Christ, dost thou not consider that all these enjoyments will quickly be at an end, and what shall become of thee then? Behold, I offer thee the free, full, and final pardon of thy sins;

peace and reconciliation with God; treasures in heaven; all these shall be thine with troubles, reproaches, and persecutions in this world. The understanding and conscience of a sinner being convinced of the vanity of earthly things, and the indispensable necessity of pardon and peace with God; I say, when a convinced judgment hath duly balanced these things, and laid them before the will, and the Spirit of God puts forth his power in the renovation of it; it moves towards Christ freely, and yet cannot, according to its natural order, act otherwise than it doth. And, doubtless, this is the true meaning of that expression so often mistaken and abused, in Luke 14:23. "Compel them to come in." What! by forcing men against the light of their consciences? No; to the shame of many Protestants let us hear the gloss of Stella, a Popish commentator upon the place. 'Christ (saith he) compels men to come in, by shewing to their will such an excellling good as it cannot but embrace:' For voluntas naturaliter fertur in bonum, the will is naturally carried to the best good. And thus the Spirit works upon the soul harmoniously, and agreeably to its own nature. That is the third thing implied in Christ's knocking.

4. Christ's knocking at the door of the soul, manifestly implies the immediate access of the Spirit of God unto the soul of man, that he can come to the very innermost door of the soul at his pleasure, and make what impression upon it he pleaseth. As for other instruments used in this work, they have no such privilege or power; Ministers can but knock at the external door of the senses. Thine eyes shall see thy teachers, we can see their persons and hear their voices; we can reason with sinners, and plead with their souls; but awaken them we cannot, open their hearts we cannot; we can only lodge our messages in their ears, and leave it to the Spirit of God to make it effectual. This is a royalty belonging unto the Spirit of God, incommunicable to angels or men; if an angel from heaven were the preacher, he could not give one immediate stroke to the conscience, much less can man; we have no dominion over your consciences. The key of the doors of your souls hang not at our girdles, but are in the hands of Christ, Rev. 3:7. "He hath the key of David, he openeth, and no man shutteth; and he shutteth and no man openeth." The conscience and all the faculties lie naked and open to the stroke of God's Spirit; he can wound them and heal them, and make what impressions he pleaseth upon them. Learn hence what need there is both

for ministers and people before they enter upon the solemn ordinances of God, to lift up their hearts by prayer for the blessing and power of the Spirit upon them. Lord, send forth thy Spirit, pour it forth upon, and with thy word. Ah! how many sermons have we preached, and you heard, and yet there is no opening! These are the four things implied in Christ's knocking at the door, viz. condescending grace: All first motions being in God, the motions of his Spirit are congruous and agreeable to the nature of the soul; and that his Spirit can have immediate access to the innermost faculties and powers of the soul at his pleasure. Now in the next place let us consider,

Thirdly, By what instruments Christ knocks at the doors, that is, the judgment, conscience, and will of a sinner. And these are two, viz.

1. His word.
2. His providence.

Here my work will be to shew you how the Spirit of God makes use both of the word and works of God, to rouse and open the consciences and hearts of sinners. These are the two hammers or instruments of the Spirit, by which he knocks at the door of the heart.

1. The word written or preached, but especially preached; to this Christ gives the preference above all other instruments employed about this work; and, answerably, the word is called God's hammer, Jer. 22:29. "Is not my word like fire, and as the hammer which breaketh the rocks in pieces?" By this hammer Christ raps at the door of a sinner's soul, to give warning that he is there. The Spirit of God can open the heart immediately if he pleaseth; but he will honour his word in this work. And therefore, when Lydia's heart was to be opened, Paul, the great gospel-preacher, must be invited, even by an angel, to come over to Macedonia, and assist in that blessed work, Acts 16:9. Lydia was to be converted, her heart must be opened to Christ; the angel could not do it, but calls for the help of the apostle, God's appointed instrument to carry on that work. "I have made thee (saith God to Paul) a minister and a witness to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God," Acts 26:13. Now there be three ways in which the Spirit uses the

word as his hammer in knocking at the door of the soul.

(1.) He knocks by the particular convictions of the word upon the conscience; this knock by conviction, rings and sounds through all the rooms and chambers of the soul; particular and effectual conviction wounds to the very centre of the soul. Ah, when the word shall come home by the Spirit's particular application, like that of Nathan's to David, Thou art the man; then all the powers of the soul are roused and alarmed; now it pierces as a two-edged sword, Heb. 4:12 divides the soul and spirit, the superior and inferior faculties of it; cuts down by the back-bone, lays open the secret guilt and innermost thoughts of a man's heart, before which the sinner cannot stand. The secrets of his heart are made manifest; and falling down on his face he must acknowledge that God is in the word of a truth, 1 Cor 14:24. O these convictions of the word are such a rap, such a knock at the door of the conscience as will never be forgotten, no not in heaven, to all eternity.

(2.) Christ knocks in the word by its terrible comminations and awful threatenings, menacing the soul that opens not with eternal ruin; these are dreadful knocks: O sinner, saith Christ, wilt thou not open? Shall all the tenders of my grace made to thee be in vain? Know then that this thy obstinacy shall be thy damnation. Thus the world denounces ruin, in the name of the great and terrible God, to all wilful impenitents and obstinate unbelievers, John 3:36. "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." O dreadful sound! like unto which is that, John 8:24. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins:" q. d. Thy mittimus for hell shall be made and signed. Will you not come to me that you might have life? Then will I foretel what death you shall die, you shall even die in your sins. O it were better for thee to die any kind of death than to die in thy sins. These are loud knocks of the word, terrible sounds, yet no more than needs to startle the drousy consciences of sinners. And then,

(3.) The Spirit knocks by the gracious invitations of the word, the sweet allurements and gracious insinuations of it; and without this, no heart would ever open to Christ. It is not frosts and snow, storms and thunder, but the gentle distilling dews and cherishing sun-beams that make the flowers open in the spring. The terrors of the law may be preparative, but

the grace of the gospel is that which effectually opens the sinner's heart. The obdurate flint will sooner fly when smitten upon the soft pillow, than upon the anvil. Now the gospel abounds with alluring invitations to draw the will, and open the heart of a sinner; such is that, Mat. 11:28. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest," O what a charming voice is here! he that considers it may well wonder what heart in the world can resist it: like unto this is that in Isa. 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money let him come; yea, let him come and buy wine and milk without money and without price." q. d. Come, sinner, come; though thou have no qualifications nor worthiness, nor righteousness of thy own; though thou be but a heap of sin and vileness, yet come: my grace is a gift, not a sale: and such is that in John 7:37. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, if any man thirst let him come to me and drink." q. d. My grace is not a sealed fountain, it is free and open to the greatest of sinners; if they thirst, they are invited to come and drink. This is that oil of the gospel grace which makes the key turn so pleasantly and effectually amongst all the cross wards of man's will. And thus you see how the word preached becomes an instrument in the Spirit's hand, to open the door of a sinner's heart, at which it knocks by its mighty convictions, dreadful threats, and gracious invitations.

2. We next come to the second hammer by which the Spirit knocks at the sinner's heart, and that is the providential works of God. These, in subserviency to the word, are of excellent use to awaken sinners, and make them open their hearts to Christ. God hath magnified his word above all his name; yet there are some of the providential works of God greatly serviceable in this case; the word sanctifies providences, and providences assist the word, and make it work. Now there are two sorts of providential dispensations which the Lord Jesus makes use of to gain entrance for him into the hearts of men, viz.

(1.) Judgments.

(2.) Mercies.

(1.) Judgments and afflictions; the Word of God many times works not till some stroke of God come to quicken and assist it; thus did the Lord open

the heart of that monster of wickedness, Manasseh, the word could not work alone, but a smart rod quickened its operation: 2 Chron. 33:10, 11, 12. "And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people; but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers."

Thus the heart of this man relented under the word assisted by the rod. Ah it is good that God takes such a course with some sinners, else the word would do them no good: and to this purpose is that in Job 36:8, 9, 10. "And if they be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction; then he sheweth them their work and their transgression, that they have exceeded; and openeth their ears to discipline." This is that rough course the obstinacy of men's hearts makes necessary for their recovery, and therefore it is very observable, that some words of God have lain dead in some sinners hearts for years together, and at last have begun to work under some smart and close rod. Alas, while all things are pleasant and prosperous about us, the word hath but little operation and effect: Jer. 22:21, 22. "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst I will not hear: this hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice. The wind shall eat up all thy pastures, and thy lovers shall go into captivity; surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness." q. d. Your eyes are so dazzled with the beautiful flowers, and your ears so charmed with the Syren songs or earthly delights, that my word can take no place upon you. Let an east-wind blow, and wither up these flowers; then the word shall work, and conscience resent the concernments of eternity. This course God is fain to take with many of you; here you sit from sabbath to sabbath under the word, and nothing takes place upon your hearts. Will you not hear the voice of my word? Go, death, saith God, smite that man's child dead, I will try what that will do; go, poverty, and blast his estate, and see what that will do; go, sickness, and smite his body, and shake him over the grave's mouth, I will see what that will do. Thus God sends to sinners, as Absalom sent to Joab, who refused to come near him, till he set fire to his field of corn, and then away comes Joab, 2 Sam. 14:29, 30, 31. And thus the Lord opened the

heart of the Jailor, by putting him into a fright, a panic fear of death, Acts 16:27. And thus doth the Lord devise means to bring back his banished.

(2.) As God makes use of the hammer of judgments, so he makes use of mercies to make way for Christ into the hearts of men. Every mercy is a call, a knock of God: and truly if there be any ingenuity left unextinguished in the heart, one would think mercy would prevail more than all the judgments in the world, Rom. 2:4. "Knowest thou not that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" q. d. Dost thou not see the hand of mercy stretched out to lead thee into a corner, there to mourn over thy sins committed against so gracious and merciful a God? By every mercy you receive, Christ doth, as it were, sue you to open your hearts to him; they are so many gifts sent from heaven to make way for Christ into your hearts. It would be an endless task to enumerate all the mercies bestowed to this end upon the unregenerate: but surely this is the errand of them all; and the Lord takes it very ill when his end is not answered in them: hence is that complaint, Jer. 5:24. "Neither say they in their heart, let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth us rain, both the former and the latter, in his season." Some of you have been marvellously preserved in times of common contagion and death, when thousands have fallen at your right hand and left: then have you been preserved or recovered, according to that, Exod. 15:26. "I will put none of those diseases upon thee, for I am the Lord that healeth thee." I am Jehovah Rophe, the Lord the physician; many of you have been at the grave's mouth, in many diseases, others upon the deeps; yet the hand of mercy pulled you back, and suffered you not to drop into the grave and hell in the Same moment. O what a knock was here given by the hand of mercy at thy hard heart! Certainly if men would but observe, they might see a strange, marvellous working and moulding of things by the hand of providence, for the productions of thousands of mercies for them: and if mercy would do the work, and win you over to Christ, many rods had been spared, which your obstinacy hath made necessary. O ungrateful sinners! doth your Redeemer thus woo and fee you by so many gifts of mercy, and yet will you shut him out? Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? For which of all his benefits do your ungrateful souls shut the doors upon him?

(3.) You see what Christ's knocking at the soul of a sinner implies, and by what instruments it is performed. In the last place, we will consider the manner how this action is performed in the ten following particulars, wherein much of the mystery of conversion will be opened; the Lord grant your experience may answer them. We cannot indeed exactly describe and mark all the footsteps of the Spirit, in this work, upon the souls of men; yet these things seem eminently observable.

1. The knocks of Christ at the sinner's heart are silent and secret to all persons in the world, except the soul itself at whose door he knocks; here be many hundreds of you this day under the word; if the Lord shall this day knock by conviction at any man's heart, none will hear that knock, but that man only; for it is a knock without sound or noise to any but the particular soul concerned in it. It was fore-*prophesied* of our Redeemer, and of this very act of his, Isa. 42:2. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." The kingdom of God cometh not into the souls of men with public observation: you read in 1 Cor. 2:11. "No man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him." None knows what convictions another man's conscience feels, until he himself shall discover them; you hear the same sound of the gospel, but you hear not the inward strokes it gives to another man's conscience. Christ's approaches to the soul make no noise; little do we know what the Spirit of Christ whispers in the ear of him that sits next us. It is said of the inward comforts of the Spirit, I will give him the hidden manna which no man knows but he that eateth of it. This is true also of inward terrors and troubles. Christ's knocks by conviction are but a secret whisper of his Spirit in the ear of a sinner, saying, Thou art the man, this is thy case. That is the first thing in the manner of Christ's knocking, it is a silent knock without public sound.

2. These silent inward knocks of the Spirit of Christ, though they are heard by none but the soul itself, yet do they greatly differ as to the terror, or mildness of them in different subjects. Some hear them with more terror and astonishment, others in a mild and gentle manner. When the Lord knocked at the Jailor's conscience, Acts 16:29, 30 it was a terrible stroke; he called for a light, and sprang in like a man distracted; and trembling and astonished fell down at the apostles feet, crying, "Sirs,

what must I do to be saved?" Here was a terrible knock indeed, which almost affrighted his soul out of his body; it is as if he had said, Tell me, for the Lord's sake, and tell me quickly, whether there be any way of salvation, and where it lies, for I am a lost man, an undone soul. But when the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, there were no such terrors, the Lord spake to her in a more mild and gentle voice; as you see ver. 14. The Spirit of God varies his method according to the temper of the soul he worketh on. Knotty pieces need greater wedges and harder blows to rive them asunder, and as he directs his ministers, Jude 22 to make a difference, to deal tenderly and compassionately with some; but others, to save with fear; and so he himself observeth like different methods.

3. Some knocks of Christ are successful, and obtain the desired effect. He knocks, and the soul opens; but others are unsuccessful; he knocks once, and again, by convictions, which may cause the conscience, for the present, to startle a little, but there is no opening to Christ by faith. O friends! this is of dreadful consideration; Prov. 1:24. "I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded." There is a call without an answer, a knock, and no opening; and these things are very common, especially among the unconverted, that live under a lively, rousing gospel-ministry. Of this Christ complains, Mat. 16:17. "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling to their fellows, saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented:" q. d. Neither the delicious airs and melody of gospel-grace, nor the mournful and dreadful threats of damnation to unbelievers, avail any thing to open your hearts to embrace me; no voices from mount Gerizzim, or mount Ebal, will prevail with you. Ah! how many sad witnesses unto this truth have I now before mine eyes! but God forbid it should be thus all round: no, no, there be some souls who hear, and open, even every one that hath heard, and learned of the Father, John 6:45 when the Spirit of God puts forth his power with the word, then, and not till then, it becomes successful.

4. Sometimes Christ knocks with a thick succession of convictions, a quick repetition of his calls. Some men have had thousands of convictions in a few years; for in this case the Lord saith, as it is Exod. 4:8. "If they

will not hearken to the voice of the first sign, yet they may believe the voice of the latter sign." And yet sometimes neither the former nor the latter avail any thing. "How oft would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not?" Mat. 23:37. How often? Intimating the many calls Christ gave Jerusalem to come unto him, yet all in vain. Obstinate sinners, Christ hath been knocking, and calling at some of your consciences, from your very childhood; thousands of convictions have been tried upon some of you, and yet, to this day, your souls are shut fast against him. The Lord hath waited, from year to year, for your answer, by this signifying how loth he is to part with you; such a time thou wast upon a sick-bed, nigh unto death; at such a time under such a sermon, and then Christ knocked at thy soul: if all this be in vain, so many convictions as you have stifled, so many faggots you carry with you to hell, to increase your flames, and torments. Yet commonly those quick repetitions, and redoublings of the strokes of convictions end well; and it is a good sign, when one conviction revives another, and the Lord keeps the soul still waking. But O take heed, and try not his patience too long, lest the next stroke be more dreadful than all the former; not to open your hearts, but smite dead your hopes for heaven.

5. Sometimes Christ knocks intermittingly, knocking and stopping, a call and silence, and that at a considerable time and distance: a conviction this day, and, it may be, not another in many months. There be some aged sinners that have not had more than one or two remarkable rousings of conscience in fifty or sixty years time, and then no more; do not think that the Lord will make his Spirit always strive with men, Gen. 6:3 no, there is a time when God saith to the word, convict the conscience of that man or woman no more, not a stroke more by way of conviction, but henceforth be thou for obduration, not to open, but to shut him up, Isa. 6:10. Reader, bethink thyself, how long was it since thy conscience was roused and awakened? O saith one, seven or ten years ago I heard such a sermon which tore my conscience to pieces; I fell under such a providence, which roused and awakened all my fears; but since that time, all hath been still and quiet; the Lord give a second awakening, lest you awake with the flames of God's wrath about you. I observe, it is usual, when God works upon any very early, he knocks thus intermittingly: now the conscience is active, and full of trouble, then the vanities of youth

extinguish these convictions again; but the Lord follows his design, and at last the conviction settles, and ends in conversion.

6. Christ sometimes knocks with both hands at once, with the word and with the rod together; the latter in subserviency to the former; and if ever the soul be like to open, it will open then, when ordinances and afflictions work together. The word smites the conscience with conviction, and at or about the same time providence smites the outward man with some affliction, to make the word work effectually; or, under some smart affliction, a suitable word is seasonably directed to the conscience: and thus juncta juvant, the one assisteth the other, and both together produce the desired effect. Thus the Lord wrought upon the Thessalonians, 1 Thes. 1:6. "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction." A child dies, an estate is lost, or a sickness seizeth at the time when conscience is prepared by a conviction from the word, or afflictions have prepared it for the word: the rod upon the back helps the word to work upon the heart, and if both these working in fellowship will not do the work, there is little hope that any thing will do it.

7. Every knock of Christ disturbs the sinful rest of the soul; it rouseth guilt in the conscience, and puts the inner man into great distress and trouble. Before Christ comes and knocks at the door of the heart all is still and quiet within; the soul is in a quiet sleep of sinful security, no fears or troubles molest its rest. Luke 11:21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted." The armour which Satan puts into the hands of sinners, to defend themselves against the convictive strokes of the word, are the general mercy of God, the outward duties of religion, partial reformations, &c. But when Christ comes by effectual conviction, he disarms the sinner of all these pleas, and then the soul sees what broken reeds it leaned upon. "When the commandment came, (saith Paul) sin revived, and I died," Rom. 7:9 i.e. all my vain hopes expired; no artifice of Satan can any longer quiet the sinner's conscience; he apprehends himself in a miserable condition, meditates an escape; farewell now to sound and quiet sleep: no peace till out of danger.

8. Every effectual knock of Christ gives an alarm to hell, and puts Satan to all his shifts and arts to secure the possession of the convinced sinner. The devil is a jealous spirit, and when his interest is in danger he bestirs himself to purpose; the time of conviction is an hour of temptation. "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, (saith the apostle) but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness, (or wicked spirits) in high places," or about heavenlies, Eph. 6:12. The strife betwixt Satan and the soul is now for no less than the prize of eternal life; it is now for all, or none, for life or death, for heaven or hell: The powers of hell are now all in arms to destroy convictions, and secure the possession of the soul against Christ; as when a granado falls into a garrison, the first care of the defendants is, to stifle and choak it before it break. Whilst Christ is speaking by his Spirit in one ear, the devil is whispering in the other; and the things he whispers to quench convictions are usually such as these: It is time enough yet, what need such haste? Enjoy thy pleasures a little longer, thou mayest come to Christ and be saved at last. If that will not do, then he changeth his voice: To what purpose wilt thou go to Christ? It is now too late, the time of grace is over; hadst thou come to him in thy youth, and obeyed his first call, it had been somewhat, but now it is to no purpose. If this will not quiet the soul, then he saith, Thy sins are too great to be pardoned, there is no hope for such a prodigious sinner as thou art. If the Lord help the soul to overcome this by discovering to it the riches of mercy, pardoning the greatest of sinners; then he represents the multitudes which are in the same case with the convinced sinner; Come, fear not, if it go ill with thee, it will be as bad for millions of men and women; if thou go to hell, thousands will go with thee: But if the soul be loth to be damned for company, then he bids it look upon the train of troubles and afflictions that come along with Christ, and will certainly follow him, if the door be open to let him in: If Christ come in, reproaches, losses, and sufferings will certainly come in with him; troops of miseries and calamities follow him; himself hath told thee so, and art thou mad to ruin all thy comforts in the world, and plunge thyself into a sea of trouble for what thine eyes never saw? But if the soul reply, these are more tolerable than damnation; better my flesh suffer for a time, than my soul be cast away for ever. Then he represents the insuperable difficultties of religion; What a hard thing it is to be saved, how many

painful duties and acts of mortification the soul must pass through! Thus you see what an alarm conviction gives to the powers of hell.

9. Every effectual knock of Christ is followed on, and new convictions revive old and former ones, and the Lord never leaves knocking till the door be opened; if one sermon will not do, another shall; if one wound be plaistered and healed by the art of Satan, a fresh wound shall be made; if a former conviction vanish, the next shall be sealed upon the soul; and when the Spirit of the Lord sealeth a conviction upon the conscience, raze it out who can? And here is the difference betwixt special and common convictions; common convictions come and go, they put the soul in a fright for a day or a month, and then trouble it no more for ever; but special convictions will be continued, one thing backs another; for Christ is in pursuit of the soul, and will give it chase, till at last he overtake, and come up with it.

10. Lastly, All the knocks of Christ cease and end when the sinner's day of grace is ended; this is of dreadful consideration; when the time of mercy is over, no more strivings of the Spirit with a man after that. Christ saith to the drowsy sinner, as he spake to the drowsy disciples in the garden, Sleep on now, and take your rest. So here, I called thee in such a sermon, but thou heardest not; by such a providence, but thou obeyedst not; sleep on now, and take thy rest: "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up to their own hearts lust, to walk in their own counsels," Psal. 81:11, 12 q. d. I have done with them, the treaty is ended, I will make no more essays towards their conversion and salvation. So I gave them up. Me thinks it sounds as much as this,—Take them sin, take them devil, I will have no more to do with them:—so Hosea 4:17. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." His heart is glued fast to sin, he is enamoured upon other lovers, let him alone. O beloved, it is a dreadful thing for God to say, Let this man alone in his formality, and that man in his carnal security. Let not this be misapplied by poor trembling souls under conviction: I know the fear of this judgment is upon their hearts, nothing makes them tremble more than lest the day of grace be ended with them. But there is no ground for this fear, whilst the Spirit continues convincing and the soul trembling lest his convictions should prove ineffectual. Thus much of the nature, instruments, and

manner of Christ's knocking at the door of a sinner's heart. Our way is now opened to a fruitful application of this point, which I will wind up in divers necessary uses.

I. Use, for Information

And first, The point before us will be useful for information in the following inferences and deductions.

Infer. 1. Into how deep a sleep hath sin cast the souls of sinners, that Christ must stand so long, and give such loud repeated knocks before it will awake and open to him? There is the spirit of a deep sleep fallen upon men, like that into which God cast Adam; God speaks once, yea, twice, but man regards it not; it is the hardest thing in the world to rouse and awaken a man out of his carnal security. Look over Satan's kingdom, and you shall find a general stillness and quietness among his subjects; there is no trouble for sin, no strivings after salvation, no cryings out, "What shall we do to be saved?" Go into the crowds of carnal men and women, and you shall find them all intent and busy about other matters. How long shall you be in their company before you hear one groan for sin, or see one tear slide from their eyes on that account? Oh! what a marvellous thing is here! do not their consciences know the guilt that lies upon them? Are they not aware of a day of reckoning which approacheth? Yes, yes, these things are not hid from their consciences: What art then is used to keep them so still and quiet? Why, there are divers rattles to still the consciences of sinners, and they do it effectually. There are four causes and occasions of this wonderful stillness in the souls of sinners.

1. Ignorance of the nature of regenerating grace, taking that for regeneration, which is none of it; thus did the Jews, John 8:25 confidently affirm God to be their God, and yet they did not know him. How many poor ignorant creatures think there is no need of any other work of regeneration, but what passed upon them in baptism? They were born and baptized Christians, and that is enough, they think, to save them: Mat. 3:9. "We have Abraham to our father." They thought it sufficient that Abraham's blood ran in their veins, though there were not a spark of Abraham's faith kindled in their souls. The Lord forgive the sin of those men that lead poor souls into such fatal mistakes. O if men were

but aware of the necessity of a greater and farther work to pass upon their souls than their baptism, common powerless profession, or the similar works which appear upon formal hypocrites, heaven and earth would ring with their cries. But ignorance of the nature and necessity of special regenerating grace, like a dose of opium, casts the consciences of many into this deep sleep.

2. Freedom from grosser sins and pollutions of the world, stills and quiets the consciences of thousands; they have had a civil, sober, and fair education; and though there be no grace and regeneration, yet what saints do they seem to themselves, being adorned with sobriety and civility! This stilled the conscience of the Pharisee, Luke 18:11. "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Thus, like delicate Agag, they spruce up themselves with moral homolitical virtues, wherein many thousand Heathens were more gay than themselves; but justice will hew them to pieces as Agag was, for all their moral ornaments and endowments.

3. The strict performance of the external duties of religion quiets the consciences of many; they question not but those that do so well shall fare well, and that God will never damn men and women that keep their church and say their prayers as they do. Thus the carnal Jews deluded themselves, crying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord:" As malefactors, in some of our neighbouring kingdoms, fly to the church from the hand of justice, so do these; but God will pluck, them from the horns of the altar, and convince them that the empty name of religion is no security from damnation.

4. Many consciences are still and quieted in a natural, sinful state, by misinterpreting the voices of providence; it may be God prospers your earthly affairs, succeeds and smiles upon your undertakings; and this you conclude must be a token of his love and favour: But alas! this is a great mistake, the Lord give you better evidences of his love than these; for who prosper more in the world than wicked men? And who are more crossed than the people of God? Read Job 21 and Psal. 73 and compare both with Eccl. 9:1, and you will quickly find the vanity of all hopes built upon such a foundation.

However, by such things as these are, the god of this world blinds the eyes of multitudes.

Infer. 2. If every conviction be a knock of Christ, how deeply are all souls concerned in the success and issue of them?

Conviction is an embryo of the new creature; if it go out its full time, and come to a perfect new birth, it brings forth salvation to your souls; if it miscarry finally, you are finally lost. It is of infinite concernment therefore to every man and woman to be tender over these convictions of their consciences. It is true, conviction and conversion are two things: there may be conviction without conversion, though there can be no conversion without conviction. The blossoms upon the trees in the spring of the year cannot properly be called fruit, they are rather the rudiments of fruit, or something in order to fruit. If they open kindly, and knit or set firmly, perfect fruit follows them; but if a blast or frosty mornings kill them, no fruit is to be expected. Thus it is here, great care therefore ought to be taken about the preservation and success of convictions, both by

1. The soul itself that is under them.
2. And by all others that are concerned about them.

1. What care should the soul itself have, upon whom convictions are wrought; have a care, friends, how you quench them, divert or hinder the operations of them, lest you hinder as much as in you lies, the very conception of Christ in your souls by them. I remember it is said, Exod. 21:22. "If men strive and hurt a woman with child, and mischief follow, life shall be given for life." The life of your souls is bound up in the life of your convictions. I know it is hard for men and women to dwell with their own convictions; guilt and wrath are sad subjects for men's thoughts to dwell upon; but yet it is far better to dwell with the thoughts of sin and wrath here, than to lie sweltering under them in hell for ever. You may be rid of your convictions and your salvation together; be not too eager after peace, a good trouble is better than a false peace. And on the other side, beware that your convictions and troubles turn not into discouragements to faith; this will cross the proper intention of them; they are Christ's knocks for entrance, and were never intended to be bars or stumbling-

blocks in your way to him; not stops, but steps in your way to Christ.

2. Let all others that are concerned about convinced souls, beware what counsels they give, and what rules they prescribe, lest they render them abortive, and destroy all in the bud. There are two errors too commonly committed, one in excess, persuading souls under trouble of conscience that there is no coming for them to Christ, unless they be so and so prepared, humbled just to such a degree; this is dangerous counsel, it overheats the troubles of conscience, and keeps the soul from its proper, present duty and remedy. I am sure Paul and Silas took no such course with the convinced Jailor, nor Peter with the three thousand wounded consciences, Acts 2. Nor do I find where God hath stated the time and degree of spiritual troubles, so that there must be no addresses to Christ in the way of faith, until they have suffered them so long and to such an height: if they have imbittered sin to the soul, and made it see the necessity of a Saviour, I think they cannot move too soon after Christ in the way of faith. Let no man set bounds where God sets none.

There is another error committed in defect, when promises and comforts are presently applied, before the nature of faith is known, or one act of recumbency put forth towards Christ: these hasty comforts come to nothing; they will not, they cannot stand. It is a dangerous thing to apply gospel-cordials, and pour out the precious ointment of the promises upon them that were never heartsick for sin; when upon every slight trouble which is but as an early dew, the peculiar consolations of penitent and believing souls are hand over-head applied to them. How many such unskilful emperics are there in every place? Such as the prophet Jeremiah complains of, "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, crying, peace, peace, where there is no peace." Remember the foundation is now laying for eternity, and that is the time of deep consideration; men and women must ponder the terms and count the cost, and deliberately accept and close with Christ, before the consolations of the promises can be regularly administered to them.

Infer. 3. What a singular blessing is a rousing faithful ministry among the people? By such a ministry Christ knocks powerfully; this is one of the greatest blessings God can bestow upon a people, next to the saving effects of it, when he sends among them powerful, judicious preachers of

the gospel, under whose ministry their consciences cannot sleep quietly. These are the proper instruments Christ knocks at men's hearts by: and as for those prophets that sew pillows for drowsy sinners to sleep quietly upon, the Lord owns them not for his; Lam. 2:14. "Thy prophets (not mine, but thine) hath seen vain and foolish things for thee, they have not discovered thine iniquity."

It is true, those ministers that give men no rest nor quietness in their sins, must expect but little rest and quietness themselves. What is it for ministers to preach home to the consciences of others, but to pull down the rage of the world upon their own heads? But certainly you will have cause to bless God to eternity, for casting your lot under such a ministry; and the Lord accounts such a mercy sufficient to recompense any outward affliction that lies upon you, Isa. 30:20. You fare richly under such doctrine, though the Lord should feed you with the bread of affliction, and give you the waters of adversity to drink; this makes amends for all, "Thine eyes shall behold thy teachers, and they shall be driven no more into corners." O blessed be God that England's corners are this day emptied, that its pulpits may be filled with laborious, faithful ministers. O that the knocks of Christ might this day be heard in all the cities, towns, and villages of this nation! the kingdom of God is come nigh unto us, this mercy is invaluable; pray that the Lord would continue it, and make all your ministers and means, whether more public or private, successful.

Infer. 4. And then, lastly, let all men beware of those things that deafen their ears, and drown the sound of Christ's knocks and calls in the gospel.

What pernicious enemies to the souls of men are those persons, and things, that turn away men's ears from attending to the knocks and calls of Christ in his word? Such are, (1.) Profane, wicked men, who, like Elymas the sorcerer, make it their business, by wicked insinuations, shouts, and jeers, to turn away men's ears from the gospel. Acts 13:10. "O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness; wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" All opposition to godliness hath a spice of devilishness, and no child more resembles his father, than a scoffing enemy resembles his father, the devil. But blessed be God for that good providence which, in a

great measure, hath stopt the mouths both of the father and his children, this day. (2.) Take heed of carnal and ungodly relations, which discourage and threaten their chosen servants, and all that depend on them, from attending upon the means, or giving way to the convictions which God by them hath set upon their hearts. Cruel parents, who had rather see their children turned into their graves, than turning to the ways of serious godliness! O that any should dare to quench the beginnings of spiritual life, in those to whom they were instruments to convey natural life. (3.) Take heed of the world, its distracting cares, and charming pleasures; what a din, what a confused buz and noise do these things make in the ears of men! Mark 4:19. "The cares of this world choak the word, and it becometh unfruitful." Tell not them of getting Christ, they must study how to get bread. These are some of those distracting and diverting sounds, which drown the voice of Christ's knocks and calls in the gospel. As you value your souls, beware of them.

II. Use, for Exhortation

Christ is now come near us in the gospel, "Behold he stands at the door and knocks:" and I am here this day to demand your answer, and in his name I do solemnly demand it; what shall I return to him that sent me? What sayest thou, sinner? Wilt thou open to Christ, or wilt thou shut him out; and with him thy own pardon, peace, and salvation? Once more, let me try the force of a few more arguments upon your hearts, and refute your vain pleas to the contrary; methinks, no heart should be able to resist such motives, and rational persuasions, as these following will be found to be.

Motive 1. "You are in extreme need of Christ, you want him more than bread or breath; many things are convenient for your bodies, but Christ is the one thing necessary for your souls." Necessity is an engine that will open any thing in the world that can be opened; necessity will make all fly before it. Now there is a plain, present absolute necessity lying upon every one of you to open your hearts to Christ, and that without delay. Necessity goes before the face of Christ, to open the way for him into the heart; thou must have him, or be lost for ever. Christ and faith are not among the may bees, but the must bees, to the happiness of thy soul. A man may be poor, and happy;

reproached, and blessed; but he cannot be christless and safe; nor christless and comfortable: you must have Christ, or you cannot have life, John 3:36 you must have Christ, or you can have no hope, Col. 1:27. Christ and life, Christ and hope, go together: No Christ, no life; no Christ, no hope: Sinner, thou must have Christ, or thou canst have no pardon; for Christ and pardon are undivided, Eph. 1:7. In a word, you must have Christ, or you can have no salvation, Acts 4:12. Well, then, if thou canst have no life nor hope, no pardon nor salvation without Christ; then a plain necessity goes before Christ, to open his way into thine heart; methinks, thou shouldst now say, then will I open to Christ whatever the terms be. Come sufferings, losses, reproaches, yea, death itself, all is one; Christ I must have, and Christ I will have: necessity is laid upon me, and my heart is opened to Christ by it: woe to me for ever, if I miss of Christ.

Motive 2. The Lord Jesus is this day come nigh to every one of your souls. I may say to you as Christ did to them, Luke 10:9. "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." The Lord grant he be not as nigh to some of you as ever he shall be; for he must come nearer, or else you are lost for ever. It is not Christ among you in the means of grace, but Christ within you by the work of grace, which must be unto you the hope of glory, Col. 1:27. He is not only among you with respect to external means, but he is come into your understandings and consciences; yea, some motions of his you may feel upon your affections; there wants but a little more to make you eternally happy. O what would one effectual touch upon your wills be worth now! the head-work is done, but O that the heart-work were done too. You are almost saved, but to be almost saved, is to be wholly and eternally lost, if it go no further. It is a sad thing for a man that hath one foot in heaven to slide from thence into hell; it is sad to be shipwrecked at the harbour's mouth.

Motive 3. Jesus Christ hath unquestionable right to enter into, and possess every one of your souls: Satan is but an usurper: Christ is your lawful owner and proprietor; thy soul, sinner, hath not so full a title to thy body, as Christ hath to thy soul: Satan keeps Christ out of his right. Christ knocks at the door of his own house; he built it, and therefore may well claim admission in to it; it is his own creature, Col. 1:16. "By him were all things made, whether they be visible or invisible;" bodies or souls. The

invisible part, thy soul, is his workmanship, a stately structure of his own raising. He hath also a right by redemption, Christ hath bought thy soul, and that at the invaluable price of his own blood. Who then can dispute the right of Christ to enter into his own house? But alas! he cometh to his own, but his own receive him not.

Motive 4. Open the door to Christ, for a train of blessings and mercies come in with him; a troop of privileges follow him. In the same day and hour that Christ comes into thine heart, by a full consent and deliberate choice, a pardon comes with him of all the sins that ever thou committedst in thought, word, or action. Will such a pardon be welcome to thy soul? Then let Christ be welcome, Eph. 1:7 for where Christ comes, pardon comes. If you open to Christ, you open to peace, and who would shut the door of his soul against peace? If peace be welcome, let Christ be welcome; for peace follows faith in Christ, Rom. 5:1. Where Christ comes liberty comes, John 8:36. "If the Son therefore make you free, then are you free indeed." Are you in love with bonds and fetters? Satan's laws are written in blood. Christ's yoke is easy, and his commands not grievous. If you love liberty, love Christ. In a word, where Christ comes, salvation comes; "for he is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him." If therefore you love pardon, peace, liberty, and salvation, shut not the door against Christ; for all these follow him wherever he goes.

Motive 5. Christ this day solemnly demands entrance into thy soul; he begs thee to open to him, 2 Cor. 5:20 he commands thee to open unto him, 1 John 3:23. He denounceth eternal damnation to those that refuse him entrance. Now consider well, here is entrance demanded under pain of the eternal wrath of God: This demand is filed and recorded in heaven; at your own peril be it, if you shut the door against him: Only thus will I say in my Redeemer's behalf, if you refuse, bear witness heaven and earth this day, that Christ solemnly demanded entrance into thy soul, and was refused; bear witness, that the door was shut against the only Redeemer, who intreated, commanded, and threatened eternal damnation to the rejectors of him. Oh! methinks, that scripture, Prov. 1:24, 25 is able to strike terror into the very centre of that soul that refuses the offers of Christ!

Motive 6. And so I have done my master's errand, if you now refuse the

knock of Christ at your hearts, he may never knock more; and where are you then? There is a knock which will be the last knock, a call which will be his last call; and after that no more knocks or calls, but an eternal silence as to any overture of mercy or grace.

Object. 1. But if I do open to Christ, he will never come in to such a filthy polluted sinful soul as mine is.

Answ. Who saith so? Who dare affirm so impudent a falsehood in the very face of the text? "If any man open to me, I will come in to him."

Object. 2. If I open to Christ, I must bid farewell to ease and rest in this world; reproaches, sufferings, losses follow him.

Answ. If Christ, pardon, and salvation, be not worth the enduring and suffering these small things, sure thou valuest Christ and thy soul at a low rate. O who can sufficiently bewail the ignorance and folly of unbelievers that will sell their souls and hopes of heaven for such trifles! And if Christ and thy soul must part upon these terms, then hear me, sinner, and let it sink into thine heart; thy damnation will be both,

1. Just and righteous.

2. Unavoidable and sure.

1. Thy damnation will be just; for thou hadst thy own choice, and deliberately preferredst the insignificant trifles of this world before Christ and salvation. It was plainly told thee what the issue of thy rejecting Christ would be; and yet, after sufficient warning thou adventuredst upon it: Whatever other sinners will plead, I know not, but as for thee thou must be speechless, Matth. 22:12. If thou die christless thou must appear at his bar speechless; and the day of judgment will be the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, Rom. 2:5.

2. It will also be unavoidable, for there is no other way to salvation but this, Acts 4:12. No Christ, no heaven; no faith, no Christ: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation;" Heb. 2:3. Mercy itself cannot save thee out of Christ, for all the saving mercy of God is dispensed to

men through him, Jude 21. It is to no purpose to cry mercy, Lord, mercy! when Christ, in whom all the mercies of God are dispensed to men, is rejected by thee.

III. Use, for Consolation

This point winds up in consolation to all such, as, hearing the knocks of Christ, have opened or are now resolved to open their hearts unto him; and that nothing henceforth shall keep Christ and their souls asunder: To such I shall address the following grounds of comfort.

Consolation 1. An opening heart to Christ is a work wholly and altogether supernatural; a special work of the Spirit of God, never found upon any but an elect soul. There are common gifts of the Spirit, such as knowledge, vanishing convictions, &c. but the opening of the heart by faith is the special, saving, and peculiar work of the Spirit, John 6:29. "This is the work of God that ye believe." Yea, it is the effect of the Almighty Power of God, the exceeding greatness of his power is exerted in the work of faith, Eph. 1:19. It rises not out of nature, as common gifts do; but of this it is expressly said, Eph. 2:8. "It is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Where this work is effectually wrought, we may reason as solidly as comfortably from it, both backward, to the electing love of God, and forward, to our eternal glorification with him, Rom. 8:30.

Consolat. 2. The opening of thy heart to Christ by saving faith, gives thee interest in Christ the very same hour; the relation is then constituted, the conjugal tie or bond is fastened betwixt him and thy soul; John 1:12. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power, (viz. right or privilege) to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on his name." You neither need, nor may expect an extraordinary messenger or voice from heaven to tell you that Christ is yours, and you are his; you have a better foundation in this word and work of faith: For my part, if God will give me the clear and satisfying experience of this work upon my heart, I would never desire more satisfaction on this side heaven. I know not but the devil may counterfeit an extraordinary voice, and cheat the soul by a lying oracle; but if I really feel my heart and will sincerely opening to Christ upon gospel-terms, I am sure there is no deceit in that.

Consolat. 3. The opening of thy heart to Christ by faith is a good assurance that heaven shall be opened to thy soul hereafter: Heaven is shut against none but those that shut their heart against Christ by unbelief. Will you bar Christ out of your souls by ignorance and unbelief, and then cry, Lord, open to us? No, God will open to none but them that open to Christ. Eternity itself shall but suffice to bless God for this opening act of faith: "He that believeth shall be saved," Mark 16:16.

Consolat. 4. The opening of thy soul to Christ by faith makes it Christ's habitation for ever; in that hour out goes sin and Satan, and in comes Christ and grace: "If any man open unto me, I will come in to him," saith the text. Of such a soul Christ saith as it was said of the temple, Psal. 132:13, 14. "The Lord hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." The soul now becomes an hallowed temple to the Lord: as he hath said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and will be their God, and they shall be my people," 2 Cor. 6:16. O what a heaven upon earth is here! Christ dwelling in the soul is the glory of the soul; as God's dwelling in the temple was the glory of the temple.

Consolat. 5. In a word, the opening of the heart to Christ is that work which answers the great design of the gospel. Wherefore hath God set up ordinances and ministers, yea, wherefore is the Spirit sent forth but to open the hearts of sinners to Christ by faith? When this is done, the main end and intention of the gospel is attained and answered; the union is effected betwixt Christ and the soul; it is now put out of hazard. The whole work of the gospel after that is but to build up, confirm, and comfort the soul; ripen its implanted graces, and make it meet for glory.

And thus, through the assistance of the Spirit, I have finished the fifth observation, That every conviction of conscience, and motion upon the affections, is a knock or call of Christ for entrance into the sinner's heart.

SERMON VI - REVEL. 3:20

Behold I [stand] at the door and knock, &c.

[I stand and knock.]

HERE is pains and patience, all means used by Christ to gain entrance into the souls of sinners. It speaks the earnestness of his suit, and vehemency of his desire to be in union with the souls of men. The sixth observation therefore will be this,

Doct. 6. That Jesus Christ is an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners.

This point lies directly and fully in the very eye and intention of the text. In the opening of it, two things must be spoken to, in the doctrinal part, viz.

I. The demonstration of this truth, that he is so.

II. The marvellous and admirable grace and condescension of Christ, that he should be so.

I. For demonstration of this truth, that Christ is an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners. I shall draw down the demonstration of this truth, from a view and consideration of the dispositions, carriages, and actions of the Lord Jesus towards poor sinners from first to last: And when you have compared them all together, and by them seen the temper of his heart, how great and clear a light will shine upon this point! That his heart hath still inclined towards union and communion with sinful man, will evidently appear by Considering him in a fourfold state and time.

1. Before his incarnation.

2. In the days of his flesh.

3. At his death. And,

4. At, and since his ascension into heaven.

First, Consider him before his incarnation, and you will find two things in that state which plainly speak his desire after union with us.

Demonstrations

1. Demonst. In the covenant of redemption he made with God concerning us before this world had a being; for such covenants and promises did really pass betwixt him and the Father before all time, or else I know not how to understand that scripture, Tit. 1:2. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." To whom could that promise be made but unto Christ, which bears date before the creation? What else can this mean but the covenant of redemption made betwixt the Father and the Son? the terms whereof are set down in Isa. 53:10, 11 where you find what Christ was to do, viz. To make his soul an offering for sin. And what should be his reward for pouring out his soul unto death, viz. To see his seed, to see the travail of his soul, even a church purchased with his own blood? Whether this be not a great demonstration of the propension and inclination of Christ's heart and desire towards union and communion with poor sinners, let all men judge. O what a value did Christ set upon our souls, that upon such costly terms he would consent to redeem them! Unto this agreement God the Father held him, Rom. 8:32. God spared not his own Son. And this very covenant Christ pleaded with the Father, John 8:6. "I have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me." This plainly shews the vehement desire of Christ's heart to be in union with men; according to that Prov. 8:31. "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." Blessed Jesus! nothing but the strength of thine own desire and love could ever have drawn thee out of that bosom of delights to suffer so many things for the sake of poor sinners.

2. Demonst. Secondly, Let us consider Christ's temper and disposition towards union and communion with sinners, within time; and every thing done by Christ carries and conforms this conclusion.

1. His assumption of our nature plainly speaks it.
2. His whole life upon earth evidently discovers it.
3. His doctrine is a clear proof of it.
4. His joy at the conversion of souls proves it.
5. His sorrows for men's unbelief evidence it.
6. His indefatigable labours plainly shew it.
7. His admirable encouragements to coming sinners.
8. His dreadful menaces to obstinate sinners.
9. His sending and encouraging ministers to draw and gather the world to himself.

All these things, which were transacted in the life of Christ, plainly demonstrate how greatly and earnestly his heart did propend and incline towards this desirable union with the sons of men.

1. Christ's assumption of our nature manifesteth his desire after union with us. Herein he gave two incomparable proofs of his transcendent love to us, and desire after us.

(1.) In passing by a more excellent nature.

(2.) In marrying our nature to himself.

(1.) He passed by a superior and more excellent nature, Heb. 2:6. "Verily he took not on him the nature of angels." Angels were excellent creatures, but behold vessels of gold cast into the fire, and earthen potsherds fitted for glory! It is true, the angels that kept their integrity are members of Christ's kingdom; he is a head to them by way of dominion, but unto us by way of vital union. Christ takes the believer into a nearer union with himself than any angel in heaven; but for the multitudes of apostate angels, he never designed their recovery, but left them, as they were

before, bound in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day, Jude, ver. 6. This preterition of Christ heightens his love to poor man.

(2.) In marrying our nature to himself, and that after sin had blasted its beauty, and let in so many direful calamities upon it, Rom. 8:3. "He was found in the likeness of sinful flesh," i.e. Flesh subject to weariness, pains and death, which though there be no sin in them, yet are the effects and consequences of sin: such a nature he assumed into a personal union with himself, not to experience any new pleasure in it, but to capacitate himself to suffer and satisfy for us; and therein to give a convincing proof of the strength of his love, and vehemency of his desire to us. His personal union with our nature shews his desire after a mystical union with our persons. He would never have been the Son of man, but to make us the sons and daughters of the living God: he came in our likeness, that we, by sanctification, might be made in his likeness. Behold how near Christ comes to us by his incarnation! O what a stoop did he make therein to recover us! Rather than lose us, he was contented to lose his manifestative glory for a time; for his incarnation made him of no reputation, Phil. 2:7. Behold the desire of a Saviour after union with sinners!

2. The whole life of Christ upon earth was an evident proof and demonstration of the desire of his heart to be in union and communion with us; John 17:19. "For their sakes I sanctify myself." The life of Christ was wholly set apart for us; therefore it is said, Isa. 9:6. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." What was the errand and business upon which Christ came into this world, but to seek and to save that which was lost.

All the miracles he wrought on earth were so many works of mercy; he could have wrought his miracles to have destroyed and ruined such as received him not; but his Almighty Power was employed to heal and save the bodies of men, that thereby he might win their souls unto him; Acts 10:38. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." When the apostles desired a commission from him to fetch fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, he rebuked them, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit

ye are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them," Luke 9:54, 55, 56. The whole life of Christ in this world was nothing else but a wooing, drawing motive to the hearts of sinners; he rejected not the vilest of sinners, Luke 7:39. He rejected none that came unto him; he would not have little children forbidden to be brought unto him, Mark 10:13. What his winning carriage should be, was long before predicted by the prophet, Isa. 42:3. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." Lentulus, the proconsul, in his epistle, ad. S. P. Q. R. having graphically described the person of Christ, gives this account of his carriage and deportment; "In his reproofs he was terrible, in his admonitions fair and amiable, cheerful without levity; he was never seen to laugh, but often to weep; his words grave, few, and modest," &c.

Christ was in the world as a load-stone drawing all men to him; his deportment was every way suitable to his commission, which was "to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," Isa. 51:1.

3. As his life, so his doctrine was a wooing and inviting doctrine: a most pathetic invitation unto sinners: Never man spake as he spake; whenever he opened his lips, heaven opened, the very heart of God was opened in it to sinners; the whole stream and current of his doctrine was one continued powerful persuasive to draw sinners to him. This was his language, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Mat. 11:28. In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink," John 7:37. Himself resembles it to the clucking of a hen, to gather her chickens under her wings, Luke 13:34. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings!" Certainly the whole stream of the gospel is nothing else but the charming voice of the heavenly bridegroom.

4. The joy he always expressed for the success of the gospel, speaks him to be an earnest suitor for the hearts of sinners. It is very remarkable, that all the evangelists who have recorded the life of Christ, never mentioned one laugh or smile that ever came from him, for he was a man of sorrows.

Yet once you read, that he rejoiced in spirit; and you shall see the occasion of it, in Luke 10:21. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit. And what was it that gladdened his heart, but the report brought him by the seventy, who returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven, ver. 17, 18. Satan's kingdom was going down in the world, and the mysteries of salvation revealed unto babes; this made his holy heart leap with joy within him, to behold the success of the gospel destroying Satan's kingdom; and the poorest, meanest among men enlightened and converted by it. This was a cordial to his very soul, and spake the earnestness of his desire after union and communion with sinners.

5. His sorrows and mourning upon the account of the obstinacy and unbelief of sinners, speaks the vehemency of his desire after union with them; it is said, Mark 3:5. "When he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts," &c. You see from hence, that a hard heart is a grief to Jesus Christ. O how tenderly did Christ resent it, when Jerusalem rejected him! It is said, Luke 19:41. "That when Jesus came nigh to the city, he wept over it." The Redeemer's tears wept over obstinate Jerusalem, spake the zeal and fervency of his affection to their salvation; how loth Christ is to give up sinners. What a mournful voice is that in John 5:40. "And you will not come unto me, that you might have life." How fain would I give you life? but you would rather die than come unto me for it. What can Christ do more to express his willingness? All the sorrows that ever touched the heart of Christ from men, were upon this account, that they would not yield to his calls and invitations.

6. This appears to be the great design of Christ, by the unwearied labours he underwent day and night to accomplish it: Many weary journeys Christ took, many sermons and prayers he preached and poured out, and all upon this design, to open the hearts of sinners to him, and win the consent of their wills, to become his; this was the work which he preferred to his necessary food; John 4:34. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work:" q. d. My bringing home the elect of God, and saving them from wrath to come, is more to me than

meat and drink. So vehement and intense were his desires after the winning of sinners, that he would lose no occasion to accomplish it. If he were never so weary with his travels and labours, yet if any occasion offered to save a lost soul, he would be sure to improve it. You have an instance of this in John 4:6. "Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, &c. now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore being weary with his journey, sat thus on the well," &c. Christ was weary with his journey, and sat on the well for a little rest and refreshment, in the heat of the day. At the same time comes a woman of Samaria, to draw water; a great sinner she was: Christ compassionately beholding this miserable object, forgets his own weariness, presently falls a preaching repentance to this sinner, and opens her heart; a greater refreshment to him than that well could afford him, by giving him a seat to sit on, or water to drink.

7. The great and admirable encouragements Christ always gave to coming and willing souls, plainly speak the earnest desire of his heart after union with them; never were the like encouragements given that Christ gave to draw the souls of men to him. It is remarkable in what general terms and forms of expression he delivered them, that none might be discouraged, but come on in hope towards him: Come unto me all ye that labour, Matth. 11:28. If any man thirst, John 8:7. All along, the terms of invitation are exceeding large, which speak the desire of his heart to be so also; and his practice was answerable to his invitation; his mercies and compassions never failed when the vilest of sinners came to him in the way of repentance and faith. You read in Luke 7:41, 42 that when Christ sat at meat in the house of Simon the Pharisee, there came in a poor convinced sinner, who had guilt enough upon her to sink ten thousand souls to the bottom of hell; this poor wretch comes with a great deal of humility unto Christ, not presuming to come before his face, but falls down behind him, kisseth his feet, washeth them with tears, and wipes them with the hair of her head; all demonstrations of a broken heart. And how did the merciful Jesus welcome this poor sinner? He seals her pardon, commends the fervour of her affections, and sends her away a joyful soul; herein making good that gracious promise, He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.

8. The dreadful threatenings of Christ against all that refuse him, and

shut the doors of their hearts against him, speak his vehement desire to prevent the loss and ruin of souls. The threats of Christ are not intended to discourage any from coming to him, to fright away souls from him; no, that is not their intention; but to bring them under a blessed necessity of compliance with his terms. O the dreadful threatenings, which, like claps of thunder, brake from the mouth of Christ against all that should refuse or delay to come unto him! "If you believe not, you shall die in your sins: he that believeth not shall not see life," John 3:36. What a terrible thunder-clap is that against all unbelievers! So Mark 16:16. He that believeth not shall be damned. All these, and many more are warning-pieces shot off from heaven to prevent the ruin and damnation of men; the very threatenings of the gospel carry a design of mercy in them; damnation is threatened, that it may be prevented.

9. And then in the last place herein appears the earnestness of Christ after union with sinners, that when he could be no longer a preacher to this world in his own person, he ordained a succession of ministers, in his bodily absence from us, to gather and build the church, and to continue to the end of the world; to carry on the suit that Christ had begun, as long as there was one elect soul in the world lying in the state of sin and nature.

Reader, Christ could not always abide here; he must die, or we could not live; he must rise again, or we could not be justified; our business called him to another place and state: Now when Christ was to ascend to heaven, what doth he do? Why, he chooseth and calleth men, men made of the same clay with ourselves, whose presence and appearance should not affright or discourage us; who should treat with us in a familiar way about the great concerns of our salvation in his name and stead: 2 Cor. 5:20. "We then are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." He did not commissionate angels to be his Legates, their presence would confound and terrify us; but men cast into the same mould with yourselves, who may say to you as Elihu said to Job, Job 33:6, 7. "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead; I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee." Upon these commission-officers of Christ he poured forth excellent

gifts, in great diversity and useful variety, to fit the capacities and various disposition of men's souls: When he ascended up on high, he gave gifts unto men; this ministerial office is by him established in the church, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," Ephes. 4:11, 12, 13. Unto these his ministers he gives the highest encouragements to quicken them to their labours: If one do but one part of the work, and another the other; one soweth, another reapeth; he tells them both, "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together," John 4:36. He tells them that every soul they win to him shall be as a jewel in their crown of glory; Dan. 12:3. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever". What is Christ's intention in all these encouragements to his ministers? Surely it is as if he should say to his servants, study hard, pray earnestly, plead with sinners affectionately; every soul you win to me shall make an addition to your glory in heaven.

Weigh now the force of this second demonstration from the life of Christ; will you have a proof of Christ's earnest suit to gain the hearts of sinners? his whole life upon earth was a great proof of it; his doctrine, so full of pathetic invitations, proves it; the joy of his heart at the success of the gospel; his tears and sorrows for the obstinacy of unbelievers; his labours and travels to gather sinners to him; his admirable encouragements put into general invitations; his dreadful threatenings to all that reject his motions; his commissionating and qualifying, continuing and encouraging his ministers to carry on his suit in his name: all these things make up a full demonstration that Jesus Christ is an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners; which was the thing to be proved.

3. Demonst. Thirdly, the death of Christ is the fullest demonstration that ever was or can be given of his love to sinners, and desire after union and communion with them. His doctrine and life discovered much, but his death and sufferings abundantly more; in his doctrine he spent his breath, but upon the cross he spent his blood. Here he comes a suing to

the souls of sinners in his scarlet robes, his red garments; garments dipt in his own blood. You may now propound the same admiring question the church propounded, Isa. 63:1, 2. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?" Wilt thou know, sinner, why he comes to thee in red garments? It is to give thee such a demonstration of his love as may draw forth all the love of thy heart to him; by this blood he hath bought and purchased thy soul for a spouse for himself, Acts 20:28. Now there are two things in the death of Christ evidential of the fervency of his desires after us.

1. The greatness of the sufferings which he endured.
2. The use and end to which they were designed.

Both these shew how the heart of Christ is heated with the vehemency of his own desires after union with our poor souls.

1. The greatness of the sufferings of Christ discover the ardency of his affection. Christ's sufferings are twofold.

- (1.) External, in his body.

- (2.) Internal, in his soul.

Both together making up the fulness of his sufferings: when you shall hear what Christ hath endured in both kinds, to purchase you to himself, then you may guess what a value he put upon you, what desire he hath after you. Now (1.) as to the external sufferings of Christ in his body, they were exceeding great, for the death he died was not a natural but violent death; indeed he could not die a natural death, for there was no sin in his nature to open a door to death that way: his body was intended for a sacrifice to God, and as a sacrifice it died; therefore it is said, 1 Pet. 3:18. He was put to death in the flesh; his soul and body were violently rent asunder in the fulness and perfection of his strength and vigour. And this violent death was also a cursed death; he was made a curse for us, For it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree, Gal. 3:13. A

ceremonial curse was affixed to the death of the cross; He that is hanged is accursed of God, saith the law: the intention of that death was to shew the person that died to be so vile, that he was not worthy to touch heaven or earth, and therefore was hanged betwixt both. Moreover, this violent death Christ died was a most painful death; full of torture, and very slow and lingering: the cross was a rack to the body of Christ; I may tell all my bones, saith he, they look and stare upon me, Psal. 21:17. But yet (2.) the sufferings of his body were but the body of his sufferings; it were the sufferings of his soul that were the very soul of his sufferings. These inward sufferings of Christ may likewise be considered two ways. (1.) In his bitter propassions in the garden; O what agonies and conflicts, what sharp encounters and distresses did his soul there meet with from the wrath of God there endured for your sakes! once and again he cried out, Abba Father, all things are possible, let this cup pass; Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass; thrice he returned to the same place, rolling himself on the ground. The sufferings of his soul cast his blessed body into a bloody agony: "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground," Luke 20:43, 44. (2.) In the fulness of his passion on the cross, there was his blessed soul for a time deserted of the Father, as to any sensible communications of joy and comfort from him; which occasioned that bitter outcry, Matth. 27:46, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Never was there such a cry heard since the heavens were spread over the earth; never had Christ seen one frown in his Father's face, from eternity, before this time; but now the smiling face of God was hid, and a strong impression of his wrath made upon him. And now, brethren, you see what Christ hath endured both in his body and in his soul; and all for the sake of sinners. What think you now, is not Christ an earnest suitor? Doth not all this fully and plainly speak the ardour of his love, the fervency of his desire after union and communion with us? If this do not, then nothing can demonstrate love and desire. That is the first thing, the greatness of the sufferings which he endured,

2. Let us next consider the use and intention of these sufferings of Christ, and how this also demonstrates the earnestness of his desire after conjugal union with us. Now there was a double use and end of the sufferings of Christ,

(1.) To make us free, that we might be capable of espousals.

(2.) To win our affections by the argument of his sufferings.

(1.) One end of Christ's death was, to purchase our freedom, that we might be capable of being espoused to him; for you must know that we were not in a capacity whilst under the curse of the law, to be married unto Christ: the apostle, Rom. 7:2, 3, 4 compares the law to a husband, to whom the wife is bound as long as he liveth, and not capable of a second marriage until her husband be dead. The death of Christ was the death of the law, as a covenant of works holding us under the bond of the curse of it; and so it gave us a manumission or freedom from that bond, and a capacity of espousals to Christ, as ver. 4. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." A slave to another is not capable of being disposed in marriage, until made free; you were in bondage to the law; the slaves of sin and Satan; Christ bought out your liberty (for his blood is called a ransom, Mat. 20:28) and so put you into a capacity of being espoused unto himself: here you see Christ loved you not for any advantage he could have by you, for you had nothing to bring him; nay, he must purchase you, and that with his own blood, before he can be united to you. O incomparable love! O fervent desires!

(2.) Another design and end of the death of Christ was to win and gain our hearts and affections to himself, by the arguments of his death; this himself hath declared to be the very end and intention of it, John 12:32. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me: this he said, signifying what death he should die." Christ endured all that you have heard, and infinitely more than the tongue or pen of man can express; and all to draw thy soul, and win thy consent to come unto him: the Lord Jesus, by his sufferings, casts a threefold cord over the souls of sinners, to draw them to himself.

1. The death of Christ obtains complete righteousness for guilty sinners; and if any thing in the world will draw the heart of a sinner, this will. The anxious search and enquiry of a convinced sinner is after a perfect righteousness to justify him before God. O, that is it the sinner wants! conscience saith, thou hast broken all the laws of God, and art therefore a

law-condemned wretch; the sentence of the law casts thee for hell. Now what would a poor sinner give for a release from this sentence of the law? Oh, ten thousands worlds for a pardon? Why here it is, saith Christ; come unto me, and thou shalt receive a free, full, and final pardon; my blood cleanseth from all sin, my righteousness answers all the demands of the law. I have taken away the hand-writing that was against thee, and nailed it to my cross, Gal. 2:14. Come unto me, and take up thy bonds, thy cancelled bonds; come unto me, and that dreadful attribute of Divine Justice shall never scare or fright thy conscience any more; nay, thou shalt build thy hope upon it. You read, Rom. 3:25. "That God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Here you see the justification and pardon of a sinner built upon that very attribute which was so frightful and dreadful to him before. Well then, poor sinner, is there guilt upon thy conscience? And doth thy soul shake and quiver to think how it shall stand before the just and terrible God in the great day? Harken to the voice of Christ crucified, who calls thee to him to receive thy discharge; which if thou refuse, the law still stands in its full force and virtue against thy soul. This is one cord Christ casts from the cross over the souls of guilty sinners, to draw them to him.

2. The death of Christ purchases and procures perfect cleansing from the filth and pollution of sin to wash the defiled souls of sinners from all their uncleanness. For, "this is he that came by water and by blood; not by blood only, but by water also," 1 John 5:6. He comes by way of sanctification, as well as by way of justification. Lord, saith a convinced sinner, what an unclean nature, heart, and life have I? Oh! I am nothing but a heap of uncleanness, an abhorrence to God and myself? how shall such a heart as mine, such an Augean stable be cleansed? Come unto me, saith Christ; I came by water as well as blood; in me thou shalt find a fountain for sanctification as well as justification: come unto me, my Spirit shall undertake the cleansing of thy heart; he shall take away the pollutions of sin perfectly, so that it shall be presented to God without spot.

3. And, lastly, the transcendent love of Christ shines out in its full strength upon the souls of sinners from the cross; and there is nothing like love to draw love. When Christ was lifted up upon the cross, he gave such a glorious demonstration of the strength of his love to sinners, as one would think should draw love from the hardest heart that ever lodged in a sinners breast. "Herein is love, (saith the apostle) not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:10 q. d. Here is the triumph, the riches and glory of Divine Love; never was such love manifested in the world. There is much of God's love in temporal providences, but all is nothing to this; this is love in its highest elevation; love in its meridian glory; before it was none like it, and after it shall none appear like unto it. And thus you see Christ, from the cross, casting forth a threefold cord (which is not easily broken) to draw the hearts of sinners to him.

4. Demonst. Fourthly, to conclude; what mighty demonstration of the desire of his heart towards us, did our Redeemer give at and since his ascension into heaven? As the whole life of Christ upon earth was a persuasive argument to draw sinners to him, so his ascension to heaven hath many things in it which are mighty attractives to the hearts of men. I will only mention two:

1. The gifts he bestowed at his ascension.
2. The ends and designs of his ascension.

1. The gifts he bestowed on men at his ascension, for this very end and purpose; whereof the Psalmist gives this account, Psal. 68:18. "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." He alludes to the Roman conquerors, who in the day of their triumph did spargere missilia, scatter their largesses among the people. Thus Christ at his ascension shed forth the gifts of the Spirit in various kinds, qualifying men for the work of the ministry; to enable them to plead with your souls, and carry on his suit when he should be in heaven. These gifts were extraordinary in the first age; as the gifts of tongues and miracles, &c. and ordinary, to continue to the end of the world, Eph. 4:8, 9. To some he gives depth of learning and judgment, to others a mighty Pathos, a melting influence

upon the affections; but all designed to win over your hearts to Christ. This shews what care he took, and what provision he answerably made for the success of his great design to draw the hearts of sinners to him.

2. The ends of his ascension, as they are declared in scripture, plainly speak the vehemency of Christ's desire to draw souls to him. Now the declared ends of his ascension were, (1) To make way for the Spirit's coming to convince, convert, and comfort the souls of all that come unto him; John 16:7. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you: And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Without the conviction of these things no man can come to Christ; and no such convictions can be wrought upon the conscience of any man, without the Spirit; and the Spirit could not come to effect these things upon men's hearts, if Christ had not ascended; John 7:39. "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." Thus Christ provided for the carrying on his great design upon your hearts when he was entering into his own glory: the thoughts of that glory made him not to forget his great design upon earth. (2.) Another end of Christ's ascension was, to make intercession with the Father for all and every soul that should come unto him; that their future sins might make no breach of the bond of the covenant betwixt God and them: a privilege able to draw the hearts of all sinners to him; 1 John 2:1, 2. "My little children, these things I write unto you that ye sin not." Mark it, the intercession of Christ must encourage and embolden no man to sin; that would be a vile abuse of the grace of God: "But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins;" i.e. If sin surprize and deceive any gracious soul, the bent of whose heart is against it, let him not be discouraged; he hath a potent advocate ascended into the heavens, to continue the peace betwixt God and that soul. O what an encouragement is here to gain the consent of a sinners heart to embrace Jesus Christ! (3.) Another declared end of Christ's ascension was, to lead captivity captive, as in the forecited place, Psal. 68:17 that is, to captivate and triumph over Satan as a conquered enemy, who led us captive in the day of our vanity: he conquered Satan upon the

cross, Col. 2:15 and he triumphed over him at his ascension: and without such a conquest and triumph no soul could come to Christ. (4.) In a word, Christ ascended into heaven to prepare mansions of rest and glory for every soul that should embrace him in the way of repentance and faith in this world; John 14:2. "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you," q. d. It satisfies me not to enjoy my glory in heaven alone; all that come unto me by faith, shall be with me where I am; let them know, for their encouragement, that the glory which God hath given me, I have given them, John 17:22. All these things loudly speak the fervent desire of Christ's soul after union and communion with poor sinners; which was the thing to be demonstrated.

II. Having proved the point, that Christ is an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners; we next come to shew the marvellous and admirable grace and condescension of Christ that it should be so. And this will appear five ways to the astonishment of every considering soul.

1. Though Christ be thus intent and earnest in his suit for your consent, yet he gaineth nothing by you when you do consent; the gain is to yourselves, but not to him: He is over all, God blessed for ever, Rom. 9:5. above all accessions from the creature. What doth the sun gain by enlightening and animating the lower world? Or what doth a fountain gain when men drink and are refreshed by its waters? If any soul that heareth me this day should presently resolve henceforth to break asunder all the ties and engagements betwixt him and sin; to subscribe the articles of the gospel; to give away himself, soul and body to Christ; to live henceforth as a hallowed, dedicated creature to the Lord Jesus; this indeed would turn to the infinite and everlasting advantage of such a soul; but yet Christ cannot be profited thereby.

2. And that which still increases the wonder is this, that though Christ make no gain or profit by our conversion, yet hath he impoverished himself to gain such unprofitable creatures as we are to him. He hath made himself poor to make us rich; so speaks the apostle in 2 Cor. 8:9. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be

rich." He expends his riches, makes no advantage unto himself; his incarnation impoverished his reputation, Phil. 2:7. How poor was Christ when he said, Psal. 22:6. "But I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people?" How poor in temporal comforts, when he said, Matth. 8:20. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Yea, how poor was he in spiritual comforts, when that astonishing out-cry brake from him upon the cross, Matth. 27:46. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" O let it astonish us, that Christ should earnestly desire union with our souls upon terms of such deep self-denial to himself.

3. Though Christ gain nothing by you, and impoverished himself for you; yet doth he endure many vile repulses, delays, and denials of his suit, and will not leave it for all that: O astonishing grace! One would think that the least delay, and much more a refusal of an overture from Christ, upon such terms as you have heard, should make his indignation presently to smoke against such a soul; and that he should say, Thou hast refused my offer, so full of self-denying and condescending grace, never shall another offer be made to so unworthy a soul; and yet you see he is contented to wait as well as knock, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

4. Herein the admirable grace of this heavenly suitor appears, that Jesus Christ passeth by millions of creatures, of more excellent gifts and temperaments, and never makes them one offer of himself, never turneth aside to give one knock at their door: but comes to thee, the vilest and basest of creatures, and will not be gone from thy door without his errand's end.

Knowest thou not, sinner, that among the unsanctified there are to be found multitudes of men and women of more raised and excellent parts, nimble wits, strong memories, solid judgments; yea, men and women of cleaner conversations, strict morality, adorned with excellent homolitical virtues, capable, if called, to do him abundantly more service than thou canst; yet these are past by, and he becomes a suitor to such a poor worthless thing as thou art; yea, and rejoices in his choice. Matth. 11:25. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Here is the triumph of free-grace.

5. And lastly, This justly increases the wonder, that ever Jesus Christ should desire and delight to dwell in such an unclean heart as thine, which, from the beginning, hath been the seat and throne of Satan, full of all uncleanness and abominations. O that ever Christ should make an overture of love to such a polluted soul! That he should chuse to erect his throne where Satan's seat was! Look into thine own heart, sinner, and think what can Christ see there to be desired? Thou knowest thy heart hath been a sink of sin, thy conscience like the common sewer, into which all the filth of thy life hath been cast; yet Christ passeth by thee, as thou liest in thy blood and filthiness, and casteth love upon thee, and desire towards thee, as it is, Ezek. 16:6, 8. All these things put together make it justly admirable, and astonishing in our eyes, that ever Jesus Christ, the Lord from heaven, should become an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners.

I. Use, for Information

Infer. 1. If Christ be such an earnest suitor for union and communion with the souls of sinners, then it follows, That sinners can justly charge their damnation upon none but themselves. Your blood must be upon your own heads; salvation by Christ is not only freely offered, but you are with great importunity persuaded to accept it. Christ offers you life, you chuse rather to die than accept it upon his terms; where now can your damnation be charged but upon your own wilful obstinacy? Hosea 13:9. O Israel, thy destruction is of thyself! Thou art the author of thine own ruin; I would have gathered thy children, saith Christ to Jerusalem, but thou wouldest not; your ruin, therefore, lies upon yourselves, and upon none beside. Indeed, if the ministers of Christ be negligent in their duty, they may come in as accessories to your destruction; but that is a poor relief to you; as for myself, I hope I may with Paul, take God to record this day, that I am free from the blood of all men. Now, consider what a dismal aggravation of your destruction will this be, that you perished by your own hands: this cuts off all plea and apology.

Inf. 2. Hence it also follows, That distressed sinners have no reason to question Christ's willingness to receive them, when their hearts are made willing to come unto him. It were no less than a blasphemous imputation

of insincerity to Christ himself, to question his willingness to receive broken-hearted sinners, after so many protestations as he hath made in the gospel, of his zeal and earnestness for their salvation; that scripture, John 6:37 puts it out of doubt, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." I know guilt breeds many fears and jealousies in the hearts of sinners; will Christ ever accept and receive such a one as I? Try him, soul, he hath said he will; let him have but the deliberate consent of thy heart to his terms, and then, if thou be rejected, thou wilt be the first soul in the world that ever met with a repulse from him.

Inf. 3. By Christ's earnest suit for the souls of sinners, you may estimate the invaluable worth, and precious nature of the soul of man. Were not the soul of a creature of great value, Jesus Christ would never be so deeply concerned about the winning and saving of it. Sinners have a vile esteem of their own souls, they will sell them for nought; but Christ knows their true worth, and his solicitude to save them is answerable to his estimation of them; he counts when he hath gained a soul, he hath gained a treasure. Therefore he pleads, woos and waits so earnestly and assiduously for the salvation of them. Two things speak the great value of the soul of man.

1. That it is a marriageable creature to Christ now.

2. That it is capable of glory with Christ hereafter.

1. It is a marriageable creature to Christ now, capable of espousals to the Son of God; upon which account it is that Christ so earnestly seeks its love, and sues for its consent. Now this is a dignity beyond all other creatures in heaven or earth; no angel in heaven, no other creature but the soul of man on earth is capable of espousals to Christ; it is a dignity above that of angels, for Christ took not on him their nature, and the hypostatical union is the ground and foundation of the mystical union. They are members indeed of Christ's kingdom, and he is to them a head of dominion; but this honour was never conferred upon angels to be members of his body, flesh, and bones, as the saints are, Eph. 5:30.

2. As the soul is capable of espousals to Christ on earth, so it is capable of glory with Christ in heaven throughout eternity, John 17:24. "Father, I

will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold the glory which thou hast given me." It hath a natural capacity of enjoying eternal blessedness which the souls of other creatures have not. And this will be the aggravation of hell-torments, that men capable of the highest happiness, should, as it were, receive that capacity in vain; but that which constitutes an actual right to the everlasting enjoyment of Christ in glory, is the soul's espousals to him here in the way of grace. Upon these two accounts it is, that Christ puts such a price upon them, courts their love so passionately; laments their loss so pathetically; and encourages his ministers to all diligence in persuading and wooing them for him with such abundant rewards, Dan. 12:3. Know then your own worth and dignity, neither pawn nor sell so precious a thing as thy soul for any thing Satan can set before thee by way of exchange for it; What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Inf. 4. Is Christ such an earnest suitor for union with sinners? then certainly, they are the enemies of Christ, and the souls of men, that any way endeavour to hinder or break off the match betwixt Christ and them?

Some there are that labour to create jealousies, and beget distastes and prejudices in the souls of men against Christ and his ways; men that bring up an evil report upon Christ, and strict religion, as that which will beggar them, and expose them to all the miseries of the world: Who instigated by Satan, whisper such stories into the soul's ear, whom Christ is wooing for himself, that the severity of religion will certainly extinguish all their joys and pleasures; they shall never laugh more, never be merry more; beside, it will expose all their comforts upon earth to hazard, their estates and lives must fall a prey to their enemies, and this is the estate in which Christ will jointer them in, if they consent to his terms: and that this is no groundless jealousy of their own, but that Christ himself hath openly declared as much; "That he that will come after him must hate father and mother, wife and children, yea, and his own life also." This is what they must expect as the fruit of their consent to Christ's proposals. But, O what will these men have to answer, and how will they stand before Christ another day, who are such professed enemies to his cross, and set themselves so directly in opposition to the great design Christ is driving on in the world! Is it not enough that you will not enter yourselves, but

you will hinder them that Would? Mat. 23:13. Thus carnal parents discourage their children, one relation another. But, to help souls under this discouragement, I will leave only this one caveat with them, That such seeming friends are their real mortal enemies, their words are poison to your souls: Satan hath fee'd them to do his work, hired their tongues for his service. But if the serious cares of salvation, and fervent love of Christ be in thy heart, thou wilt resolve, as Jerom did, 'If my father who begat me, and my mother who bare me, should hang about my neck with tears and entreaties, to keep me from Christ, I would fling off my father, and tread upon my mother, to go to Christ.'

To this head also belong all those scandals and offences which loose and careless professors cast in the way to discourage others from coming unto Christ; Wo to the world (saith Christ) because of offences, Matth. 18:7. Wo to the world, this will be their ruin and undoing; by this means such prejudices will be begotten in their souls against Christ and religion, as they will never be able to free themselves from. "But woe to them by whom such offence cometh; it were better a mill-stone were hanged about their necks, and they were cast into the bottom of the sea." Christians, look carefully to your conversations; for besides the evil effects of sin upon yourselves, you see the mischievous effects of it upon others. And thus we may understand those words, Cant. 2:7. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please." Roes and hinds are timorous creatures, the least crack of a stick will startle and fright them away; such are comers on toward Christ; young beginners in the ways of religion, how small a matter may damp and discourage them? O friend, you have sins enough of your own, bring not the sin and ruin of other men upon your account also.

Inf. 5. To conclude, How great is the blindness and ignorance of sinners, that need so much entreaty and importunity to be made happy? It is your ignorance, sinners, that makes all the gospel-importunity necessary; did you know your own misery, and see Christ in his necessity, suitableness, and excellency, all these persuasions might be spared; nay, you yourselves would become importunate suitors for Christ: He would not need to be twice offered: there is a conscience in every man and woman,

set there on purpose by the Lord to give them an alarm; but the alarm goes off for want of a spring, to wit, the knowledge of your sin and misery. Ah soul! didst thou but know who it is that sues for thy love, what the benefits of union with Christ are, thou wouldst answer his first call in such language as this: Lord Jesus, write down thine own terms; be they what they will, I am ready to subscribe them with the fullest consent of heart and will; and then, how soon would the match be made betwixt Christ and you! Yea, you would watch for, and hang on half a word of encouragement from Christ's mouth, as Benhadad's servant did on that word of Ahab, My brother Benhadad, 1 Kings 20:32, 33. There is no need of rhetoric to persuade a condemned malefactor to accept his pardon, a hungry man to sit down at a full table; but, alas! Sin is not felt, Christ is not known; therefore the one is not bewailed, nor the other desired.

II. Use, for Exhortation

In the next place, the point naturally leads us to an use of exhortation, to persuade sinners to embrace Christ's motion, subscribe his terms, and debate no more with him, but end the treaty in a cordial present consent; and so close up the match betwixt him and your own souls. How long sinner, wilt thou be at shall I, shall I? and thy will hang undetermined betwixt Christ and sin, bivious and unresolved in so great and deep a concernment? O that Christ's next overture might bring the matter to an issue! Why will you trifle and dally with him at this rate? There is, indeed, a treaty on foot betwixt Christ and you; but you may perish for all that; there is no conclusion or agreement made; Christ and you may yet part. The Lord help you therefore to ponder and deliberate, with all speed and seriousness, the terms propounded by Christ in the gospel; to count the cost, and yet not always to be deliberating neither, but to bring matters to an issue, and that, with all the convenient speed you can: in order whereunto, I will lay two things before you; weigh and seriously ponder them.

1. What are the advantages you will gain by Christ?
2. What is the most you can lose by your consent to his terms? and then bring thoughts to an issue.

First, Ponder well the advantages you will gain by Christ; these are so great and manifold, that it is impossible for me to enumerate or value them: it shall suffice in this place, to shew you one of those bunches of the grapes of Eshcol, that by it you may estimate the riches and fertility of that good land, settled upon you by Christ as a dowry or jointure; and these are four.

1. The payment of all your debts to the law.
2. An honour above angels.
3. An eternal inheritance in heaven.
4. A glorious and joyful presentation of you to the Father, in the great day, by Christ, as his spouse and wife.

1. The same day and hour you give your cordial consent to take Christ upon gospel-terms, that is to say, Christ with his yoke of obedience, and Christ with his cross of sufferings, all your debts to the law are discharged and paid. What have you been doing, ever since you came into the world, but running upon score to God, deeper and deeper every day? Oh, what a vast sum owest thou to his justice! and not able to pay one farthing. If thou consent not to Christ's offer, the bailiff and executioner, death and the devil, will shortly be upon thy back, and hurry thee away to that prison, from whence thou shalt not come until thou hast paid the last farthing, Mat. 5:25, 26. If thou consent to Christ's terms, thy debts are paid upon thy marriage-day, thy bonds cancelled, and thy discharge in heaven sealed; Rom. 8:1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ;" and the reason is given, ver. 4. In this, "That the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us that believe." But how in us? certainly the meaning is not that the *to credere*, the act of faith doth, as it is a work of ours, satisfy the demand of the law, and fulfil its righteousness; no, but it apprehends the righteousness of Christ, applies it, and makes it ours, and so "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us that believe." It is an ease, it is a comfort to be out of debt? Then embrace the offer of Christ; for after thy espousals to him, the law cannot touch thee by an act of condemnation; it goes to the husband, Christ; thou art discharged. Well then, resolve what to do: shall the debt run on and

increase till justice come to levy it upon you in hell-torments? Or will you accept of Christ and the riches of righteousness that are in him, and so be fully and finally acquitted from all your debts at once, and be able to lie down in peace, and enjoy your lives without slavish fear? He that owes nothing, fears no bailiffs, but may (as we use to say) whet his knife upon the compters threshold.

2. Your consent to Christ's terms, will advance you to an honour above and beyond the honour of angels. It is said, that the children of the resurrection shall be equal unto angels; and it is most sure, that in some respect their union with Christ advances them far above angels; for the apostle tells us, Heb. 1:14. "They are ministering spirits, sent forth for the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation:" as the great peers and nobles in a kingdom, count it no dishonour to perform their service to the heir apparent. The ministry of angels is a mystery which we little understand; but by it we receive great and manifold advantages, and it certainly puts a great deal of honour upon all the members of Christ.

3. Christ will not only pay all your debts, and exalt you to a dignity above angels; but in that day wherein you cordially consent to his terms he will entitle you to the most glorious inheritance purchased by his blood; "You shall be heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ," Rom. 8:17. Oh, what an inducement is here to close the match betwixt Christ and our souls! If I consent to take Christ upon gospel-terms, I shall thereby be entitled to all the glory that is in heaven; it shall be mine as truly as it is Christ's. It is true the glory of Christ will in some respects far surpass the glory of the saints; he will shine among them as the sun compared with the stars; but yet the glory which God gave him, that is, the communicable glory shall be truly theirs, as it is his, John 17:22. "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them." Tell my brethren (saith he) John 20:17. "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God." This, you shall gain also by closing this treaty with a hearty consent to Christ's terms and proposals.

4. If you will consider and Consent, you shall be presented by him to the Father, pure and spotless, with exceeding joy and gladness in the great day. This will be such a presentation of your persons to God as will make your hearts leap for joy to read what the scriptures speak about it. This,

methinks, should induce every soul, without further delay, to present himself, soul and body, cheerfully and willingly to Jesus Christ. For, (1) Christ will bring you in the great day to his Father, in the shining beauty of perfect holiness, not a spot or wrinkle upon your souls, Eph. 5:27. The blood of Christ perfectly washes off every spot of guilt; for then, the Spirit of Christ hath perfectly cleansed the soul from all the defilement and filth of sin; so that it shall come to God a pure and beautiful creature out of Christ's hand. (2.) This presentation will be made with the greatest honour and solemnity; we little think in what state and triumph Christ intends to bring the poorest believer to his Father, Psal. 45:14, Psal. 45:15. "With joy and gladness shall they be brought," &c. So Jude, ver. 24. "They shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy:" Joy running over joy, upon all hands; God himself will rejoice, that ever he created such a soul as hath sincerely bestowed itself upon Christ: Jesus Christ will rejoice that ever he shed his blood for that soul that now places his sole righteousness therein: the Holy Spirit will rejoice, that ever he came with a commission from the Father and the Son to draw such a soul to Christ, who hath obeyed his voice. The angels will rejoice with joy unspeakable, Luke 15:10. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." If the consent of any of your souls shall be this day gained to Christ; if the word you have heard this day shall send any poor soul hence to his closet, or into a corner, there to make his covenant with Christ, (for that is the way of making up the match with Christ) in that hour the news of it will be in heaven, and excite joy among the angels of God. Lay these and many other privileges together, which I want time to mention, but the scriptures will abundantly furnish you with them; and then consider what a rich bargain, what an advantageous match, Jesus Christ is for your souls.

Secondly, Upon the other side cast up the account, what you may lose by your consent to be Christ's; and whether these losses be sufficient to balance or preponderate the gain that comes by such a consent; that so your choice of Christ may be a deliberate and full choice, and you may never repent afterwards of the choice you have made. It is a rule in the civil law, *Non consentit qui non sentit*. He cannot consent that doth not think, understand, and deliberate: and this is the reason of so much flinching from Christ, and shameful apostasy in times of persecution;

men did not think of such sufferings and losses; they are mere surprisals to them. To prevent all such occasions of offence, our Lord deals candidly and openly with us, and tells us before-hand what are the worst things that may befall us for his sake, John 16:1, 2. "These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended: They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think he doth God service." But, ver. 4 he adds, "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them:" q. d. Remember yourselves in times of persecution, that all these things were propounded, considered, and consented to; they were the very terms you subscribed to me; had you not liked them, you might, at the everlasting damage and ruin of your immortal souls, have refused and rejected them. Now the things you are to balance with the gain of Christ, must by you be sorted into two ranks.

1. Things that must be parted with.

2. Things that may be parted with for Christ.

1. The things that you must part with, viz. your lusts, and all the vicious pleasures you have had in them; how much profit or pleasure soever they have brought you in, away they must go; they must be devoted to destruction and mortification, or you can have no interest in Christ, you must shake hands for ever with all your sinful courses and companions, Rom. 6:16. "His servants you are, to whom you obey." Be they as pleasant and profitable as your right hand or eye, they must be plucked out and cut off, Mat. 5:22, 30. Doth this sound harsh and unpleasant to your ears? Doth this cause the demur? O, consider, what it is to part with sin; it is but to part with the disease of your souls, and the instruments of your everlasting ruin. Which of you would not be glad to part with a fever, the stone, or dropsy? What is passion, but the fever of the soul? What is a hard heart, but a stone? What is covetousness and earthly-mindedness, but the insatiable dropsy of the soul? Now, if men would be glad to be rid of such dreadful diseases in their bodies, and to be restored to soundness, case, and health; how much more should you be glad to be rid of your corruptions, and have the rectitude, ease, and pleasure of your souls restored again? yea, instead of these impure, vicious, brutish pleasures you have taken in sin, you shall enjoy the pure, divine, suitable and

everlasting pleasures of holiness. Consider now, and accordingly make your choice, whether you will take the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, in exchange for the everlasting joys which are at God's right hand for ever.

2. There are other things which you may be called to part with, and give up for Christ. It is uncertain whether God may actually call you to part with your liberties, estates, relations, and lives for Christ: Many are never actually called forth to such sufferings; but because many are, and every one of you may be so called, you must realize them, ponder them, and subscribe those very terms, making full account of these things as if they were now before you, Luke 9:23. For so Christ hath propounded them: But then withal, weigh these troubles with the gain and advantages you shall have by them, and not singly and alone by themselves; for so Christ hath presented them to you, Matth. 19:28. "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Now, if you think such gainful troubles, such soul-enriching losses, be worth accepting for Christ's sake; then close the match with Christ, and bring the matter to a conclusion: Do not befool yourselves with a fond and groundless presumption that these things will never befall you. I fear many flatter themselves with such vain hopes; the Lord knows how soon these suppositions, at a distance, may be turned into realities before your eyes: You have much reason to expect them, and much more to embrace them, whenever Christ shall call you to them. This is the great work you have now to do; and really you cannot safely demur any longer; this matter must come to a conclusion, and the sooner the better. For you know, (1.) that your lives are immediately uncertain, and it is an unaccountable madness to let the great concern of your salvation lie one day or night at hazard; your breath is continually coming and going, and that which is going must at last be gone, James 4:14. Your souls hang over everlasting dangers by the single thread of that feeble breath which plays in your nostrils, and every disease is like the flame of a candle held under that thread; and can it either be safe or comfortable to delay so great a work as this, upon which all your expectations and eternal

blessedness depend? (2.) Not only your lives are hazardous and uncertain, but the enjoyment of the gospel, and all the opportunities and means of your conversion, are as uncertain as they. It is true, and to the glory of God be it acknowledged, we now enjoy the freedom and fulness of gospel-mercies: but where has God made any such settlement of these blessings upon you, as puts the enjoyment of them out of hazard? The rain is over, but yet the clouds may return after the rain; we are upon our good behaviour: if it bring forth the fruits of your conversion, well; if not, the ax lieth at the root of the tree, Matth. 3:10. And if God remove the gospel from among us (as our delays and triflings may provoke him to do) then the treaty is ended, and there is little probability that any thing further will be done betwixt Christ and you, Luke 13:25. (3.) Bring this matter to an issue with all due speed, because you are not capable to give one sound reason for a moment's delay of so great and weighty a concernment. Can you be safe too soon? Can you be happy too soon? Certainly you cannot be out of the danger of hell too soon; and therefore why should not your closing with Christ upon the terms propounded be your very next work? For certainly if the business, the main work and business of every man's life be to fly from the wrath to come, as indeed it is, Matth. 3:7 and to fly for refuge to Jesus Christ, as indeed it is, Heb. 6:18 then certainly, all delays are highly dangerous in such a business as this: the man-slayer, when flying to the refuge-city before the avenger of blood, when his heart was hot within him, did not think he could recover the city too soon. And now set all your own reason to work upon this matter; put the case as really it is: I am fleeing from wrath to come: the justice of God, and the curses of the law are closely pursuing me: is it reasonable that I now sit down in the way to gather flowers, or play with trifles? For such are all our other concernments in this world, compared with our salvation. (4.) Bring this treaty to an issue with all due speed, because most souls that perish, perish by delays; men think they have time enough before them, and that to-morrow will be as to-day, and so Satan gets part by part, what he had not confidence to demand in the whole lump. Most that perish under the gospel had convictions upon their consciences, and vain purposes in their hearts; but not bringing them to a speedy execution, that was their undoing; James 1:24. "He beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgets what manner of person he was." It is an allusion to a man that looks in the

morning into a glass, where he discerns a spot upon his face, and resolves with himself anon to wash it off; but some diversion or other falls in, other matters take up his thoughts, and so the spot remains all day, and he carries it to bed at night. O these delays are the undoing of millions! (5.) Delay not to close this treaty with Christ, because all delay increases the difficulty; and the longer you neglect, the more will your hearts be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, Heb. 3:13. Continuance in sin, and quenching of convictions, do insensibly harden the heart, and stiffen the will. Under the first convictions the heart is tender, the affections flowing: O if this advantage were apprehended and pursued, how soon might the work come to a comfortable conclusion! but after a while, those soul-affecting words, sin, Christ, heaven, hell, death, and eternity, will become words of a common sound. (6.) And lastly, beware of delays in this matter, because you can never expect a fitter and fairer opportunity and season for the dispatch of this great concernment, than, by the special indulgence of heaven, you enjoy this day, 2 Cor. 6:1, 2. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." You have now the wind and tide with you; if you will not weigh anchor now, you may lie wind-bound to your dying day. What advantages can you reasonably expect, which God hath not furnished you with at this day? You have the means of grace among you; you have liberty and freedom to attend on those means without fear. Say not, I have such or such troubles and encumbrances in the world; for you must never expect to be without them, except you, only, shall find the world another thing than all others find it. Have you health? O what a precious season and advantage is that? art thou sick! O what a spur is that! What is to be done must be done quickly.

III. Use, for Direction

But it may be some souls may plead ignorance, that they know not how to manage and transact so great a concernment with Christ, and therefore set not about it; and it is very likely there may be much truth in that plea. For the help and assistance of such souls, I will gather up the sum of what hath been, and ought to be further spoken about this matter, in the following directions; so that nothing but your unwillingness and slothfulness shall remain to hinder you.

Direct. 1. If ever you bring the treaty betwixt Christ and your souls to a

happy issue and conclusion, you must, as before was noted, sit down and count the cost, Luke 14:28 it will be vain else to engage yourselves in the profession of religion: it is not Christ's design to draw you under a rash inconsiderate engagement, and so to reap more dishonour by your apostasy and hypocrisy than ever he shall have glory by your profession. No, he would have you foresee and seriously bethink yourselves of all the outward troubles and inconveniences you may afterwards meet with for his sake. You are to embark yourselves with Christ, and abide with him in storms as well as in halcyon days; you must follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, Rev. 14:4. There is no retreating after engagement to Christ: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," Heb. 10:38. It is eternal death by that martial law of heaven, to run from Christ's colours in the day of battle. Well then, retire thyself into the innermost closet of thy soul; sit quiet and patiently there, until thou hast debated this matter fully with thy own thoughts, and hast balanced the good and the evil, the profits and losses of religion; for want of this the church is filled with hypocrites, and hell with inconsiderate and rash professors; the more we deliberate the better we shall conclude.

Direct. 2. Having debated the matter over and over in thy most sedate and serious thoughts, let not Satan discourage thee from casting thy soul at Christ's feet with a hearty consent to all his terms, for want of such and such qualifications as thou canst not find in thine own soul. It is usual for Satan to suggest at this time, the want of greater sorrow and humiliation for sin; that the soul hath not lain long enough under the humbling work of the law; that the aggravations of its sins have been such, that there is no hope of acceptance. Free thy soul from these snares of Satan, by the consideration of this unquestionable truth; that Christ expects from thee no more humiliation than what produceth such a hearty deliberate consent as thy will is now to give; and such a consent once gained, no aggravation of sin is pleadable against the duty of believing.

Direct. 3. Distrust not the sincerity of Christ in those gracious offers he makes unto coming souls. Be satisfied, he speaks his very heart in them to thee; the devil labours to sow jealousy and beget suspicions in the hearts of poor convinced sinners, that they will not find such a welcome entertainment with Christ as he seems to promise them in those

encouraging scriptures, Mat. 11:28, 29. John 6:37 but that something else lies hid in those scriptures, as a mystery which they understand not, and so by shaking the assenting act, labours to hinder the accepting act of faith. This is a case as common as it is sad. The Lord help poor souls to avoid this snare, lest instead of honouring Christ, by a resolved adherence to him, they make him a liar, and impute insincerity to the God of truth: For he that believeth not hath made him a liar.

Direct. 4. Look up to God for power to enable you to come to Christ in this supernatural and difficult work of faith. Do not think faith is of the growth of thine own heart; "No man can come unto me, (saith Christ) except my father which hath sent me, draw him." There is a legal spirit working under evangelical pretences in many souls; they look within them to find that which is quite above them. The apostle points you to the fountain of faith, in Eph. 2:8. "It is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God". It is one of the greatest difficulties in the world to believe. For if the power of God must be owned as the cause of every new degree of faith in the greatest believers in the world, as is plain, Luke 17:5. "The apostles said unto the Lord, increase our faith;" how much more is the production of faith itself, and the first vital act thereof to be ascribed to the Almighty Power of God?

Direct. 5. Keeping thine eye of expectation upon that Almighty Power, pray and plead with the Lord assiduously and importunately for the exerting that power upon thy soul; and give not over thy suit, until thou feel that power coming upon thee. The time of believing is a time of earnest pleading thine own danger and necessity; and the Spirit of the Lord, improving them, will abundantly furnish thee with pleas and arguments to enforce this suit. Such as these; (1.) Lord, I have thy call and invitation; yea, I have thy command to encourage me to believe; it is not presumption, therefore, in thy poor creature, to come after thou hast invited and commanded me; hadst thou not encouraged me, I durst not have moved towards thee: Lord, whose word is it? 1 John 3:23 is it not thine own? This makes my faith an act of obedience. (2.) Yea, Lord, I have thy promise, as well as thy command, made upon no other condition but my coming to thee. Blessed Jesus, hast thou not said, John 6:37. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out?" An invitation is much,

but thy promise is more. (3.) O my God, I have not only thy command, making it my duty to believe, and thy promise to encourage me to that duty, but I have the examples of other sinners that came unto thee long ago, and thou didst not reject them: nor do I abuse these examples in drawing encouragement from them; for it was thy very design in recording them, that they might be so many patterns to all that should hereafter believe on thee, 1 Tim. 1:16. (4.) O my God, I am shut up under a plain necessity; I have no other way to take: thus stands the case with me, I am beaten off from all other refuges; there is no help for me in angels nor in men, in duties or self-righteousness; in thee only my soul can find rest. I am shut up to thee as to the only door of hope, Gal. 3:23 here I must speed or perish; my soul is burdened and wearied; I know not how to dispose of it, but into thy hands; nor where to lay the burden of my guilt, but upon thee: If I miss here, I am gone for ever. (5.) Lord, I am willing to renounce and abandon all other hopes, refuges, and righteousness, and to stick to and rely upon thee only. Duties cannot justify me, tears cannot wash me, reformation cannot save me; nothing but thy righteousness can answer my end; I come to thee a poor naked creature, saying as the church, Hos. 14:3. "Ashur shall not save us, &c for in thee do the fatherless find mercy." Thus plead it with God, and still remember you are pleading for life, yea, for your eternal life.

Direct. 6. Labour to make a resolved adventure upon Christ, amidst all those encouragements, let the issue be what it will; resolve to venture, though you have not the least degree of assurance that you shall be accepted and pardoned. This is that brave and noble act of faith, which carries the soul to Christ: much as Esther came to the King, "Yet will I go into the king; and if I perish, I perish," Esth 4:16. It pities me to think how the faith of the fervent love of Christ alone should be enough to save a sinner, and make him justified without any act of belief; but you see faith is another matter. O there are great difficulties and mighty wrestlings in the work of believing: it is a great matter for a poor convinced sinner, in the face of so much guilt and vileness, and amidst such manifold damps and discouragements from Satan, to cast and adventure himself upon Christ, and that upon such self-denying terms: but the pinch of necessity will bring the soul to this, for now it reasons with itself as the lepers did, 2 Kings 7:4, 5. If we go to the camp of the

Assyrians, we can but die; and if we abide here, we must certainly die: thus here, if I sit still in the state of nature, and still continue demurring, and delaying, my damnation is unavoidable; to hell I must go: and if I cast myself upon Christ, I can but be rejected. But he hath said, He will not cast out those that come unto him: in this way of faith there is a possibility of salvation, yea, there dawns from it a strong probability: this therefore is my only way; To him I will go, and if I perish, I perish.

Direct. 7. Never measure the grace of God, nor the mercy of Christ, by the rule of your own narrow conception and apprehensions of him; but believe them to be far greater than your contracted and narrow understanding represents them to you. Our casting of the pardoning power and mercy of God in the mould of our own thoughts, disfigures and alters them, so that they look not like themselves, but with a very discouraging aspect upon our souls; by this, Satan keeps off many a soul from coming to Christ: the Lord knows how to forgive thee, though thou scarce knowest how to forgive thyself for the injuries thou hast done against him. That is a very considerable scripture to this purpose, in Isa. 55:7, 8, 9. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Man lies under a double misery, one by reason of affliction, another by reason of transgression; concerning both these, God's thoughts are not as ours, but far above what we can think: Either (1.) with simple cogitation: i.e. we cannot think such thoughts to others, under misery in themselves, or under transgression against us, as God doth towards us. Or (2.) by way of reflective comprehension; i.e. we cannot conceive what those thoughts of God are towards us, when we are under misery or sin, just as he thinks them; still his thoughts will be above ours, as the heavens are above the earth. Such is the altitude of heaven above the earth, that the vast body of the whole earth is but a small, inconsiderable point to it; the highest cedars, mountains, clouds, cannot reach it: God's thoughts are infinite, ours finite; his thoughts are continued, ours interrupted and at a stand; his are immutable, ours changeable; his are intuitive, ours discursive: therefore

never measure his by your own; the thoughts of pardoning grace in him, are rich, plenteous and glorious; but when our unbelieving hearts have practised upon them, they are quite another thing. Thou sayest, how can such a wretch as I obtain mercy? Thou knowest not, but the Lord knoweth. O if we could take in such a proper idea and apprehension of the mercy and goodness of God, as he hath given of them himself, in Exod. 34:6, 7 this would bring you to Christ with much encouragement.

Direct. 8. Be not discouraged in the work of faith, though no peace or comfort should come in by the first act of it: nay, though there should be an increase of trouble for the present; the first saving act of faith certainly puts you into a state of peace, but it may not presently produce the sense of peace; you may, after you have believed and really closed with Christ, meet with some discouragements which may make you question whether Christ has received you or no, whether he has any love for your souls or no? Yet hold on, whether comfort come or not; though Christ and comfort are inseparable, yet Christ and the sense of comfort are not so: think not that all your troubles shall be over as soon as ever you believe, because it is said, Heb. 4:3. We which have believed do enter into rest: That scripture speaks of a state of rest, and not of the present or continued sense of rest. The woman of Canaan, in Mat. 15:26, 27 did really believe in Christ, yet met with sore trials under the first act of her faith; yet this took her not off from the work of faith; but rather quickened and inflamed her the more; she was glad of a word from Christ, and she expected deeds. O but the words were discouraging; it is not meet to take the children's bread, and give it to dogs; yet this beats not off her faith; the dog belongs to the family, and crumbs to the dog. O woman, saith Christ, great is thy faith. If you resolve for Christ, you must not be discouraged; a resolute faith overcomes all difficulties. You pray, you believe, and yet no comfort; well, the vision of peace is for an appointed time, at the end it will speak, and not lie.

Direct. 9. In your treating with Christ, have a care of all secret reserves that will spoil the treaty betwixt Christ and you; If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer, saith David: If there be but a reserve of one lust, that reserve will break off the treaty: be honest with Christ, and say not of any sin, the Lord be merciful to me in this; and be sure

there be no secret purpose or reserve in thy heart for a retreat in time of danger; but embark thyself with Christ for storms and tempests, troubles and afflictions, as well as peace and prosperity. Christ bestows himself wholly upon you, and he expects the same from you: give up all, or you will get nothing from him.

Direct. 10. Close up your treaty with Christ by a solemn covenant with him; engage yourselves to be the Lord's: "One shall say, I am the Lord's: And another shall subscribe with his hand to the holy One of Israel." Here you have two things to do: (1.) To give yourselves up to Christ, according to that expression, 2 Cor. 8:5. They gave themselves to the Lord. Make your soul and body, time and talents, henceforth to be dedicated things to his service. (2.) Take Christ in both his natures, and in all his offices to be yours; and to this covenant you are to stand to the last breath, whatever times or troubles shall come. This consent of thy heart to be Christ's, this choice of thy will in taking him for thine, is but the echo of Christ's choice of thee; and I would rather have such an evidence of my interest in him, than a voice from heaven to assure me that Christ is mine.

SERMON VII - REVEL. 3:20

Behold I stand at the door and knock; [if any man] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

If any man*.

THIS expression extends the gracious offer of Christ, and brings in hope to every hearer. It is a proclamation with a Si quis, if any man; as if Christ should say, I will have this offer of my grace to go round to every particular person; if thou, or thou, or thou, the greatest, the vilest of

sinners, of what quality or condition soever, old or young, profane or hypocritical, will hear my voice, and open to me, I will come into their souls. And hereby all objections are obviated; as for example, I am the greatest of sinners, saith one; I have been a self-cozening hypocrite, saith another; I have resisted grace too long, and doubt the time of mercy is past, saith a third. The ground of all these, and a thousand more objections, is taken away by the gracious extent of Christ's offer in the text: for who is he that can limit where Christ doth not? This gives us a seventh profitable and comfortable Observation, which is this,

Doct. 7. That Jesus Christ will not refuse to come in to the soul of the vilest sinner, when once it is made highly willing to open to him.

If any man open, I will come in to him. It is not unworthiness, but unwillingness, that bars any man from Christ: thousands have missed of Christ by their unwillingness, but Christ never put off one soul upon account of its unworthiness; Christ is not the sale but the gift of God; you come not to make a bargain, but to receive a, free gift: faith is a marriage with Christ, wherein nothing but our hearty consent is expected; so runs the strain of the whole Scriptures, Isa. 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, (i.e. no merit, no worthiness of his own) let him come." Behold the free grace of Christ to the vilest and unworthiest of sinners. So Rev. 22:17. "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely." And, in the very phrase of my text, he speaks again, John 7:37. "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." It is very observable, throughout the whole gospel, that Christ never made any objection against any soul that came to him upon the account of its sinfulness and unworthiness; but all the complaints of Christ are still upon the account of their unwillingness. So in his complaint over Jerusalem, Luke 13:34. "I would, but you would not;" so again, John 5:40. "You will not come unto me, that you might have life." The complaint is still upon their unwillingness. In stating this point, I shall doctrinally discourse these two things:

First, What it is to be truly willing to receive Jesus Christ.

Secondly, How it appears that they who are so, shall certainly be received,

and graciously accepted of him.

First, What it is to be truly willing to receive Jesus Christ; for this is meant by opening to him. Now this implies, and involves in it, many great and weighty things.

1. It implies, and necessarily includes, the right understanding and true apprehension of gospel terms and articles: these must be known, pondered, and duly considered, before the will can savingly open, in an act of consent, to Christ's offer. I desire this may be especially observed, because multitudes are mistaken and deceived about this thing: he that doth not consider, doth not consent; you must exercise your understandings upon the terms and articles of Christianity, or else your consent is rash, blindfold, and unstable. This in Luke 14:31 is called consulting; the consent of faith is the result of many previous consultations and debates in the mind; the soul that comes to Christ must take up religion in his most sedate and serious thoughts; turn both sides of it, the dark as well as the bright side of religion, to the eye of his mind; balance all the conveniences and inconveniences, losses as well as gains. If I open to Christ, this I shall gain, but that I must lose; I cannot separate Christ from sufferings, Christ will separate me from my sins; if I seek him, I must let them go; if I profess Christ, providence will one time or other bring me to this dilemma, either Christ or earthly comforts must go. It is necessary therefore that I now propound to myself what providence may, one time or other, propound to me; he hath set down his terms, Mat. 16:24. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." This self-denial deserves serious consideration; for Christ extends it to natural self, righteous self, and civil self; and requires that I give up my life, my liberty, my estate, my relations, and my own righteousness, as hard to be parted with as any of the former. I must take up my cross, that is, the sufferings and troubles God shall appoint for me, and which I cannot avoid or escape without sin; and I must follow Christ, follow him whither soever he goes. I know not what religion may cost me before I die; all this it hath cost others; and there is no bringing down Christ's terms lower than he hath laid them. I must come up to them, they will not come down to me: if I like them not as Christ hath left them, the treaty between him and me is ended; Mat.

10:37, 38. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me, and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Where, by worthiness, we are not to understand the meritoriousness of these acts, but the necessary qualification of the will, and due qualification of a comer unto Christ; these previous consultations and debates in the mind prepare and enable the will to make a serious and well-advised choice of Christ; and for want of this, there are such swarms of hypocrites and apostates in the world.

2. It implies such a sense of misery in us, and of the necessity and excellency of Christ, as determines the will to the choice of him, notwithstanding all those difficulties and troubles which have fallen, or can fall under consideration and debate in the mind. When the soul sees that in Christ which preponderates all sufferings, all losses, all reproaches, &c. and then determines, I will have Christ, though I sacrifice all that is dear to me in the world for him, this is to be truly willing to open to Christ. It is true, the enjoyments of this world are understood by Christians as much as other men; they have a feeling sense of the sweetness and comforts of earthly enjoyments; their souls have as much affection to the body as other men; they understand the charming language of the world, and their dear relations in it, as well as others; only they see a greater necessity of Christ, and a greater worth in Christ than they do in these things. You read, Lam. 1:11 that in the famine of Jerusalem they gave their pleasant things for meat to relieve their soul; jewels, bracelets, gold, silver, any thing for bread: they understood the worth of those things, knew the price and cost of them; but away they go to preserve life. So it is here, no earthly enjoyment, of what value soever it be, hath such an excellency in it, such an absolute necessity of enjoying it as Christ hath.

Object. But oh! saith the poor soul, who can do this? I am willing to have Christ, and to come up to every term he hath laid down in the gospel; I am willing to part with every sin, and to endure any suffering for Christ: But oh! I tremble to think, if it should come to a prison, to a stake, to an actual separation from all the comforts and relations in the world, what shall I do for strength to go through such hard and difficult work as this!

Here is the great rub in the way of many souls; they find a willingness, but fear the want of strength.

Answ. How or where you shall find strength to endure and suffer these things for Christ, is not the question now before you: God will take care for that, and it shall be given you in that hour, and so others have found who have had the very same fears you have. I say, the question is not whether you be able, but whether you be heartily willing? Christ asks but your will, he will provide ability: The greatest believer in the world cannot say, I am able to suffer this or that for Christ; but the least believer in the world must say, I am willing, the Lord assisting me, to endure and suffer all things for his sake. And this is the second thing included in opening to Christ.

3. The third thing which perfects and consummates the whole act, is an entire choice of Jesus Christ upon all those terms prescribed by him; the entireness of the choice, without halving or dividing, excepting or reserving, making the consent full and effectual. There is a twofold consent of the will to Christ.

(1.) One partial, and with exception.

(2.) The other entire, and without any reservation.

(1.) There is a partial consent, which is always hypocritical, defective, lame, and ineffectual; thus the hypocrite consents to the offer of Christ: He is really willing to have the pardons of Christy, and the glory purchased by Christ; but to part with his beloved lusts, and to give up his earthly enjoyments, that his will cannot consent to.

(2.) There is a full and entire consent of the will, called, A believing with all the heart, Acts 8:34. Now this integrity and fulness of the will's choice, is that which closeth the match betwixt Christ and the soul, and frees a man from the danger of hypocrisy. And there are three things which make the consent to, and choice of Christ complete and full.

1. When we give up all we are and have to him.

2. When we derive and draw all we want from him.

3. When we are ready to deny any thing for his sake.

1. We do then heartily consent to be Christ's, when we give up all we are and have to him; so that after this choice of Christ, we look upon ourselves thenceforth as none of our own, but bought with a price, to glorify God in our body and soul, which are his, 1 Cor. 6:19, 20. Soul and body are all that we are, and both these parts of ourselves do now pass, by an act of our own consent, into the Redeemer's right; we are not to have the dispose of them; that belongs to him that purchased them. You know in all purchases, property is altered: You did live as your own, followed your own wills, lusts, passions, were under the dominion, and at the beck of every lust; but now the case is altered; Tit. 3:3, "We ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures." So many lusts, so many lords. But now the case is altered, we have given ourselves to Christ, no more to be swayed this way or that against his word, and the voice of our own consciences. Thus our souls and bodies are his, hallowed dedicated things to Christ, temples for God to dwell in. And then all other things follow of course; if I am the Lord's, then my time, my talents, and all that I have are his.

2. As you must give up all to Christ, so we must derive and draw all we want from him; else your choice of Christ is not entire and full: God hath stored up in Christ all that you want, a suitable and full supply for every need; and made it all communicable to you, 1 Cor. 1:30. "Who of God is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption." All the believer's fresh springs are in Christ. Have I any difficult business to do that requires counsel? then I must repair to Christ the fountain of wisdom: Am I under any guilt? then I must repair to Christ for righteousness: Is my soul defiled by corruption? then must I go to Christ for sanctification: Do I groan under troubles of soul or body, temptations, afflictions? &c. then must I relieve myself by the faith and hope of that complete redemption, and final deliverance, procured by Christ from all these. If you consent to be Christ's, you must not look for justification, partly upon his righteousness, and partly upon your own graces and duties; but must make mention of his righteousness, even of his only. If there be but one conduit in a town, and not a drop of water to

be had elsewhere, then all the inhabitants of that town repair thither for water. In the whole city of God there is but one conduit, one fountain, and that is Christ; there is not one drop of righteousness, holiness, strength or comfort to be had elsewhere. Then we fetch all from Christ, when we live upon him, as the new-born infant doth upon the mothers breast.

3. Then is our consent to, and choice of Christ entire and full, when we are ready to deny, give up, and part with any thing we have for his sake; reckoning nothing to be lost to us, which goes to the glory of Christ. How dear soever our liberties, estates or lives are to us, if the Lord have need of them, we must let them go. Thus you read, Rev. 12:11. "They loved not their lives unto the death." These three things shew saving faith to be another manner of thing than the world generally understands it to be; and it is impossible for any mans will to open to, and receive Christ, upon terms of such deep self-denial as these, until there be,

1. A conviction of our sin and misery.
2. A discovery of Christ in his glory and necessity.
3. The drawing power of the Spirit upon the soul.

1. Conviction of our sin and misery makes these terms of religion acceptable; poor sinners stand debating with Christ, excepting and objecting against his terms, until the Lord hath shaken them by conviction over hell, made them to see the dreadful danger they are in; and then the next cry is, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Acts 2:37. q. d. Prescribe any means, impose upon us the greatest difficulties, we are willing to comply with them.

2. Nor will souls ever comply with those terms of the gospel, until a discovery hath been made to them of Jesus Christ in his glory and necessity. When a man feels his wants, and sees a complete remedy, his will then complies and bows readily and freely; the convinced sinner sees a full and suitable supply in Christ for all his wants, a complete Saviour, in whom there is nothing defective, but in all respects according to the wish of a sinner's heart, 1 Cor. 1:24.

3. To all this must be superadded the powerful drawings of the Spirit, in the virtue whereof the will comes home to Christ, John 6:44. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." When these things are past upon the soul, then it hears Christ's voice, his powerful call, which breaks asunder all the ties and bonds betwixt a man and his lusts; a man and his earthly enjoyments; and without these things the will is unpersuadable to comply with the difficulties and severities of religion. This is the first thing, what the opening of the door, or consent of the will to receive Christ is.

Secondly, The next thing to be opened in order is, How it appears that Jesus Christ will not refuse to come into the soul of any sinner, be his sins or unworthiness ever so great, when once he is made heartily willing thus to embrace and receive Christ upon his own terms. Oh, sinner! what good tidings are these to thy soul, that Christ will not disdain to be in union and communion with thee, as vile as thou art, if thy will stand thus open to him! The tidings are sweet, and I hope thou wilt find them as sure and certain, as they are sweet and comfortable, when thou shalt have seriously pursued and pondered the following evidences.

Evidences

Evidence 1. The truth of this sweet assertion clearly evidenceth itself from the form and manner of gospel-invitations. They are designedly put into large, general, free, and most extensive terms, to assure sinners that Christ will not be shy of the worst sinner in the world, thus made willing to embrace him; they are so framed on purpose to anticipate or take away all objections from sinners. No other condition is put in the gospel, but this only, Art thou heartily willing to take Christ upon his own terms? The offers of Christ are extended to all that thirst and desire after him, John 7:37 to the greatest of sinners, upon this only condition, that they be willing and obedient, Isa. 1:18, 19. "Go preach the gospel to every creature: He that believeth shall be saved," Mark 16:15, 16. It is extended to all nations, "For in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free," Col. 3:11. If there be any poor soul of any quality or condition whatsoever, under the cope of heaven, whose will is wrought up to a hearty compliance with the terms of the gospel, Christ will not be shy of coming

into that soul, though it hath been never so vile and abominable; the heart of a Mary Magdalen, which had been an habitation of devils; the soul of a Saul, a bloody, raging persecutor, will make as delightful habitations for Christ, as the soul of the most civilized person in the world, when once the will is thus opened.

Evidence 2. The truth of this assertion further appears from the encouraging promises made by Christ unto all who are thus made willing to come unto him. All the promises with one mouth, assure the willing sinner of a welcome with Christ; so doth that glorious promise, to which so many thousand souls have been beholden for encouragement and help at their first coming to Christ; John 6:37, 38. "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out: For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Note here, (1.) That this is not a promise made to them that are already in Christ, that they shall never be cast out by apostasy, or final desertion; but it is a promise made to coming souls, to such as are moving towards Christ, under great discouragements, fears and tremblings. When a poor sinner looks to Christ, sees his fulness and suitableness, and sees the pinching need and want of him; O, saith he, that I had an interest in him, though I should beg my bread in desolate places! But looking into his own heart, and seeing such a heap of guilt and unworthiness there, then saith he, how can I think that ever Jesus Christ will come into such a heart as this? These are the persons upon whom this promise casts an encouraging aspect. (2.) And because the fears of such poor creatures are double to the fears that others have, Christ hath put a double negative into this promise for the soul's encouragement; "I will not, in no case, or at any hand, cast out such a soul as this." (3.) And to put all out of doubt, he doth not only assure the soul that he will not, but condescends to give it the reason why he will not cast it out, ver. 38. "I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." As if he should say, this was the very errand upon which I came down from heaven; it was my great business to receive all that were made willing to embrace me; for this I had my Father's commission, Isa. 61:1. "To preach good tidings to the meek; and to bind up the broken-hearted; and to comfort all them that mourn." I cannot be faithful to the trust committed to me by my Father, should I

shut the door upon such souls. How can Christ comfort the soul that mourns, but by opening his arms of mercy to receive it? If Christ should say to the convinced mourning sinner, hold thy peace, soul, I will give thee riches, honours, and pleasures in the world; but as for me, thou canst not have union with me. I say, this would never comfort the heart of a convinced sinner; it is Christ, and none but Christ, can quiet it. Like unto this, is that testimony and promise made on purpose for the encouragement of willing souls, Acts 10:44 "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." This you see is a truth confirmed by the testimony of all the prophets, who foretold what his gracious readiness to receive poor broken-hearted sinners should be; and sure they neither did, nor could conspire to deceive the world. These gracious assurances and promises cut off all pleas against faith, from the greatness of sin; and why should we except, where God hath not excepted? Had Christ said, all sinners of such a size and degree may come unto me, but let all others stand back, the case had been otherwise; but this promise assures us, that all the sincerely willing, shall be truly welcome to Jesus Christ. Moreover, these universal promises take away all fear and doubt of presumption in coming to Christ. That is the case of many a poor soul. I am afraid I am running out of despair into presumption; I doubt I am an unbidden, and therefore shall be an unwelcome guest to Christ. All this is prevented and cut off by these sweet universal terms inserted on purpose in these promises for our encouragement. That is the second evidence of this truth.

Evidence 3. The willingness of Christ to receive the willing soul, how many and great soever its sins and unworthiness be, appears from the actual grants of pardon and mercy, even to the vilest sinners that ever were upon the earth, when they thus came unto him. Here you see how the waters of free-grace rise higher and higher. An invitation is much; a promise of welcome is more; but the actual grant of mercy is most satisfying of all. Come on, poor trembling soul, do not be discouraged, stretch out the small weak arms of thy faith to that great and gracious Redeemer; open thy heart wide to receive him; he will not refuse to come in. He hath sealed thousands of pardons to as vile wretches as thyself; he never yet shut the door of mercy upon a willing, hungering soul. It is a

great matter to have the way beaten, and the ice broken before thee, in thy way to Christ. If thou wert the first sinner that had cast his soul upon Christ, I confess I should want this encouragement I am now giving thee; but when so many have gone before thee, and all found a welcome beyond their expectation, what encouragement doth this breathe into thy trembling, discouraged heart to go on and venture thyself upon Christ, as they did? What an example have we in Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33 from ver. 3 to 12. An idolater, one that used enchantments and divinations, familiar spirits, shed innocent blood in the streets of Jerusalem! A man might rake the world, and hardly bring to sight a viler wretch, a greater monster in sin and wickedness: yet his heart being broken, and his will bowed, this man found mercy. How great a sinner was Mary, that came to Christ in the house of Simon the Pharisee, Luke 7:39 so notorious a sinner, that Simon took offence at Christ for suffering so vile a wretch to come into his presence. "If this man were a Prophet, (saith he) he would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that touched him, for she is a sinner". Yet Mary's heart being broken for sin, and made willing to accept of a Saviour, what a gracious demonstration of welcome did Christ give her, and to all other sinners a singular encouragement in her example? Once more, you have an eminent example of the abundant welcome of another sinner to Christ, who owned himself for the greatest of sinners; a persecutor, a blasphemer, injurious; but saith he, I obtained mercy, 1 Tim. 1:16. And the example of his gracious entertainment with Christ, is recorded on purpose for an encouragement unto all that should hereafter believe. How many thousands are now in hell that never stood guilty of greater enormities than the Corinthians did? Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, such were some of them; yet sanctified, washed, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. If ever Christ would have shut the door of mercy upon any; if ever he would have been coy and shy of coming into any souls, certainly these were the souls he would have disdained to come near. O what a demonstration is here of that comfortable point before us! That Christ will not refuse to come into the soul of the vilest sinner, when once it is made heartily willing to open to him.

Evidence 4. A further evidence of this comfortable truth shall be taken

from the scriptural-resemblances of the abundant grace of God, and riches of mercy in Christ, towards all broken-hearted and willing sinners. There are some chosen resemblances and excellent emblems, which bring down the grace of God before the eyes of men; amongst which I will single out three glorious resemblances of free-grace, chosen by his wisdom on purpose for the encouragement of poor drooping sinners. A resemblance from the heavens, a resemblance from the sun, and a resemblance from the sea; all such as the wisdom of men and angels could never have chosen for such a purpose as this is.

1. A resemblance from the heavens, those vast extended heavens that cover and compass this earth. What an inconsiderable spot is the whole terrestrial globe, to those high and all-surrounding heavens? And yet these heavens are not at so vast a distance above the earth, as the pardoning grace of God is above the guilt, yea, and the very thoughts of poor sinners. For, of the pardoning grace of God to penitent and willing souls, that precious scripture speaks, Isa. 55:8, 9. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." O, saith the soul, I cannot think God will ever have mercy on such a wretch as I: why, saith he, ver. 8. "My thoughts are not your thoughts," and it is well they are not; but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." You cannot take the height, nor sound the depth of my pardoning grace. That is one emblem, from the unconceivable height of the heavens above the earth.

2. Another is taken from the sun in the heavens, a creature of admirable power and virtue. You know, that anon this part of the world will be the throne of darkness; the sable curtains of the night will be spread over all the beauties of this part of the earth, and it may be in the morning a thick fog or mist will cover it; thick and dark clouds may darken the heavens: But, behold this glorious creature the sun chasing before him the darkness of the night, breaking up the mists and clouds of the morning, scattering the dark and thick clouds of heaven; they are all gone, and there is no appearance of them: Just so, saith God, shall it be with thy sins, and thy cloudy fears arising out of sin, Isa. 44:22. "I have blotted out

as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." Thy soul is beclouded, thy fears have bemisted thee, so that thou canst not see the grounds of thy encouragement; but my grace shall rise upon thee like the sun in the heavens, and scatter all these dismal clouds both of guilt and fear, and make a clear heaven over thee, and a clear soul within thee. "Unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing under his wings," Mal. 4:2.

3. Another resemblance you have from the sea, the great abyss, that vast congregation of waters, whose depth no line can fathom: Veer out as much line as you will, you cannot touch the bottom. To this unfathomable ocean the pardoning grace of God is also resembled, Micah 7:18, 19. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage: He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." If the loftiest pyramid, or highest mountain were cast into the depth of the sea, it would never be seen more by the eyes of men. God hath on purpose chosen these emblems of his grace, to obviate that common discouragement of Satan, taken from the greatness and aggravation of sin; and, in that case, thou art to make use of them, and bless the Lord for them: He never designed them for encouragement to sin, but, for encouragement to repentance and faith. That is the fourth evidence of the truth before us.

Evidence 5. The truth of this conclusion will also evidently appear from the innate characters and properties of the grace and pardoning mercy of God towards penitent and hungering sinners. Now there are three glorious characters of Divine grace, which do all assure such sinners of welcome to Christ, whatever they have been or done. The grace of God shines forth in scripture in three illustrious characters.

1. As superabounding grace.
2. As free grace.
3. As grace exercised with delight.

1. It is superabounding grace. Waters do not so abound in the ocean, nor light in the sun, as grace and compassion do in the bowels of God towards broken-hearted and hungry sinners, Isa. 55:6. "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The compassions of our God inserted that word on purpose to relieve poor souls, fainting under the sense of their abounding iniquities. Here is abundant pardon for abounding guilt; and yet, lest a desponding sinner should not find enough here to quiet his fears, the Lord goes yet farther in the expression of his grace, Rom. 5:20. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." It overflowed all the bounds, it rose quite above the high-water mark of sin and guilt: but these overflowings of grace run only through that channel of all grace, Jesus Christ, to broken-hearted and obedient sinners.

2. The grace of God to such souls is free; every way free; it is the very design of the gospel to exhibit it in this its glory. It costs you nothing but acceptance; it is free without merit; yea, free against merit. You can deserve nothing of God, therefore his grace is free without merit; yea, you have deserved hell as often as you have sinned against him, and so it is free against merit. If a pardon were to be purchased by us, we want a stock for such a purchase; neither can we borrow from men or angels a sufficient sum for such a purchase; blessed be God therefore, that it flows freely to us without money and without price, Isa. 55:2.

3. Grace glories in another property also, which is very encouraging to the soul of a drooping sinner, viz. That it is the darling attribute which God greatly delights to exercise. The tender mother draws not out her aching breast with such delight to her hungry crying child, as the Lord doth his mercy and compassion to broken-hearted and hungry sinners. In this attribute, and in this property of it, his people therefore admire him, Micah 7:18. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." You cannot put Jesus Christ upon a more delightful employment, than to bind up the wounds, and set the broken bones of poor convinced humbled sinners. Let every such soul come to Christ and welcome; for he greatly delights in such employments.

Evidence 6. Such sinners need not doubt a welcome reception with Christ; for should he reject, and turn back such as these, then none can have the benefit of his blood; and, consequently, it must be shed in vain, as water spilt upon the ground. The blood of Christ is invaluablely precious, and it cannot be lost; it were a desperate impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God to think so; yet so it must be, if broken-hearted and willing souls be rejected and turned back from him. There are but two sorts in all the world, viz. hardened, and broken-hearted sinners; willing and unwilling sinners. The whole world falls into these two ranks. As for impenitent, hardened, and obstinate sinners, it is certain they can have no benefit by the blood of Christ; they shall die in their sins; the gospel cuts them off (so continuing) from all expectation of pardon and mercy. Now there is but one sort of sinners more left in the world, and they are convinced and humbled sinners, who are made heartily willing to receive Christ upon his own terms; who stretch forth the hands of their desires to him, and pant after an interest in him. Should Christ reject these also, who then shall receive the benefit of his blood? did Christ die in vain? or can the counsels of heaven prove abortive? No; fear not therefore to go to Christ, thou broken-hearted sinner, thou poor panting, longing soul; fear not, he will not cast thee out.

Evidence 7. Moreover, for the encouragement of all such souls, mercy and pardon are designed for, and bestowed upon, the greatest and vilest of sinners; to enhance and raise the glory of free grace to the highest pitch. God picks out such sinners as you are, on purpose to illustrate the glory of his grace in and upon you: he knows that you, to whom so much is forgiven, will love much, Luke 7:47. Ye that have done so much against his name and glory, will excel others in zeal and obedience, 1 Cor. 15:9, 10. You will go beyond others in service for God, as you have done in sinning against him. All these things laid together make up a full demonstration of the point, That Jesus Christ will not refuse to come into the soul of the vilest sinner, when once it is made heartily willing to open unto him: which was the thing to be proved; and now our way is open to the application of the point, which will be exceeding useful for information, exhortation, and consolation.

I. Use, for Information

Infor. 1. Learn hence, what an invaluable mercy it is to enjoy the gospel in its light and liberty, which is so great a relief to the distressed consciences of sinners.

Here only that balm is to be found that heals your spiritual wounds. The gospel hath been a low-priced commodity in England: The Lord pardon the guilt thereof to us. Ah! brethren, if you were in the heathen world with your sick and wounded consciences, what would you do? There are no Bibles, ministers, or promises, not a breath of Christ, or the blood of sprinkling, which are the true and proper remedies of sick souls. That is a pitiful cry, Micah 6:6. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Behold here the anguish of a distressed, sinburdened conscience; it would give up any thing in the world for peace and ease; they would cast their children, their dearest children, their first-born into the burning flames, if that might be an atonement for their sins. O the efficacy of conscience! and the misery of an unrelieved conscience! but the gospel which you enjoy leads you to the fountain of pardon and peace, Isa. 53:5. "By his stripes we are healed." The voice of the gospel is peace, peace to every one that believeth; a rational peace, founded upon the full satisfaction of Christ, Eph. 1:7. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Here you see justice and mercy kissing each other; God satisfied, and the sinner justified: for conscience demands as much to satisfy it, as God demands to satisfy him; if God be satisfied, conscience is satisfied. "O blessed are the people that hear this joyful sound," Psalm 89:15. And, doubtless, it is a joyful sound to every convinced humbled soul. "Beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring good tidings, that publish peace." It is a gospel worthy of all acceptation, 1 Tim. 1:15. It brings with it a fulness of blessings among the people. O England! O Dartmouth! Provoke not thy God to extinguish this blessed light. Great is our wantonness, and ominous is our barrenness and ingratitude. "Yet a little while the light is with you, walk whilst ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he

goeth," John 12:35. Should God blow out this light, whither will ye go? Who shall pour in balm to your distressed bleeding consciences?

Infor. 2. Hence, in like manner it follows, that the greatness or heinousness of past sins is no bar to believing and accepting Christ upon gospel-terms. Let no sinner be dismayed by the atrocity and heinousness of sins past, from coming unto Jesus Christ for remission and peace. I am aware what mischievous use Satan makes of former sins to discourage souls from the work of faith. By heaping them together, he raiseth up a mountain betwixt Christ and the distressed soul; but behold this day Christ leaping over these mountains, and skipping over these hills. Could this objection be rolled out of the way, sinners would go on in hope: but, certainly, if God hath given thee a broken heart and a willing mind, the greatness of thy sin needs not discourage thee from believing. For (1.) thou hast sufficient encouragement from the sufficiency of the causes of pardon, whatever thy particular enormities have been. There is a sufficiency in the impulsive case, the free grace and mercy of God, Exod. 34:6, 7. Mic. 7:18, 19. Isa. 55:7, 8, 9. It is well there is mercy enough in God to heal and cover all; and there is no less sufficiency in the meritorious cause of pardon, the blood of Jesus Christ, which taketh away all sin, 1 John 1:7. John. 1:29. And it must needs be so because of its divine blood, Acts 20:28. Neither is there any defect in the applying cause, the Spirit of God, who hath already begun to work upon thy heart, and is able to break it and bow it, and bring it home fully to Christ, and to complete the work of faith upon thee with power. Thou complainest, thou canst not mourn nor believe as thou wouldst; but he wants no ability to supply all the defects of thy repentance and faith. Well then, if the mercy of God be sufficient to pardon the sin of a creature; if the blood of Christ, the treasures and revenues of a king, be able to pay the debts of a beggar, if the Spirit of God, who works by an Almighty power, be able to convince thee of righteousness, as well as sin, John 16:9. I say, if all these three causes of forgiveness be sufficient, every one in its kind, the first to move, the second to purchase, and the third to apply; what hinders but thy trembling conscience should go to Christ, and thy discouraged soul move onward with hope, in the way of believing, whatever thy former enormities have been? (2.) If God raise glory to his name, out of the greatness of the sins he pardoneth, then the greatness of sin can be no

discouragement to believing; but so God doth; he raiseth the glory of his name from the multitude and magnitude of the sins he pardoneth, Jer. 33:8, 9. "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and will pardon their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me; and it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good I do unto them. And they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." As a cure performed upon a man labouring under a desperate disease; it magnifies the physician, and spreads his name far and near. The devil envies God this glory, and thy soul this comfort; and therefore scares thee off from Christ, by the aggravations of thy sins. David was willing to give God the glory of pardoning his great iniquities, and with that very argument moves him for a pardon, Psal. 25:11. "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great." You see there are strange ways of arguing in scripture, which are not in use among men; this is one, "Lord, pardon my sin, for it is great." He doth not say, Lord pardon it, for it is but a small offence; no, but pardon it because it is great; and the greater it is, the greater glory wilt thou have in pardoning it. And then there is another way of arguing for pardon in the scripture, which is peculiar; and that is, to argue from former pardons unto new pardons. When men beg their pardon one of another, they use to say, I never wronged you before, and therefore forgive now; but here it is quite otherwise; Lord, thou hast signed thousands of pardons heretofore, therefore pardon me again. Such is that plea, Numb. 14:19. "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven them from Egypt even until now." (3.) As great sins as those that now stare in the face of thy conscience, have been actually forgiven to men, upon their humiliation and closing with Christ. Poor sinners, under trouble of conscience, are apt to think there is no sin like theirs. God forbid I should diminish and extenuate sin; but certain I am that free grace hath pardoned as great sinners as thou art, upon their repentance and faith. What think you, had you had a hand in putting Christ to death, would not that sin have been as dreadful as any that now discourages you? Yea, certainly you would have thought that an unpardonable sin; and yet behold that very sin was no bar to their pardon when once they were pricked at their heart, and made willing to come to Christ, Acts 2:36,

37, 38. (4.) If it be the design and policy of Satan to object the greatness of your sins, to prevent the pardoning of them; then certainly it is neither your duty nor interest to plead it to the same end the devil doth, to say a confederacy, and join with your mortal enemy in a plot against the honour of Christ, and salvation of your own souls. Take heed what you do, seal not Satan's conclusions. Do you think it is a small matter to be confederate with the devil? Certainly this is his design, he magnifies your sins on purpose to discourage you from faith. While you were secure and carnal, the devil never aggravated, but diminished your sins to you; but now the Lord hath opened your eyes, and you are come near to the door of hope, mercy, and pardon, now he magnifies them, hoping thereby to lame and weaken thy faith, that it shall not be able to carry thee to Christ. (5.) If thy sin be really unpardonable, then God hath somewhere excepted it in the gospel-grant. He hath somewhere said, The man that hath committed this sin, or continued so many years in sin, shall never be forgiven: but now in the whole gospel there is but one sin that is absolutely excepted from the possibility of pardon, and that such a sin as thy sorrows and desires after Christ do fully acquit and clear thee from the guilt of. This sin indeed is excepted, Mat. 12:31. "But the sin against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven." This is that which the scripture calls a sin unto death. Let apostate professors, transformed into persecutors, scoffers, and haters of godliness, and the professors of it, look to themselves; the dreadful symptoms of this sin seem to appear upon such. But the humbled, thirsty soul after Christ, stands clear of the guilt of that sin. (6.) If there were no forgiveness with God for great sinners, then great sinners had never been invited to come to Christ. The invitations of the gospel are no mockeries, but things of most awful solemnity. Now such sinners are called and invited under the encouragement of a pardon. Consult Isa. 1 from ver. 10 to 17 and see the horrid aggravations of thy people's sins; and yet at ver. 17, 18 you may read the gracious invitations of God, with conditional promises of a plenary remission. So in Jer. 3 from 1 to 13 what a sad catalogue of sins, with their horrid aggravations, do you find there? and yet it is said, ver. 12. "Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, return thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful." (7.) If thy sins had not been capable of remission, God would never have given thee conviction and compunction for sin, nor

have drawn forth the desires of thy heart in this manner after Christ. He hath tacked remission to repentance, Acts 5:31 a blessing to gracious desires and hungerings, Mat. 5:6 There is therefore hope, that when God hath given thee one, he will not long withhold the other. This very wounding of thy heart by compunction, and drawing forth thy will by inclination, shews that remission is not only possible, but even at the door. (8.) And lastly, Let this be thine encouragement, (whatever Satan or thine own heart suggests to discourage thee) that great sinners are moving in the way of repentance and faith to a great Saviour, who hath merit enough in his blood, and mercy enough in his bowels, to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, Heb. 7:25. The Lord open to the eyes of your faith that rich treasury of free-grace, Exod. 34:6, 7 and give you a sight of that plenteous redemption and forgiveness that is with God, Psal. 130:4, 7 that you may not at once cast reproach upon the most glorious attribute of God, impeach the precious blood of Christ, and stab your own souls with a death-wound of desperation; which is that the devil intends, and the whole strain of the gospel-designs to prevent.

Infor. 3. If the vilest of sinners stand as fair for pardon and mercy, upon their closing with Christ by faith, as the least of sinners do: then, certainly, the pardon and salvation of sinners is not built upon any righteousness in themselves, but purely and only upon the free-grace of God in Jesus Christ. Do not think God hath set the blood of Christ to sale, and that those only are capable of the benefits of it, who have lived the strictest and soberest lives. No; though sobriety, morality, and strictness in religious duties be things commanded and commended in the gospel; yet no man by these things can purchase a pardon for the least sin, Rom. 11:6. "And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." See how these exclude one another: thus Titus 3:5. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." No man can satisfy God by any thing he himself can do or suffer; not by doing, for all we do is mixed with sin, Job 14:4 and that which is sinful can be no atonement for sin. All we do or can do, is a debt due to God, Luke 17:10 and one debt cannot satisfy for another. Nor yet by suffering, for the sufferings awarded by the law are everlasting; and to be ever satisfying is never to satisfy: so then by the works of the

law shall no flesh living be justified in his sight. The saints in all generations have fled to mercy for remission, Psal. 130 ult. The two debtors, Luke 7:43, 44, 45 though there were a vast difference in the debts; yet of the lesser, as well as of the greater, it is said they had nothing to pay. Nothing but the satisfaction of Christ can quit your scores with God.

Infor. 4. If the grace of Christ be thus free to the greatest of sinners, then it is both our sin and folly to stand off from Christ, and draw back from believing, for want of such and such qualifications, which we yet find not to be wrought in our hearts. Poor convinced souls think, O if they had more humility, tenderness, love to God, spirituality of mind, this would be some encouragement to believe; but because they have no such ornaments to dress up their souls withal, they are not fit to go to Christ. Now to remove this great mistake, let two things be considered.

1. That such a conceit as this crosses the very stream of the covenant of grace, where nothing is sold, but all freely given. This is the very spirit of the covenant of works; fain we would find something in ourselves to bring to God, to procure his favour and acceptance; but the gospel tells us we must come naked and empty-handed, to be justified freely by his grace, Rom. 3:24. We must be justified as Abraham was, who believed in him that justifieth the ungodly; Rom. 4:5. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." The meaning is, to him that worketh not in a law-sense, to procure pardon and acceptance by and for working. Go then, poor sinner, unto God through Christ, and tell him thou hast nothing to bring him; thou comest not to bring, but to receive: Lord, I am a vile sinner, I have nothing to plead but thy mercy, and Christ's merit. This is the spirit of the gospel.

2. By standing off from faith, for want of these qualifications, you invert the settled order of the gospel: by putting consequents in the place of antecedents, and antecedents in the place of consequents. It is as if a man should say, if I were cured of such and such diseases, then I would go to the physician; alas, could you otherwise procure the healing of your corruptions, or the gracious qualifications you speak of, you would have no need to go to Christ at all. Nothing is required of us in our coming to

Christ, but such a sense of, and sorrow for sin, as makes us heartily willing to accept Christ, and subscribe the terms on which he is offered in the gospel.

Infor. 5. Behold the admirable condescension of Christ, that he would come into the heart of the vilest sinner, and not disdain to take his abode in that soul which hath been the seat of Satan, where he hath ruled, and every unclean lust hath been harboured!

There are two things wherein the admirable condescension of Christ appears. (1.) In taking union with our nature after sin had blasted the beauty of it. This was a marvellous stoop indeed, and justly admired by the apostle, Phil. 2:7. "He made himself of no reputation, and was made in the likeness of man." Yea, "God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," Rom. 8:3. But (2.) it is justly admirable in our eyes, that Christ should also take union with our persons, and take his habitation and abode in our hearts, after Satan and sin had so long inhabited and defiled them; that he should accept those members as instruments of his service; that very tongue to praise him that had blasphemed him, &c. yet so he is willing to do, and commands us to deliver them up to him, Rom. 6:19. "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." One would have thought Jesus Christ should have said, vile wretch, Satan hath had the use and service of thy soul and body, from the beginning to this day; thy memory hath been his store-house, thy mouth his shop, thy will his throne, and all thy members his tools and instruments to sin against me; thou hast been a creature dedicated to Satan, and to him thou shalt go. No; but the merciful Lord declares his willingness, if thou wilt open thy soul to receive him, to cleanse it by his Spirit, and make it his temple to dwell in. O admirable grace!

Infor. 6. Lastly, How just and inevitable will their damnation be, who consent not to the necessary and reasonable terms of the gospel, which is the only point on which Christ and their souls part for ever.

The terms required by the gospel are every way equal and reasonable. If a gracious prince will bestow a pardon upon a traitor, upon this condition,

that he lay down his arms, acknowledge his offence, and list himself into his prince's service, and he shall refuse so to do, how just and unpitied would his destruction be? And what else doth God require of thee, but only this? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," Isa. 55:7. And as the damnation of such is just, so it will be inevitable; for, if there be no way to glory but by Christ, as you know there is not, Acts 4:12. "Neither is there salvation in any other." And if there be no way to Christ, but by accepting him upon these very terms, as it plainly appears from Luke 14:26 there is not; what then remains but inevitable damnation to all that come not up to the terms of the gospel? If you think not Christ a good bargain, with all the sufferings, losses, and reproaches that attend him, your mouths will be stopped; no plea will be left you in the great day. You refused a fair offer, when it was seasonably and graciously made you by the gospel, and now you must expect no more such offers to eternity. Thy blood, sinner, be upon thine own head; the freeness and importunity of the tenders of grace will then only serve to illustrate and clear the righteousness of God in thy condemnation.

II. Use, for Exhortation

In the next place, the point naturally leads me to a vehement persuasive unto all sinners, of what rank or size soever they be, to hearken to the voice of Christ, who takes them all within the compass of his gracious invitation in the text, saying, If any man open, I will come in. Let all sorts of sinners bless God for the extensiveness of this invitation, and that they find themselves by it, as yet, within the reach and compass of the arms of a merciful Redeemer; and that there is nothing wanting to secure their salvation, but the hearty consent of their wills to the reasonable and necessary terms of the gospel. Look over the whole book of God, and you shall there find but one case absolutely excepted from the possibility of forgiveness; but one wound absolutely incurable, of which Christ speaks, Mat. 12:31, 32. And what may be the reason that this only is an incurable wound? Certainly it cannot be because the malignity of this sin exceeds the meritorious and pardoning virtue of the blood of Christ; but rather, because there is no sacrifice appointed by the Lord for it. God never

designed that the blood of Christ should be an expiatory sacrifice for that sin, as the apostle plainly speaks, Heb. 6:4, 5, 6, 7. All other sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto men, saith Christ; that is, they are capable of forgiveness, upon sincere and actual repentance and faith; yea, they have been actually pardoned unto many: now the greater any man's sins have been, the greater need he hath to hasten to Christ for pardon. There are some of you greater sinners than others; for though no sin be venial, light and trivial in itself, yet compared one with another, there is a vast difference found betwixt them in the weight and aggravations of them. Now, I will labour to shew you by what rules men are to estimate the greatness and aggravations of sin; and then, to convince you that the greatest of sinners stand yet fair for mercy as well as the lesser, and sometimes much fairer. "Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," saith Christ, Mat. 22:31. Now the rules to estimate the aggravations and greatness of sin by, are these:

1. There be sins of infirmity, committed out of weakness; and there are crying sins in the ears of the Lord. Of the former sort, sins of infirmity, you read, Gal. 6:1 where it is called a being overtaken in a fault. Here is no premeditation, nor deliberate consent, but a surprize: these go not to the account of gross and heinous enormities, called in Scripture, crying sins, such is the sin of oppression, Hab. 2:10, 11. "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." The meaning is, that the injustice and oppression which men have used in raising their own houses, shall cry in the ears of the Lord for vengeance. The stone in the wall shall say, I was digged out of the quarry, hewn, and laid here by the unrewarded labours of the poor Mason; and the timber out of the beam shall say, I was hewn, squared, and placed here by the unrewarded hands of the poor Carpenter. This is a crying sin; so also is the sin of murder, when our hands have been defiled with innocent blood. This makes a dismal cry to heaven; Gen. 4:10. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." A sin that makes a horrid outcry in both worlds at once; in heaven, and in the sinner's conscience. Such also is the sin of unnatural lusts. The sin of Sodom made a cry which came up to heaven, Gen. 18:20. "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous." Compare these sins with the sins of common infirmity, which come by way of involuntary surprize, and what

vast odds will be found in the weight and aggravations of them?

2. You find in Scripture a great difference put betwixt sins committed against the clear shining light of knowledge in the sinner's conscience, and sins of ignorance, which are committed for want of knowledge. Christ himself puts a great difference betwixt them, Luke 12:47, 48 and so doth the apostle, James 4:17. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin." Sin with a witness!

3. There are single acts of sin, and continued or repeated acts of sin; sins committed after convictions, promises, and resolutions. Now there is not so much of guilt in a single act of sin as there is in a repeated and continued course of sin, called, Deut. 29:19. "The adding of drunkenness to thirst;" and Isa. 30:1. "Adding sin to sin." For, as it is in numbering, so it is in sinning; if the first figure be 1, the second is 10, the third 100, the fourth 1000; and every addition makes a greater multiplication. O what a dreadful reckoning will there be for the consciences of poor sinners!

4. Contrivers and studiers of sin are always in Scripture placed in the first rank of sinners. The best servant God hath in the world may be surprised by the deceitfulness of sin, against the gracious bent and resolution of his soul; but the contrivance and plotting of sin is quite another thing; therefore it is said of the wicked, Job 15:35. "They conceive mischief, and bring forth vanity, and their belly prepareth deceit." This sin, like the foetus in the womb, hath its time of conception, growth, and birth; and all this by the deliberate consent of the naughty heart and will, which fosters and cherishes it.

5. There are ring-leaders in sin, and single personal sins, which spread no farther than ourselves: a ring-leader in sin, is in Scripture reckoned amongst the greatest sinners; so, Rev. 2:14. "Thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel." Thus Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, made Israel to sin. There is the same difference betwixt these and single personal sins, as there is betwixt a chain-shot, and a single bullet. Mind this, you that have induced others to sin by your counsel or example.

6. There are sins in which men glory and take pleasure; and sins for

which men groan and mourn. Now, the more pleasure any man takes in sin, the greater doth the sin arise in its aggravation. We read of some, Job 20:12. "In whose mouths wickedness is sweet, and they hide it under their tongue." That is, they draw a great deal of contemplative delight before and after the commission of sin, as well as in the commission of it. It is bad enough to sin and sigh, to sin and weep; but to sin and boast, to sin and make a mock of sin, what a prodigious way of sinning is this! O sinner! what a heart hast thou, that canst play and sport with that which grieves God, crucified Christ, and which, without deep and sound repentance, will damn thine own soul!

7. The more bonds of restraint any man breaks asunder to commit sin, the greater and more aggravated always that sin is in the sight of God. There be some persons upon whom God hath laid more restraints to keep back their souls from iniquity, than he hath upon others. The more mercies he hath bestowed upon you, the more restraints from sin. So many mercies, so many ties, Jer. 2:5, 6 especially spiritual mercies; as light in your minds, pardons sealed to your consciences, love manifested to your souls. Such also are your own vows, promises, and resolutions; Jer. 2:20. "Thou saidst, I will no more transgress. Didst not thou promise me", saith God, more care and circumspection for time to come? And such are all the examples and warnings God hath given us by his judgments upon others, 1 Cor. 10:11. These things put an accent upon sin, and make it out of measure sinful.

And now my friends, what have I been driving at all this while, in opening the greatness and aggravations of sin? The design of all this is to shew you the indispensable need of repentance, and faith, to carry you to Christ.

Object. But I am the person upon whom these crying aggravated sins are found. You tell me of going to Christ; alas! there is no hope of mercy for such a wretch as I am! There it sticks. Poor sinners think it is to no purpose, they had as good go on in sin; for they conclude, there is no hope for them.

Answ. Come sinners, give me leave to tell you, you have a text before you, that clears the way of your duty and salvation at once; If any man, be he

what he will, be his sins never so great, yet if he hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, saith Christ. There is mercy in Jesus Christ, for thee who art guilty of crying sins: for thee, that hast sinned against light and knowledge: for thee, that hast added drunkenness to thirst; for thee, that hast contrived sin with deliberation: for thee, that hast induced others to sin by counsel or example: for thee, that hast taken pleasure in iniquity, and made a sport of sin; yea, and for thee also, that hast broken asunder the bonds of mercies, vows and warnings, provided thou wilt now hear the voice of Christ, and thy will open to him with a hearty firm consent, Isa. 55:4. You are great and heinous sinners; but I shew this day a great and Almighty Saviour, one that is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, Heb. 7:25. There is a sacrifice laid out and appointed for these sins. O bless God for that! they are no where excepted from the possibility of forgiveness. Nothing but the impenitency of thy heart, and obstinacy of thy will, can bar thee from a full and final pardon. JESUS CHRIST can save thee to the uttermost. Say not within thyself, Can the virtue of his blood extend itself to the remission of this or that sin? He can save to the uttermost. Look round about thee to the uttermost horizon of all thy guilt, and Christ can save thee to the uttermost that the eye of thy conscience can discern, yea, and beyond it too; but then thou must come unto him. You speak of the greatness of sin, and you have cause to have sad thoughts about it; but, in the mean time, you consider not, that your unbelief, by which you stand off from Christ, your only remedy, is certainly the greatest of all the sins that ever you stood guilty of against the Lord. This is the sin that binds the guilt of all your other sins upon you. Let me therefore address myself, (1.) To you who cry out of the greatness of sin that discourages you from going to Christ. (2.) To lesser sinners, who because they are clear of great enormities, see not their need of Christ.

1. This exhortation speaketh to you, whose consciences are seared with the horrid and hideous aggravations of your sins, by reason whereof your own misgiving hearts, assisted by the policy of Satan, discourage you from all attempts to gain Christ and pardon, in the way of repentance and faith. Let me, at this time, hint three or four considerations to you, by way of encouragement.

(1.) The sparing goodness of God, till now, gives some encouragement, that God may have a reserve of mercy for so great and vile a sinner as thou art. O what a mercy is it, that thy life hath been spared hitherto! Many of thy companions in sin are beyond hope and mercy, whilst thou art left. I confess, this is no sure sign of God's gracious intention to thee, unless his goodness and forbearance do lead thee to repentance: Then the gracious intention of God, in prolonging thy life, would evidently appear. But, however, it is in itself a very great mercy; because, without it, no spiritual mercy could be expected.

(2.) It is matter of encouragement and hope, that though your disease be dreadful, yet it is not desperate and incurable. The text takes it within the compass of mercy: O bless God for that, If any man, &c.

(3.) As great sinners as you have been have found mercy, 1 Tim. 1:16 and God would have it to be recorded for your encouragement. If now the Lord shall make thy heart to break, and thy will to bow, whatever thy sins have been, they shall not bar thee from mercy and forgiveness. But if thou resolve to go on in sin, or sit down desponding or discouraged, and wilt not come in at the invitation and call of Christ, then thy wound is incurable indeed; and there is but one way with thee, thy mittimus is already made for hell; and that scripture in 1 Cor. 6:9 will tell thee whither thou art going. But God forbid that this should be the issue of Christ's gracious invitations to thee, and forbearance of thee. Seeing mercy is tendered to any man that will accept it upon Christ's terms, exclude not thyself when he hath not excluded thee.

2. I will close up this use of exhortation to another sort of persons, who are not of the notorious, infamous rank of profane sinners, but their lives have been drawn more smoothly through a course of civility. These have as great need to be pressed to repentance and faith, as the most notorious sinners in the world. These are a generation that bless themselves in their own eyes, and thank God with the Pharisee, Luke 18:11. They are "not as other men." They acknowledge conversion to be the duty of the profane; that such sinners as I last dealt with stand in apparent need of it. But, as for themselves, they scarce know where to find matter for repentance; nor do they feel any need of Christ. Now, I would lay three considerations before such persons, to convince them that their case is as sad and

hazardous, yea, and in some respect, more hazardous than the state of the most notorious sinners in the world; and that a change must also pass upon them, or else it had been good for them they had never been born.

Considerations

Consideration 1. Let the civilized part of the world lay this thought close to their hearts, That, though their sins be not so gross and horrid to appearance as other men's are, yet, continued in, they will prove as mortal and destructive as those greater abominations of other men. No sin, absolutely considered, is small. Every sin is mortal and damning without Christ, Rom. 6 ult. The wages of sin is death. It is no great odds, if a man be killed, whether it were by a broad sword, or by a small penknife. The least sin violates the whole law, James 2:10. "He that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all." The least transgression of the law pulls down the guilt and curse of the whole law upon the sinner's head. And this is your misery, that you are out of Christ, and stand under the rigorous terms of the first covenant. Moreover, the law of God is violated grossly and externally; or spiritually, and more internally. Thus every unchaste thought is adultery: And the very inward burning of malice and anger in the heart is murder. Now, if the Lord shall bring the spiritual sense of the law home to your consciences, as he did to Paul's, Rom. 7:9 you will certainly give up that plea, and you have not so much need of conversion as other sinners have. There are sins of greater infamy, and sins of deeper guilt. There may be more guilt in those sins that are stifled in thy heart, and never defamed thee, than there may be in some sins that make a louder noise in the word.

Consid. 2. You are guilty of one sin (how civil and blameless soever your lives are) which is certainly more great and heinous than any outward act of sin can ordinarily be, and that is, your trusting to your own righteousness, as the Pharisees did, Luke 18:9. "He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Here is an idol of jealousy set up in the room of Christ. It is true, this sin makes not so loud a noise in the world, raises not such a dust as the sins of profane ones do. But certainly it is as abominable in the eyes of God as the sins that stink so much in the nostrils of nature. Civilized persons, thus trusting to their own civility, and neglecting Jesus

Christ, will be one day put into the van of that wretched crew that are going to hell; a portion with unbelievers, as the scripture speaks.

Consid. 3. Lastly, it hath been always found a more rare and difficult thing to convince and bring home to Christ the civilized part of the world, than it is to convince and work upon the profane part of it, Matth. 21:31. "Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Publicans were reckoned the vilest sort of men, and harlots the worst sort of women: yet, either of these were easier to be brought to Christ than self-righteous Pharisees. Well then, away with your own vain and idle pretensions, that your case is safer and better than others. By what hath been said, it evidently appears, that you stand in as much need of Christ as the most infamous sinners in the world do.

III. Use

This point winds up in encouragement to every willing and obedient soul, whom the Lord shall persuade to comply with the call of the gospel, whatever his former rebellions have been. There are some whose hearts the Lord hath touched with a deep sense of their sin and misery, and of the all-sufficient remedy that is in Christ; but the sense of former rebellions appals and daunts them; they cannot hope for any acceptance with him. Here is good news for such souls; Christ is at the door, and former rebellions are no bar to him, provided there be now a hearty compliance with his voice; I will come unto him. A glorious promise, comprising five inestimable benefits and mercies in it. (1.) This is the most glorious work of God that ever was, or can be wrought upon the heart of a poor sinner, to open it by repentance and faith, and put Christ into the full possession of it. The power of all the angels in heaven, ministers on earth, duties and ordinances, cannot effect this; this is the peculiar work of God, 1 Cor. 1:30. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus." Look, as it were the marvellous work of God to unite our nature unto Christ, by an hypostatical union; so it is no less a marvellous work of God to unite our persons to Christ by a mystical union, to prepare the soul as a habitation for Christ, and give him the possession of it. (2.) This coming of Christ into the soul is the very foundation of all our hopes for glory; until this be done, we are without hope. But in the same hour Christ comes into the soul, a solid foundation of the hopes of glory is laid in that

soul, Col. 1:27 "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." I know the unregenerate world is full of hope; but their hopes are built upon the sand. Union with Christ is the steady foundation on which the hopes of heaven are laid. (3.) I will come unto him; that is, to dwell in his soul for ever, never to leave him more; therefore (Eph. 3:17) he is said to dwell in our hearts by faith; not sojourn for a night, but abide there for ever. Nothing can separate Christ and that soul, Rom. 8:35. Thy soul shall never be an habitation for Satan any more. When Christ comes in, he saith, as of the temple, "Here will I dwell for ever." (4.) This coming in of Christ entitles the soul to all spiritual privileges, 1 John 5:12. "He that hath the Son, hath life:" and, 1 Cor. 3 ult. "All is yours, for ye are Christ's." (5.) This is the highest honour that ever God put upon a creature, I will come in to him. O, how should the soul feel itself advanced by such an honour as this! What, to be the living temple of Jesus Christ! for Christ to dwell, and walk in thy soul! as it is 2 Cor. 6:16. I tell you, this is an honour beyond and above the honour done to angels.

And, how near art thou to all these blessed privileges in the day that thy heart is wounded for sin! Thy thoughts become solicitous about union with Christ, and thy will begins to bow and yield after a serious debate of the terms of the gospel in thy most solemn thoughts. Now is the door half open, and Christ ready to make his first entrance into thy soul. God forbid any thing should now hinder the completing of so great work.

SERMON VIII - REVEL. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; [if any man hear my voice,] and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

IN the former sermons, Christ's free and general invitation to sinners hath been considered; in the next place we are to take into consideration the principal means or instrument by which the heart of a sinner is opened to receive Christ; and that is not by the native power of his own will, not by the alone efficacy of the gospel preached, but by the voice of

Jesus Christ, which opens the will, and makes the persuasions of the gospel effectual. If any man, hear my voice.

Hearing is either external or internal; for the soul hath its ear, as well as the body. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," Rev. 2:17 i.e. He that hath a spiritual ear to perceive and judge the voice of the Spirit by. And it is a sore judgment when God denies such an ear to the soul, Isa. 6:9. "Go tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not." Spiritual hearing is the work of the inner man. And though we have many auditors, yet, in this sense, no more hearers than believers. Words of sense do in scripture connote affections. This hearing of Christ's voice implies not only the receiving of the sound of the gospel into the external organ; but it notes the work of the understanding, which by the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat, Job 12:11. And the work of the affections, which receive the truth in love, 2 Thess. 2:10. It also implies the obedience of the soul to what we hear. We cannot be said, in this sense, to hear what we obey not. Our minds may be delighted with the pleasant air and melody of the gospel, and yet it is all one as if we heard it not, when obedience doth not follow hearing, Ezek. 33:32. "Thou art unto them a very lovely song, &c. for they hear thy words, but they do them not." But in this place it especially signifies the vital sound of Christ's efficacious internal voice, which is the principle of spiritual life to the souls of dead sinners; according to that expression of Christ, John 5:25. "Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live."

From hence the eighth Observation will be this,

Doct. 8. That no man's will savingly and effectually opens to receive Christ, until the spiritual quickening voice of Christ be first heard by the soul.

Now, touching this almighty spiritual voice of Christ, by which the hearts of sinners are effectually opened, six things must be explained in order.

1. The divers sorts and kinds of Christ's voices.

2. The general nature of this internal voice.
3. The innate characters and special properties of it.
4. The objects to whom it is directed.
5. The motives inducing Christ to speak to one, and not to another.
6. The special effects wrought and sealed by it upon every soul that hears it.

First, We will speak of the divers sorts and kinds of Christ's voices. I am here only concerned about two, viz.

1. His external.

2. His internal voice.

1. There is an external voice of Christ, which we may call his ministerial voice in the preaching of the gospel. The scriptures are his word, and ministers his mouth, Jer. 15:19. He that heareth them, heareth Christ.

2. There is also an internal energetical voice of Christ, consisting not in sound, but power: and betwixt these two, there are two remarkable differences. (1.) The external or ministerial voice of Christ is but the organ or instrument of conveying his internal and efficacious voice to the soul; in the former he speaks to the ear, and in or by that sound conveys his spiritual voice to the heart. (2.) The external voice is evermore ineffectual and successful, when it is not animated by that internal spiritual voice. It was marvellous to see the walls of Jericho falling to the ground at the sound of rams-horns; there was certainly more than the force of an external blast to produce such an effect; but more marvellous it is, to see at the sound of the gospel, not only the weapons of iniquity falling out of sinner's hands, but the very enmity itself out of their hearts. Here you see is a voice in a voice, an internal efficacy in the external sound; without which the gospel makes no saving impression.

Secondly, This spiritual voice of Christ must be considered in its general nature, which implies two things in it:

1. Almighty efficacy.

2. Great facility.

1. Almighty efficacy, to quicken and open the heart with a word; O what manner of voice is this, which carries such a vital power along with it! In all the mighty works of Christ, his power was still put forth in some voice, as at the resurrection of Lazarus, John 11:43. "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth; and he that was dead came forth." So in curing the deaf man, Mark 7:34. "He saith unto him, Ephphatha, and straightway his ears were opened." Thus, in the exerting of his Almighty glorious power in quickening a soul spiritually dead, and opening the heart that was locked up by ignorance and unbelief; an internal almighty efficacy passeth from Christ, along with the voice of the gospel, to effect this glorious work upon the soul: an emblem whereof we have in Ezek. 37:9, 10. "Then said he unto me, prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, unto the wind, saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." The animating vital breath which quickened the dead, came in, or with the four winds of heaven, as this almighty power of Christ doth with the sound of the gospel; and before it the heart opens, the will bows, Psal. 110:3. Man can no longer oppose the power of God; man and man stand upon equal ground; the power of man can repel the power of a fellow-creature; but when the power of Christ comes along with the voice of man, there is no more power to resist.* This voice of Christ then, of which the text speaks, is an almighty impression made upon the soul of a sinner from heaven, which is to that soul instead of a voice; and as fully expressive of God's mind concerning it, as any articulate voice in the world can be. It is a beam of light shining immediately from the Spirit, into the soul of a sinner; as plainly and evidently discovering both its danger and duty, as if a voice from heaven had declared them. Thus it is said, Isa. 8:11. The Lord spake to Isaiah with a strong hand, that is, by a mighty impression upon the prophet's spirit, which was as a voice to him. Thus here, the Lord not only directs a suitable word to a sinner's condition; but also impresses it with such a strong hand upon his heart, as leaves no doubt behind it, but

that it was the Lord himself that spake to his soul. This is Christ's way of speaking by his spirit, to the inner spiritual ear of the soul; not by oraculous voices, which I take to be but the suppositions of an overtroubled fancy; but by an efficacious impression upon the heart. As to oraculous voices, we may sooner meet satanical delusions, than divine illuminations in that way. The learned Gerson speaks of a good man, who, being in prayer, seemed to hear such a voice as this; I am come in person to visit thee, for thou art worthy. But he justly suspecting a delusion of Satan, shut his eyes and said, *Nolo hic videre Christum, &c.* 'I will not see Christ here, it shall suffice me to see him in glory.' I am sure Christ's voice in the written word is more sure than a voice from heaven, 2 Pet. 1:19. This inward spiritual impression is Christ's effectual call from heaven; and it is a voice *sine strepitu syllabarum*, without sound or syllable.

2. As this voice of Christ implies almighty efficacy, so it implies, in like manner, the facility of conversion unto Christ; he can do it easily with a word of his mouth: As in the bodily cures performed by him in the days of his flesh, how suddenly and easily did Christ effect them? Speak the word only, said the Centurion, and my servant shall be healed. Thus, let the Spirit but speak internally to the deadest soul, and it lives. Elijah did but cast his mantle upon Elisha, as he was plowing in the field, and he presently intreats the prophet to give him leave to go home, and bid his friends farewell, and he would follow him: Thus it is here; let a beam of saving light shine from the Spirit into a man's heart; let an effectual impression be made upon his soul, and he is presently made willing to quit and give up his dearest lusts and interests, and to embrace Christ upon the severest terms of the gospel. Conversion is too difficult a work for angels or men to effect in their own strength; but Christ can do it with a word. And thus much of the general nature of Christ's spiritual internal voice; but all this gives us but a remote imperfect knowledge of it: Therefore,

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to open the innate characters and special properties of this internal spiritual voice of Christ, which must be heard, or there can be no opening the door of the heart to receive him.

Characters

I. Character. And the first character is this; it is a secret and a still voice, whereby somewhat is, as it were, whispered into the ear of the soul, making a particular application of what is spoken externally to the ear, much like that of Nathan to David, Thou art the man. This still voice sounds throughout the whole soul, yet none hear it but the soul concerned in it; it is said, 1 Sam. 9:15. "The Lord told Samuel in his ear, the night before," &c. that is, he whispered the secret into the prophet's mind: So the Spirit of Christ whispers a word into the ear of a sinner, which makes his heart to tremble, after this manner, This is thy very state and condition; this is thy sin, which is now opened by the gospel in thine ears. This is a voice without sound or noise to any others, but very intelligible to the soul unto whom it is spoken. You read in 1 Kings 19:11, 12 when Elijah stood upon the mount before the Lord, there came "a great and strong wind, which rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice: And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle," &c. So it is here; dreadful things are thundered against men by the voice of the law, the terrors of the Lord are made known, hell and damnation are set before the eyes of sinners; but until the Lord come in the still voice of his Spirit, and apply those things to the conscience, the sinner never covers his face with shame and confusion, nor goes aside to mourn and lament his misery. This voice of God sounds to the very centre of the soul. As for the outward voice of the gospel alone, it signifies little; in hearing, men hear not, Mat. 13:13. They hear the voice of man, but not the voice of God: They hear the sound, but feel not the power of the word. What is spoken externally, dies in the ear that hears it: But this still voice of the Spirit by secret passages makes its way to the heart, and none knows what God speaks but the soul to whom he speaks. That is the first character.

II. Character. The internal spiritual voice of Christ is a personal and particular voice, speaking distinctly and particularly to the case and state of the soul, as if it were by name. Ministers do, and must speak in general; they draw the bow of the gospel at a venture, not knowing to

whom God will direct the arrow; but the Spirit guides it to the mark. He applies general truths unto particular persons, so as the soul, to whom he directs it, is fully convinced and satisfied the Lord intends and means it, in such a convictive and threatening expression. Oh, saith the soul, hath the Lord singled me out in special? This is my very state and case. You read, John 10:5 that Christ calleth his sheep by name. How doth he call them by name? But by speaking directly and particularly to their condition and case, as if he called them by their particular names. He doth not now in an extraordinary way, as of old, call Samuel, Samuel; or Saul, Saul; but he sends a beam of convincing light into the conscience, plainly discovering this or that to be our sin, danger, or duty; and so as to the effect, it is all one as if God named him: And truly, until it comes to this, the word hath no saving operation upon the soul. A man may hear ten thousand general truths, assent to them, and never be the better for them. How still and quiet was David's conscience, until Nathan struck the nail upon the head, by a home personal application, and then his conscience startled? Thus God singles out one man or woman from among a thousand in the congregation, speaks to the heart, rips up the secure conscience; the rest hear the same words, but feel not the same efficacy. And truly, it is a choice mercy when God shall please thus to single out one person from among many, after this manner to speak to his heart. As Christ said in Luke 4:25, 26. "Many widows were in Israel in the days. of Elias, &c. but to none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." So here, multitudes sat with you under the same prayer or sermon, but unto none of them, at that time, was the Spirit sent, to make a particular convictive application thereof, but unto thee. In this the peculiar goodness of God shines out, and should for ever be admired in the eyes of that soul.

III. Character. This spiritual, internal voice of Christ is distinguishable by the soul that hears it from all other voices; John 10:4. "The sheep know his voice." As in the stile of the scriptures, there is a weight and majesty which distinguishes it from all human composures; so in this voice of Christ, there is a majesty, a peculiar efficacy, a Divine and awful authority, by which the soul distinguishes it from all human voices. It was said of Christ in the days of his flesh, John 7:46. "Never man spake like this man." The same may we say of his spiritual voice, the soul never

heard such a voice before; it seals the truth upon the heart so firmly, that no objections are left against it. It was not so when he heard the voice of man. And there are two things in this inward voice of Christ, which apparently difference it from all human voices. (1.) A marvellous light comes into the soul with it, which discovers all the secrets of the heart. God shines into the heart the same time he speaks unto it, 2 Cor. 4:6 and now the secret of the hearts are manifest, and God is acknowledged to be in that word of truth, 1 Cor. 14:25. (2.) A marvellous power accompanieth this voice, to make a deep and firm impression of what is spoken upon the soul: and this power is an innate character of the voice of God, whereby the soul receives it as his, with much assurance, as the apostle speaks, 1 Thes. 1:5. "Our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." They could not be more certain of any thing in the world, than they were of this, that it was the Lord that spake to them in that word. It is true, at the first instant, the soul may be amazed and at a loss, as Peter when he was delivered out of prison, Acts 12:11 thought at first he had seen a vision; but when he was come to himself, "Now, (said he) I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel," &c. Thus it is with the soul, it is amazed, and doubts what manner of call or power this is, sure it is, it never heard such a voice, nor never felt any thing like this before. But the matter is quickly cleared up, when the soul hath reflected duly upon it, and finds (as it quickly doth) such a wonderful change of the frame and temper of the heart following upon it. I now speak not of those into whom grace is distilled in the way of godly education in their tender years, but of adult persons, and especially such as have been grosser sinners.

IV. Character. This spiritual internal voice of Christ is a surprising voice, altogether unexpected by the soul that hears it; "I am found of them that sought me not," Isa. 65:1. Little do we foresee the designs God hath upon us in bringing us to such a place, and under such a sermon, at such or such a time; even as little as Saul thought of a kingdom when he was seeking his father's asses. It is much with us as it was with the apostles when Christ called them; little did Matthew think when he sat at the receipt of custom, or Saul think when posting unto Damascus upon the devil's errand, that Christ and salvation had then been so near them. Some have come to scoff and deride the messengers and truths of God;

others to gratify their curiosity; and many in a customary course, not knowing where else, with peace to themselves or reputation with others, to spend that hour. But God's thoughts were not theirs; the time of mercy was now come and whatever sinful or low ends brought them thither, the Lord's design was then and there to manifest himself to them. It is with such souls, in some respect, as it was with the spouse, Cant. 6:12 to whose expression I may here allude, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me as the chariots of Abinadab." I went to the congregation for company, I was sitting under the word with a careless wandering heart, as at other times; when lo, above all the thoughts of my heart, an arrow of conviction was suddenly shot into my conscience, which startled, wounded, and disquieted it, as it is now beyond the power of any but Christ himself to settle and satisfy it.

V. Character. This spiritual internal voice of Christ is energetical, great and mighty in power; piercing the heart, cleaving, as it were, the very reins; full of efficacy to the soul that hears it. The power of God comes along with this voice of God. You read, Heb. 4:12. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow."

Now this efficacy is not inherent in the word itself, it works not thus as a natural agent; then all would feel this power, that comes within the sound of it. No, this comes from the Spirit of Christ, speaking in it to the sinner's conscience; when it is the administration of the Spirit, then it becomes thus efficacious. You read in Psal. 29 from ver. 3 to 10 of the wonderful efficacy of God's providential voice; "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty; it breaks the cedars, divides the flames of fire, shakes the wilderness, maketh the hinds to calve." This the providential voice of God, in the winds, thunders, and lightnings, can do; but, alas! what is this to the efficacy of his spiritual voice? What is the breaking of the cedars of Lebanon to the breaking of the heart of a sinner? What is the shaking of the trees in the wilderness to the fears of wrath to come, which shake the souls of convinced sinners, and make their very hearts to tremble? Acts 16:30. What is the dividing of the flames of fire, to the dividing of a soul from its beloved lusts? "The

weapons of our warfare (saith the apostle) are mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. Here be the glorious effects of this voice, which plainly discover from whom it comes. The voice of God is no less to be admired in its magnificent effects in the new creation, than in the first creation, with which the apostle compares it, 2 Cor. 4:6. "God that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts." It was marvellous to see, at the word of Christ, Lazarus, that was dead in his grave, to come forth bound in his graveclothes; and no less to see a soul dead in sin, bound in the bonds of corruption, at a word of Christ, to arise and come forth with spiritual life; John 5:25. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear it shall live."

VI. Character. This spiritual voice of Christ is so convictive to the conscience of a sinner, that it puts a final end to all shifts and evasions: Whilst man only spake, the soul had a thousand shifts to evade and put off what was spoken; but now all disputes and debates are at an end; no more subterfuges and cunning evasions now. The Spirit when he cometh, "he shall convince the world of sin," John 16:8. The word signifies to convince by demonstration; and that is, to shew a thing impossible to be otherwise than we represent it to be. Formerly, when the terrors of God were threatened against sin, the shuffling heart was wont to say, this concerns me no more than another; if it go ill with me, it will go ill with thousands as well as me. It is true, this is my evil, and who is without them? I have some evils in me, but yet I have some good too. But no sooner doth the Spirit speak conviction to the conscience, but all these pleas are out of doors. It may be, the state of the sinner's soul was doubtful to him before; but it is not so now: It had some fears of hell, but balanced with some vain hopes of heaven: But now the debate is ended, the great question determined. Whatever I am, or have; Whatever duties I have done, and whatsoever sins I have avoided, I see I am not regenerated, I am in my natural christless state; and except I be changed, I must be damned. This was the effect of Christ's convictive voice unto Paul, Rom. 7:9. "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." He had read the law many

a time, and had the literal knowledge of it: But under these things his vain hopes lived and flourished, until the spiritual sense of the law came home to his heart, by the teaching voice of the Spirit, and then his vain hopes gave up the ghost, and his sin and guilt stared in the face of his conscience.

VII. Character. The voice of Christ whereof we now speak, is generally and ordinarily conveyed to the souls of men through the word preached, which is the chosen organ or instrument of its conveyance. We cannot absolutely and universally affirm that Christ always speaks to men this Way: but certainly this is his standing and ordinary course; 1 Thes. 1:5. "Our gospel came not to you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost." Our gospel, because preached and ministered by us; but had that been all, it had come to you in word only, as it doth to many thousand others in the world, who hear and feel nothing in it more than what is human; But unto you it came in power, and in the Holy Ghost; that is, our words were the vehicle and organ through which the vital power of the Spirit was conveyed into your souls. Providences have their voices as well as the word; and sometimes the voice of Christ hath accompanied the voice of Providence, to the conversion of men's souls; but this is more rare and unusual: The established and ordinary way of Christ's speaking to the hearts of sinners, is by the word, and especially the word preached, which upon that very account and consideration, as it is the organ of conveying the voice and power of Christ to the soul, is therefore called the power of "God to salvation," Rom. 1:16. This instrument the Lord generally uses and honours for the conveyance of spiritual life into the souls of men, though it be despised and contemned in the world. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God," 1 Cor. 1:18 i.e. the chosen instrument by which the saving power of God communicates itself to the souls of men: And although God may exert his saving power through providences, yet we seldom or never find he doth so where the word may be had, but is despised and neglected. And truly herein God consults our peace and satisfaction; for, suppose he should make use of another medium, as a voice from heaven, &c. and after calling (which is an usual case) the called soul should question all, and say, how do I know but all this may be a delusion? May not Satan impose upon poor mortals, and

this voice from heaven be a counterfeit voice? My eternal estate depends upon it, and I had need to be sure it was the very voice of God himself. In such a case as this, it would be hard to give such clear distinguishing characters as might be to the satisfaction of the soul, and clearly difference one from the other. But now, when God makes the word his instrument in this matter, it yields abundantly more satisfaction; "We have a more sure word of prophecy," surer than a voice from heaven, 2 Pet. 1:19. And though Paul was converted by a voice from heaven, yet the Lord sends him to Ananias to preach the gospel to him, Acts 9:17. The Lord will honour his word. Providence may make way, and prepare the heart; but the word is the instrument by which the Lord puts forth his power ordinarily to salvation.

VIII. Character. The voice of Christ leaves abiding effects and lasting impressions upon the soul that hears it. The words of men are scattered into the wind, but the effects of Christ's voice are durable and lasting things; Psal. 119:93. "I will never forget thy word, for by it thou hast quickened me." How many hundred sermons have we heard, and all those excellent truths vanished away as a dream? Oh, but if ever thou heardst Christ speaking to thy heart in any sermon, or prayer, to be sure that will stick by thee for ever; his words are sealed upon the soul for ever; they are written in the heart, Jer. 31:33. What Job wished, concerning his word, that is really performed in the words of Christ, "They are written as in the rock for ever." We have slippery memories, but the weakest memory will, and must retain the words of Christ, spoken to the heart by his Spirit; for they are sealed upon it. Job 32:16. "He sealeth their instructions;" and this secures them. Thus you have the innate characters of Christ's voice.

Fourthly, I shall next speak to the personal objects unto whom Christ ordinarily directs this his internal, efficacious, and saving voice or call. And although it be true that the Spirit of Christ is a free agent, acting with the greatest liberty, and calleth whom he will, according to that, John 3:8. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." And it is true de facto, that Christ hath made some of all sorts and ranks of men to hear his voice; yet if we consider the way he commonly takes, we shall find that it is very true and seldom, that Christ directs this saving voice or call of his to the great and

wise of this world: 1 Cor. 1:26. "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." He saith not any, but not many. Some Christ doth call; 'lest (as one notes) the world should think that Christians were deceived through their simplicity and weakness.' One rich Joseph of Arimathea; one honourable Nicodemus, but not many. Men of the greatest fame and renown in the world have been the greatest and fiercest enemies against Christ: Galen the chief physician, Porphyry the chief Aristotelian, Plotinius the chief Platonist, Lybanus and Lucian the chief orators, were all professed enemies of Christ. Two things make a great man in the eyes of the world; the external endowments of Providence, heaping up riches and honours upon the outward man; and internal gifts and endowments of the mind, adorning the inward man, as strong reason, sharpness of wit, &c. When both these meet (as many times they do) in one and the same person, they make him great in the eyes of the world, and usually in his own eyes too; yea, too great to stoop to the simplicity of the gospel, and the humbling self-denying terms thereof. These the Lord usually passes by, and directs his voice to the poor: the poor receive the gospel; "God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," James 2:5. And this choice of God, Christ blesseth him for, Matth. 11:25. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." And, indeed, the wisdom of God deserves our admiration in this dispensation: For,

(1.) Hereby the freeness of his grace is vindicated. None can now pretend that any earthly excellency commends any man to God, or that the favour of heaven is engaged by the same motives that the respects of this world are: For now you see the truth of that scripture, Job 34:19 before your eyes, "He accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of his hands." Earthly riches and honours, as empty things as they are, yet are too much idolized by men: What would they be, could they procure our favour and acceptance with the Lord? (2.) By such a choice as this the Lord plainly shews us, that religion needs not worldly props to support it. As at first it was spread by the power of God in the world, by poor contemptible men, so it

is still upheld without human policy or riches. The church is called the Congregation of the poor, Psal. 74:20. The Lord will have us know, that he is able to maintain and carry on his counsels in the world, without the wealth of rich men, the authority of great men, or the policies of wise men; he needs them not. (3.) By this choice he pours contempt upon those things which are most admired among men: So he tells us, 1 Cor. 1:27. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty." And, certainly, shame and confusion of face will cover the great ones of this world in the world to come, when they shall see these poor Christians whom they contemned and scorned upon earth, as not worthy to come into their presence, to be so infinitely preferred before them in the favour of God. In a word, this efficacious spiritual voice of Christ is directed but to a few, even of the many that sit within the sound and call of the gospel, Matth. 22:14. "Many are called, but few are chosen." Christ's flock is a little flock. There be many birds of prey to one bird of paradise: Many common pebbles to one sapphire or diamond. It is not for us to dispute the reason, but to adore the sovereignty of God in this matter. And of those few whom he calleth, the greatest part is of the lower rank and order of men. The glitter and dazzle of this world blinds the eyes of the greatest. Extremity of pinching wants diverts the minds of the very lowest; but, betwixt these two extremes there is a third sort of persons whom the Lord most usually calls.

Fifthly, If it be queried why the voice and call of Christ should be directed to this person rather than to that? Certainly, it is not from any dignity or excellency outward or inward, that Christ sees in one above another; for all are shut up under the same common sin and misery of the fall; and therefore the apostle told the Ephesians, who had heard and answered the voice of Christ, "that they were by nature the children of wrath even as others," Eph. 2:3. If it were not so, man would have something to glory in before God; but Christ resolves this whole dispensation into its proper cause, the good pleasure of the Divine will, Mat. 11:26. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." This good pleasure of the will of God sometimes orders those to hear the voice of his Son, that seem to stand at a far greater distance and improbability to hear it than others do. It is said of the Ephesians, that they were afar off, Ephes. 2:13 yet they heard

the voice of Christ, when that discreet scribe, Mark 12:34 who was not far from the kingdom of God, and Agrippa, Acts 26:28 who almost, or within a very little, was persuaded to be a Christian, never heard it; therefore it is said, Matth. 8:11, 12. "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven: But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." O marvellous dispensation! many a poor soul under the greatest disadvantages, a poor servant that hath but little time, and multitudes of incumbrances; yet such a one is often called effectually by this voice of Christ; when those that enjoy multitudes of opportunities, and have abundance of time lying upon their hands which they know not what to do with; who have the choicest books at command, yet hear nothing, and feel nothing amidst all these advantages to any purpose; all this is wholly to be resolved into the good pleasure of the will of God.

Sixthly, In the next place, let us view the effects of this voice of Christ upon the souls of men, and we shall find divers remarkable effects wrought upon the heart by it.

Effects

I. Effect. And the first effect of the voice of Christ, is conviction upon the conscience; conviction both of sin and misery, John 16:9. "The Spirit when he cometh, shall convince the world of sin." This is a voice of terror; it strikes dead the vain hopes of a sinner, Rom. 7:9. Now the soul that was before secure and quiet, becomes the seat of trouble and anxiety; It is true, there was a general conviction of sin before, they knew that all are sinners; that they denied not. But alas! this general conviction is quite another thing to what the soul feels now; now it can shift and wave the matter no longer. This voice of Christ "shews them their iniquities, and how they have exceeded," as the expression is, Job 36:8, 9 exceeded in number, and exceeded in heinousness of aggravation. A general conviction of sin affects a man no more than the sight of a painted lion upon a sign post; but when a particular conviction is set home upon the conscience, by this special inward voice of Christ, sin is then like a living lion, meeting a man in the way, and roaring dreadfully upon him. This is the first effect of Christ's voice, and is introductive unto the,

II. Effect. Which is humiliation, and Contrition of heart for sin; those threats of scripture against sin and sinners, which were wont to be slighted, are now trembled at; those Jews, Acts 2:37 to whose hearts Christ spake in Peter's sermon, as soon as ever they heard his voice, sounding conviction in their consciences, they were presently pricked at the heart; no sword or poniard can make such a wound, and put a poor creature into such pain, as a sight of sin will do; therefore, Zech. 12:10 they are said to mourn for Christ, as for an only son. Now this is the glorious prerogative of Jesus Christ, to be able to reach and wound the heart with a word: The voice of man cannot do it; but the spirit of a man lies naked and open, both to be wounded and healed by a word from the mouth of Christ. No sooner hath a poor sinner heard the awful voice of conviction spoken to his conscience, by the Lord Jesus, but he feels himself sick at heart; home he goes from that sermon by which Christ spake effectual conviction to him, crying, O sick! sick! my soul is distressed, because of sin! There is, indeed, a great difference in the depth and degrees of this contrition and humiliation; it penetrates deeper into some hearts than others, and holds them longer under it: But certain it is, who ever hath heard the convincing voice of Christ, he feels so much sorrow for sin, as for ever separates him from the love of it.

III. Effect. This voice of Christ rouses and awakens the careless and sluggish mind to the greatest solicitude and thoughtfulness after deliverance, and escape from the danger that hangs over it; Acts 16:30. "Trembling and astonished, he cried out, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" All the powers of the soul run into solicitude and care about deliverance. You shall generally observe in convinced and humbled sinners, three evident signs of extraordinary solicitude about salvation. (1.) There is a strong intention of their minds and thoughts, they stand night and day like a bow at the full bent; their thoughts are still poring upon this matter, their sleep departs, for their sin and danger is ever before them. (2.) It appears by their searching inquisitiveness about the way of escape; the question they still carry with them from company to company, where they meet with any whom they judge able to resolve or direct them, is this: What course shall I take? What shall I do? Is there any hope for such a one as I? Did you ever know a soul in my condition? (3.) It appears by the little notice they take at this time of their outward

troubles and afflictions; which, it may be, are strong and sharp enough to overwhelm them at another time: but now they take little notice of them. Sin lies so heavy, that it makes heavy afflictions lie light.

IV. Effect. A fourth effect of the voice of Christ, is encouragement and hope, putting the soul upon the use of means in order to the attainment of Christ and salvation; for, it is an inviting as well as a convicting voice: and this is a remarkable difference betwixt the voice of Christ and the voice of Satan, with respect to sin. Satan labours to cut off all hope, and strike the soul dead under the despair of mercy; as well knowing, that if he can cut off hope, all emotions and endeavours of the soul after Christ are effectually stopt, and at a dead stand: But how much convincing terrors soever there are in the voice of Christ, there is always something left behind it upon the heart to breed and support hope. And truly the soul amidst these sad circumstances, hath great need of some encouragement; but the Lord usually, after sharp convictions, sets home upon the soul such a word as that, John 6:37. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out: For I came down from heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Wherein Christ offers the most rational satisfaction, and greatest encouragement imaginable, that a poor convinced sinner, if he be made willing, shall certainly find a hearty welcome and acceptation with Christ. For mark how he argues it on purpose for the satisfaction of such souls; "I came not down from heaven to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me," The force of the encouragement lies here, "I and my Father are one," one in will, and one in design, our wills never did, nor possibly can jar and clash one with another; that would be utterly repugnant to the perfect unity that is betwixt us. Now, saith he, I came down from heaven, not only to do mine own will,) which must necessarily be supposed to be intently set, and strongly inclined to receive and save all convinced and willing sinners, this being the very end of my incarnation and death) but also to do the will of my Father, who hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, and anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, Isa. 61:1. And therefore no such soul can rationally doubt of a welcome reception with me. And because the fears and jealousies of a convinced conscience are great and many, and the devil sets in with them to aggravate them beyond the hopes of mercy; therefore it is usual with the Lord, at such a time as this,

to direct the convinced and trembling sinner to such a scripture as that, Heb. 7:25. "Wherefore he is also able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him," &c. Making the fulness of Christ's saving power to shine with a cheerful beam into the dark and distressed soul of a sinner, from such a word as that.

V. Effect. A fifth effect or consequent of Christ's powerful voice, is an attractive efficacy, or sweet alluring of the soul to Christ by that power and efficacy which it communicates to the soul, John 6:44, 45. "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." Mark it, this voice speedily puts the soul into motion after Christ; coming follows hearing; when once the soul hath heard the voice of God, away it comes from all sinful engagements in the world; all bonds and ties betwixt the soul and sin break asunder and give way; nothing can hold it from Christ. There is a strange restlessness in the spirit of man, nothing but Christ can centre and quiet it.

VI. Effect. And then lastly, the last effect of Christ's voice or call is sweet rest and consolation to the inner man. When once the soul is come home to Christ by the efficacy of his heavenly call or voice, it enters into peace, Heb. 4:3. "We, which have believed; do enter into rest;" not only shall, but do enter into rest. As the first effect of Christ's voice was terror and great trouble to the soul, so the last effect is peace; it puts the soul into the most excellent position in the world, for comfort and joy; it never stood upon such ground before; for this vocation stands betwixt predestination and glorification, Rom. 8:30. "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." See here into what a blessed mount of vision, the voice of Christ calleth the souls of sinners! where, let the soul look backward or forward, from eternity, to eternity, there is nothing but a vision of peace before its eyes. This call of God points it backward to God's eternal choice, which by this very call it is now manifest, he made of that soul before the world was; and it also points forward to that eternal glory unto which God is leading it. These are the effects of this Almighty voice of Christ, and these the special instructions sealed by it upon the hearts of men.

But now, this voice of Christ is not heard at all times; but in some special season or hour, as Christ calls it, John 5:25. "The hour cometh when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." And, elsewhere, by the apostle, it is called "the accepted time, the day of salvation," 2 Cor. 6:2. And the conjunction of the Spirit of Christ with the word, ordinances, or providences of God, but especially the word, makes this blessed hour. The word alone, though never so excellently preached, conduces no more to the conviction and salvation of a sinner than the waters of Bethesda did, when the angel came not down to trouble them, John 5:4. But when the Lord pours out his Spirit with the word, according to that promise, Prov. 1:33. "I will pour out my Spirit upon you, and make known my words unto you," then Christ speaks to the heart; this great conjunction of the word and Spirit makes that blessed time and season of salvation the time of love, the time of life. Now the voice of Christ is heard with effect; the ordinances impregnated with convincing and converting efficacy. There was an abundant effusion of the Spirit in the first age of Christianity, and then the voice of Christ was heard by multitudes of souls at once. There hath since been a restraint of the Spirit, comparatively speaking; whereas three thousand souls were then converted at one sermon, possibly three thousand sermons have since been preached, and not one soul effectually called. This hath made the church like a wilderness; a land of drought; and so it is like to remain, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field;" according to that promise, Isa. 32:15. And such a time we expect; Lord hasten it, when the waters, of the ordinances shall be healed, "and every thing that liveth, which moveth whithersoever the river shall come, shall live. And fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kind, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many," Ezek. 47:9, 10. Then ministers shall no longer fish with angles, catching now one, and then another; but shall spread forth their nets, and inclose whole shoals, multitudes of converts. In the mean time there are some signal periods, and happy seasons, wherein Christ uttereth his almighty voice in the word; but that season is utterly unforeknown to man; we cannot say when it will come, but are to wait for it, as the man did at the pool of Bethesda. Ministers must preach in hope, wait in hope, if at any time God will give the people repentance, 2 Tim. 2:25. We are often mistaken in our conjectures; when we have

made the best preparations, and find a more than ordinary enlargedness of spirit, we are apt to conclude, certainly this is the blessed hour wherein Christ will speak to the heart as we do to the ear; but we oft-times find ourselves mistaken; yet we must wait in hope, and so must our people. Such a happy time may come, and when it doth, it will be a day for ever to be remembered; because then the first actual application of Christ will be made to your souls; without which all that the Father hath done in election, and the Son in his meritorious redemption, had been of no benefit or advantage to your souls, And, therefore, you shall find that this work of the Spirit stands betwixt both those works, and makes them both effectual to our salvation, 1 Pet. 1:2. This is that blessed hour upon which our eternal blessedness depends; eternity will be taken up in blessing God for this hour: it will be celebrated for ever in your praises, in the world to come. O what an influence hath this hour to all eternity! The hearing of this voice of Christ effectually opens the cabinet-counsels of heaven, and brings to light the eternal counsels of God concerning you; 1 Thes. 1:4, 5. "Knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God: for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." This gives greater assurance of the eternal love of God to a man's soul, than the sweetest smile of providence or any oraculous voice from heaven could do. This is the time of life, the day of our spiritual resurrection, John 5:25. A greater and more glorious resurrection by far than that of your bodies at the last day; so much greater, as the value of your souls is above your bodies. As, also, because the blessedness of your corporeal resurrection depends upon this your spiritual resurrection, by the voice of Christ. Dreadful will the voice of Christ be at the resurrection of your bodies, except you first hear this vital voice of Christ quickening your souls on earth with spiritual life. To conclude; this is the great Æra, or head of account, from which you are to reckon and date all your spiritual sanctified mercies; for as the Lord said unto the Jews, Hag. 2:19. "From henceforth will I bless you;" so saith the Lord to you, from this hour wherein you have heard and obeyed the voice of Christ, will I bless you for ever with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him.

I. Use, for Lamentation

This point presents us with abundant matter of lamentation and

mourning over the greatest part of those that sit under the sound of the gospel; but yet as Christ speaks of the Jews, John 5:37. "who have not heard the voice of God at any time:" the ministerial voice of Christ they hear daily; but this efficacious internal voice, which makes the ministerial voice the word of life and power, they have not heard. The gospel, to the most of our hearers, is but an empty sound: this is a sad symptom, 2 Cor. 4:3. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not," &c. This hiding of the gospel is not opposed to the external ministration of it, nor yet to the understanding of the true sense and meaning of the truths delivered by it; but only to that internal efficacy which is here called the hearing of Christ's voice. Our people are generally well satisfied when they have heard a sermon, much more if they can remember something of it, though the Lord hath not spoken one truth they have heard home to their hearts. Now this is a sad case, and God grant it be not that very judgment threatened, Isa. 6:9. "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." So that hearing the mere voice of man, without feeling the power of God, is all one as if we heard not. Reflect sadly upon this you that sit as unconcerned under the word as the seats you sit upon. God speaketh once, yea twice, but man perceiveth it not. Well, the eternal decrees and counsels of God are now executing upon the souls of men under the gospel. As many as are ordained to eternal life shall believe and feel the power of God's truths upon their hearts, Acts 13:48. And methinks it should be of a startling consideration, when you shall see others struck to the heart, cast into fears and tremblings by the same word that doth not in the least touch your hearts. It may be you think this is but fancy and melancholy; that very thought is an artifice of Satan to blind your eyes. I am sure Christ made another use of it, when he told the secure and self-righteous Jews, Mat. 21:32. "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him," q. d. What shift did you make to quiet your consciences, when you saw other poor sinners so humbled, and brought to faith under John's ministry? It is strange there should be no reflections in your consciences upon your own state and condition; but thus it must be, one shall be taken and another left; to some it shall be the savour of life unto life, and to others the savour of death unto death. O

who can look over so great a part of a congregation without melting bowels of compassion! Considering that unto this Day the Lord hath not given them eyes to see, nor ears to hear: They have heard multitudes of sermons; they have heard also what effects they have had upon other men's hearts, but none upon theirs. O that such poor such would cry to the Lord Jesus, in such language as that, Cant. 8:13. "The companions hearken to thy voice, cause me to hear it." Lord, let me not sit under the word any longer deaf to the voice of thy Spirit in it. Open and unstop the ears of my soul, that I may hear thy voice, and feel thy power; otherwise the external ministerial voice will be ineffectual to my salvation; it will be but a rattle to still and quiet my conscience for a little while, and a dreadful aggravation of my misery in the issue.

II. Use, for Information

Secondly, The point before us presents five other truths with equal clearness to our eyes.

Infer. 1. In the first place, hence it follows, that we have this day before our eyes a great seal and confirmation of the truth of the scriptures. No miracles can seal it firmer than the events of it do, which are visible to all that will observe them. What you read in the word you may see every day fulfilled before your eyes. You read, 2 Cor. 2:15, 16. "We are unto God a sweet savour, of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life." And again, Acts 28:24 it is observed, that when Paul in his lodgings had expounded and testified the kingdom of God to the people, and persuading them to believe from morning to evening; it is observed, I say, that some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not. Here you see the different, yea, the contrary events of the preaching of the gospel, according to the scripture-account of it; it quickens some, and kills others; it brings some to faith, and leaves others still fixed in unbelief. Compare this account with what is daily before your eyes; do you not see souls differently influenced to contrary effects under the same word? One melting and tender, another hardened and wholly unconcerned? Tell me, you that are apt to ascribe all to nature, how comes it to pass that men exercising reason alike, men that have the same inbred fears and hope of things eternal, who have the same passions and

affections, and are in the self-same condition and state with others; yet one man's heart shall be wounded, and go away trembling from under the self-same word, which affects the other no more than if it had been preached among the tombs to the dead that lie there? Say not, some have more courage than others, or clearer understandings; for it is most certain the word hath convinced as rational and courageous persons as those upon whom it has had no such effect. I doubt not but the jailor that was cast into such tremblings and astonishment, Acts 16:30 was as stout and rugged a person as any to whom Paul usually preached: his very office bespoke him such a man. Wonder not what it is that makes men fright at such a sound, which you hear as well as they, but it affects you not: The Lord speaks in that voice to their hearts, but not to yours; and so it must be according to the account the scriptures gives us of the contrary events of the gospel upon them that hear it; which is, I say, a fair and firm seal of the truth of the scriptures, and highly worth the due observation of all men.

II. Infer. What dignity hath God stamped on gospel-ordinances, in making them the organs and medium through and by which Christ speaks life to dead souls. This greatly exalts the dignity of the gospel, and deservedly endears it to all our souls: I deny not but God can convey spiritual life immediately without them; but though he hath not tied up himself, yet he hath tied us up to a diligent and constant attendance upon them, and that with the deepest respect and reverence to them; Luke 10:16. "He that heareth you, heareth me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." Behold how this sin is graduated and aggravated to the height of sinfulness. The contempt of the gospel runs much higher than men are aware of. We think it no great matter to neglect and contemn a messenger of Jesus Christ; but that contempt flies in the very face and authority of Christ, who gave them their commissions; yea, in the very face of God the Father, who gave Christ his commission. Christ speaks in and by his ministers, they are his mouth, Jer. 15:19. Moreover, the sin strikes at our own souls, and we injure them as well as Christ. For the word preached is his appointed instrument to convey spiritual life, the best of blessings, to our souls. Upon which account it is called "the word of life," Phil. 2:16 and "the power of God to salvation" Rom. 1:16. We then militate against

our life and salvation, when we despise and neglect the ordinances of God. It is good for men to lie under them, and continually wait on them; who knows when the Spirit of God will breathe life to your souls through them? What if yet you have found no such benefit from them? The very next opportunity may be the time of life, the appointed season of your salvation. Bring your carnal relations to them, as they did their sick and diseased friends, in the days when Christ was on earth, laying them in the way he was to pass. Christ will honour his ordinances; see that you do not despise them. I think no age was ever deeper drenched in the guilt of this sin than the present age is.

III. Infer. What a fearful judgment is the removing the gospel from a nation, seeing it is in and by the gospel Christ speaketh life to the souls of men!

The Spirit of God, and the word of God usually come and go together; when therefore these are gone, no more conversions are to be expected; dreadful is the case of that people, Prov. 29:18. "Where no vision is, the people perish." Those are direful menaces, Isa. 8:16. "Bind up the law, seal up the testimony among my disciples." And Rev. 2:5. "I will remove thy candlestick out of its place." Better the sun were taken out of heaven than the gospel out of the church. O England! provoke not thy God to execute upon thee the judgment here threatened. Think not God hath made such a settlement of the gospel, that it shall never be removed, however you use it. Your Advocate in heaven hath obtained it for you for a time upon trial; if you bring forth fruit, well; you and the generations to come shall be happy in it; if not, this blessed tree, which hath brought forth so many mercies to you and yours, must and will be cut down, Luke 13:8. Yea, and even now "is the ax laid at the root of the tree," Mat. 3:13. It is an allusion to a carpenter that throws down the ax and saw at the root of the tree he intends to cut down. The only ground of hope which remains with us this day, is, that there are some buds appearing, some fruits putting forth; and if there be a blessing in the bud, the Lord will spare it, according to Isa. 65:8. But these hopes are balanced with many sad symptoms, which may make us tremble to think what God is about to do with such a sinful nation.

IV. Infer. Those that have heard Christ's voice and call in the gospel, have

no reason to be discouraged from going to Christ in the way of faith; Christ's call is a sufficient warrant to believe. Many poor souls are staggered in their work of faith, by the fear of presumption; an ugly objection which they know not how to clear themselves of: but certainly, this, above all considerations in the world, enervates this objection of presumption. Then men presume, when they act without a call or warrant; but if Christ have spoken to your hearts by the voice of his Spirit, you have the best warrant in the world to go to him. What though you know not the issue? yet your obedience is due to his call. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went," Heb. 11:8. So must you. It is not necessary to your going to Christ, that you must be ascertained before-hand what the event and issue thereof shall be. Your believing is an act of obedience to the voice of Christ that calls you. When therefore Satan shall object, what, such a wretched soul as thou go to Christ! Canst thou imagine to find entertainment with him, whom thou hast so abused and deeply wronged? Thy answer shall be ready: It is true, I have been a vile wretch, and deeply wronged the Lord Jesus; but Christ hath spoken to my heart, he hath called me, and therefore it can be no presumption in me to go at his call; but contrariwise, it would be flat rebellion against his Sovereign command to refuse to believe, and come unto him; yea, it would be a greater sin than any of my former sins, have been. Besides, had the Lord Jesus no intention of mercy (as thou maliciously insinuatest) towards my soul, he would never have spoken to my heart by conviction and persuasion, as he hath done.

V. Infer. If no soul can open to Christ until it hear his powerful, spiritual voice, then the change made upon men by conversion is wholly supernatural.

The rise of faith is from this power of Christ, not from the nature of man, John 1:13. Proud nature arrogates this power and honour to itself, but without any ground; for though some things may be done by men in their natural state, which have a remote tendency to conversion and spiritual life, yet it can never open to Christ savingly, without a power communicated from himself. There is a total impotence in nature to

produce such an effect as this. The scripture speaks it roundly; telling us, "The natural man cannot (of himself) know the things that are of God," 1 Cor. 2:14. Cannot believe; for faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, John 6:44. Cannot obey; Rom. 8:7. "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Cannot speak a good word, Mat. 12:34. Cannot think a good thought, 2 Cor. 3:5. What a poor impotent thing then is the natural man, who can neither believe, nor obey, speak a good word, nor think a good thought, by any natural power of his own?

Say not it is against reason for God to require men to do what they cannot, and then damn them for not doing it. For, (1.) though man hath lost his ability to obey, yet God hath not lost his right to command. For at that rate any man might shake off the yoke of God's sovereignty by disabling himself through his own sin, for the duties of obedience. (2.) Though man hath not sufficient power, yet there is in him an intolerable pride, which puffs him up with a conceit that he hath what he hath not, and can do what he cannot. The command is therefore of great use to check this pride, and convince man of his impotency, Rev. 3:17. (3.) Every man can do more than he doth towards his own conversion. And therefore it is good for men to be urged by the commands to all those duties, in the use and observance whereof Christ ordinarily comes into the soul, by a supernatural power.

III. Use, for Exhortation

This voice gives a loud call to all that are within the sound of the gospel, especially to such as begin to feel some power accompanying the word to their hearts, diligently to hearken to the voice of Christ, and obey his first call without further delay; Rev. 2:7. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear." It is a dreadful and dangerous thing to turn away the ear from him that speaks from heaven; Heb. 12:25. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not that refused him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven." See that ye refuse not. The caution implies the matter to be very weighty, and a neglect or refusal in this matter, to be highly dangerous. Turn not away your ear, be not guilty of the least aversion, slight, or neglect, in so great or important a concern. And truly this caution is no more than needs; for Satan is never more busy with the

souls of men than when Christ gives them their first call to himself.

O what a thick succession of discouragements do impetuously assault the soul at this time! Art thou young? Then he insinuates that it is too soon for thee to mind the serious things of religion. This will extinguish all thy pleasure in a dull melancholy; thou mayest have time enough hereafter to mind these matters. This temptation Augustine confesseth kept him off many years from Christ. But certainly, if thou art old enough to be damned, thou art not too young to mind Christ and salvation. There are graves just of thy length, and abundance of young sprigs, as well as old logs burning in hell-flames. Besides, all those godly young ones which turned to the Lord betimes, as Josiah, Abijah, Timothy and many more, will be your judges, and condemn you in the great day. Never any repented that they opened to Christ too soon: Thousands have repented that they kept him out so long. Art thou old? then he scares thee with the manifold sins of thy youth, and rolls them as blocks in thy way to Christ. And whether young or old, he will be sure to present the sufferings, reproaches, and persecutions of godliness, to discourage thee from hearkening to the voice of Christ. But what are the sufferings for Christ here, to those sufferings from Christ hereafter? What are the pains of mortification to the pains of damnation? Besides, all the promises of Christ, promises of strength, comfort, success, &c. go along with the command of Christ to believe, and shall surely be performed to the obedient soul. See therefore that thou refuse not his voice.

IV. Use, for Trial

But you will say, all that hear this spiritual voice of Christ are said to live, John 5:25. Now I am much in the dark whether ever this vital voice of Christ hath sounded into my soul. Alas! I feel little of any thing of the spiritual life in my soul. I am dead and dark.

Quest. By what signs doth the life of Christ discover itself in the souls of men?

Answ. I answer, there are diverse signs of spiritual life, and blessed is the soul that finds them.

1. There is a spiritual sense and feeling flowing from, and accompanying the spiritual life. I speak not only of the sense and feeling of comfort, for many a soul that is in Christ, feels little of that; but certainly, there is a sense and feeling of the burdensomeness of sin, Rom. 7:24. And it is well that we can feel that; for there are multitudes in the world that are past feeling, Isa. 6:9, 10. It is a sign Christ hath spoken to thy heart, if sorrows for sin begin to load it.

2. Spiritual motions towards Christ are a sign of spiritual life: at least, that God is about that quickening work of faith upon thy soul, John 6:45. "Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." The effectual voice of God sets the soul in motion towards Christ; the will is moving after him; the desires are panting for him. The voice of God makes the soul that hears it restless. As for others, their wills are fixed, there is no moving of them, John 5:40. Now consider how it is with thee, reader: Art thou one that art weighing and pondering the terms of the gospel, struggling through discouragements and temptations to come to Christ upon his own terms, lifting up thy heart to him for power to believe, crying with the spouse, Draw me, I will run after thee? This is a comfortable sign Christ hath spoken to thy heart.

3. A spirit of prayer is an evidence of spiritual life, as the effect of Christ's voice to thy soul. As soon as ever Christ hath spoken effectually unto Paul's heart, the first effect that appeared in him as a sign of spiritual life, was prayer-breath, Acts 9:11. Behold he prayeth! God hath no still-born children. Measure thyself by this rule: Time was, when thou couldst say a prayer, and wert very well satisfied with it, whether thou hadst any communion with God in it or no; but is it so still? Is there not a holy restlessness of spirit after God, since the time that his word came home to thy heart? Surely thou canst remember when it was not with thee as it is now.

4. There is a spiritual relish, a divine gust resulting from the spiritual life, which is also evidential of it; *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*. If God have spoken life to thy soul, there will be in it an agreeable pleasure and delight in spiritual things, Psal. 63:5. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness," &c. Now thy thoughts can feed with pleasure upon spiritual things which they nauseated before.

5. Spiritual aversations as well as spiritual inclinations speak a spiritual life. Every creature hath an aversation to that which is noxious and destructive to it. Now there is nothing so destructive and dangerous to the spiritual life as sin; that is the deadly poison which the renewed soul dreads, Psal. 19:13. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." It cries out as a man that finds himself upon the brink of a pit, or edge of a precipice: Keep back thy servant. Such aversations to sin, and tremblings under temptations tending thereunto, are a comfortable sign Christ hath spoken life to thy soul.

Lastly, Heavenly tendencies and propensions after God are an excellent sign thy soul hath heard his voice, and been quickened with spiritual life by it. Sanctification is a well of water springing up into everlasting life, John 4:24. If thou hast seen the beauty, felt the power, and heard the voice of Christ, thy soul like an uncentered body, will be still propending, gravitating, and inclining Christward. When thou hast once heard this effectual call, Matt. 11:28. Come unto me, thy soul will be continually echoing with the spouse, Rev. 22:17. "Come Lord Jesus, the Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come." A sweeter sign of thy hearing Christ's voice can hardly be found in a soul of man, than restless longing to be with Christ in the state of perfect freedom from sin, and full fruition of the beloved and blessed Jesus.

SERMON IX - REV. 3:20

If any man hear my voice, [and open the door.]

THE powerful voice of Christ is the key that opens the door of the soul to receive him. The opening of the heart to receive Christ is the main design aimed at in all the external and internal administrations of the gospel and Spirit.

The gospel hath two great designs and intentions. One is to open the heart of God to men, and to shew them the everlasting counsels of grace and peace which were hid in God from ages and generations past: that all men may now see what God hath been designing and contriving for their happiness in Christ before the world was; Ephes. 3:9. "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." The next intention and aim of the gospel is, to set open the hearts of man to receive Jesus Christ, without which all the glorious discoveries of the eternal counsels and gracious contrivances of God for and about us, would signify nothing to our real advantage. Christ's standing, knocking, and speaking by his Spirit (of which we have before treated) receive their success, and attain their end, when the heart opens itself by faith to receive him, and not till then. Hence note,

Doct. 9. That the opening of the heart to receive Christ, by faith, is the great design and aim of the gospel.

This is the mark to which all the arrows in the gospel-quiver are levelled; the centre into which those blessed lines are drawn. John 20:31. "These things are written that you might believe, and, believing, might have life through his name." All those precious truths that are written in the scriptures are to bring you to faith. The great aim of the Spirit in his illuminations, convictions, humiliations, &c. are the very same thing, John 6:29. "This is the work of God, that you believe." It is not only Opus

Deo dignum, a work worthy of such an author, but it is that on which God's eye is fixed in his workings upon us; the end and aim of his work.

Great persons have great designs. This is the glorious project of the great God, and every person in the Godhead is engaged and concerned in it. (1.) The Father hath his hand in this work, and such a hand as without it no heart could ever open or move in the least towards Christ; John 6:44. "No man can come unto me (saith Christ) except the Father which hath sent me draw him." None but he that raised up Christ from the dead can raise up a dead heart unto saving faith in him. (2.) The Son's hand is in this work, he is not only the object, but the author of our faith, 1 John 5:20. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus "Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." (3.) And then for the Spirit, he comes from heaven designedly and expressly to convince sinners of their need of Christ, and beget faith in them, John 16:9. So that this appears to be the great design of heaven, the drift and level both of the word and works of God. Touching this design of the gospel, I shall here speak, endeavouring to open this great and glorious project of heaven in the ensuing properties of it; which are,

1. The greatness of it.
2. The difficulty of it.
3. The instruments employed in it.
4. The scope and aim of it. And,

First, Of the greatness of this design of God. We little understand what a marvellous thing is done on the earth, when the heart of a sinner is brought to close with Christ by faith. It would transport us with admiration, did we thoroughly consider it. Well may the apostle place it in the first rank of all the glorious and wonderful works of God, as he doth, 1 Tim. 3:16. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world." Observe with what works of wonder faith is here ranked and associated. It is an astonishing work of God that ever

God should be manifested in the flesh, that he that thunders in the clouds should be heard crying in a cradle; that he who is over all God blessed for ever, should become a man. It is astonishing, that when he was taken down dead from the cross, laid in the sepulchre, and the stone sealed upon it, he should rise on the third day from the dead by his own power: That ever the gospel should be preached to such a miserable and forlorn people as the Gentiles were, the scorn and contempt of the Jews. And no less marvellous is it to see the hearts of such poor creatures, glued so fast to idolatry, so perfectly dead in sin, to open to Christ upon such self-denying terms, as to let go all they had in the world for a blessed inheritance which they never saw. And were not this a marvellous work of God indeed, there would never be such joy and triumph in heaven among the holy angels, as there is upon the opening of every sinner's heart to Christ, Luke 15:7. The whole city of God is moved with it. Heaven rings again with the joyful tidings. As soon as ever the will begins to bow and open to Christ, the news is quickly in heaven, and all the angels of God rejoice at the tidings. As when a young prince is born, the conduits run with wine; there is joy in every city throughout the kingdom: So also there is in heaven, when Christ hath gotten a new habitation in the soul of any sinner upon earth. Moreover, the greatness of this design appears from the great rewards promised by the Lord to every servant of his, who hath but the least hand to help it on. God would never reward the instruments so richly, if the success of the work were not of great value in his eyes. The ministers of Christ may be ill-rewarded by men, persecuted and reproached for their labour; but God will bountifully repay their pains and faithfulness, Dan. 12:3. "They that turn many unto righteousness, shall shine as the stars, and as the brightness of the firmament for ever and ever." All these things bespeak it a very great and important design; upon which the heart of God is much set.

Secondly, And then, in the next place, as it is an exceeding great and important design and work of God, so it is a very hard and difficult work in itself; a work whose difficulties surmount the ability of angels. It is certainly a work carried on by the mighty power of God, through the greatest oppositions imaginable: and therefore it is noted, Rev. 3:7 that it is the peculiar prerogative of Jesus Christ, who only hath the key of the house of David, to open the heart of a sinner by faith. Men think it is an

easy thing to believe; but if you consult the scriptures, you will quickly be informed how grossly you mistake the nature of this work. In Gal. 2:12 the believing soul is said to "rise with Christ, through the faith of the operation of God, who raised him from the dead." In the resurrection of Christ there was a glorious operation of the power of God indeed! you know it astonished the world to hear of it. The very same power that wrought that, must also be put forth to work this, or else it would never be wrought. So again, Eph. 2:8. "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of your selves, it is the gift of God;" not of yourselves. You are no more able to believe in Christ, than you were to raise him from the dead: no more able to come one step towards him by faith, in your own power, than Lazarus was able to unbind himself in the grave, and come forth. Yea, in Eph. 1:18, 19, 20 the work of believing is ascribed unto the exceeding greatness of the power of God. Nothing but power can do it; no other power but the Almighty power of God can do it: it exceeds the power of ministers, yea, of angels. Three things will evince the difficulty of this work, viz.

1. The nature of it.

2. The subject of it.

3. The enemies of it.

1. The nature of the work of faith, which is wholly supernatural; it is no less than gaining over the hearty and full consent of the will to take Jesus Christ with his yoke of obedience, Mat. 11:29 and with his cross of sufferings, Mat. 16:24. And how far these will carry a man into outward dangers, losses, torments, and sufferings, who Can tell? and all this upon the account of an unseen happiness and glory. Dearest lusts and corruptions must be mortified, sweetest pleasures and profits in the world abandoned and forsaken: all reproaches, losses, pains and penalties the devil and the world can lay upon us for Christ's sake, must be embraced and welcomed. And can it be supposed that any power beneath the almighty power of the Lord, any voice except the efficacious voice of Christ, can prevail with the will to give its firm explicit consent to such difficult and self-denying terms as these?

2. Consider the Subject wrought upon, viz. the dead, hard, obstinate heart of a blind perverse sinner; a heart harder by nature than the nether millstone. It is as easy to melt the most obdurate rock into a sweet syrup, as it is to melt the heart of a sinner into penitential sorrows for sin. What, to bring a dead heart to life! to make that man bitterly bewail the sins that were his pleasure and delight, more than ever he bewailed the death of his nearest and dearest relation in the world! to make a proud heart renounce its own self-righteousness, which it dotes upon, and take all shame and reproach to itself upon the account of sin! this is wonderful. You would think it a strange thing to see the course of the tide stopped with the breath of a man; but oh, what a marvellous thing is here, that at the preaching of the gospel by a poor worm, the Lord should turn the tide of the will, and thus work about the soul to a ready compliance with his most self-denying terms and proposals!

3. And that which farther increaseth the difficulty of believing is the fierce and obstinate opposition made by the enemies of faith. All the powers of hell and earth, devils and men without us, are confederate and in league with the corruptions within us, to resist and hinder this work of believing. Never is the devil more busy than when Christ and the soul are treating about union. Oh, the discouragements, objections, and difficulties that are rolled into the way of faith! one while it is the highest presumption; another while it is impossible, and utterly too late: sometimes blasphemous injections, like fiery darts, are shot reeking hot out of hell into the soul; other while the invincible difficulties of religion are objected, all losses, torments, &c. opposed unto this work. The tempter casts himself into a thousand shapes to hinder the soul's passage out of nature unto Christ; sometimes objecting the greatness of sin, and sometimes the lapse and loss of the proper season and opportunity of mercy, together with the want of due qualifications, to come to Christ. Thus, and many other ways, he endeavours to rap off the fingers of faith from taking hold of Christ: And as every devil in hell opposes this work, so every carnal interest we have in the world, is an enemy to faith. We have enemies enough within us, as well as without us, both conspiring together to obstruct this work: all things increase the difficulty of believing.

Thirdly, We are next to speak of the instruments employed in this great design; and these are,

1. Principal; or,

2. Subordinate.

1. The principal instrument, by whose efficacy the heart is opened, is the Spirit of God, without whom it is impossible the design should ever prosper: neither ordinances, providences, or ministers can successfully manage it without him. If the Lord will make use of any man for the conversion and salvation of another's soul, he may rejoice in it; but withal must say, as Peter to the Jews, Acts 3:12. "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" So may the ablest minister in the world say, when God blesses his labours to the conversion of any soul; look not upon me as though by the strength of my reason, or power of my gifts, I had opened thy soul to Christ: this is the work of God's Spirit, in whose hand I am an instrument, 1 Cor. 3:7. "He that plants is nothing, and he that waters is nothing." Nothing in himself; the very first stroke of conviction, which is introductive to the whole work of conversion, is justly ascribed to the Spirit; John 16:9. "The Spirit when he cometh, shall convince the world of sin." He is the Lord of all sanctifying and gracious influences. Ordinances are but as the sails of a ship; ministers as the seamen that manage those sails: the anchor may be weighed, the sails spread, but when all this is done, there is no sailing till a gale come. We preach and pray, and you hear; but there is no motion Christ-ward, until the Spirit of God (compared to the wind, John 3:8) blow upon them. Until he illuminates the understanding with divine light, and bows the will by an almighty power, there can be no spiritual motion heaven-ward. Now the Spirit of the Lord is a free agent, not tied to means, time or instruments; but as at a certain time an angel came down upon the waters of Bethesda, and put a healing virtue into them, so it is here: therefore never come to any gospel-ordinance, without an eye to the Spirit, on whom all their blessing and efficacy depend. O lift up your hearts for his blessing upon the means, as ever you expect saving benefits from them.

2. The subordinate instrumental means by which this blessed design is

effectually managed in the world, is the gospel-ministry, 1 Cor. 3:5. "Who then is Paul, and who then is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" This is the ordinary stated method of begetting faith; and though God hath not tied himself to this or that minister, time, or place, yet he hath tied us to a diligent and constant attendance upon them; Rom. 10:14. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" I confess, it seems a very unlikely means, a weak and foolish method, according to the dictate of corrupt human wisdom; yet by the foolishness of preaching, it pleases God to save them that believe, 1 Cor. 1:20. That which the wisdom of men derides, God makes effectual unto salvation. And oh, how many are there that will have cause to bless God to all eternity, for gifting and sending such ministers among them, whose doctrine the Lord blessed unto the conversion of their souls!

Fourthly, In the next place let us consider the scope and intention of this great design wherein these instruments are employed: there are no great designs in the world but aim at some end to be accomplished by them. Now there are two things in the eye and intention of this design, which are worthy of it.

1. The Exaltation of his own grace, and the riches of his goodness before angels and men to all eternity. The name of God is never made so glorious in this world, as it is by bringing over the hearts of men and women to believe. God reaps more glory from the faith of a poor creature that comes to Christ empty and weary, than he doth from the other works of his hands. He hath not the like glory from the sun, moon, and stars, as from such poor creatures whose hearts open to Jesus Christ under the gospel-call. Thus they are fitted to manifest the glory of his grace, Eph. 1:5, 6. "To the praise of the glory of his grace," &c. God will have his rich and glorious grace praised and admired by angels and men for evermore; and every converted soul is as it were a monument erected unto the praise of his grace. Heaven will ring with praises for ever, that the great God would humble himself to come into the heart of a vile sinner, and dwell and walk therein, as the expression is, 2 Cor. 6:16. O this is admirable, that the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, will take up

his dwelling-place in a poor contrite sinner, that trembles at his word, Isa. 57:15.

2. The eternal salvation and blessedness of the soul so opened to Christ is also the design and aim of this work of opening the heart. Luke 19:9. When the soul of Zaccheus was opened by faith, "This day, saith Christ, is salvation come to thy house." You do not only believe to the glory of God, but to the salvation of your own souls, Heb. 10:39. The opening of our hearts to Christ now, is in order to the opening of heaven to us hereafter. This is both the *finis operis et operantis*, end of the work, and intention of the worker. 1 Cor. 1:21. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that do believe." It presently puts them into a state of salvation, though they be not yet actually and completely saved. There is a necessary connection betwixt conversion and salvation; though betwixt conversion and complete salvation, there may be many groaning hours, sick and sad days and nights; but full deliverance from sin and misery is secured to the soul in the work of faith, Col. 1:27. "Christ in you is the hope of glory."

Thus you see this great and glorious design projected and managed; and this is the very scope, aim, and intention of the whole gospel, even the opening the hearts of sinners unto Christ by faith, will evidently appear by considering the several parts of the gospel which have a direct aspect upon this design, and the declared end of the Spirit, who is sent forth to make it effectual to this very end and purpose.

1. To this the commands of the gospel look; it lies full in the eye of the preceptive part of the gospel, 1 John 3:23. "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And it is a very great encouragement (if rightly considered) that faith is constituted a duty by a plain gospel-precept; for this cuts off that vain pretence and plea of presumption; What! such a vile wretch as thou (saith Satan) presume to believe in Christ? But this cuts off the plea; here is a command from the highest sovereignty, the contempt whereof men shall answer at their utmost peril.

2. This also is the declared end and scope of the gospel promises and threatenings, whereby the souls of sinners are assaulted on both sides. As

for promises, how are all the sacred pages of the Bible adorned with them as the firmament with radiant stars! Amongst which that in the text seems to excel in glory. "If any man open to me, I will come in to him." Like unto which is that, John 6:35, 37. "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst; him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Such rich and excellent encouragements to faith had never been put into the promises, but for faith's sake. And then for gospel-threatenings, though they have a dreadful sound, yet they have a gracious design. What a terrible thunder-clap is that, John 3:36. "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." To which another threatening echoes with a like terrible voice, Mark 16:16. "He that believeth not shall be damned." There be dreadful things, you see, threatened in the gospel against unbelievers; but what is the intention of those threatenings but to scare men out of their unbelief and carnal security unto Christ? And thus both the promises and the threatenings, though of far different natures, conspire and meet in the self-same design, even to open the heart to Christ by faith,

3. For the sake of this design all gospel-ordinances and officers are instituted and appointed, maintained and continued in the world unto this day. Why did Christ at his triumphant ascension shed forth such variety of gifts upon men, but that God might dwell among them? Psal. 68:18. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." The whole frame of gospel-ordinances is declaredly set up for this purpose to bring men to Christ, and build them up in Christ, Eph. 4:12.

4. All the scripture-records of converted sinners, whose hearts God hath in any age opened, were made for this very purpose to encourage other souls by their examples to believe in, or open unto Christ as they did. For this purpose that famous and memorable conversion of Paul was graciously recorded, 1 Tim. 1:16. "Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Never was any man's heart bolted and made fast with

stronger prejudices against Christ than this man's was; yet the Spirit of the Lord opened it. O how flexible was his will! "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This gives great encouragement to other sinners to come in to Christ as he did; and therefore when men shall see other sinners receiving Christ, and themselves continue still obstinate and unbelieving, those very examples which God hath set before their eyes put a dreadful aggravation upon their unbelief? as you may see, Mat. 21:32. "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him; and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him." q. d. Though you saw publicans, reputed the worst of men, and harlots the worst of women, convinced, humbled, and brought unto faith; yet these sights no way affected your souls; you never had one such reflection as this, Lord! have not I as much need to fly from the wrath to come, and mind the salvation of my own soul as these? will it not be a dreadful aggravation of my misery, that such as these should obtain Christ and heaven, and I be shut out?

5. To conclude: The opening of the heart to Christ is the very end and errand of the Spirit of God, upon whose concurrence and blessing the success of all ordinances depends; upon this design he is sent expressly from heaven to open the understanding and consciences of sinners by conviction, John 16:9. For it is not in the power of the word alone to produce this effect; thousands of excellent sermons may be preached, and not one heart opened by conviction. He is expressly set to this end and purpose. What remains is the application of this point.

I. Use, for Information

Inf. 1. If the opening of the heart to Christ be the great and direct intention and end of the gospel, How are they deceived that bless themselves in the attainment of some lesser end and intentions of the gospel, whilst the great end (the effectual persuasion of the will to Christ) is not at all effected upon them. There are some collateral strokes, some by-effects as I may call them, which the gospel hath upon men. It would pity a wise considerate man to see how poor souls hug themselves with a conceited happiness in these lesser things, whilst they still stick fast in the state of unregeneracy. I would fain undeceive such mistaken wretches

who bow down under the power of self-deceit, and that in so great and important a point, in which their eternal salvation is concerned. There be two things which are exceeding apt to deceive men in this matter; viz.

1. Partial convictions on the understanding.
2. Transient motions upon the affections.

In these two things multitudes deceive themselves, as if the whole design of the gospel were accomplished upon them therein. (1.) Partial convictions upon the understanding; light and knowledge breaking into the mind, producing orthodoxy of judgment; this seems to be the effectual opening of the understanding to Christ, though alas! to this day they never saw sin in its vileness, much less their own special sin; nor Christ in his suitableness and necessity. People that live under the gospel can hardly avoid the improvement of their understandings by the light that shines upon them: knowledge grows, parts thrive; these enable them to discourse and defend the points of religion excellently. Yea, it may be from the strength of these gifts, they can pray with commendable variety and largeness of expression: these things beget applause from men, and confidence in yourselves, whilst all the while no saving influences are shed down to quicken, change, and spiritualize the heart. (2.) There are transient motions and touches of the gospel upon the affections, which give some men their melting pangs and moods now and then under the word, though it never settles into a spiritual frame, an habitual heavenliness of temper; of such the apostle speaks, Heb. 6:5. And this is the more dangerous, because they now seem to have attained all that is essential to religion, or necessary to salvation. For when unto the light of their understandings there shall be added melting affections, a man now seems to be complete in all that the gospel requires to the being and constitution of a Christian, as a great divine speaks*: for thus poor souls are apt to reason; If I had only light in my mind, and never found any meltings of my affections, I might suspect myself justly to be an hypocrite; but there are times when my affections, as well as my understanding, seem to feel the power of the gospel. And yet these things may be where the heart never effectually opens to Christ; all this may be but a morning dew, an early cloud, that vanisheth away; as is plain in John's hearers, John 5:35 and in Paul's hearers, Gal. 1:14, 15. For except

the convictions upon the understanding be particular and effectual, and the motions upon the affections settled to a heavenly habit and temper, the man is but where he was before as to the real state and condition of his soul. Were thy understanding so convinced of the evil nature and dreadful consequences of sin, and thy affections and will thereupon so effectually determined to choose and embrace the Lord Jesus, upon a considerate and thorough examination of his own terms and articles propounded in the gospel; then thou mightest conclude the great design of it were accomplished upon thy soul: but to rest in general convictions and transient affections without this is but to mock and deceive thy own soul. Alas! this comes not home to the main end of the gospel,

Inf. 2. Learn from hence the prodigious stubbornness and hardness of the hearts of men living daily under the gospel, which still resist it, though it bear upon them in part of it.

You have heard how all its commands, promises, threatenings, and examples, bear directly and jointly upon the hearts of sinners to get open the will to Christ: and yet how few are there, comparatively, that obey and answer this great design of it! all these are like heaven's great artillery planted against the unbelief and stubbornness of the hearts of men, to batter down their carnal reasonings, overthrow their vain hopes, and open a fair passage for Christ into their souls. 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds, casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." If a mount be raised, and many cannon planted thereon, and all played against the wall of a fort, thousands of shots made, and yet no breach, not one stone moved out of its place, you will say, that is a strong wall indeed. Beloved, God hath, as I may say, raised a mount in the gospel, planted the great ordnance of heaven upon it, discharged many dreadful vollies of threatenings; nay, he hath as it were, come under the walls of the unbelieving soul, with terms of grace and mercy, and yet no opening; O prodigious obstinacy! "We have piped unto you, but ye have not danced: we have mourned unto you, but ye have not lamented," Matth. 11:17. Neither the sweet airs of gospel-grace, nor the dreadful thunders of the law, make any impression upon

you. O what an obdurate rock is the heart by nature! Certainly, every Christian may see enough in others, and find enough in himself, without the help of other books to confute the Arminian doctrine, which so extols and flatters the nature of man. It is as possible to make an impression with your finger upon a wall of brass, as for the best sermon in the world, in its own strength, to make an effectual saving impression upon a sinner's will.

Infer. 3. It is the great design of the gospel, to open the hearts of men to Christ? Then wonder not that it meets with such strong and fierce opposition from Satan, wherever it is sincerely and powerfully preached. As for general and formal preaching, which comes not to the quick, the devil is not so much concerned about it, he knows it will do him no great damage; nay, it fastens and secures his interests in the souls of men. But wherever the gospel comes with Spirit and power, laying the axe to the root, shewing men the vanity of their ungrounded hopes, pressing the necessity of regeneration and faith, this preaching quickly gives an alarm to hell, and raises all manner of opposition against it. 'What is it to preach the gospel, (saith Luther) but to drive the rage and fury of the whole world upon us?' Satan is the god of this world, all men by nature are his born subjects: no prince on earth is more jealous of the revolt of his subjects than he; and it is time for him to bestir himself, when the gospel comes to dethrone him, as it doth in the faithful preaching of it, John 12:31. "Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Now he falls as lightning from heaven, Luke 10:18. Now sinners are made sensible of the cruel tyranny and bondage of Satan's government, and of the glorious liberty offered to them by Jesus Christ. Satan suspecting the issue of these things, bestirs himself to purpose. O what showers of calumnies, and storms of persecution doth he pour upon the names and persons of Christ's faithful ambassadors! Certainly, he owes Christ's ministers a spite, and they shall know and feel it, if ever he get them within the compass of his chain. But let this discourage none employed in this glorious design; the Lord is with them to protect their persons and reward their diligence.

Infer. 4. If the opening of the heart be the main design of the gospel, Christ and faith ought to be the principal subjects that ministers should

insist on among their people.

There are many other useful doctrines which may, and ought to be opened and pressed in their time and place. Moral duties, &c. have their excellencies; but Christ and faith are the great things we are to preach. Let men be once brought to Christ, and the rest will follow; but, to begin and end with morality, will never make men gospel-Christians. Grace teaches morality, Tit. 2:11 but morality without grace saves no man. I doubt not but it has been a grand artifice of the devil, to confound grace with morality, and make men believe that nothing is more required unto men's salvation, but a civil sober conversation in the world, and so lay by the principal part of the gospel, which opens and presses the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith in the blood of Christ. Such preaching as this answers not the end and design of Christ in the conversion of souls; such kind of preaching disturbs not the consciences of men: the Lord help all his ambassadors to mind the example and charge of their Redeemer, and laying aside all carnal interest, to apply themselves faithfully unto the souls and consciences of their hearers, "not as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ."

II. Use, of Conviction

In the next place, this doctrine is of excellent use to convince men of the dreadful damning nature of the sin of unbelief: a sin which defeats and frustrates the main design of the blessed gospel of Christ on the unbeliever's soul.

This is the sin that keeps the heart fast shut against him. As faith is the radical grace, so unbelief is the radical sin. What shall I say of it? It is the traitor's gate, through which those souls pass that are to perish for ever. The gospel can do you no good, the blood of Christ can yield no saving benefit, whilst your souls remain under the dominion and power of this sin. When we consider the mighty arguments of the gospel, we may wonder that all that hear them are not immediately persuaded to Christ by them. And, on the other side, when we consider the mighty power of unbelief, how strongly it holds the soul in bondage to sin; we may admire that any soul is brought over to Christ by the gospel. It was not without cause that the apostle puts faith in Christ among the great mysteries and

wonders of the gospel, 1 Tim. 3:16. Now the intrinsic evil and fearful consequences of this sin of unbelief will appear in these following particulars:

1. Unbelief fixes the guilt of all other sins on the person of the unbeliever; it binds them all fast upon his soul, John 8:24. "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Die in thy sins man? it were better for thee to die any other death. What more terrible can God threaten, or man feel? This is the sin that makes "the death of Christ of none effect to us," Gal. 5:4. There is indeed a sovereign virtue in the blood of Christ to pardon sin, but thy soul cannot have the benefit of it, while it remains under the dominion of this sin. As it was said of the miraculous works of Christ, "He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief," Matth. 13:58 so none of his spiritual works, no ordinances can do thy soul good, until the Lord break the power of this sin; Heb. 4:2. "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." If a man were dangerously sick, or wounded, the richest cordials and most sovereign plaisters in the world can never recover him, unless received and applied. Unbelief spills the most sovereign cordials of the gospel as water upon the ground. The greatest sins that ever thou committedst might be pardoned, did not this sin lie in the way; were this gone, all the rest were gone too: but whilst unbelief remains, they also remain upon thee.

2. Of all the sins that are upon the souls of men, this is the most difficult sin to be removed and cured: other sins lie more open to conviction, but this hath the most specious pretences to countenance and defend it. Men commit this sin out of a fear of sin. They will not believe, lest they should presume: they dare not believe, because they are not qualified. The strength of other sins meets in this sin of unbelief: it is the strongest fort wherein Satan trusteth. Take an adulterer, or a profane swearer, and you have a fair open way to convince him of his sin; shew him the command he hath violated, and he hath nothing to say in his own defence; but the unbeliever hath a thousand plausible defences.

3. This is the great damning sin of the world. I do not say but all other sins deserve damnation, (for the wages of sin is death) but this is the sin in the virtue whereof other sins damn and ruin the soul. This is the

condemnation, John 3:19. And as it is a damning sin, so it is a sin which damns with aggravated damnation, 2 Thess. 1:8. O then, let us mourn over, and tremble at this dreadful sin which opposes and so often frustrates the great design and main end of the whole gospel.

III. Use, for Exhortation

Is it the main scope of the gospel to bring men to Christ by faith? then be persuaded heartily to comply with this great design of the Father, Son, and Spirit, ministers, ordinances, and providences, in opening your hearts to receive Christ this day by faith unfeigned.

And, O that I could suitably press this great point, which falls in so directly with the main stream and scope of the whole gospel: and O that whilst I am pressing it, you would lift up a hearty cry to heaven, 'Lord give me faith, whatever else thou deny me; open my heart to Christ under the gospel-calls.' I do not only press you to a general and common assent to the truths of the gospel, 'that Christ is come in the flesh, and laid down his life for sinners;' but unto 'a hearty evangelical consent to receive him upon gospel-terms; to close with him in all his offices, subjecting heart and life unto his authority, living entirely upon him for righteousness, and to him by holiness.' The value of such a faith as this is above all estimation. For, (1.) this is the grace which God hath dignified and crowned with glory and honour above all its fellow-graces. Its singular praises and encomiums are in all the scriptures. This is called precious faith, 2 Pet. 1:1. Soul-searching faith, Jam. 2:5. That is a miserable poor soul indeed that is destitute of it, whatever the largesses of providence have been to him. And he is truly rich to whom God hath given faith, whatever he hath denied him of the comforts of this life. This Christ calls the work of God, John 6:22. "This is the work of God, that you believe." Why so, are all other things that your eyes behold; they are the works of God; the earth, the sea, the sun, moon, and stars, they are his handy-work. True, they are so; but this is the work, the most eminent, glorious, and admirable work of God, sine pare, excelling all his other works which your eyes behold. And, (2.) that which exalts and dignifies it not only above all the works of God's hands, but even above its fellow-graces, the work of his Spirit, is that high office unto which it is appointed in the justification of a sinner. God hath singled out this grace from among all

the other graces, to be the instrument of receiving and applying the righteousness of Christ for the justification of a guilty soul, Rom. 5:1. You are never said to be justified by love, hope, or desire, but by faith. It is true, all other graces are supposed in the person justified; but none apprehends and applies the righteousness of Christ for justification, but this only. And the justifying act of faith being a receiving act, the glory of God is therein secured; therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace.

(3.) The grace of faith, which I am recommending to you this day, is not only the instrument of your justification, but it is also the bond of your union with Christ, Eph. 3:17. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." It is the uniting grace, the marriage-knot; it is that which gives interest in, and title to the person and benefits of Christ; the great thing upon which the eyes of all the awakened world are intently and solicitously fixed. Whatever apprehensions you have of an interest in Christ, and whatever his benefits be worth in your eyes, neither himself nor they can ever be obtained without faith. O brethren, there is a day coming when they that now slight and neglect this interest and concern of their souls, would gladly part with ten thousand worlds for a good title to Christ, could it be purchased therewith: but it is faith, and nothing without faith, that intitles you to Christ, and to his benefits.

(4.) That which should yet more endear this grace of faith to you is this, that it is the hand which receives your pardon from the hand of Christ, the messenger that brings a sealed pardon to a trembling sinner. Acts 10:43. "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Cleared of all those sins from which the law could never clear them, nor any repentance, restitution, nor obedience of their own without faith. O what a welcome messenger is faith, and what joyful tidings doth it bring! you would say so if ever you had felt the efficacy of the law upon your consciences; if ever you had lain, as some sinners have, with a cold sweating horror upon your panting bosoms, under the apprehensions of the wrath of God. This fruit of faith is rather to be admired than expressed, Psal. 32:1.

(5.) Faith is not only the messenger that brings you a pardon from heaven; but it is, as I may say, that heavenly herald that publishes peace in the soul of a sinner. O peace, how sweet a word art thou! how welcome to a poor condemned sinner! "Beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that publish peace." Now it is faith that brings this blessed news and publishes it in

the soul, without which all the publishers of peace without us, can administer but little support, Rom. 5:1. Faith brings the soul out of the storms and tempests with which it was tossed, into a sweet rest and calm, Heb. 4:3. "We which have believed do enter into rest." Is the quiet harbour welcome to poor weather-beaten seamen, after they have past furious storms and many fears upon the raging sea? O how welcome then must peace be to that soul that hath been tossed upon the tempestuous ocean of its own fears and terrors, blown up and incensed by the terrible blasts of the law and conscience? It was a comfortable sight to Noah and his family, to see an olive-leaf in the mouth of the dove, by which they knew the waters were abated. But, oh! what is it to hear such a voice as this from the mouth of faith, Fury is not in me, saith the Lord; his anger is turned away, and he comforteth thee? Fear not thou, poor tempestuated soul, the God of peace is thy God. (6.) Faith doth not only bring the tempestuous soul into a calm, but it is the grace also which opens to the soul a door of access into the gracious presence of God; without it there is no coming to him acceptably; Heb. 11:6. "He that cometh unto God must believe." This liberty and access to God is indeed the purchase of the blood of Christ; he procured it at a great sum: but faith is the grace that brings the soul actually into the presence of God, and there helps it to open and ease its griefs, and, with liberty of speech, to discover all its grievances, fears, and burdens to the Lord. And truly, this world were not worth the living in without such a blessed vent to our troubles as this is. The believer only hath gotten the key that opens the door of access unto God; if he have any sins, wants, burdens, afflictions, temptations, &c. here he can ease them. Ah! Christian, the time may come when thy heart may be filled with sorrows to the brim, and there may not be found a person of thy acquaintance in all the world to whom thou canst turn to ease thy sorrows, or give vent to thy troubles. Now, blessed be God for faith; O the ease one act of faith gives a troubled soul, which is like bottles full of new wine, and must either vent or break! Well may it be said, The just shall live by faith: how can we imagine we should live without it? Certainly our afflictions and temptations would swallow us up, were it not for the sweet assiduous reliefs that come in by faith. (7.) And yet farther to enflame your desires after faith, this is the grace that gives you the soul-reviving sights of the invisible world, without which this world would be a dungeon to us, Heb. 11:1. It is not only the substance of things

hoped for, but the evidence of things not seen. O it is a precious eye! how transporting are those visions of faith! 1 Pet. 1:8. "Whom having not seen, we love; whom though now we see him not, yet, believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." We that preach of heaven to you, cannot shew you the glorious person of Christ there, nor the thrones, crowns, and palms that are above; but faith can make these things visible. That is an eye that can penetrate the clouds, and shew you to him that is invisible, Heb. 11:27. (8.) The grace of faith, which I am recommending to you this day, is instrumentally the livelihood of your souls in this world, Hab. 2:4. "The just shall live by his faith." When God gives a soul faith, he gives it him for a livelihood, and expects he should keep house upon it while he lives in this world; and God reckons he hath made plentiful provision for your souls, when he hath given them faith, and furnished out such variety of precious promises for your faith to feed upon. Abraham, Moses, David, and all the saints, kept house upon no other provision but what faith brought in; and at what a high and excellent rate did they live? Here man eateth angels food. It is a storehouse of provision; it is a shop of cordials; "I had fainted unless I had believed," Psal 27:13. A believer lives the highest life of all men upon earth; and as the believer's soul is daily fed by faith, so all the other graces in his soul are maintained and daily supported by the provision faith brings them in. The other graces (as one saith) like the young birds in the nest, live upon that provision this grace of faith gathers for them, and puts into their mouths. Take away faith, and you quickly starve the soul of a Christian. Will not all this engage your desires after faith? Why then (9.) consider this is the grace whereby we die safely as well as live comfortably: as you cannot live comfortably without it in this world, so neither can you die safely or comfortably without it when you go out of this world; Heb. 11:13. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." Mark here, how these excellent persons died; they all died embracing the promises in the arms of their faith. An allusion to two dear friends, hugging one another at their parting. O precious promises, saith the dying believer; of what unspeakable use and benefit have you been to me all the days of my pilgrimage! You are they to whom I was wont to turn in all my troubles and distresses; but I am now going into the life of immediate vision; farewell blessed promises, scriptures, ordinances, and

communion of imperfect saints; I shall walk no more by faith, but by sight. (10.) In a word, and that a great word too, this is the grace that saves you, Eph. 2:8. "By grace are you saved through faith." Your salvation is the fruit of free-grace; but grace itself will not save you in any other method but that of believing. The grace of God runs down through the channel of faith; faith is the grace that espouses your soul to Christ here, and accompanies it every step of the way until it comes to its full enjoyment in heaven, and then is swallowed up in vision. It embarks you with Christ, and pilots you through the dangerous seas, till you drop anchor in the haven of everlasting rest and safety; where you receive the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. O then, in consideration of the incomparable worth and absolute necessity of this precious grace, make it your great study, make it your constant cry to heaven, night and day, Lord give me a believing heart, an opening heart to Jesus Christ. If you fail of this, you come short of the great end and design of the whole gospel, which is to bring you to faith, and by faith to heaven.

SERMON X - REVEL. 3:20

— If any man hear my voice, and open the door, [I will come in to him, and sup with him.]

IN the former sermons, we have considered Christ's suit for a sinner's heart: we now come to the powerful arguments and motives used by him to obtain his suit, which are two:

1. Union, "I will come in to him, and sup with him."
2. Communion, "and he with me."

These are strong and mighty arguments and encouragements, able, one would think, to open any heart in the world to Christ, and yet considering how fast the hearts of men are glued to their lusts, fixed and riveted in

their sins, until the Spirit come upon them with powerful convictions; and when under conviction, what mighty discouragements they labour under from their former sinfulness and present unworthiness, all this is little enough to bring them to faith; nay, in itself utterly insufficient, without the almighty power second and set them home with effect on the heart; for it is not mere moral suasion will do the work. It is true, Christ will not make a forcible entrance into the soul, he will come in by the consent of the will; but the will consents not, until it feels the power of God upon it, Psal. 110:3. Almighty power opens the heart and determines the will, but still in a way congruous to the nature of the will; Hos. 11:4. "I drew them with the cords of a man, with the bands of love." When, under the influence of this power, the soul opens unto Christ, he will come in, take that soul for his everlasting habitation, refresh and feast it with the sweetest consolations and privileges purchased by his blood, whence the tenth observation is,

Doct. 10. That Christ will certainly come into the soul that opens to him; and will not come empty-handed, but will bring rich entertainment with him. I will come in to him, and sup with him.

When the prodigal (the emblem of a convert) returned to his father, Luke 15:22 his father not only received, but adorned and feasted him. In opening this point, I shall shew,

First, What Christ's coming into the soul intends.

Secondly, How it appears Christ will come in to the opening soul.

Thirdly, What that rich entertainment is he brings with him.

Fourthly, Why he thus entertains the soul that receives him and opens to him.

First, What Christ's coming in to the soul intends; and in general I must say, this is a great mystery, which will not be fully Understood till we come to heaven; John 14:20. "At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Then the essential union of Christ and his Father, and the mystical union between believers and Christ, will

be more clearly understood than we are capable to understand them in this imperfect state: yet for the present so much is discovered, as may justly astonish poor sinners at the marvellous condescension of the Lord Jesus to them. More particularly, this expression, I will come in to him, imports no less than his uniting such a soul to himself; for he comes in with a design to dwell in that soul by faith, Eph. 3:17 to make such a man a mystical member of his body, flesh and bones, Eph. 5:30 which is the highest honour the soul of man is capable of. Indeed this coming of Christ into the soul of a sinner, doth not make him one person with Christ: that is the singular honour to which our nature is advanced by the hypostatical union: But this makes a person mystically one with Christ; and though it be beneath the hypostatical union, yet it is more than a mere fœderal union. Christ's coming into the soul, signifies more than his coming into covenant with it, for it is the taking of such a person into a mystical union with himself, by the imparting of his Spirit unto him. As the vital sap of the stock coming into the graft, makes it one with the stock, John 15:15 so the coming of Christ's Spirit into the soul, makes it a member of his mystical body; and this is a glorious supernatural work of God, 1 Cor. 1:30 most honourable, most comfortable, and for ever sure and indissoluble; as I have elsewhere* more fully shewed.

Secondly, I shall evidence the truth and certainty of this most comfortable point, that Christ will come in, and that with singular refreshments and comforts, to every soul that hears his voice and opens to him. No present unworthiness, or former rebellions shall bar out Christ, or obstruct his entrance into such a soul. Whatever thou hast been or done; all that notwithstanding, Christ will come in to thee, and dwell with thee, and make thy soul an habitation for himself through the Spirit, Eph. 2:22. I say, let thy heart be open to him, and he will both fill and feast thee, with a non obstante, as to all thy former miscarriages.

I know it is the common discouragement that multitudes of convinced humbled sinners lie under, who seeing so much vileness in their natures and practices, cannot be persuaded that ever the Lord Jesus will cast an eye of favour on them, much less take up his abode in them. What, dwell in such a heart as mine, which hath been an habitation of devils, a sink, a puddle of sin from my beginning! this is hard to be believed; but, sinner,

thou hast the word of a King from heaven for it, a word whose credit has never failed from the first moment it was spoken, that whatever thy former or present vileness or unworthiness hath been, or is, he will not be shy of such a soul as thou art, if thou be but willing to open to him. Thy great unworthiness shall be no bar to his union with thee. "If any man open, I will come in to him," &c. For,

1. If personal unworthiness were sufficient to bar Christ out of thy soul, it would equally bar him out of all the souls in the world: for all are unworthy as well as thyself. Wherever Christ finds sinfulness, he finds unworthiness; and to be sure he finds this wherever he comes. Christ never expected to find worthiness in thee, but it highly pleases him to find thee under a becoming sense of thy personal unworthiness, Jer. 3:13. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God," &c. The returning prodigal acknowledged to his father, "I am not worthy to be called thy son," Luke 15:18, 19. But this did not bar his access to, or hinder his acceptance by his father. All that come to God to be justified, must see and confess their own vileness, and come to him as one that justifieth the ungodly, Rom. 4:5.

2. Thy former vileness and present unworthiness can be no bar to Christ's entrance, because it can be no surprize to him. He knew thou wast an unworthy soul when he made the first overture of grace and reconciliation to thee; and if thy unworthiness hindered not the beginning of his treaty with thee, it shall not hinder the closing and finishing act thereof in his union with thee. "I knew that thou wast a transgressor from the womb," Isa. 47:8.

3. Christ never yet came into any soul where Satan had not the possession before him. Every soul in which Christ now dwells, was once in Satan's power and possession, Acts 26:18. "To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." So Luke 11:21, 22. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoil."

4. Thy present vileness and unworthiness can be no bar to Christ's entrance into thy soul, because Christ never yet objected to any man his

unworthiness, but his unwillingness to come unto him; John 5:40. "You will not come unto me, that you might have life." And again, Mat. 23:37. "How oft would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not?" Indeed, you find something like a repulse from Christ to that poor Canaanitess, Mat. 15:24, 26. "Lord, help me," said that poor distressed soul; "but he answered and said, it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." However harshly and discouragingly these words sound, yet certainly it was none of Christ's intent to damp and discourage her faith, but to draw it forth to a more excellent and intense degree: which effect is produced, ver. 27.

5. Neither would Christ have made the tenders of mercy so large and indefinite, had he intended to have shut out any soul upon the single account of personal unworthiness, provided it be but willing to come unto him. Cast thine eye, poor discouraged soul, upon Christ's invitations and proclamations of grace and mercy in the gospel, and see if thou canst find any thing beside unwillingness as a bar betwixt thee and mercy; hearken to that voice of mercy, Isa. 55:1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; come buy wine and milk without money, and without price," i.e. without personal desert or worthiness. So again, Rev. 22:17. "The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Here you see personal vileness and unworthiness is no obstacle in the way of Christ. Once more, see John 7:37. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Thus you see what Christ's coming into the soul is, and what evidences there are, that when once the soul is made truly willing, Christ will certainly come into it; and no former vileness or present unworthiness shall be a bar to obstruct his entrance.

Thirdly, In the next place I shall shew you, That when Christ comes into the soul he will not come empty-handed. It is Christ's marriage-day, and he will make it a good day, a festival-day; bringing such comforts along with him, as the soul never tasted before. He spreads as it were a table, furnishes it with the delicacies of heaven: I will sup with him, saith the text. What those spiritual mercies are which Christ brings along with him to the opening, willing soul, comes next in order to be spoken to. And,

1. When Christ comes into the soul of a sinner, he brings a pardon with him, a full, a free, and a final pardon of all the sins that ever that soul committed. This is a feast of itself, good cheer indeed: Christ thought it to be so when he told the poor palsy-man, Matth. 9:2. "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." He doth not say, Be of good cheer, thy palsy is cured, thy body recovered from the grave; but, "be of good cheer, thy sins are pardoned." O how sweetly may the pardoned soul feed upon this! And this is not any peculiar mercy designed for some special favourites, but what is common to all believers, Acts 13:43. "By him all that believe are justified from all things." Christ and pardon come together; and without a pardon no mercy would relish: no feast, no music, no money, no honour, have any favour or comfort with them to a condemned man; but the comfort of a pardon reaches to the very heart, Isa. 40:1, 2. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith the Lord: speak comfortably to Jerusalem;" or, as in the Hebrew, speak to the heart of Jerusalem. But what are the ingredients of that cordial that will comfort Jerusalem's heart? Why, "Say unto her, that her iniquities are pardoned;" that carries along with it the spirit of all consolation.

And there are three things in the pardon of sin that makes it the sweetest mercy that ever the soul tasted; comfort which is impossible to be communicated to another with the same sense that the pardoned soul hath of it, Rev. 2:17.

(1.) That which makes the pardon of sin ravishingly sweet, is the trouble that went before it. The labourings and restless tossings of the troubled soul, which were antecedent to his pardon, make the ease and peace that follow it incomparably sweet. As the bitterness of hell was tasted in the sorrows of sin, so the sweetness of heaven is tasted in the pardon of it.

(2.) The nature of the mercy itself is incomparably sweet; for it is a mercy of the first rank. Pardon is such a mercy as admits no comfort to come before it, nor any just cause of discouragement can follow after it. If God hath not spoken pardon to the soul, it can have no settled ground for joy, Ezek. 33:10. And if he have, there can be no just ground for dejection, whatever the troubles be that lie upon it. Isa. 33:24. "The inhabitants shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquities."

(3.) The third thing that makes this mercy delicious and ravishingly sweet to the soul, are the properties of it, which are four. (1.) God writes upon thy pardon, Frank: it is a free mercy which costs thee nothing, Rom. 3:24. "Being justified freely by his grace. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, yet I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgression for my own name's sake." (2.) God writes upon thy pardon full, as well as free; the pardon extends to all the sins that ever thou committedst, Acts 13:39. "By him all that believe are justified from all things." The sins of thy nature and practice; the sins of thy youth and riper age; great sins and lesser sins are all comprehended within thy pardon. Thou art acquitted not from one, but from all! Certainly, the joy of heaven must come down in the mercy of remission. O what a feast of fat things with marrow is this single mercy, a pardon free without price, full without exception! And then, (3.) it is final, without revocation; the pardoned soul never more comes into condemnation: "Thine iniquities are removed from thee as far as the east is from the west." As those two opposite points of heaven can never meet, so the pardoned soul and its pardoned sins can never more meet unto condemnation, Psal. 103:12. (4.) God writes upon the pardon another word, as sweet as any of the rest, and that is sure. It is a standing mercy never to be recalled, vacated or annulled, Rom. 8:33, 34, 35. The challenge is sent to hell and earth, men and devils: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died," &c. Who can arrest when the creditor dischargeth? Who can sue the bond when the debt is paid? It is Christ that died. The table is spread, and the first mercy served in is the pardon of sin. "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Now the labouring conscience that rolled and tossed upon the waves of a thousand fears, may drop anchor, and ride quiet in the pacific sea of a pardoned state. What joy must stream through the conscience when the sweetness of that scripture, Rom. 8:1 shall be pressed into thy cup of consolation! The pardoned soul may speak and think of death and judgment without consternation; yea, may look upon it "as a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," Acts 3:19. This is heavenly manna, the sweetness of it swallows up all expressions, all conceptions; no words, no thoughts can comprehend the riches of this mercy.

2. And yet this is not all; behold another mercy, in consequence unto this, brought in to refresh and cheer the consenting soul, and that is, peace with God. Pardon and peace go together, Rom. 5:1. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Peace is a word of a vast comprehension; peace, in the language of the Old Testament, comprehends all temporal good things, 1 Sam. 25:6. And peace in the New Testament comprehends all spiritual mercies, 2 Thess. 3:16 the blessings of heaven and earth are wrapt up in this word. The soul that opens to Christ hath peace of reconciliation in heaven; the enmity that was betwixt God and that soul is taken away through Jesus Christ, Isa. 12:1, 2. "O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me." This must be an invaluable mercy, for the purchase of it cost the blood of Christ, Isa. 53:5. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." He made peace by the blood of his cross, Col. 1:20 and this peace of reconciliation is settled by Christ upon a firm foundation. His blood gives it a more firm and steady basis and foundation than that of the hills and mountains, Isa. 54:10. And that which makes it so firm and sure, is the advocateship of Jesus Christ in heaven, 1 John 2:1, 2. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." There is also peace in the believer's conscience; peace as it were by proclamation from heaven; and this is built upon the peace of reconciliation. We cannot have the sense of peace, till we are brought into a state of peace; the latter is the result of the former. And this is a special part of that supper Christ provides to entertain the soul that receives it. How sweet this is, is better felt than spoken. A dreadful sound was lately in the ears of the law-condemned sinner; but now his heart is the seat of peace. And this peace is, (1.) the soul's guard against all inward and outward terrors, Phil. 4:7. The peace of God shall keep $\varphi\rho\upsilon\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\iota$ or, as the word is, guard your hearts and minds. The persons of princes are secured by guards of armed and valiant men, who watch while they sleep. Thus Solomon had his royal guard, because of fear in the night, Cant. 3:7, 8. This peace of God, Christian, is thy life-guard, and secures thee better than Solomon's threescore valiant men that were about him. Time was when thou wast afraid to sleep, for fear thou shouldst awake in hell: Now thou mayest say with David, "I will both lay me down and sleep, for thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety." Now come life, come death; the soul is safe, the peace of God is its royal guard. (2.) This peace is ease as well as safety to the soul: it is

hearts-ease: No sooner doth God speak peace to the conscience, but the soul finds itself at ease and rest, Heb. 4:3. "We which have believed, shall enter into rest." It is with such a soul as it was with the dove Noah sent out of the ark; that poor creature wandered in the air, as long as her wings could carry her; had her strength failed, there was nothing but the waters to receive her. O how sweet was rest in the ark? (3.) This peace is news from heaven, and the sweetest tidings that ever blest the sinner's ear, next unto Christ; Heb. 12:24. "The blood of Christ speaketh better things than that of Abel." And you are come to this blood of sprinkling, the same day and hour that Christ is come into your souls. This is the voice of that blood, 'Thou hast sinned, I have satisfied; Thou hast kindled the wrath of God, and I have quenched it.' The angels of heaven cannot feed higher; their joys are not more delicious than those prepared for believers are, whereof this is a foretaste: Whatever circumstances of trouble a man may be in, this effectually relieves him. Paul and Silas were in sad circumstances, shut up in the inner prison, their feet made fast in the stocks, their cruel keepers at the door, their execution designed in a few days: God did but set this dish upon the table before the prisoners, and they could not forbear to sing at the feast, Acts 16:25. At midnight they sang, &c.

3. After these two royal dishes, pardon and peace, a third will come, in, viz. Joy in the Holy Ghost. This is somewhat beyond peace, it is the very quintessence and spirit of all consolation. The kingdom of God is said so consist in it, Rom. 14:17 it is somewhat near to the joy of the glorified, 1 Pet. 1:8 it is heaven upon earth. All believers do not immediately attain it, but one time or other God usually gives them a taste of it; and when he doth, it is as it were a short salvation. O, who can tell what that is which the apostle calls, "The shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart, by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us!" Rom. 5:5. It is a joy that wants an epithet to express the sweetness of it, 1 Pet. 1:8. "Joy unspeakable and full of glory." It hath the very scent and taste of heaven in it, and there is but a gradual difference betwixt it and the joy of heaven. This joy of the Holy Ghost is a spiritual cheerfulness streaming through the soul of a believer upon the Spirit's testimony, which clears his interest in Christ, and glory. No sooner doth the Spirit shed forth the love of God into the believer's heart, but it streams and overflows with joy. Joy is no more under that

soul's command. And this will evidently appear, if you consider the matter of it; it arises from the light of God's countenance, Psal. 4:6, 7 the heavenly glory, 1 Pet. 1:8. "Whom having not seen we love," &c. The soul is transported with joy, ravished with the glory and excellency of Christ. Didst thou ever see this Christ whom thy soul is so ravished with? No, I have not seen him; yet my soul is transported with so much love to him, whom having not seen we love. But if thou never sawest him, how comes thy soul to be so delighted and ravished with him? why, though I never saw him by the eye of sense, yet I do see him by the eye of faith; and by that sight my soul is flooded with spiritual joy. Believing we rejoice. But what manner of joy is that which you taste? why, no tongue can express that, for it is joy unspeakable. But how are Christ and heaven turned into such ravishing joys to the soul? why, the Spirit of the Lord gives the believing soul not only a sight to discern the transcendent excellency of these spiritual objects, but a sight of his interest in them also. This is my Christ, and this the glory prepared for me. Without interest, heaven itself cannot be turned unto joy, "My soul rejoices in God my Saviour," Luke 1:47. We read, Luke 13:28 of some that shall have a sight of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yet a sight without joy; a dreadful sight to them, for want of a joint interest with them in that glory. They shall see, and yet wail and weep, and gnash their teeth: But an interest sealed, gives joy unspeakable. Now, as to the excellency of this joy, it will be found to be the pleasant light of the soul. Light and joy are synonymous terms in scripture, Psal. 97:11. It is as the cheerful light of the morning after a sad and dismal night. You that have sat in darkness and the shadow of death, you that have sat mourning in the dark, without one glimpse of a promise, you that have conversed with nothing but dismal thoughts of hell and wrath; Oh! I shall be cast away for ever! What will you say, when after all this darkness, the day-star shall arise in your hearts, the joy of heaven shall beam upon your souls? Will not this be a glorious reward for all your self-denial for Christ, and fully recompense for the frowns of carnal relations for giving entertainment to Christ? This joy of the Lord, if there were no other heaven, is an abundant recompence. This joy of the Lord shall be your strength, Neh. 8:10. Let God but give a person a little of this joy into his heart, and he shall presently feel himself strengthened by it, either to do or to suffer the will of God. Now he can pray with enlargement, hear with comfort, meditate

with delight: and if God call him to suffer, this joy shall strengthen him to bear it. This was it that made the martyrs go singing to the stake. This therefore transcends all the joys of this lower world. There are sinful pleasures men find in fulfilling their lusts. There are sensitive joys that men find in the good creatures of God, filling their hearts with food and gladness: There are also delusive joys, false comforts that hypocrites find in their ungrounded hopes of heaven. The joys of the sensualist are brutish, the joys of the hypocrite are ensnaring and vanishing; but the joys of the Holy Ghost are solid, sweet, and leading to the fulness of everlasting joy. This is the third heavenly dainty you may expect to feed on, if you open your hearts to receive Christ by faith, else you have all the consolation that ever you must expect.

4. We read in scripture of the sealings of the Spirit, a choice and blessed privilege of believers, consequent upon believing; Eph. 1:13. "In whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed," &c. This then may be expected by every soul that opens to Christ, how rich soever the comforts of it be. The Spirit indeed seals not before faith, for then should he set his seal to a blank: but he usually seals after believing, and that as the Spirit of promise. Note here, the agent or person sealing, the Spirit, he knows the counsels and purposes of God, 1 Cor. 2:10, 11. He also is authorized to this work; and being the Spirit of truth, he cannot deceive us. There is a two-fold seal spoken of in scripture; one referring to God's eternal foreknowledge and choice of men, 2 Tim. 2:19. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth who are his;" i.e. The Lord perfectly knows every soul that belongs to him through the world. But now what comfort is this to a poor believer, that God knows who are his? Therefore there is another sealing referring to the Spirit, as his act upon believers, to make them know that they are his. The first is general, The Lord knoweth who are his. But this is particular, The Lord knoweth thee to be his. This is joyful news indeed. The former makes it sure in itself, the latter makes it sure to us. Now this is a most glorious privilege, a work of the Spirit, which hath a most ravishing, delicious sweetness in it; and that which makes it so, is,

(1.) The weightiness of the matter sealed to, which is no less than Christ, and the eternal inheritance purchased by his blood. This seal secures our

title to Christ, and to the eternal glory: We are sealed to the day of redemption. The sealed believer can say, Christ, how great, how glorious soever he be, is my Christ; the covenant of grace, and all the invaluable promises contained in it are mine.

(2.) The rest and quietness which follow it, make it an invaluable mercy. This brings the anxious solicitous mind and conscience to rest and peace. O what a mercy is it to have all those knots untied, those objections answered, those fears banished, under which the doubting soul so long laboured, and which kept it so many nights waking and restless! God only knows at what rate some poor creatures live under the scarings of their own consciences, and frequent fears of hell: And what an unconceivable mercy would it be to them to be delivered at once from their dangers and fears, which hold them under a spirit of bondage? Open to Christ, and thou art in the way to such a deliverance: "Come unto me and I will give you rest," saith Christ, Mat. 11:28, 29.

(3.) This sealing of the Spirit, which follows upon believing, will establish the soul in Christ, confirm it and settle it in the ways of God, which is an unspeakable privilege; 2 Cor. 1:22. "Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ is God, who also hath sealed us." Mark how establishment follows sealing. Now temptations may come, great persecutions and sore afflictions may come; but how well is that soul provided for them all, that hath the sealings of the Spirit unto the day of redemption? Yea, though the soul that was sealed should for the present be under new darkness, new temptations and fears, yet the former sealing will give establishment and relief, when the thoughts run back to the sealing day, and a man remembers how clear God once made his title to Christ. Well then, open to Christ, if ever you expect to be sealed to salvation. If you continue to despise and reject the tenders of Christ in the gospel, whilst others that embrace him are sealed to the day of redemption; your unbelief and final rejection of Christ, will seal you up to the day of damnation.

5. And lastly, we read likewise in the Scriptures, of the Earnest of the Spirit; this is three times mentioned in the Scriptures. Eph. 1:14. "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." 2 Cor. 1:22 where it is joined with the former privilege of sealing, "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in

our hearts." And again, 2 Cor. 5:5. "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." The word is ἀρραθων, originally a Syriac word; the Greeks are supposed to get it from the Phœnician merchants, with whom they traded, and it notes a part paid in hand, to confirm a bargain for the whole. There are two things in an earnest. (1.) It is part of the sum, or inheritance; if it were a contract for a sum of money, then it was a small part of a greater parcel: if for an inheritance, then the earnest is taking a part of the inheritance, as a twig, or turf, part of the whole. Now the Spirit of God chuses this word on purpose to signify two great things to his people by it:

(1.) That those comforts communicated by the Spirit to believers, are of the same kind with the joys of heaven, though in a far inferior degree. 1 Pet. 1:8 called there, joy unspeakable, and full of glory: And Rom. 8:23 called there, The first fruits of the Spirit. The first-fruits, and the crop or harvest, are one in kind; surely there is something of heaven, as well as hell, tasted by men in this world: hell is begun here in the terrors of some men's consciences, and heaven also is begun here in the absolution, peace and comfort, of other men's consciences.

(2.) As an earnest is part of the sum or inheritance, so the use and end of it is confirmation and security; as much as to say, take this in part till the whole be paid; yea, take it for thy security that the whole shall be paid. Believers have a double pledge, or earnest for heaven, one in the person of Christ, who is entered into that glory for them, John 14:2, 3 the other in the joys and comforts of the Spirit, which they feel, and taste in themselves. These are two great securities, and the design of God in giving us these earnest, and foretastes of heaven, are not only to settle our minds but to whet our industry, that we may long the more earnestly, and labour the more diligently for the full possession. The Lord sees how apt we are to flag in the pursuit of heavenly glory, and therefore gives his people a taste, an earnest of it, to excite their diligence in the pursuits of it. God deals with his people in this case, as with Israel; they had been forty years in the wilderness, many sore temptations they had there encountered; at last they were come upon the very borders of Canaan, but then their hearts began to faint; there were Anakims, giants in the land,

poor Israel feared they should not stand before them: but Joshua sends spies into the land, who returning, bring the first-fruits of Canaan to them, whereby they saw what a goodly country it was; and then the fear of the Anakims began to vanish, and a spirit of courage to revive in the people. Thus it is, even with the borderers upon heaven; though we be near that blessed land of promise, yet our hearts are apt to faint upon a prospect of those great sufferings without us, and those conflicts with corruptions we feel within us: but one taste of the first-fruits of heaven, like those grapes of Eschol, revive our spirits, rouse our zeal, and quicken our pursuits of blessedness. For these reasons, God will not have all of heaven reserved till we come thither. And now tell me, you that have tasted these first-fruits of the Spirit, (1.) Is there not something of that glorified eye, in faith, by which the pure in heart do see God in heaven? Mat. 5:8. O that eye of faith! that precious eye! which comes as near to the glorified eye, as any thing in this imperfect state can come, 1 Pet. 1:8. "Whom having not seen ye love, in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (2.) Is there not something of that glorified love to be felt in an inferior degree by the saints in this world? What else can we make of that transport of the spouse, Cant. 2:5. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love!" It is true, our love to God, in heaven, is much more fervent, pure, and constant; yet these high-raised acts of spiritual love have a taste and relish of it. (3.) Is there not something here of that heavenly delight wherewith the glorified delight in God? As the visions of God are begun on earth, so the heavenly delights are begun here also. Some drops of that delight, are let fall here, Psalm 94:19. "In the multitude of the thoughts I had within me, thy comforts delight my soul." David's heart, it is like, had been full of sorrow and trouble; a sea of gall and wormwood had overflowed his soul: God lets fall but a drop or two of heavenly delight, and all is turned into sweetness and comfort. (4.) Is there not something here of that transformation of the soul into the image of God, which is complete in heaven, and a special part of the glory thereof? It is said in 1 John 3:2. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." This is heaven, this is glory, to have the soul moulded into full conformity with God: something thereof is experienced in this world: O that we had more! 2 Cor. 3:18. "But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from

glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." (5.) Is there not something felt here of the ravishing sweetness of God's presence in ordinances and duties, which is a faint shadow, at least, of the joys of his glorious presence in heaven? There is certainly a felt presence of God, a sensible nearness unto God at sometimes and in some duties of religion, wherein his name is as ointment poured forth, Cant. 1:3 something that is felt beyond, and above, all the comforts of this world. (6.) In a word, the joys of heaven are unspeakable joys, no words can make known to others what they are. When Paul was caught up into paradise he heard unspeakable words, 2 Cor. 12:4 and are there not times, even in this life, wherein the saints do feel that which no words can express? 1 Pet. 1:8, Rev. 2:17.

Now if such earnestness of the Spirit do follow after believing, if opening the soul to Christ do bring it unto these suburbs of heaven; who then would not receive Christ into his soul, and such an heaven upon earth with him? And thus I have shewed you what some of those heavenly rarities are with which Christ entertains believers upon earth, the fulness and perfection whereof is reserved for heaven, and hereby secured to the opening or believing soul: which was the third thing to be discovered.

Fourthly, Next we shall enquire into the reasons why Christ thus entertains, feasts, and refreshes the soul that receives him. And,

Reasons

Reason 1. This he doth to express the great joy and satisfaction his soul hath in the faith and obedience of poor sinners. We read, Isa. 53:11 of the hard travail of Christ's soul, and the great satisfaction he hath in the fruit and issue thereof: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." O what pleasure and satisfaction doth it give him to behold the eternal counsels of God and sore travails of his soul brought to such a birth! there is no such pleasure like it to the soul of Christ in this world. As it is abundant satisfaction to a man, to behold the accomplishment of a design upon which he hath laid out many thoughts and much cost, at last happily finished: or as it is to a woman that has had a hard labour, a sore travail for a child, to behold the fruit of her womb, to embrace and smile upon that child she travailed for; so, and much more than so, it is to Christ; and therefore, as the Father of the prodigal manifested the joy of

his heart for the return of his son (who was to him as dead, and lost) by a feast and music, so doth Christ here answerably manifest the content and satisfaction of his soul by entertaining the believer with these royal dainties of heaven: it is the soul's welcome home to Christ.

Reason 2. This Christ doth to relieve and refresh poor distressed souls who have endured so many fears and sorrows from the time of their first conviction until this day of their union with Christ by faith. The way of faith is a very humble way; there is much cutting work in antecedent convictions and humiliations, sad nights and sick days with many poor souls; and these things bring them very low: they see the law broken by sin, wrath hanging over them in the threatenings, the bitter taste thereof they have in their consciences; they have dealt with fears and horrors a long time, and they need succour and support, which the Lord Jesus is now resolved to give them, lest the spirit fail before him, Isa. 57:16. He delights to comfort them that are cast down, 2 Cor. 7:6. Christ is of a compassionate nature, he is as ready as able to succour them that are tempted, Heb. 2:18. That word which we render succour, signifies to run in by way of help at the cry of one that is in distress. Many emphatical cries have gone up to heaven from the distressed, sin-sick soul; these the compassionate Jesus hears, and now comes in seasonably to succour and refresh it; he hath rich cordials for fainting hours; the soul hath had a bitter breakfast, and therefore Christ will give it a comfortable supper; "I will come in to him, and sup with him."

Reason 3. Those that open their hearts to Christ must expect to meet great troubles, sufferings, and temptations, in that new course whereinto they are entered: their way to heaven lies through much tribulation; all our troubles are not over when we are got into Christ; nay, then commonly our greatest outward troubles begin. Heb. 10:32. "After ye believed ye endured a great fight of afflictions." Carnal relations now scoff, frown, and cast off; the world hates them, and marks them out for persecution. Now that poor Christians may not utterly be discouraged when they meet with those troubles in the way of their duty, Christ will cheer and hearten them by these spiritual refreshments: this is a stock laid in for a rainy day. Christ himself had a voice from heaven, Matth. 17:5. "This is my beloved Son," a little before his great combat; much

more do his poor people need such consolations, to support and encourage them. The wise God foresees, and by this provision fore-lays the troubles they are to meet with: an hour of sealing fortifies the soul for an hour of suffering. It hath been the observation of some Christians when they have felt more than ordinary comforts of the Spirit, that some great trial hath been near them; and the event hath confirmed it. Whatever comforts Christ gives his people at their first entrance into his service, they will have need enough of them all before they finish their course. To these first sealings they will need often to run back and have frequent recourse to them, and all little enough to support them in after-trials.

Reason 4. Christ comes in to the opening soul with such divine cordials and refreshments to defeat and counterminde the plot of Satan, who hath so often and so lately been discouraging them by representing the ways of Christ as sad, melancholy ways; telling them they shall never laugh more, never be merry more after they have embraced and espoused the ways of holiness: *Spiritus Calvinianus est Spiritus melancholicus*. Well, their own experiences shall now confute it, for they now taste that pleasure in Christ, in faith and obedience, which they never tasted in the ways of sin: thus that scandalous libel of the devil is experimentally confuted. They find they were never truly merry till now, Luke 15:24 all true mirth commences from our closing with Christ; "and they began to be merry."

Now these spiritual refreshments are by Christ here called a supper, because the supper among the Jews was their best meal, Luke 14:17 and because it is the last meal. This is not only the best meal that ever a believer made, but upon these spiritual comforts (though much more refined and perfect) they are to feed for ever in heaven. O Christian, well mayest thou be contented with thine outward lot of providence, however it shall fall in this world with respect to thy outward man; will a King from heaven come and sup with thee? Doth he feed thy soul with pardon, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, seal an earnest of future glory? Then thou livest at a higher and nobler rate than any of thy carnal neighbours do. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," Eph. 1:3. The same person that thus blesses God with a heart overflowing with

joy and comfort, endured as many persecutions, felt as many wants and straits as any man. What if providence do but meanly clothe your bodies, so that you cannot ruffle it out in that splendor and gallantry others do? Yet mayest thou say with the church, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels," Isa. 61:10. What if thou fare not so deliciously as the great ones of this world do? Yet if Christ will give thee to eat of the hidden manna which he promiseth, Rev. 2:17. art thou not better clothed and fed than any of the grandees or nobles of the world? This takes away all grounds of complaint. It may be you will say, O but we have bodies as well as souls; if God had created us angels, that we could live without material food, it were another case. I reply, Christ never thus intended to feast thy soul and starve thy body; he that feeds thy soul with bread from heaven will take care for all necessary provisions on earth, Isa. 41:17. You have sought and found the kingdom of God and his righteousness; fear not but all other things shall be added to you.

I. Use, for Information

The point before us is full of uses; I shall begin with information in the following inferences.

Infer. 1. Hence learn, That it is a vile and groundless slander upon religion, to say or insinuate that it deprives men of the comfort and joy of life.

The devil, in design to discourage men from the ways of God, puts a frightful mask upon the beautiful face of religion, pretending there is no pleasure or joy to be expected therein; but this is abundantly confuted and refuted in the text, "I will come in to him, and sup with him. Solomon tells us, Eccl. 10:19. A feast is made for laughter." I am sure that soul that sits with Christ at such a feast as has been described above, has the best reason of any man in the world to be merry. Religion indeed denies us all sinful pleasure, but it abounds with all spiritual pleasure. No rational, solid mirth can come before Christ: the unsanctified rejoice in things of nought, and their joy will be soon ended; they are hastening to

that place where they will find that to be verified of the wages of sin, which they now falsely impute to the wages of holiness; they shall never rejoice more, never be merry more: But believers shall find that scripture attested by their daily experience, Prov. 3:17. "Her way are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." And that there are such pleasures in the ways of God, as they never experienced in the ways of sin; for is it a solid ground of comfort to a man to be out of debt and all fears of arrests, and is it not much greater to have our debts paid to God by Christ our surety? Matth. 9:2. "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Is it matter of joy to have a sufficiency of all things for the supply of every want? He that is in Christ hath so. 1 Cor. 3:22, 23. "All are yours, and ye are Christ's." Is it a joyful life to be a borderer upon heaven, to confine upon blessedness itself? Then it is a joyful life to be in Christ; for they that are so may rejoice in the hopes of glory, Rom. 5:2. Is it matter of all joy to have the Comforter himself, who is the Spirit of all consolation, taking up his residence in thy heart, cheering, comforting, and refreshing it with such cordials as are unknown things in all the unbelieving world? Then, certainly, the life of a Christian and the ways of holiness must be most pleasant and comfortable: And therefore let none that are looking towards Christ be discouraged in their way by the slanderous reproaches designedly cast upon religion for that end. Christ and comforts dwell together.

Infer. 2. Hence, in like manner it follows, That Christians usually meet the greatest difficulties at their first entrance into religion.

The first work of religion is cutting work, wounding work, groaning and weeping work: Thus religion usually begins, Acts 2:37. Acts 16:29. Now the soul seems to be struck dead, in the giving up of all its former vain hopes, Rom. 7:9. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;" but afterward come pardon, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost. They that go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, now come back rejoicings bringing their sheaves with them, Psal. 126:6. Now that blessing takes place upon the soul, Mat. 5:4. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart." It is quite contrary in the ways of sin; all the pleasures of sin come first, the terrors and gripes of conscience come after. Sin comes with

smiles in its face, but a sting in its tail. Pleasures lead the van, hell and destruction bring up the rear, Job 20:12, 13, 14. "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; yet his meat in his bowels is turned into the gall of asps within him." But here conviction and humiliation come first, these prepare the way for Christ; and after him come rest and peace. "Their sorrow is turned into joy," John 16:20.

Object. But is this always true? Do not the worst things of religion many times come last? How many Christians go out of the world in a bloody winding sheet?

Sol. Whatever the after-sufferings of Christians may be, the worst is past when they are once in Christ. Great and sharp sufferings they may endure, but the Lord sweetens them with answerable consolations, 2 Cor. 7:4. "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." The lowest ebbs are followed with the highest tides; the greatest troubles need not give an interruption to their peace.

Infer. 3. Hence it follows, that no man can be owner of any true comfort till he be in Christ.

Comfort and refreshment, in the natural order follow faith; it is the vainest imagination in the world to expect solid, spiritual comfort before union with Christ; you may as well expect an harvest before a seed-time. I do confess there are two sorts of comforts found in the world without Christ. (1.) Men may have sensitive and sinful comforts and delights without Christ; these are common in the unregenerate world, where you may daily see rich men taking comfort in their riches, voluptuous men in their pleasures, James 5:5. "You have lived in pleasure upon earth." But these are the pleasures common to brutes, and beneath the noble, immortal spirit of a man. (2.) Hypocrites have their delights and comforts in a false imaginary happiness, which they fancy to themselves; but this is a vanishing shadow: They take comfort from their groundless hope of heaven, whither they shall never come; it is a feast in a dream, Isa. 44:20. Thus they make a bridge of their own shadow, and are drowned in the waters. Such sensitive and false comforts and pleasures men may have; but no true, solid, spiritual joy takes place in any man's heart before Christ come into it.

Infer. 4. Guess from hence what heaven is, if there be such a feast to the soul in the very foretastes of it.

If a relish, a taste of heaven, in the earnest thereof, be so transporting and ravishing, what then is the full fruition of God! If these be unutterable, what must that be! Give me leave to say, whatever the comforts and joys of any believer in this world may be, yet heaven will be a surprize to him when he comes thither. The joys of God's presence are other manner of things than our present comforts are; though these be of the same kind with them, yet in a far inferior degree. There is a six-fold difference betwixt the spiritual comforts of believers on earth, and the joys that are above. They differ,

1. In quantity.
2. In constancy.
3. In purity.
4. In efficacy.
5. In the society, and
6. In the durability of them.

1. They differ in quantity. "Here we know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," 1 Cor. 13:9, 10. When the scripture speaks of the comforts communicated to saints on earth, it usually expresses them in some diminutive terms or other, calling them first-fruits, earnest, and the like; and indeed it is necessary we should receive them here with such allays, and in remiss degrees, because the imperfection and weakness of our present state will not bear them in their plenitude and perfection. Here the joy of the Lord enters into us, but there we are said to enter into that joy, Mat. 25:21. It is too great to enter into us, therefore we enter into, and are swallowed up in it.

2. They differ in constancy; the best comforts upon earth are found to be intermitting comforts; a sun-blast and a cloud; a good day and a bad. You

know house-keepers feed upon two sorts of meat, daily-bread and dainties; rarities come not every day to the table. The daily-bread upon which believers live, is there cumbence and affiance of faith; as for assurance and joy, those come but now and then.

3. They differ in purity, as well as constancy; here we have the comforts of the Spirit, but we mingle sin with them, and usually the sin of spiritual pride, which spoils all. Yea, many times, the Lord suffers Satan to mingle his temptations and injections with them, lest we should be exalted, 2 Cor. 12:7. But above, the comforts of the saints are as the pure water of life, clear as chrystal, Rev. 22:1.

4. They differ in efficacy, as well as in purity. The highest comforts of the Spirit here are not perfectly transformative of our souls into the image of God, as they are in heaven; 1 John 3:3. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Here, after we are comforted by him, we grieve the Comforter himself by sin. Neither do the comforts of the Spirit, in this state, produce the fruits of obedience in their perfect maturity, as they do above; there is the same difference in point of efficacy as there is betwixt the influence of the sun beams in the winter months, and those in May and June.

5. There is a great difference in respect of society. Here, the believer, for the most part, eats his pleasant morsels alone; one Christian eats, and another hungers; but in heaven they all feast and feed together at one table, Mat. 8:11. "They shall sit down "with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." O what is it to rejoice in the fellowship of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, where the joy of one is the joy of all.

6. They differ also in durability; sin here puts a stop to our comforts, but in heaven as there is no comma, so there shall never be a full point or period. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. There is an eternal feast, no taking away the cloth, no rising from that feast, 2 Thes. 2:16. It is everlasting consolation: We shall be ever with the Lord.

II. Use

This point puts serious matter of exhortation into my mouth. The Lord

direct it to the hearts of all, whether they be in Christ, or out of Christ.

First, To those that are out of Christ, and will not yet be persuaded to open their hearts, and consent to his terms. O what a spiritual infatuation is here! What, shut the door of thy heart against Christ and all the delights and comforts of this and the coming world! What madness is this! Hear me, thou poor deluded sinner, that wilt not be persuaded to part with thy sinful, sensual delights in exchange for Christ, and the peace, comfort, and joy that follow him: I have a few things to speak on Christ's behalf at this time; O that they might prevail, O that by them the Spirit of the Lord might persuade thy spirit, thou poor unregenerate creature! Let me offer four or five considerations or pleas on Christ's behalf, if haply they may prevail and make way for his entertainment in thy soul. And,

Plea 1. Let me plead thine own necessity with thee; a mighty argument; which in other cases useth to make its ways through all oppositions, and make all difficulties fly before it; thou art a poor necessitous, pining, famishing soul; however thy body be accommodated, thou hast not one bit of spiritual bread for thy famishing soul to live upon. Christ is the bread that cometh down from heaven. The starving prodigal, Luke 15:16, 17 is the lively emblem of thy soul; he feeds upon husks, and thou feedest upon that which is not bread, Isa. 55:2. Thou art wretched and miserable, poor, blind, and naked, Rev. 3:17. Thy body hath often been filled and refreshed with the good creatures of God, but thy soul never tasted one bit of spiritual bread since it came into thy body; it never relished the sweetness of a pardon, the deliciousness of a promise, the joy and comfort of Christ; the choicest food that ever thou tasted, was such as thy soul cannot live upon.

Plea 2. Christ is at the door of thy soul with plenty and variety of heavenly comforts, costly dainties, purchased by his blood; if thou wilt but open to him, "Thou shalt be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and drink of the rivers of his pleasure," Psal. 36:7, 8. "He that believeth," as the scripture hath said, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," John 7:38 meaning the graces and comforts of the Spirit.

Plea 3. If Christ be put off and refused now, you may never taste of those

invaluable mercies for ever, Luke 14:24. "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." They were bidden, invited to this feast, and so are you; they refused to come, God grant you may not; for methinks this sentence of Christ, "Those men which were bidden shall not taste of my supper," is like a sentence upon a malefactor that is to be hanged in chains, and whom the law permits none to relieve. O, it will be dreadful to see the saints sitting at the royal feast in heaven, and yourselves shut out as a company of starving beggars standing in the streets, and about the doors where the marriage-supper is kept; they see the lights, they behold the rich dishes carried up, they hear the mirth and music of the guests, but not a bit comes to their share.

Plea 4. The refusal of Christ's invitation, as it is the greatest of all sins, so it will be avenged with the sorest wrath and greatest punishment; it is said of those guests that were bidden, Mat. 22:5 that they made light of it, but it fell heavy upon them, ver. 7. "He was wroth, and sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city." Have a care of making light of Christ.

Plea 5. What light and vain things are all those pleasures of sin, for the sake whereof you deprive your souls of the everlasting comforts of Jesus Christ? Deluded soul, it is not the intent of Christ to rob thee of thy comfort, but to exchange thy sinful for spiritual delights, to thy unspeakable advantage. It is true, you shall have no more pleasure in sin, but instead of that you shall have peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, and solid comforts for evermore. What are the sensitive or sinful pleasures of the world? You have the total sum of them in 1 John 2:16, 17. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever."

Quest. But how may a poor, unregenerate soul be prevailed with to make such a blessed exchange, to part with the pleasures of sin in exchange for the comforts of Jesus Christ?

Answer. Besides all that hath been offered before, let me briefly add these three following directions and counsels to such a soul.

1. Labour to see and feel thy need of Christ, and then thou wilt quickly be willing to give up all the pleasures of sin for the enjoyment of him. What makes men so tenacious of their lusts, so hard to be persuaded to give up their sinful pleasures, but this, that they never felt the need of a Saviour! Oh, sinner, didst thou but feel thy need of Christ, wert thou but hungry and thirsty for him, thou wouldst never stand upon such trifles for the enjoyment of him. We read, in the famine of Jerusalem, how they parted with their pleasant things for bread to relieve their souls; jewels, rings, bracelets, things which cost dear, and were highly valued at another time, now were willingly parted with for bread. Christ is more necessary to thee than thy necessary bread.

2. Consider the spiritual and immortal nature of thine own soul, which cannot live upon material things, and must over-live all temporary things. Now if thy soul cannot live upon them, and must certainly over-live them; what a miserable condition will it unavoidably fall into, when all these sensual, and sinful enjoyments are vanished and gone, as thou knowest they shortly will be? 1 John 2:17. "These things pass away:" and then hath thy soul nothing to live upon to all eternity.

3. Hearken to the reports and experiences of the saints, who have tried both sorts of pleasures, which you never did: They have tried the pleasures of sin, and they have tasted the pleasures of Christ, and so are best able to make a true judgment upon both; and they have accordingly determined, "That one glimpse of the light of God's countenance, puts more gladness into their hearts, than in the time that their corn and their wine increased," Psal. 4:7. Nay, the wisest Christians, upon trial of both, have rightly determined, That the worst things in religion are infinitely to be preferred to the best things belonging to sin; the very sufferings and afflictions of the people of God, have been pronounced better than the pleasures of sin for a season, Heb. 11:25. Could you but see with their eyes, and were you but capable of making a right judgment as they did, there needed not a word more to be said to persuade you to let go your most pleasant, and profitable lusts, in exchange for Christ and his beneficial, comfortable sufferings.

Secondly, The point affords variety of counsels and exhortations to the regenerate, who have opened their wills to Christ, and are thereupon

admitted into this comfortable state.

It is found, in experience, a difficult thing for a soul, after conversion, to bear and duly manage their own comforts, as it was to bear and rightly manage their troubles at conversion. My business here is to advise souls, under their first comforts and feelings of the Spirit, how to manage and improve their spiritual comforts, that they may abide with them, and be growing things continually in their souls.

Advices

Advice 1. And first, See that you humbly admire and adore the condescending goodness of God to you, in all the comforts of the Spirit which refresh you.

O that ever God should comfort such a soul as thine, that hath so often grieved him! That Christ should be a joy to thee, who hast been a sorrow to him! If you look into Eph. 1:3 you will find the spirit of the apostle there filled with the sense and admiration of this mercy, which breaks forth into this rapturous expression, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (or things in Christ)." Some there are that never enjoy an ordinary degree of earthly comforts, Job 30:3, 4, 5 others enjoy abundance of earthly comforts, but no spiritual comforts, Psal. 17:14. Some there are for whom God intends everlasting consolations in the world to come; but they are kept low, as to spiritual comforts in this world, Psal. 88:15. O, what cause have you to admire the bounty of God to you, for whom there is not only fulness of joys prepared in heaven, but such precious foretastes and earnestings of it communicated in the way thither.

Advice 2. Cleave fast to Christ and those sweet and comfortable duties of religion, wherein you have found, and tasted the best comforts that ever your souls were acquainted with.

This is one thing God aims at in the communication of these spiritual refreshments, to glue your souls fast by them to the ways of holiness. The Lord knows temptations will befall you, discouragements enough you

shall be sure to meet with; but these enjoyments of God, which you have met with in prayer and hearing, in meditation, sacraments, &c. should engage your hearts for ever to the ways of obedience. You never found that sweetness in the ways of sin, which you have found in repentance, and faith. When a temptation comes baited with sinful pleasures, say as the olive tree and the vine, in Jotham's parable, Judg. 9:9, 10, 11. Shall I leave such soul-refreshing comforts as these, for the insipid pleasures of sin? God forbid.

Advice 3. Be communicative of the spiritual comforts you enjoy, for the benefit and refreshment of others.

The Lord never intended you should engross the comforts of his Spirit to yourselves, nor eat your pleasant morsels alone. 2 Cor. 1:4. "He comforts us, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." It is true, religion lays not all open, nor yet doth it conceal, and hide all. There needs a great deal of wisdom, humility, and caution, to secure us from pride, and vanity in spirit, whilst we communicate our comforts to others: As ostentation, so also impropriation of our comforts, are against scripture-law; he may be justly suspected that opens all, and so may he too that conceals all. Spiritual comforts are not diminished, but improved by a wise, and humble communication.

Advice 4. Be much in renewing the acts, and exercises of faith; be frequent in that work.

Your first faith hath brought in your first comfort; your renewing, and repeating those precious acts of faith, will bring you in greater stores of comfort, than you yet enjoy. We are not to look upon faith as a single, but a continued act, 1 Pet. 2:4. "To whom coming as unto a living stone." Thy soul, Christian, is to be in a continual motion towards Christ; the more you believe, the more you will rejoice. You see the door through which comfort, comes into your souls. Joy is the daughter of faith, Rom. 15:13 your present comfort is the first birth of faith; but there are many comforts more in the womb of faith, which will yet be born to your souls, if unbelief cause not a miscarriage.

Advice 5. Take heed you be not a grief to Christ, who hath already brought so much comfort to you.

It will be a sad requital, if after he hath given you the joys of heaven to drink, you shall give him that which is as wormwood and gall; the Lord write that caution upon thy soul, reader, Eph. 4:30. "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day, of redemption." The argument of the apostle, in this place, strongly infers caution from comfort. Christ hath been all joy, all peace, rest, and comfort to you; take heed you be not a grief and shame to him. The intermission of thy duties, the falling and flatting of thy affections in duties, thy rash adventures upon sin, will be a grief to the heart of Christ, who hath filled thy heart with so much comfort; and if you grieve him, you cannot expect he should comfort you. A little sin may rob you of a great deal of comfort.

Advice 6. Be not staggered or dejected, if the first comforts Christ gives you should afterwards abate, or be taken away for a time.

This is a very common thing in the experience of most Christians; you must not think your first comforts are such fixed, settled things, that there is no hazard of losing them; alas! nothing is more volatile than the joys of a Christian. You will be apt to lose your first love, Rev. 2:4 and if you lose your first love, no wonder that you lose your first comforts: Yet if it should so fall out, be not cast down and discouraged; Christ is not gone, though comfort be gone; and though comfort be gone, it is not gone for ever; renew thy repentance, faith, and obedience, and try if God will not renew thy comfort. There is a former, and there is a latter spring of joy; God will make thy comforts spring again. Besides, thy justification is stedfast, though thy consolation be not so. There are two things that belong to a Christian, one to his being, viz. union with Christ; another to his well-being, viz. Comfort from Christ: The latter is uncertain and contingent, the former fixed and stedfast.

Advice 7. Be filled with compassion to others who want those comforts you enjoy, especially such as God hath knit to you in the bonds of natural relations.

Art thou a father, or a mother, to whom God hath given those comforts,

and soul-refreshments, that have been opened in this discourse? And hast thou no compassion for thy poor children, who never yet tasted one drop of these spiritual consolations; Certainly it will do a man little good to be feasted abroad, whilst his wife and children are starving at home: Say to them, as Paul in another case, "Would to God you were all as I am, except these corruptions." Religion breeds bowels of compassion. O tell them what sweetness there is in the ways of godliness; counsel, plead, and pray, that those that are yours may also be Christ's.

Advice 8. As ever you expect the continuance or enlargement of your comforts, see that you walk circumspectly.

It is as much as all your comfort is worth to give way to a little carelessness: That is a remarkable expression of the Psalmist, Psal. 85:1. "I will hearken what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, and to his saints; but let them not return again to folly." Sin, in this text, is fitly called by the name of folly; for indeed it is the greatest folly and madness in the world to forfeit and divest ourselves of such sweet peace and comfort by returning unto sin, which hath cost us so much sorrow and trouble before. Are you willing to be in your former darkness and fears, tears and troubles; to exchange the pleasant light you now enjoy, for the horrors you have formerly felt? This you must do if you return again to folly.

Advice 9. Long for heaven, where the fulness of those joys is, whereof those you taste are but the earnest and first-fruits.

One design of God in giving them, is to set us a longing after heaven to help our conceptions, and raise our affections: if these be so sweet, what must they be? Rom. 8:23. "We which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." We are not to sit down satisfied, and say we have enough of these first-fruits; but they are given to set us a groaning after the fulness of those enjoyments. This answers God's end in giving.

Advice 10. Lastly, Improve every spiritual comfort you have from Christ unto greater cheerfulness in the paths of obedience to Christ.

This is another end for which God communicates them, that our souls being refreshed by them, we might pluck up our feet the more nimbly in the paths of duty. Psal. 119:32. "Then will I run the ways of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Now God expects that you pray more frequently, meditate more delightfully, and perform every duty more cheerfully; and this is the way to perpetuate your comforts. How many Christians go on droopingly in the ways of duty for want of those encouragements you enjoy?

SERMON XI - REV. 3:20

—I will sup with him, and he with me.

WE have heard the first encouragement or argument of Christ to persuade the hearts of sinners to open to him, viz. That he will come in to them, and that not empty-handed; He will also sup with them: And to make the encouragement complete, and full, he here adds, And he with me. This last clause sets forth that spiritual, soul refreshing communion which is betwixt Christ and believers; begun in this world, completed and perfected in the world to come. Hence our eleventh observation is,

Doct. 11. That there is a mutual, sweet, and intimate communion betwixt Jesus Christ and believers in this world.

Communion with Christ is frequent in the lips of many men, but a hidden mystery to the souls of most men. This atheistical age scoffs at, and ridicules it as enthusiasm and fanaticism; but the saints find that reality and incomparable sweetness in it, that they would not part with it for ten thousand worlds. When the Roman soldiers entered the temple at Jerusalem, and found no image there, as they used to have in their own idolatrous temples; they gave out in a jeer, that the Jews worshipped the clouds. Thus profane Atheists scoff at the most solemn, awful, and sweetest part of internal religion as a mere fancy; but the thing is real, sure, and sensible: if there be truth in any thing in the world, there is truth in this, that there are real intercourses betwixt the visible and invisible world; betwixt Christ and the souls of believers, which we here call communion: 1 John 1:3. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." It is really and truly so, we impose not upon the world, we tell you no more than we have felt. The life of Enoch is called his walking with God, Gen. 5:24. O sweet and pleasant walk! all pleasures, all joys are in that walk with God. "Blessed are the people that hear the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the right of thy countenance," Psal. 89:15. The joyful sound there spoken of was the sound of the trumpet, which called the people to the solemn assemblies, where they walked in the light of God's countenance, the sweet

manifestations of his favour; and because the world is so apt to suspect the reality and certainty of this doctrine, the apostle again asserts it, Phil. 3:20. "Truly our conversation is in heaven." We breathe below, but we live above; we walk on earth, but our conversation is in heaven. To open this point, three things must come under consideration.

1. What communion with Christ is.
2. That there is such a communion betwixt him and believers.
2. The excellency of this communion.

First, What communion with Christ is, in the general nature of it. To open this it must be considered that there is a twofold communion.

1. A state of communion.
2. Actual communion.

The first is fundamental to the second; we can have no actual communion with the Father, Son, or Spirit, till we be first brought into a state of communion. This state of communion is in scripture called *κοινωνία*, our fellowship or partnership with Christ: such a fellowship as merchants have in one and the same ship and cargo; where one hath more and another less, but, however, a joint, though unequal interest; one lives in one kingdom, another in another kingdom, but they are jointly interested in the same goods. This comparison must not be stretched beyond its intention, which is to shew nothing but this, that Christ and believers are copartners, or co-heirs in the same inheritance: Hence they are called, Psal. 45:7 his fellows; "God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows:" And again, Rom. 8:17. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Christ states his people, gives them a right and title not only to himself, but to those good things purchased by him, yea, and the very glory he now enjoys in heaven, John 17:22. "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them."

It is true, there are some things in Christ which are peculiar to himself, and incommunicable to any creature, as his eternity, con-substantiality

with his father, &c. neither have we fellowship in his mediatorial works; we have the fruits and benefits of them, but no partnership with him in the glory and honour of them; that is peculiarly his own: And though it be said in the scriptures, that believers are righteous as he is righteous, yet the meaning is not that they can justify others as Christ doth; no, they are justified by him, but cannot communicate righteousness to others as Christ doth to them. But there are other things wherein there is a partnership betwixt Christ and his people; among others, they partake with him in the spirit of sanctification on earth, and glory in heaven: the same spirit of holiness which dwells in Christ without measure, is communicated by him to the saints in measure, 1 John 4:13. "He hath given us of his Spirit" And as Christ communicates his Spirit to the saints, so he communicates the glory of heaven to them; not that they shall be as glorious in heaven as Christ is: no, he will be known among the saints in glory, as the sun is known from the lesser stars. Thus briefly of the state of communion, which is called in scripture our being made nigh, Eph. 2:13 and indeed we must be made nigh before we can actually draw nigh. We must be put into a state of fellowship before ever we can have actual communion with God. 2. Beside this state of communion, there is also an actual communion which the saints have in this world with the Father and the Son in the duties of religion. This is that I am here engaged to open: this is our supping with Christ, and his with us; and, for clearness sake, I shall open it both.

1. Negatively, what it is not.

2. Positively, what it is.

1. Negatively, what it is not; for I find persons are hugely apt to mistake in this matter, taking that for communion with God which is not so: and here let it be noted,

- (1.) That communion with God doth not consist in the bare performance of religious duties. I do not say that men may have communion with God in this world without duties, it is a delusion of Satan to think so; but this is what I say, that communion with God consisteth not in the mere performance of duties. Communion and duties of religion are two things, separable one from the other. Men may multiply duties, and yet be

strangers to communion with God in them; even humiliation and fasting days may be kept by souls that are estranged from communion with the Lord, Zech. 7:5. "Speak unto all the people of the land, and unto the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?" q. d. Had your souls pure intentions and respects in those duties to my glory? Had you special communion with me, or I with you in those duties? Did you ever feel your souls in these days wounded for sin? Or did you not fast out of custom, and mourn for company? God may be near in men's mouths and at the same time far from their reins. Jer. 12:2. Religious words may flow out of men's lips when not one drop of religion touches their reins and hearts; that is, the secret inward powers of their souls; you cannot therefore safely depend upon this, Christ rejects this plea, Matth. 7:22. Get a better evidence of communion with God than this, or you will certainly come short of your expectation. I know you not, saith Christ; there was never any spiritual acquaintance betwixt your souls and me; I know you not in a way of approbation.

(2.) Neither do all stirrings and workings of the affections in duties infallibly evidence and prove communion betwixt Christ and that soul; for it is possible, yea, common, to have the affections raised in a natural way, and by external motives in the duties of religion; this you see in that example, Ezek. 33:32. "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." The sweet modulation of the prophet's voice was like the skilful touch of a rare musical instrument, which in a natural way, moved and excited their affections. Thus John's hearers rejoiced in his ministry for a season. I confess this is very apt to cast souls into a mistake of their condition. They distinguish not betwixt the influences that come upon their affections from without, from extrinsic things and those that are purely inward, divine, and spiritual. But then,

2. To shew you positively what communion with God is. Here we must consider two things,

1. What things it pre-supposes in us.

2. Wherein the nature of it consists.

1. There are divers things pre-required and pre-supposed unto all actual communion with God in duties; and where these things are wanting, men have no communion with God. You may have communion with his people, and communion with his ordinances, but not communion with God and Christ in them. And these pre-requisites are three.

(1.) Union with Christ is fundamentally necessary to all communion with him. All communion is founded in union; and where there is no union, there can be no communion. 'You know (saith an excellent* person), the member receives nothing from the head unless it be united to it; nor the branch from the root.' "All is yours, and ye are Christ's," 1 Cor. 3:23. 'Here is a vast possession, but all founded upon union: as all communion is founded upon union, so all union terminates in communion: and the closer the union the fuller is the communion.'

Before our union with Christ we are strangers unto God, Eph. 2:13. "We live without God in the world," it is in Christ that we are made nigh; it is in the beloved we are made accepted. Whilst we are in the state of alienation from Christ, we have no more to do with the communications of joy and peace, with the seals and earnest of the Spirit, than a native Indian hath with the privileges of London. "If any man open to me, (saith Christ) I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me."

(2.) Communion with God pre-supposes the habits of grace implanted in the soul by sanctification; a sound and sincere change of heart No sanctification, no communion; 1 John 1:6. "If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." The apostle gives the lie to such bold pretenders. "The Lord is nigh to all that call upon him, unto all that call upon him in truth;" the latter clause restrains all spiritual communion unto upright souls. "For an hypocrite shall not come before him," Job 13:16.

(3.) Communion with God doth not only suppose grace implanted, but also implanted grace excited, grace in act: for a man may have the habits of faith, love, and delight in him; and yet be without actual communion with God; for by this grace is awakened and put into act. A believer when

he is asleep, and acts no grace, is in a state of communion with God; but if he will have actual communion, his faith, love, and delight must be awakened; they must not lie asleep in the habit. "Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face Lord will I seek," Psal. 27:8. It was in order to actual communion with Christ that the church so earnestly begs fresh influences of the Spirit to excite her graces into act, Cant. 4:16. "Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out, Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." And though believers are not so to wait for the influences of the Spirit, as in the mean time to neglect all proper outward means of exciting their own graces, engaging their hearts to approach unto God, Jer. 30:21 yet certainly it is the work of God's Spirit, and without him we can do nothing to any purpose. The seamen may trim the sails, weigh the anchor, put all into a sailing posture; but till a gale come from heaven there is little or no motion. The same Spirit that plants the habits, is he also that excites the acts of grace. These three things therefore are pre-requisites unto all communion with God.

2. Next let us consider wherein this heavenly privilege of communion with God doth consist; and more generally it will be found to lie in a spiritual correspondency betwixt Christ and the soul. God lets forth influences upon our souls, and we, by the assistance of his Spirit, make returns again unto God. Communion is a mutual action; so in the text, "I will sup with him, and he with me." We cry to God, and God answers that cry by the incomes of spiritual grace upon the soul: Psal. 138:3. In the day that I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." More particularly, there are many ways and methods wherein men have this spiritual correspondence or communion with God, viz.

1. In the contemplation of his attributes.
2. In the exercises of our graces in religious duties.
3. In his various providences. In all these the saints have communion with him.

1. There is a sweet and sensible communion betwixt God and his people, in the contemplation of the Divine attributes, and the impressions God

makes by them upon our souls, whilst we meditate oil them. As for instance,

(1.) Sometimes the Lord discovers and manifests to the souls of his people his immense greatness; the manifestation of which attribute makes an awful, humbling impression upon the soul, makes them seem as nothing to themselves. Thus when Abraham, that great believer considered the greatness of that God with whom he had to do; that sight of God seems to reduce him to his first principles, to crumble him, as it were, into dust and ashes again, Gen. 18:27. "I that am but dust and ashes have taken upon me to speak unto God." He now looks upon himself as a heap of vileness and unworthiness; so David, Psal. 8:3. "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars which thou hast made," (from hence he inferred the greatness of the Creator) "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him?" q. d. When I consider what a great God the Creator of the world is, I am justly astonished that ever he should set his heart upon so vile a thing as man. When men compare themselves among themselves, and measure themselves by themselves, their spirits are apt to swell with pride; but would they look up to God, as these holy men did, they would admire his condescension. And this is communion with God in the meditation of his immense greatness.

(2.) The representation and meditations of the purity and holiness of God, working shame and deep abasement in the soul, for the pollutions and sinful filthiness that are in it. This is communion with God, and an excellent way of fellowship with him. Thus, when a representation of God, in his holiness, was made unto the prophet, Isa. 6:3, 4, 5 there were the seraphims, covering their faces with their wings, and crying one to another, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The effect this produced, or the return made by the prophet to this manifestation of God in his holiness, was a deep abasement of soul for his unsuitableness to so holy a God; ver. 5. "Then said I, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips," &c. And this is real communion with God in his holiness. Thus Job who had stiffly defended his own integrity against men, yet when God enters the lists with him, and he saw what a great and holy God he had to do with, cried out, Job 40:4, 5. "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I

will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther." q. d. I have done, Lord, I have done; I could answer men, but I cannot answer thee: Thou art holy, but I am vile.

2. There are sometimes representations of the goodness and mercy of God, made unto the souls of his people; when these produce an ingenuous thaw and melting of the heart, into an humble, thankful admiration of it, and an answerable care of pleasing him in the ways of obedience, then have men communion with God in his goodness. The goodness of God runs down to men in a double channel, his goodness to their bodies, in external providences; his goodness to their souls, in spiritual mercies. When the goodness of God, either way, draws forth the love and gratitude of the soul to the God of our mercies, then have we real communion with him! Thus Jacob, Gen. 32:9, 10. "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac; which saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Ah, Lord, I see a multitude of mercies round about me, and the least of them is greater than I. So David, 1 Chron. 17:16, 17. "And David the king came and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hither? And yet this was a small thing in thine eyes, O God, &c. what can David speak more to thee?" You see in these instances, what effects the goodness of God, even in inferior, outward mercies useth to produce in sanctified hearts. But then, if you come to spiritual mercies, and ponder the goodness of God to your souls, in pardoning, accepting, and saving such vile, sinful creatures as you have been; this much more affects the heart, and overwhelms it with holy astonishment: as you see in Paul, 1 Tim. 1:16. "The grace of our Lord was abundant: I was a persecutor, a blasphemer, yet I obtained mercy." So Mary, that notorious sinner, when pardoning grace appeared to her, into what a flood of tears, into what transports of love did the sight of mercy cast her soul! She wept, and washed her Saviour's feet with tears of joy and thankfulness, Luke 7:44. No terrors of the law, no frights of hell, thaw the heart like the apprehensions of pardoning mercy.

(4.) Sometimes there are special representations of the veracity and faithfulness of God, made unto his people, begetting trust and holy confidence in their souls; and when they do so, then have men communion with God in his faithfulness. Thus, Heb. 13:5, 6. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is a discovery of the faithfulness of God, and what follows upon this? See ver. 6. "So that we may boldly say, the Lord is our God; we will not fear what man can do unto us." Here is faithfulness in God, producing truth and confidence in the believer; this is that reciprocation, that sweet fellowship and communion betwixt God and a believer, with respect to his fidelity. "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid," Isa. 12:2. And truly, friend, this is what the Lord justly expects from thee, even thy truth and confidence in him, thy steady dependence on him, in return to all the discoveries of his faithfulness to thee both in his word and providences.

(5.) There are manifestations of the anger, and displeasure of God, by the hiding of his face from them, and the frowns of his providence: When these produce repentance, and deep humiliation for sin, an unquietness, a restlessness of spirit till he restore his favour, and manifest his reconciliation to the soul; even here, also is a real communion betwixt God and the soul. Psal. 30:7. "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." Nor will a gracious soul rest there, but will take pains to sue out a fresh pardon. Psal. 51:8. "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; restore unto me the joys of thy salvation," ver. 12.

I cannot here omit to detect a great mistake even amongst God's own people; many of them understand not what communion there should be with God under the manifestations of his displeasure for sin: They know the affectionate meltings of their souls into love, praise, &c. to be communion with God, but that in the shame, grief and sorrow produced in them by the manifestations of God's displeasure; I say that even in these things there may be communion with God they understand not. But let me tell thee, that even such things as these are the choice fruits of the spirit of adoption, and that in them thy soul hath as real and beneficial communion with God as in the greatest transports of spiritual joy and comfort. O it is a blessed frame to be before the Lord, as Ezra was, after

conviction of thy looseness, carelessness, and spiritual defilements, the consequents of those sins; saying with him, "O my God, I am ashamed, and even blush to lift up my face unto thee," Ezra 9:6. Shame and blushing are as excellent signs of communion with God as the sweetest smiles.

Lastly, There are representations and special contemplations of the omniscience of God, producing sincerity, comfort in appeals, and recourse to it in doubts of our own uprightness: And this also is a choice and excellent method of communion with God. (1.) When the omniscience of God strongly obliges the soul to sincerity and uprightness, as it did David, Psal. 139:11, 12 compared with Psal. 18:23. "I was also upright before him." The consideration that he was always before the eye of God was his preservative from iniquity, yea, from his own iniquity. (2.) When it produceth comforts in appeals to it, as it did Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20:3. "Remember now, O Lord, that I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart." So Job 10:7 he also appeals to this attribute, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." So did Jeremiah, Jer. 12:3. "But thou, O Lord, knowest me, thou hast seen me, and tried my heart towards thee." (2.) When we have recourse to it under doubts and fears of our own uprightness. Thus did David, Psal. 139:23. "Search me, O God, and try my heart; prove me, and see my reins: see if there be any way of wickedness in me." In all these attributes of God, Christians have real and sweet communion with him. Which was the first thing to be opened, to wit, communion with God in the meditation of his attributes.

2. The next method of communion with God is in the exercises of our graces in the various duties of religion; in prayer, hearing, sacraments, &c. in all which the Spirit of the Lord influences the graces of his people, and they return the fruits thereof in some measure to him. As God hath planted various graces in regenerate souls, so he hath appointed various duties to exercise and draw forth those graces; and when they do so, then have his people sweet actual communion with him. And,

(1.) To begin with the first grace that shews itself in the soul of a Christian, to wit, repentance, and sorrow for sin. In the exercise of this grace of repentance, the soul pours out itself before the Lord with much bitterness and brokenness of heart; casts forth its sorrows; which sorrows

are as so much seed sown, and, in return thereto, the Lord usually sends an answer of peace. Psal. 32:4, 5. "I said, I will confess my transgression, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Here is a voice of sorrow sent up, and a voice of peace coming down, which is real communion betwixt God and man in the exercises of repentance.

(2.) As there are seasons in duty wherein the saints exercise their repentance, and the Lord returns peace; so likewise the Lord helps them in their duties to act their faith, in return whereunto, they find from the Lord inward support, rest, and refreshment. Psal. 27:13. "I had fainted unless I had believed." And oft-times an assurance of the mercies they have acted their faith about, 1 John 5:14.

(3.) The Lord many times draws forth eminent degrees of our love to him, in the course of our duties; the heart is filled with love to Christ. The strength of the soul is drawn forth to Christ in love, and this the Lord repays in kind, love for love. John 14:21. "He that loveth me, my Father will love him; and we will come and make our abode with him." Here is sweet communion with God in the exercise of love. O what a rich trade do Christians drive this way in their duties and exercises of graces?

(4.) To mention no more in the duties of passive obedience, Christians are enabled to exercise their patience, meekness, and long-suffering for Christ, in return to which, the Lord gives them the singular consolations of his Spirit, double returns of joy. "The Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon them," 1 Pet. 4:13, 14. The Lord strengthens them with passive fortitude, with all might in the inner man, unto all long-suffering; but the reward of that long-suffering is joyfulness, Col. 1:11. This is the trade they drive with heaven.

3. Beside communion with God in the contemplation of his attributes, and graces exercised in the course of duties, there is another method of communion with God in the way of his providences, for therein also his people walk with him. To give a taste of this, let us consider providence in a fourfold aspect upon the people of God.

(1.) There are afflictive providences, rods and rebukes wherewith the Lord chastens his children, this is the discipline of his house; in answer

whereunto gracious souls return meek and childlike submission, a fruit of the Spirit of adoption; they are brought to accept the punishment of their iniquities. And herein lies communion with God under the rod; this return to the rod may not be presently made, for there is much stubbornness unmortified in the best hearts, Heb. 12:7 but this is the fruit it shall yield; and when it doth, there is real communion between God and the afflicted soul. Let not Christians mistake themselves, if when God is smiting, they are humbled, searching their hearts, and blessing God for the discoveries of sin made by their afflictions; admiring his wisdom in timing, moderating, and chusing the rod; kissing it with a childlike submission, and saying, it is good for me that I have been afflicted: That soul hath real communion with God, though it may be for a time without joy.

(2.) There are times when providence straitens the people of God; when the waters of comfort ebb and run very low, wants pinch; if then the soul returns filial dependence upon fatherly care, saying with David, Psal. 23:1. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;" it belongs to him to provide, and to me to depend: I will trust my Father's care and love. Here now is sweet communion with God under pinching wants. The wants of the body enrich the soul, outward straitenings are the occasions of inward enlargements. O see from hence how good it is to have an interest in God as a Father, whatever changes of providence may come upon you.

(3.) There are seasons wherein the Lord exposes his people to imminent and visible dangers, when to the eye of sense there is no way of escape. Now when this produces trust in God, and resignation to the pleasure of his will, here is communion with God in times of distress and difficulty. Thus David, Psal. 56:3. "At what time I am afraid I will trust in thee." q. d. Father, I see a storm rising, thy poor child comes under his Father's roof for shelter; for whither should a distressed child go but to his Father? And then, as to the issues and events of doubtful providences, when the soul resigns and leaves itself to the wise disposal of the will of God, as David in 2 Sam. 15:24, 26. "Here am I, let him do with me as seemeth good in his sight:" This is real and sweet communion with God in his providences. And so much for the nature of communion with God.

Secondly, In the next place I shall evidence the reality of communion with

God, and prove it to be no fancy. I confess it grieves me to be put upon the proof of this, but the atheism and profaneness of the age we live in seems to make it necessary; for many men will allow nothing for certain but what falls under the cognizance of sense. And O that they had their spiritual senses exercised; then they would sensibly discern the reality of these things. But to put the matter out of question, I shall evidence the truth and reality of the saints communion with God divers ways.

Evidences

Evidence 1. From the saints' union with Christ. If there be an union betwixt Christ and believers, then of necessity there must be a communion between them also. Now the whole word of God which you profess to be the rule of your faith, plainly asserts this union betwixt Christ and believers; an union like that betwixt the k branches and the root, Job 15:4, 5 or that betwixt the head and the members, Eph. 4:16. Now if Christ be to believers as the root to the branches, and as the head to the members: then of necessity there must be a communion between them: For if there were not a communion, there could be no communications; and if no communications no life. For it is by the communication of vital sap and spirits from the root and from the head that the branches and members subsist and live.

Evid. 2. There is a co-habitation of Christ with believers; he dwells with them, yea, he dwells in them, 2 Cor. 6:16. "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." The soul of a believer is the temple of Christ: yea, his living temple, 1 Pet. 2:5. And if Christ dwell with them; yea, if he dwell in them and walk in them, then certainly there must be communion betwixt him and them; if they live together they mast converse together. A man indeed may dwell in his house, and yet cannot be said to have communion with it; but the saints are a living house, they are the living temples of Christ; and he cannot dwell in such temples capable of communion with him, and yet have no communion with them.

Evid. 3. The reality of communion betwixt God and the saints is undeniably evinced from all the spiritual relations into which God hath taken them. Every believer is the child of God and the spouse of Christ. God is the believer's Father, and the church is the Lamb's wife. Christ

calls the believer not only his servant, but friend; henceforth I call you not servants, but friends, &c. Now, if God be the believer's Father, and the believer be God's own child, certainly there must be communion between them. If Christ be the believer's husband, and the believer be Christ's spouse, there must be communion between him and them. What, no communion between the Father and his children, the husband and the wife? We must either renounce and deny all such relations to him, and therein renounce our Bibles; or else yield the conclusion, that there is a real communion betwixt Christ and believers.

Evid. 4. The reality of communion with God evidently appears from the institution and appointment of so many ordinances and duties of religion, on purpose to maintain daily communion betwixt Christ and his people. As to instance but in that one institution of prayer, a duty appointed on purpose for the soul's meeting with God, and communion with him: James 4:8. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Now, to what purpose can it be conceived such an ordinance is appointed for the soul's drawing nigh to God, and God to it; if there be no such thing as communion to be enjoyed with him? If communion with God were a mere phantom, as the carnal world thinks it to be, what encouragement have the saints to bow their knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? But surely there is an access to God in prayer, Eph. 3:12. "In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence." Access to what? If God be not there, and that there can be no communion with him, what means that access? "I will meet with you, saith the Lord, and I will commune with you in every place where I record my name," Exod. 25:22. Certainly duties had never been appointed, but for the sake of God's communing with us, and we with him.

Evid. 5. This is yet further evidenced from the mutual desires both of Christ and his people to be in sweet and intimate communion one with the other. The scripture speaks much of the saints vehement desires after communion with Christ, and of Christ's desires after communion with the saints, and of both jointly. The saints' desires after communion with him are frequent in all the scriptures, see Psal. 63:1, 2, 3. Psal. 42:1. Psal. 119:20 and the like throughout the New Testament. And Christ is no less desirous, yea, he is much more desirous of communion with us than we

are with him. Consider that expression of his to the spouse, in Cant. 8:13. "O thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it." As if he should say, O my people, you frequently converse one with another, you talk daily together! why shall not you and I converse one with another: You speak often to men, O that you would speak more frequently to me! "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely." And then these desires are mutually expressed one to another, Rev. 22:20. Surely (saith Christ) I come quickly, amen: Even so come, Lord Jesus, saith the church. Now if there be such vehement mutual desires after communion betwixt Christ and his people in this world; then certainly there is such a thing as real communion between them, or else both must live a very restless and dissatisfied life.

Evid. 6. The mutual complaints that are found on both sides of the interruption of communion, plainly prove there is such a thing. If God complain of his people for their estrangements from him, and the saints complain to God about his silence to them, and the hidings of his face from them; surely then there must be a communion between them, or else there could be no ground of complaints for the interruptions of it. But it is manifest God doth complain of his people for their estrangements from him, Jer. 2:5. "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thy espousals. What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?" As if he should say, You and I have been better acquainted in days past; what cause have I given for your estrangements from me? And thus Christ in like manner complains of the church of Ephesus; after he had commended many things in her, yet one thing grieves and troubles him, Rev. 2:4. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." And then on the other side, when the Lord hides his face, and seems to estrange himself from his people; what sad lamentations and moans do they make about it, as an affliction they know not how to bear? Thus Heman, Psal. 88:14. "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?" So Psal. 27:9. "Hide not thy face from me? put not thy servant away in anger." This is what they cannot bear.

Evid. 7. The reality of communion with God is made visible to others, in the sensible effects of it upon the saints that enjoy it. There are visible signs and tokens of it appearing to the conviction of others. Thus that marvellous change that appeared upon the very countenance of Hannah, after she had poured out her heart in prayer, and the Lord had answered her; it is noted, 1 Sam. 1:18. "She went away, and her countenance was no more sad." You might have read in her face that God had spoken peace and satisfaction to her heart. Thus, when the disciples had been with Christ, the mark of communion with him was visible to others, Acts 4:13. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marvelled, and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." It is sweet, Christian, when the heavenly cheerfulness and spirituality of thy conversations with men, shall convince others that thou hast been with Jesus.

Evid. 8. We may prove the reality of communion with God, from the impossibility of sustaining those troubles the saints do without it, If prayers did not go up, and answers come down, there were no living for a Christian in this world. Prayer is the out-let of the saints sorrows, and the in-let of their supports and comforts, Rom. 8:26. Say not, other men have their troubles as well as the saints, and yet they make a shift to bear them without the help of communion with God, It is true, carnal men have their troubles, and those troubles are often too heavy for them. The sorrows of the world work death; but carnal men have no such troubles as the saints have, for they have their inward, spiritual troubles, as well as their outward troubles. And inward troubles are the sinking troubles; but this way the strength of God comes in to succour them: And except they had a God to go to, and fetch comfort from, they could never bear them. Psal. 27:13. "I had fainted unless I had believed." Paul had sunk under the buffetings of Satan, unless he had gone once and again to his God, and received this answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee," 2 Cor. 12:9.

Evid. 9. We conclude the reality of communion with God, from the end of the saints vocation. We read frequently in scripture of effectual calling; now what is that to. which God calls his people, out of the state of nature, but unto fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ? 1 Cor. 1:9. "God is faithful, by whom ye are called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ

our Lord." They are called, you see, into a life of communion with Christ; therefore certainly there is, such a communion, else the saints are called to the enjoyment of a fancy, instead of a privilege, which is the greatest reproach that can be cast upon the faithful God that called them.

Evid. 10. Lastly, In a word, the characters and descriptions given to the saints in scripture, evidently prove their life of communion with God. The men of this world are manifestly distinguished from the people of God in scripture; they are called, The children of this world; the saints, The children of lights Luke 16:8. They are said to be after the flesh, saints to be after the Spirit, Rom. 8:5. They mind carthly things, but the saints conversation is in heaven, Phil. 3:19, 20. By all which it undeniably appears that there is a reality in the doctrine of communion betwixt Christ and his people. We are not imposed upon, it is no cunningly devised fable; but a thing whose foundation is as sure as its nature is sweet.

Thirdly, In the last place, I shall shew you the transcendent excellency of this life of communion with God: it is the life of our life, the joy of our hearts; a heaven upon earth, as will appear by these twenty excellencies thereof following.

Excellencies

I. Excellency. It is the assimilating instrument whereby the soul is moulded and fashioned after the image of God. This is the excellency of communion with God, to make the soul like him. There is a two-fold assimilation, or conformity of the soul to God, the one perfect and complete, the other inchoate and in part. Perfect assimilation is the privilege of the perfect state, resulting from the immediate vision and perfect communion the soul hath with God in glory, 1 John 3:2. "When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Perfect vision produceth perfect assimilation; but the soul's assimilation or imperfect conformity to God in this world, is wrought and gradually carried on, by daily communion with him. And as our communion with God here, grows up more and more into spirituality and power, so in an answerable degree doth our conformity to him advance: 2 Cor. 3:18. "But we all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are

changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." All sorts of communion among men have an assimilating efficacy; he that walks in vain company is made vainer than he was before: and he that walks in spiritual, heavenly company, will be ordinarily more serious than he was before: But nothing so transforms the spirit of a man as communion with God doth. Those are most like unto God that converse most frequently with him. The beauty of the Lord is upon those souls; it figures the spirit of a man after the divine pattern That is the first excellency of communion with God, it assimilates them to God.

II. Excellency. It is the beauty of the soul, in the eyes of God and all good men; it makes the face to shine. No outward splendor attracts like this; it makes a man the most desirable companion in the whole world: 1 John 1:3. "These things have I written unto you, that you might have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This was the great and only inducement the apostle makes use of to draw the world into fellowship with the saints, that their fellowship is with God. And if there were ten thousand other inducements, yet none like this. You read of a blessed time, Zech. 8 when the earth shall be full of holiness; when the Jews, that are now as a lost generation to the eye of sense, shall be called, and an eminent degree of sanctification shall be visible in them; and then see the effect of this, ver. 23. "In those days, ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirts of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." This is the powerful attractive, the Lord is with you; it is the effect of communion with God, which makes the righteous more excellent than his neighbour, Prov. 12:26. What a vast and visible difference doth this make between one man and another! How heavenly, sweet, and desirable are the conversations and company of some men! How frothy, burthensome, and unprofitable is the company of others! and what makes the difference but only this, the one walks in communion with God, the other is alienated from the life of God.

III. Excellency. It is the centre which rests the motions of a weary soul: it is the rest and refreshment of a man's spirit, Psal. 116:7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul. When we attain perfect communion with God in heaven,

we attain to perfect rest, and all the rest the spirit of man finds on earth, is found in communion with God. Take a sanctified person, who hath intermitted for some time his communion with the Lord, and ask him, Is your soul at rest and ease? He will tell you, no! The motions of his soul are like those of a member out of joint, neither comely nor easy. Let that man recover his spiritual frame again, and, with it, he recovers his rest and comfort. Christians, you meet with variety of troubles in this world; many a sweet comfort is cut off, many a hopeful project dashed by the hand of providence; and what think you is the meaning of those blasting, disappointing providences? Surely this is their design and errand, to disturb your false rest in the bosom of the creature; to pluck away those pillows you were laying your heads upon, that thereby you might be reduced unto God, and recover your lost communion with him; and say, with David, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." Sometimes we are settling ourselves to rest in an estate, in a child, or the like; at this time it is usual for God to say, go, losses, smite and blast such a man's estate; go, death, and take away the desire of his eyes with a stroke, that my child may find rest no where but in me. God is the ark; the soul, like the dove Noah sent forth, let it fly where it will, it shall find no rest till it come back to God.

IV. Excellency. It is the desire of all gracious souls throughout the world. Where-ever there is a gracious soul, the desires of that soul are working after communion with God. As Christ was called, The desire of all nations, so communion with him is the desire of all nations: and this speaks the excellency of it, Psal. 27:4. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple;" i.e. to enjoy communion with him in the public duties of his worship. One thing have I desired, that is, one thing above all other things; such a one, as, if God shall give me, I can comfortably bear the want of all other things. Let him deny me what he will, if so be he will not deny me this one thing; this one thing shall richly recompense the want of all other things. Hence the desires of the saints are so intense and fervent after this one thing; Psal. 42:1. "My soul panteth after thee, O God;" and Psal. 119:81. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation." Psal. 101:2. "When wilt thou come unto me?" No duties can satisfy without it, the soul cannot bear the delays, much less the denials of it. They reckon their lives worth

nothing without it. Ministers may come, ordinances and sabbaths may come; but there is no satisfaction to the desires of a gracious heart, till God comes too; O when wilt thou come unto me?

V. Excellency. As it is the desire, so it is the delight of all the children of God, both in heaven and earth. As communion with the saints is the delight of Christ, Cant. 2:14. "Let me hear thy voice:" and again, Cant. 8:13. "The companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it:" So communion with Christ is the delight of his people. Cant. 2:3. "I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." It is the pleasure of Christ to see the yearning countenances, the blushing cheeks, the dropping eyes of his people upon their knees; and it is the delight of the saints to see a smile upon his face, to hear a voice of pardon and peace from his lips. I must tell you Christians, you must look for no such delights as these, in any earthly enjoyment, none better than these, till you come home to glory; communion with God then appears most excellent in as much as it is found to be the desire and delight of all gracious souls.

VI. Excellency. It is the envy of Satan, that which cuts and grates that wicked spirit. O how it grates and galls that proud and envious spirit, to see men and women enjoying the felicity, and pleasure of that communion with God, from which he himself is fallen, and cut off for ever! to see the saints imbosomed in delightful communion with Christ, whilst himself feels the pangs of horror, and despair! this is what he cannot endure to behold. And therefore you should find in your experience, that times of communion with God are usually busy times of temptation from the devil. Zech. 3:1, "And he shewed me Joshua the high-priest standing before the Lord, and Satan standing at his right-hand to resist him." It is well for thee, Christian, that thou hast an advocate standing at God's right hand to resist, and frustrate his attempts upon thee; otherwise Satan would this way destroy your communion with God, and make that which is now your delight, to be your terror. Many ways doth the devil oppose the saints communion with God; sometimes he labours to divert them from it: this, business shall fall in, or that occasion fall out, on purpose to divert thy soul's approach to God; but if he cannot prevail there, then he labours to distract your thoughts, and

break them into a thousand vanities; or if he succeed not there, then he attacks you in your return from duty, with spiritual pride, security, &c. these fierce oppositions of hell discover the worth, and excellency of communion with God.

VII. Excellency. It is the end of all ordinances, and duties of religion. God hath instituted every ordinance, and duty, whether public or private, to beget, and maintain communion betwixt himself and our souls. What are ordinances, duties, and graces, but perspective-glasses to give us a sight of God, and help us to communion with him? God never intended his ordinances to be our rest, but mediums, and instruments of communion with himself, who is our true rest. When we go into a boat, it is not with an intention to dwell, and rest there, but to ferry us over the water, where our business lies. If a man miss of communion with God in the best ordinances, or duty, it yields him little comfort. He comes back from it, like a man that hath travelled a great many miles to meet a dear friend, upon special and important business; but met with disappointment, and returns sad and dissatisfied. God appoints ordinances to be meeting-places with himself in this world, Exod. 25:21, 22. "Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark, and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee; and there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims." It was not the sight of the golden-cherubims, or of the ark overlaid with pure gold, that could have satisfied Moses, had not the special presence of God been there, and he had had communion with him. "O God, (saith David) my soul thirsteth for thee, that I might see thy beauty, and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary," Psal. 63:1, 2. Magnificent structures, artificial ornaments of the places of worship, are of little account with a gracious soul; it is the presence of God, and communion with him, which is the beauty and glory the saints desire to behold.

VIII. Excellency. It is the evidence of our union with Christ and interest in him. All union with Christ must evidence itself by a life of communion with him, or our pretensions to it are vain and groundless. There be many of you (I wish there were more) enquiring after evidences and signs of your union with Christ; why, here is an evidence that can never fail you:

do you live in communion with him? May your life be called a walking with God, as Enoch's was? Then you may be sure you have union with him, and this is so sure a sign, as death itself (which uses to discover the Vanity of false signs) will never be able to destroy. 2 Kin. 20:2, 3. "Remember now, O Lord, (saith Hezekiah) that I have walked before thee in truth, and in a perfect heart." O professors! it will be a dreadful thing (whatever ungrounded hopes and false comforts you now have) to find them shrinking away from you, as certainly they will do at death; and all upon this account: I have been a man of knowledge, I have been frequent in the external duties of religion, but my heart was not in them; I had no communion with the Lord in them, and now God is a terror to my soul. I am going to his awful bar, and have not one sound evidence to carry along with me. That is a remarkable place, Gal. 5:25. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" that is, let us evidence the life of grace in us by exercising that grace in a life of communion with God. When all is said, this is the surest evidence of our union with Christ; and no gifts or performances whatsoever can amount to an evidence of our union with Christ without it.

IX. Excellency. It is ease in all pains, sweet and sensible ease to a troubled soul. Look, as the bleeding of a vein cools, eases, and refreshes a feverish body; so the opening of the soul by acts of communion with God, gives sensible ease to a burdened soul: griefs are eased by groans heavenward. Many souls are deeply laden with their own fears, cares, and distresses; no refreshment for such a soul, no such anodyne in the whole world as communion with God is, Psal. 32:1, 2, 3. How did troubles boil in David's soul? night and day God's hand was heavy on him; his soul, as Elihu speaks, was like bottles full of new wine; he must speak to God that he may be refreshed: and so he did, and was refreshed by it, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." It would grieve one to see how many poor distressed souls carry their troubles up and down the world, making their complaints to one and another; but no ease. Away to thy God, poor Christian, get thee into thy closet, pour out thy soul before him; and that ease which thou seekest in vain elsewhere, will there be found, or no where.

X. Excellency. It is food to the soul, and the most delicious, pleasant,

proper, and satisfying food that ever it tasted; it is hidden manna. Rev. 2:17. "By these things, O Lord, do men live, and in them is the life of their soul," Isa. 28:16. A regenerate soul cannot live without it; their bodies can live as well without bread or breath as their souls without communion with God: it is more than their necessary food. Here they find what they truly call marrow and fatness, Psal. 63:5, 6. O the satisfaction and support they suck out of spiritual things by thoughts and meditations upon them! "To be spiritually minded is life and peace," Rom. 8:6. The delicacies upon princes tables are husks and chaff to this. Crows and vultures can live upon the carrion of this world, but a renewed soul cannot subsist long without God. Let such a soul be diverted for a time from its usual refreshments this way, and he shall find something within paining him like the sucking and drawing of an empty stomach. It is angel's food, it is that your souls must live upon throughout eternity, and most happily too.

XI. Excellency. It is the guard of the soul against the assaults of temptation. It is like a shield advanced against the fiery darts of that wicked one. Your safety and security lie in drawing nigh to God. Psal. 73:27, 28. "They that are far from thee shall perish: but it is good for me to draw near to God." It is good indeed; not only the good of comfort, but the good of safety is in it. Deut. 33:12. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him." You know the gracious presence of God is your shield and safety; and if you will have the Lord thus present with you in all your fears, straits, and dangers, see that you keep near to him in the duties of communion: "For the Lord is with you whilst you are with him," 2 Chron 15:2.

XII. Excellency. It is the honour of the soul, and the greatest honour that ever God conferred on any creature. It is the glory of the holy angels in heaven, to be always beholding the face of God, Matth. 18:10. O that God should admit poor dust and ashes unto such a nearness to himself! to walk with a king, and have frequent converse with him, put a great deal of honour upon a subject; but the saints walk with God; so did Enoch, so do all the saints. 1 John 1:3. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." They have liberty and access with confidence; the Lord as it were delivers them the golden key of prayers by which they

may come into his presence on all occasions with the freedom of children to a father.

XIII. Excellency. It is the instrument of mortification, and the most excellent and successful instrument for that purpose in all the world, Gal. 5:16. "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the works of the flesh." Walking in the Spirit is the same thing with walking in communion with God. Now, saith that apostle, if you walk thus in the Spirit, in the actings of faith, love, and obedience, throughout the course of holy duties, the effect of this will be, that ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. He doth not say, You shall not feel the motions of sin in you, or temptations to sin assaulting you; but he saith, You shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, sin shall not have dominion over you; this will let out the life-blood of sin. A temptation overcome this way is more effectually subdued than by all the vows, resolutions, and external means in the world: as a candle that is blown out with a puff of breath may be re-kindled by another puff: but if it be quenched in water it is not so easily lighted again: so it is here; you never find that power or success in temptations when your hearts are up with God in their exercises of faith and love, as you do when your hearts hang loose from him, and dead towards him. The schoolmen assign this as one reason why the saints in heaven are impeccable, no sin can fasten upon them, because, say they, they there enjoy the beautiful vision of God. This is sure, the more communion any man hath with God on earth, the freer he lives from the power of his corruptions.

XIV. Excellency. It is the kernel of all duties and ordinances: words, gestures, &c. are but the integuments, husks, and shells of duties. Communion with God is the sweet kernel, the pleasant and nourishing food which lies within them: you see the fruits of the earth are covered and defended by husks, shells, and such like integuments; within which lie the pleasant kernels and grains, and these are the food. The hypocrite who goes no further than the externals of religion, is therefore said to feed on ashes, Isa. 44:20 to spend his money for that which is not bread, and his labour for that which satisfieth not, Isa. 55:2. He feeds but upon husks, in which there is but little pleasure or nourishment. What a poor house doth a hypocrite keep? Words, gestures, ceremonies of religion,

will never fill the soul; but communion with God is substantial nourishment. "My soul (saith David), shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst I think and meditate on thee," Psal. 63:5, 6. It would grieve one's heart to think what airy things many souls satisfy themselves with; feeding like Ephraim upon the wind, well contented if they can but shuffle over a few heartless empty duties; whilst the saints, feeding thus upon hidden manna, are feasted as it were with angel's food.

XV. Excellency. It is the light of the soul in darkness; and the pleasantest light that ever shone upon the soul of man. There is many a soul which walketh in darkness; some in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, the most dismal of all darkness, except that in hell. There are others who are children of light in a state of reconciliation, yet walk in the darkness of outward afflictions, and inward desertions and temptations; but as soon as ever the light of God's countenance shines upon the soul in the duties of communion with him, that darkness is dissipated and scattered; it is all light within him and round about him, Psal. 34:5. "They looked unto him and were enlightened;" They looked, there is faith acted in duty; and were enlightened, there is the sweet effect of faith. The horrors and troubles of gracious souls shrink away upon the rising of this cheerful light. As wild beasts come out of their dens in the darkness of the night, and shrink back again into them when the sun ariseth, Psal. 104:20, 21, 22. So do the fears and inward troubles of the people of God when this light shines upon their souls. Nay more, this is a light which scatters the very darkness of death itself. It was the saying of a worthy divine of Germany upon his death-bed, when his eye-sight was gone, being asked how it was within? Why, said he, though all be dark about me, yet, pointing as well as he could to his breast, *hic sat lucis*, here is light enough.

XVI. Excellency. It is liberty to the straitened soul, and the most comfortable and excellent liberty in the whole world. He only walks at liberty that walks with God, Psal. 119:45. "I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts." Wicked men cry out of bands and cords in religion, they look upon the duties of godliness as the greatest bondage and thralldom in the whole world, Psal. 2:3. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." q. d. Away with this strictness and preciseness, it extinguishes the joy and pleasure of our lives; give us our cups instead

of bibles, our profane songs instead of spiritual psalms, our sports and pastimes instead of prayers and sermons. Alas, poor creatures, how do they dance in their shackles and chains! when, in reality, the sweetest liberty is enjoyed in those duties at which they thus snuff. The law of Christ is the law of liberty, the soul of man never enjoys more liberty than when it is bound with the strictest bands of duty to God. Here is liberty from enthralling lusts, and from enslaving fears. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," Rom. 8:2. And here is freedom indeed; "If the Son make you free, then are ye free indeed," John 8:36. And here is freedom from fears, Luke 1:74, 75. Those that will not endure any restraint from their lusts, will have their freedom to sin; a freedom they shall have, such as it is. Rom. 6:20. "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." Let none therefore be prejudiced at the ways of duty and strict godliness. "The law of Christ is the perfect law of liberty," James 1:25 not liberty to sin; but liberty from sin.

XVII. Excellency. It is a mercy purchased by the blood of Christ for believers, and one of the principal mercies settled upon them by the new covenant-grant. A peculiar mercy, which none but the redeemed of the Lord partake of; a mercy which cost the blood of Christ to purchase it. I do not deny but there are thousands of other mercies bestowed upon the unregenerate; they have health, wealth, children, honours, pleasures, and all the delights of this life; but for communion with God, and the pleasures that result therefrom, they are incapable of these. No supping with Christ, upon such excellent privileges and mercies as these, till the heart be opened to him by faith; you cannot come nigh to God, until you be first made nigh by reconciliation, Eph. 2:13. Heb. 10:19, 20, 21, 22. What would your lives, Christians, be worth to you, if this mercy were cut off from you? There would be little sweetness or savour in all your outward mercies, were it not for this mercy that sweetens them all. And there is this difference, among many others, betwixt this mercy and all outward mercies: you may be cut off from the enjoyment of those, you cannot from this; no prison can keep out the Comforter. O bless God for this invaluable mercy.

XVIII. Excellency. It is natural to the new creature; the inclination and

instinct of the new creature leadeth to communion with God. It is as natural to the new creature to desire it, and work after it, as it is to the new-born babe to make to the breast, 1 Pet. 2:2. "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." There is a law upon the regenerate part, which inwardly and powerfully obliges it to acts of duty, and converse with God in them. Communion with God is a thing that ariseth out of the principles of grace. You know all creatures in this lower world act according to the laws of nature; the sun will rise, and the sea will flow at their appointed times; and the gracious soul will make towards its God in the times and seasons of communion with him. They are not forced on to those duties by the frights of conscience, and the fears of hell, so much as by the natural inclination of the new creature. Two things demonstrate communion with God to be co-natural to the regenerate part, called the inner-man, and the hidden-man of the heart, viz. (1.) The restlessness of a gracious soul without it, Cant. 3:2, The church, in the first verse, had sought her beloved, but found him not. Doth she sit down satisfied in his absence? No; "I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth." (2.) The satisfaction and pleasure, the rest and delight which the soul finds and feels in the enjoyment of communion with God, plainly shew it to be agreeable to the new nature: Psal. 63:5. "My soul shall be satisfied when I think on thee." And when it is thus, then duties become easy and pleasant to the soul: 1 John 5:3. "His commandments are not grievous." Yea, and such a soul will be constant and assiduous in those duties. That which is natural, is constant as well as pleasant. What is the reason hypocrites throw up the duties of religion in times of difficulty, but because they have not an inward principle agreeable to them? The motives to duty lie without them, not within them.

XIX. Excellency. It is the occupation and trade of all sanctified persons, and the richest trade that was ever driven by men. This way they grow rich in spiritual treasures; the revenues of it are better than silver and gold. There be many of you have traded long for this world, and it comes to little; and had you gained your designs you had gained but trifles. This is the rich and profitable occupation: Phil. 3:20. "Our conversation is in heaven." Our commerce and trade lies that way, so that word signifies. There be few Christians that have driven this soul-enriching trade any

considerable time, but can shew some spiritual treasures which they have gotten by it, Psal. 119:50. "This I had, because I kept thy precepts." As merchants can shew the gold and silver, the lands and houses, the rich goods and furniture, which they have gotten by their successful adventures abroad; and tell their friends, so much I got by such a voyage, and so much by another: So Christians have invaluable treasures, though their humility conceals them, which they have gotten by this heavenly trade of communion with God. Their souls are weak, and by communion with God they have gotten strength. Psal. 138:3. "I cried, and thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." They have gotten peace by it, a treasure inestimable. Psal. 119:165. "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them." They have gotten purity by it. Psal. 119:3. "They do no iniquity that walk in thy ways." O what rich returns are here! nay, they get sometimes full assurance by it. The riches of both the Indies will not purchase from a Christian the least of these mercies. These are the rich rewards of our pains in the duties of religion; In keeping thy commandments there is great reward.

XX. Excellency. It is Oil to the wheels of obedience, which makes the soul go on cheerfully in the ways of the Lord: Psal. 119:32. "Then will I run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." Non tardat uncta rota. Oiled wheels run nimbly. How prompt and ready for any duty of obedience, is a soul under the influence of communion with God! Then, as Isaiah, having gotten a sight of God, "Here am I, Lord, send me," Isa. 6:8. Now the soul can turn its hand to the duties of,

1. Active; And

2. Passive obedience.

1. Hereby the soul is prepared and fitted for the duties of active obedience, to which it applies itself with pleasure and delight; Psal. 43:3, 4. "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy;" or, as it is in the Hebrew, the gladness of my joy. It goes to prayer as a hungry man to a feast, or as a covetous man to his treasures: Psal. 119:14. "I have rejoiced in the way of thy commandments as much as in all riches.

2. It prepares the soul for passive obedience: makes a man to rejoice in

his sufferings, Col. 1:24. It will make a Christian stand ready to receive any burden or load that God shall lay upon his shoulders, and even be thankful to be so employed; "This joy of the Lord is their strength," Neh. 8:10. A Christian under the cheerful influences of near communion with God, can, with more cheerfulness, lay down his neck for Christ, than other men can lay out a shilling for him. In all these twenty particulars, you have an account of the excellency of this privilege; but, O how short an account have I given of it! What remains, is the application of this point, in a double use:

1. Of information.
2. Of exhortation.

First, For information in the following inferences.

Inferences

Inference 1. How sure and certain a thing it is, that there is a God, and a state of glory prepared in heaven for sanctified souls.

These things are undeniable. God hath set them before our spiritual eyes and senses: Beside the revelation of it in the gospel, which singly makes it infallible; the Lord, for our abundant satisfaction, hath brought these things down to the touch and test of our spiritual senses and experiences. You that have had so many sights of God by faith, so many sweet tastes of heaven in the duties of religion, O what a confirmation and seal have you of the reality of invisible things! You may say of heaven, and the joys above, as the apostle did of him that purchased it, 1 John 1:1. "That which our eyes have seen, and our ears have heard, and our hands have handled," &c. For God hath set these things in some degree before your very eyes, and put the first-fruits of them into your own hands. The sweet relish of the joy of the Lord is upon the very palate of your souls. To this spiritual sense of the believing Hebrews, the apostle appealed, Heb. 10:34 when he said, "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better, and an enduring substance." This knowing in ourselves is more certain and sweet than all the traditional reports we can get from the reports of others, 1 Pet. 1:8.

"Whom having not seen ye love; whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." There is more of heaven felt and tasted in this world than men are aware of; it is one thing to hear of such countries as Spain, Italy, Smyrna, by the discourses and reports we heard of them in our childhood, and another thing to understand those countries by the rich commodities imported from them, in the way of our trade and commerce. O did we but know what other Christians have felt and tasted, we would not have such staggering thoughts about invisible things! but the secret comforts of religion are, and ought to be for the most part inclosed things. Religion lays not all open; the Christian life is a hidden life.

Infer. 2. If such a height of communion with God be attainable on earth, then most Christians live below the duties and comforts of Christianity.

Alas, the best of us are but at the foot of this pleasant mount Pisgah. As we are but in the infancy of our graces, so we are but in the infancy of our comforts. What a poor house is kept by many of God's own children; living between hopes and fears, seldom tasting the riches and pleasures, the joys and comforts of assurance! And will you know the reasons of it? There are five things which usually keep them poor and low as to spiritual joys and comforts. (1.) The incumbrances of the world, which divert them from, or distract them in their duties of communion with God, and so keep them low in their spiritual comforts: They have so much to do on earth, that they have little time for heavenly employments. O what a noise and din do the trifles of this world make in the heads and hearts of many Christians! How dear do we pay for such trifles as these? (2.) A spirit of morality creeping into the duties of religion, impoverishes the vital spirit thereof, like the wanton embraces of the ivy, which binds and starves the tree it clasps about. Religion cannot thrive under formality; and it is difficult to keep out formality in a settled course of duty, and much more when duties are intermitted. (3.) The business of temptations pestering the minds of many Christians, especially such as are of melancholy constitutions. How importunate and restless are these temptations with some Christians? They can make little comfort or advantage out of duty, by reason of them. (4.) Heart-apostasy, inward decays of our first love, is another reason why our duties prosper so little, Rev. 2:14. "Thou hast left

thy first love." You were not wont to serve God with such coldness. (5.) In a word, spiritual pride impoverishes our comforts; the joys of the Spirit, like brisk wines, are too strong for our weak heads. For these causes, many Christians are kept low in spiritual comforts.

Infer. 3. How sweet and desirable is the society of the saints! it must needs be desirable to walk with them, who walk with God, 1 John 1:3. No such companions as the saints. What benefit or pleasure can we find in converses with sensual worldlings? All we can carry away out of such company is guilt or grief. "All my delight (saith David) is in the saints, and in the excellent of the earth, which excel in virtue," Psal. 16:3. And their society would certainly be much more sweet, and desirable, than it is did they live more in communion with God than they do. There was a time when the communion of the saints was exceeding lovely, Mal. 3:16. Acts 2:46, 47 the Lord restore it to its primitive glory, and sweetness.

Infer. 4. What an unspeakable mercy is conversion, which lets the soul into such a state of spiritual pleasure?

Here is the beginning of your acquaintance with God, the first tale of spiritual pleasures, of which there shall never be an end. All the time men have spent in the world in an unconverted state, hath been a time of estrangement and alienation from God; when the Lord brings a man to Christ, in the way of conversion, he then begins his first acquaintance with God. Job 22:21. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace, thereby good shall come unto thee." This is your first acquaintance with the Lord, which will be a growing thing; every visit you give him, in prayer increaseth your acquaintance, and begets more intimacy, and humble, holy familiarity betwixt him and you. And, O what a paradise of pleasure doth this let the soul into! the life of religion abounds with pleasures, Psal. 16:11. "All his ways are ways of pleasantness, and his paths are peace," Prov. 3:17. Now you know where to go, and unload any trouble that presseth your hearts; whatever prejudices and scandal Satan, and his instruments, cast upon religion, this I will affirm of it, that that man must necessarily be a stranger to true pleasure, and empty of real comfort, who is a stranger to Christ, and the duties of communion with him. It is true, here is no allowance for sinful pleasures, nor any want of spiritual pleasures. Bless God, therefore, for converting grace, you that

have it, and lift up a cry to heaven for it, you that want it.

Infer. 5. Lastly, If there be so much delight, and pleasure in our imperfect, and often interrupted communion with God here; O then what is heaven! what are the immediate visions of his face in the perfect state? 1 Cor. 2:9. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." You have heard glorious, and ravishing reports, in the gospel, of that blessed future state, things which the angels desire to look into. You have felt, and tasted joys unspeakable, and full of glory, in the actings of your faith, and love, upon Christ; yet all that you have heard, and all that you have felt, and tasted in the way to glory, falls so short of the perfection and blessedness of that state, that heaven will, and must be a great surprise to them that have now the greatest acquaintance with it. Though the present comforts of the saints are sometimes as much as they can bear, for they seem to reel, and stagger, under the weight of them, Cant. 2:5. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, I am sick of love:" Yet, I say, these high tides of pleasant joys, are but shallows to the joys of his immediate presence, 1 Cor. 13:12. And as they run not so deep, so they are not constant and continued, as they shall be above; 1 Th 4:17ult. "Ever with the Lord." And thus much for information.

II. Use, for Exhortation

The last improvement of this point will be by way of exhortation.

1. To believers.
2. To unbelievers.

First, Is this the privileged state, into which all believers are admitted by conversion? Then strive to come up to the highest attainment of communion with God in this world, and be not contented with just so much grace as will secure you from hell; but labour after such a height of grace and communion with God, in the exercise thereof, as may bring you into the suburbs of heaven on earth.

Forget the things that are behind you, as to satisfaction in them, and

press towards the mark, for the prize of your high calling. It is greatly to your loss, that you live at such a distance from God, and are so seldom with him; think not the ablest ministers, or choicest books will ever be able to satisfy your doubts and comfort your hearts, whilst you let down your communion with God to so low a degree. O that you might be persuaded now to hearken obediently to three or four necessary words of counsel.

Counsels

I. Counsel. Make communion with God the very level and aim of your souls in all your approaches to him in the ordinances and duties of religion. Set it upon the point of your compass, let it be the very thing your souls design; let the desires and hopes of communion with God be the thing that draws you to every sermon and prayer. Psal. 18. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may see the beauty of the Lord, and enquire after him in his temple." That was the mark David aimed at; and men's success in duties is usually according to the spiritual aims and intentions of their hearts in them: both sincerity and comfort lie much in men's ends.

II. Counsel. In all your approaches to God, beg and plead hard with him for the manifestations of his love, and further communications of his grace. "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice; have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When thou saidst, seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me, put not thy servant away in anger," Psal. 27:7, 8, 9. How full and thick of pleas and arguments for communion with God was this prayer of David? Lord, I am come, in obedience to thy command; thou saidst, Seek ye my face, thou biddest me come to thee, and wilt thou put away thy servant in anger? Thou hast been my help, I have had sweet experience of thy goodness, thou dost not use to put me off, and turn me away empty.

III. Counsel. Desire not comfort for comfort's sake; but comforts and refreshments for service and obedience sake; that thereby you may be strengthened to go on in the ways of your duty with more cheerfulness, Psal. 119:32. "Then will I run the ways of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." As if he should say, O Lord, the comforts thou

shalt give me, shall be returned again in cheerful services to thee. I desire them as oil to the wheels of obedience, not food for my pride.

IV. Counsel. As ever you expect to be owners of much comfort in the ways of your communion with God, see that you are strict and circumspect in the course of your conversations. It is the looseness and carelessness of our hearts and lives which impoverishes our spiritual comforts. A little pride, a little carelessness, dashes and frustrates a great deal of comfort, which was very near us, almost in our hands; to allude that, Hosea 7:1. "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered." So here, just when the desire of thy heart was come to the door, some sin step in the way of it. "Your iniquities (saith God) have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you," Isa. 59:2. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is sensible and tender; he hath quick resentments of your unkindnesses and offences. As ever, therefore, you expect comfort from him, beware of him, and grieve him not.

Secondly, In the last place, this point speaks necessary counsel and advice to unbelievers; to all that live estranged from the life of God, and have done so from the womb, Psal. 58:3. To you the voice of the Redeemer sounds a summons once more, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." O that at last you might be prevailed with to comply with the merciful terms propounded by him. Will you shut out a Saviour bringing salvation, pardon and peace with him! Christ is thy rightful owner, and demands possession of thy soul: if thou wilt now hear his voice, thy former refusals shall never be objected. If thou still reject his gracious offers, mercy may never more be tendered to thee; there is a call of Christ which will be the last call, and after that no more. Take heed what you do; if you still demur and delay, your damnation is just, inevitable, and inexcusable. Hear me, therefore, you unregenerated souls, in what rank or condition soever providence hath placed you in this world, whether you be rich or poor, young or old, masters, or servants, whether there be any stirrings of conviction in your consciences or not. For however your conditions in this world differ from each other at present, there is one common misery hanging over you all, if you continue in that state of unbelief you are now fixed in.

And, 1. Hearken to the voice and call of Christ, you that are exalted by providence above your poorer neighbours; you that have your heads, hands, and hearts full of the world; men of trade and business, I have a few solemn questions to ask you this day.

(1.) You have made many gainful bargains in your time, but what will all profit you if the agreement be not made betwixt Christ and your souls? Christ is a treasure which only can enrich you, Mat. 13:44. Thou art a poor and miserable wretch, whatever thou hast gained of this world, if thou hast not gained Christ, thou hast heaped up guilt with thy riches, which will more torment thy conscience hereafter, than thy estate can yield thee comfort here.

(2.) You have made many insurances to secure your floating estates, which you call policies; but what insurance have you made for your souls? Are not they exposed to eternal hazards? O impolitic man! to be so provident to secure trifles, and so negligent in securing the richest treasure.

(3.) You have adjusted many accounts with men, but who shall make up your accounts with God, if you be Christless? "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mat. 16:26. Say not, you have much business under your hands, and cannot allow time; you will have space enough hereafter to reflect upon your folly.

2. You that are poor, and mean in the world, what say you, will you have two hells, one here, and another hereafter? No comfort in this world, nor hope for the next? Your expectations here laid in the dust, and your hopes for heaven built upon the sand? O if you were once in Christ, how happy were you, though you knew not where to fetch your next bread! "Poor in the world, but rich in faith; and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised," Jam. 2:5. O blessed state! If you had Christ, you had then a right to all things, 1 Cor. 3:22, 23 you had then a father to take care for you: But to be poor, and christless, no comfort from this world, nor hopes from the next; this is to be truly miserable indeed. Your very straits, and wants, should prompt you to the great duty I am now pressing on you; and methinks it should be matter of encouragement that the greatest number of Christ's friends, and followers, come out of that rank, and

order of men, to which you belong.

3. You that are seamen, floating so often upon the great deeps, you are reckoned a third sort of persons between the living and the dead; you belong not to the dead, because you breathe, and scarcely to the living, because you are continually so near death. What think you, friends, have you no need of a Saviour? Do you live so secure from the reach and danger of death? Have your lives been so pure, righteous, and innocent, who have been in the midst of temptations in the world abroad? Ponder that scripture, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10. "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind," &c. ponder it, I say, and think whether you have not as great and pressing a necessity of Jesus Christ, as any poor souls under heaven? You have had many temporal salvations from God, great and eminent deliverances, and will these satisfy you? Is it enough that your bodies are delivered from the danger of the sea, though your souls sink, and perish in the ocean of God's wrath for ever? If you will yet accept Christ upon his terms, all that you have done shall be forgiven, Isa. 55:2. The Lord now calls to you in a still voice; if you hear his voice, well; if not, you may shortly hear his voice in the tempestuous storms without you, and a roaring conscience within you. Poor man, think what an interest in Christ will be worth, wert thou now (as shortly thou mayest be) floating upon a piece of wreck, or shivering upon a cold and desolate rock, crying, mercy, Lord, mercy! Well, mercy is now offered thee, but in vain wilt thou expect to find it, if thou continue thus to despise and reject it.

4. You that are aged and full of days, hearken to the voice of Christ, God hath called upon you a long time: When you were young you said, it is time enough yet, we will mind these things when we are old, and come nearer to the borders of eternity. Well, now, you are old, and just upon the borders of it; will you indeed mind it now? You have left the great concernments of your souls to this time, this short, very short time: And do the temptations of your youth take hold upon your age? What! delay and put off Christ still as you were wont to do? Poor creatures, you are almost gone out of time, you have but a short time to deliberate; what you do must be done quickly, or it can never be done. Your night is even come upon you when no man can work.

5. You that are young, in the bud or flower of your time, Christ is a suitor for your first love; he desires the kindness of your youth; your spirits are vigorous, your hearts tender, your affections flowing and impressive, you are not yet entered into the incumbrances and distracting cares of the world: Hereafter a crowd and thick succession of earthly employments and engagements will come on; sin will harden you by custom and continuance. Now is your time; you are in the convertible age; few that pass the season of youth (comparatively speaking) are brought over to Christ afterwards. It is a rarity, the wonder of an age, to hear of the conversion of aged sinners. Besides, you are the hopes of the next generation: Should you be Christ-neglecting and despising souls; how bad soever the present age is, the next will be worse. Say not we have time enough before us, we will not quench the sprightly vigour of our youth in melancholy thoughts: Remember there are skulls of all sizes in Golgotha; graves of all lengths in the churchyard: You may anticipate those that stand nearer the grave than you seem to do. O you cannot be happy too soon: As young as you are, did you but taste the comforts that be in Christ, nothing would grieve you more than that you knew him no sooner. Behold he standeth at thy door in the morning of thy age, knocking this day for admission into thy heart.

6. You that have had some slight, ineffectual, and vanishing convictions upon you formerly; the Lord Jesus once more renews his call: Will you now at last hear his voice? It is an infinite mercy to have a second call. I doubt not but there are many among you, whilst you have sat under the word, have had such thoughts as these in your hearts: Sure my condition is not right, nor safe; there must another manner of work pass upon my soul, or I am lost for ever. External duties of religion I do perform, but I am a stranger to regeneration. Such inward convictions as these were the knocks and calls of Christ, but they passed away and were forgotten: your convictions are dead, and your hearts the more hardened; for it is in putting a soul under conviction as it is in putting iron into the fire, and quenching it again, which hardens it the more. You have been near the kingdom of God, but the more miserable for that, if you be shut out at last. The quickening of your convictions is the right way to the saving of your souls. The Lord make you this day to hear his voice.

7. Such as have come hither upon vile or vain accounts, for mere novelty or worse ends; to catch advantages, or reproach the truths of God; scoffing at the most solemn and awful voice of Christ. The word that you have slighted and reproached, the same shall judge you in that great day, except the Lord will give you repentance unto life, and make the heart tremble under it that hath scoffed at it. "Be not mockers, lest your bonds be made strong," Isa. 28:22.

8. To conclude; let all whose hearts the Lord hath opened this day, for the enjoyments of the gospel, the blessed instrument of their salvation, bless the Lord that hath made it a key by regeneration to open the door of salvation to your souls, And as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.

AN APPENDIX TO THE FOREGOING TREATISE - ROM. 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

IN all the foregoing sermons I have been pleading and wooing for Christ. And as Abraham's servant, to win the damsel's consent, told her what treasures his master's son had, so I have laboured to shew you some part of the unsearchable riches of Christ, if by any means I might allure your hearts, and be instrumental to close the happy match betwixt him and you; and (as the apostle speaks) espouse you to one husband, even to Christ.

But alas! How few stir towards him? The most seem to be immoveably fixed in their natural state, and sinful courses. All our arguments and entreaties return to us again, and effect nothing. It is amazing to think what is the matter, that souls which have in them the inbred hopes and fears of the world to come, and self-reflecting powers cannot, for all this,

be prevailed with to quit the way of sin, and to embrace the way of holiness, though their consciences mean while stand convinced, that eternal damnation is the issue and result of the one; life, peace, and eternal joys of the other.

This hath put me upon a serious search what may be the cause and reason of this fixed and unreasonable obstinacy; and in this it seems evidently to lie with most that live in an unregenerate state under the gospel, that they put a force upon their own consciences, and do imprison and hold the truth in unrighteousness, though the wrath of God be revealed from heaven against all that do so.

If by this discourse I can but set truth at liberty, and loose the Lord's prisoners which lie bound in your souls, I shall not doubt the value of Christ will quickly rise among you, and free convictions will make the work of your ministers much more easy and successful than they now find it. It is hardly imaginable but the things you have heard must leave your souls under convictions: but if you suppress and stifle them, they produce nothing but aggravations of sin and misery. Now, in order to the free and effectual working of all your convictions, and begetting that reverence which is due to them from every soul, as to the voice of God, I have chosen this scripture, the scope and sense whereof I shall next give you.

The true scope and aim of this context is to prove the justification of sinners to be only by the imputed righteousness of Christ in the way of faith. To make this evident, he distributes the whole world into Gentiles and Jews; the one seeking righteousness by the dim light of nature, or the law written in their hearts; the other, viz. the Jews, by the works of the law, or external conformity to the law of Moses: But that neither can find what they seek, he distinctly and fully proves. He proves it first upon the Gentiles from this verse to the 17th verse of the second chapter; and then he proves it upon the Jews also from thence to the end of the third chapter. As for the Gentiles, he acknowledges that they had inbred notions of God imprinted in their nature; they had also the book of the creatures before them, enough to leave them without excuse, ver. 20 they have no pretence of ignorance: But these common notices of God, and of good and evil, they did not obey and put in practice, but acted against the

very light and dictates of their natural consciences. For which cause the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against them, as the text speaks. Wherein note,

1. A clear and dreadful revelation of Divine wrath.
2. The object or impulsive cause thereof, ungodliness and unrighteousness.
3. The special aggravation of this ungodliness and unrighteousness, that they held the truth in unrighteousness.

1. Here is a clear and dreadful revelation of Divine wrath, the "wrath of God (saith the apostle) is revealed from heaven;" οργη Θεου, the indignation or vengeance of God. It is a word of deep and dreadful signification; the damned that feel the weight of it, have the fullest sense of it. It is said, Psalm 90:11. "Who knows the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath." That is, the fears of an incensed Deity are no vain bugbears, nor the effects of ignorance and superstition as athcists fancy; but let men's fears of it be what they will, they shall find, except they repent, the wrath of God to be according to, yea, and far above their fears of it. If the wrath of a king be as the messengers of death, what then is the wrath of the great and terrible God? This Wrath is here said to be revealed, Αποκαλυπτεται, discovered, or made manifest; and so it is divers ways: It was revealed to them by the light of nature, their own consciences gave them notice and warning of it. Thus it was revealed to them by an internal testimony, a witness within them; and it was also revealed to them by the instances and examples of strokes and punishments of sin in all ages by the immediate hand of a justly incensed God. They came not by chance, but Divine direction: therefore it is added, απ' ουρανου, from heaven, or from God in heaven.

2. Here is the object, or impulsive cause of this revealed and inflicted wrath, it is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Επι πασαν ασεθειαν και αδικιαν. The former ασεθεια, ungodliness, compriseth all sins against the first table; the irreligious lives and practices of men, living in the neglect of the duties of religion: the other word αδικια, unrighteousness, compriseth all sins

against the second table, acts of fraud, uncleanness, &c. against men. And because these two general comprehensive words are branched out into many particulars, therefore he saith, "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness." There is not one of the many sins into which ungodliness and unrighteousness are branched out, but incenseth the Lord's wrath: and though he only mentions the sins in the abstract, we are to understand the abstract put here for the concrete; the sins for the sinners that commit them, or God's punishing these sins upon the persons of the sinners.

3. Lastly, We have here before us the special aggravation of these sins, or that which made them much more provoking to God than otherwise they had been. And it was this, that whilst they committed these sins, or omitted those duties, they held the truth in unrighteousness: *κατεχοντων*, the word signifies to detain, stop, hinder or put a Remora in that way of the truth of God, or those common notions they had of his being, power, goodness, truth, &c. as also of his worship, and the difference between good and evil. These truths struggled in their consciences; conscience instigated them to duty, and laboured to restrain them from sin; but all in vain, they overbear their own consciences, and keep those sentiments and convictions prisoners, though they struggled for liberty to break forth into practice and obedience. Their convictions were kept down under the dominion and power of corruptions, as a prisoner is shut up by his keeper. Their lusts were too hard for their light. Thus you have both the scope and sense of the text. The point from it is this.

Doct. That the wrath of God is dreadfully incensed against all those that live in any course of sin, against the light and dictates of their own consciences.

Sins of ignorance provoke the wrath of God, yet are they not of so heinous a nature as sins against light and conviction are, nor shall they be punished so severely, Luke 12:47. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

It excuses, a tanto, *Conscia mens ut cuique sua est* in some measure, when a man can say, Lord, had I known this to be a sin, I would not have done

it: but when the conscience is convinced, and strives to keep us from, such an act or course of sinful actions, and we stop our ears against its voice and warnings; here is a high and horrid contempt of God and his law, and gives the sin a scarlet dye or tincture. Sins of ignorance cannot compare with such sins as these, John 3:19. John 16:22, To open this point, let me.

1. Shew you what conscience is.
2. What the light of conscience is, and what its kinds are.
3. How this light binds the conscience, and makes it strive in us.
4. Then instance in some cases wherein it doth so
5. And, Lastly, how and why the imprisoning of these convictions so dreadfully incenseth the wrath of God.

First, It will be needful to speak a little to the nature of conscience in general. Conscience (as our Divines well express it) is the judgment of man upon himself, as he is subject to the judgment of God. A judgment it is, and a practical judgment too; it belongs to the understanding faculty, 1 Cor. 11:13. If we would judge ourselves, &c. This self-judgment is the proper office, of the conscience, and, to enable it for this its work and office, there are (as is generally observed) three things belonging to every man's conscience.

1. A knowledge of the rule or law, according to which it is to judge, called the Synteresis, which is a treasury of rules and principles, without which conscience can no more do its work, than an artificer that wants his square or level can do his.
2. Knowledge of the facts, or matters to be judged, called the Syneidesis. The conscience of every man keeps a register of his actions, thoughts, and the very secrets of the heart.
3. An ability or delegated authority to pass judgment on ourselves and actions, according to the rule and law of God, called Crisis, judgment. Here it sits upon the bench as God's vicegerent, absolving or condemning,

as it finds the sincerity or hypocrisy of the heart upon trial, 1 John 3:20, 21.

Conscience, therefore, is a high and awful power, it is solo Deo minor; next, and immediately under God, our Judge; riding, as Joseph did in the second chariot. And concerning conscience, he saith to every man, as he once did to Moses, with respect to Pharaoh, See, I have made thee a God to Pharaoh, Exod. 7:1. The voice of conscience is the voice of God. What it bindeth or looseth on earth, Clave non errante, is accordingly bound or loosed in heaven, 1 John 3:21 the greatest difference and precise obedience is due to its command. Its consolations are, of all, the most sweet, and its condemnations (only excepting those by the mouth of Christ in the last judgment) most terrible. Zuinglius spake not without ground, when he said, "What death would I not rather chuse? What punishment would I not rather bear? Yea, into what a profound abyss of hell would I not rather enter, than to witness against my conscience?" It is like he had felt the terrors of it to be more bitter than death. How many have chosen strangling, rather than life, under the terrors of conscience? Wherever you go, conscience accompanies you; whatever you say, do, or but think, it registers and records, in order to the day of account. When all friends forsake thee, yea, when thy soul forsakes thy body, conscience will not, cannot forsake thee. When thy body is weakest and dullest, thy conscience is most vigorous and active? Never more life in the conscience than when death makes its nearest approach to the body. When it smiles, cheers, acquits and comforts, oh, what a heaven doth it create within a man! And when it frowns, condemns, and terrifies, how doth it becloud, yea, benight all the pleasures, joy, and delights of this world? O conscience! how glad would the damned be to have taken their last farewell of thee, when they bid this world and all its inhabitants farewell, at death! And what had become of all the sufferers and martyrs, when shut up from friends in dungeons, had it not been for the cheering cordials and comforts thou there administered to support them! It is certainly the best of friends, or the worst of enemies in the whole creation. This is conscience, these are its powers and offices; which was the first thing.

Secondly, Our next enquiry must be into the light of conscience, and the

various kinds of that light.

The Lord did not frame such an excellent structure as the soul of man, without windows to let in light, nor doth he deny the benefit of light to any soul; but there is a twofold light which men have to inform and guide their consciences.

1. The light of natural reason, which is common.

2. The light of scripture revelation, which is special.

1. There is a common light of natural reason, which is connate, called by Solomon, Prov. 20:27. "The candle of the Lord. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." This is affirmed by him that had an extraordinary portion of intellectuals, a brighter lamp of reason, and wisdom, than other men; and this is not only true of the soul in general, but of that special power of it, which is called conscience, which is God's spy, and man's overseer. The Heathens had this light shining to their minds, and consciences; some of them, by the alone help of this natural light, made wonderful discoveries of the mysteries of nature; yea, they found its efficacy and power, great in their consciences, to raise their hopes or fears, according to the good or evil they had done.

* *Conscia mens ut cuique sua est, ita concipit intra*

Pectora pro facto, spemque metumque suo. Ovid.

And to the shame of many that are called Christians, some among them paid great reverence to their own consciences.

†*Imprimis reverere teipsum,*

Turpe quid ausurus, te sine teste time.

But however, the generality of them did not so, and are taxed for it in the text; and besides, this light can make no discoveries of Christ, and of the way of salvation by him. The most eagle-eyed philosophers among them were in the dark here. And therefore,

2. God hath afforded men a more clear, and excellent light to shine into their minds, and consciences, even the light of the gospel, which, compared with the light of natural reason, is as the light of the sun to the dim moon-light. Psal. 147:19, 20. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." Every creature hath the name of God engraven on it, but he hath magnified his word above all his name, Psal. 138:2. God, who best knows the rate and value of his own mercies, accounts this a singular favour and privilege to any nation. Without revelation we could never have known the cause of our misery, the fall of Adam, or the only way and means of our recovery by Christ: by this a people are lifted up to heaven, Matth. 11:21 in respect of means and advantages of salvation; and consequently the contempt or neglect of such light and love, will certainly plunge the guilty into proportionable misery. John 3:19. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light."

Moreover, God doth not only afford the light of natural reason and external gospel-revelation to some men in an eminent degree; but to both these he super-adds the internal illumination of his Spirit, which is the clearest and most glorious light in the whole world. "He shineth into their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. 4:6. These are the three sorts of light that God makes to shine into the souls and consciences of men to direct and guide them; the first a common and general light, the two last the most clear and transcendent in excellency, especially that of the Spirit with the gospel: For though the sun be risen, yet men may draw the curtains about them, and lie in darkness; but the Spirit opens them, and makes it shine in.

Thirdly, How this light shining into the consciences of men obligeth them to obedience, and how men's lusts struggle against the obligations of an enlightened conscience, is the next thing to be spoken to.

It is manifest and beyond all controversy, that an enlightened conscience lays strong and indispensable obligations and engagements on the soul to obedience; for the will of God is the supreme law, 1 Tim. 6:15 it is the will

of "the only potentate, the King of kings, and Lords of lords:" And the promulgation and manifestation of it, so binds the conscience of the creature to obedience, as no authority or power on earth can loose those bands; no man can grant a Supersedeas in this case, or relieve the soul so bound by a *noli prosequi*: For conscience, as God's vicegerent, in his name requireth obedience, and the man that heareth the voice of God from the mouth of his own conscience presently thereupon becomes a debtor, Rom. 1:14 put under a necessity, 1 Cor. 9:16.

Now conscience, by reason of the light that shineth into it, feeling itself under such strong bands and necessities, stimulates and urgeth the soul to obedience, warns, commands, and presses the soul to its duty against the contrary interest, and inclinations of the flesh: and hence arise those combats and conflicts in the bosoms of men. Sometimes conscience prevails, and sometimes lusts and corruptions prevail, and that with great difficulty; for it is not alike easy to all men to shake off, or burst the bands of their own consciences, though others can do it easily. What a hard task had Saul to conquer his own conscience? I forced myself, saith he, 1 Sam. 13:12 he knew it belonged not to him to offer sacrifice, his conscience plainly told him it would be his sin; but yet the fear of the Philistines being stronger than the fear of God, he adventured upon it, *renitente conscientia*, against the plain dictates of his own conscience. Thus Herod gives sentence to put John to death, Mat. 14:9. "The king was sorry, nevertheless, for his oath's sake, and "them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." His honour weighed up all his fear of sin, his own word weighed more with him than God's word; *Nemo ita perplexus tenetur inter duo vitia, quin exitus patent absque tertio*: 'No man is held so perplexed between two vices, but he may find an issue without falling into a third.'

Pilate's conscience was convinced of Christ's innocency, Matth. 27:18, 19 yet the fear of Cæsar hurries him on to the greatest of wickedness, even to give sentence against innocent blood, yea, the blood of the Son of God. Darius, in like manner, Dan. 6:14 knew that Daniel was not only an excellent person, but that he was entrapt by the nobles, merely for his conscience, and that to put him to death was to sacrifice him to their malice: This he and his conscience debated all the day, many encounters

he had with it; for the text saith, He "was sore displeased with himself, and he set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and laboured until the going down of the sun to deliver him;" but after a day's sharp fight betwixt him and his conscience, lust prevails at last against light, and returns victor out of the field in the evening. So it was with poor Spira; he seemed to hear, as it were, an inward voice, Do not write, Spira, do not write: but the love of his estate, wife, and children, drew his hand to the paper, though conscience struggled hard to hold it back.

Thus, as the restless sea strives to beat down, or break over its bounds, so do impetuous lusts strive to over-bear light and conviction; *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*: They know this or that to be a sin, and that they hazard their souls by it; but yet they will adventure on it, and rush into sin as the horse into the battle.

Fourthly, I promised to give you some instances of the conflicts betwixt men's consciences and their corruptions, wherein conscience is vanquished and over-borne, and by what weapons the victory over conscience is obtained. Now the convictions of men are two fold, viz.

1. General, respecting their state.

2. Particular, respecting this or that action.

1. There are general convictions and notices given to some men and women by their consciences, that their condition, or state of soul is neither right nor safe; that they want the main things which constitutes a Christian, viz. regeneration, or a gracious change of heart and life: They hear and read the signs and effects of these things; but their consciences plainly tell them it cannot find them in them; that they enjoy the external privileges of the saints, but they belong not to them; that something is still wanting, and that the main thing too. O my soul, thou art not right; thou hast gifts, thou hast a name to live, but for all that thou art dead some further work must be done upon thee, or thou art undone to eternity: thou passest for a good Christian among men, but woe to thee if thou die in the state thou art. These, and such as these are the whispers of some men's consciences in their ears; and yet they cannot so yield themselves up into the hands of their convictions, as to confess and

bewail their hypocrisy and gross mistake, and seek for a better foundation to build their hope on. Felix's conscience gave him such a terrible rouse and monition as this, and made him to tremble whilst Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, Acts 24:25 it whispered in his ear such language as this, O poor soul, how shall such an oppressor, such an intemperate wretch as thou art, stand before God in this day of judgment, which Paul proves in thy face is certainly future? For, as Tacitus saith of him, He was inexplebilis gurgis, an insatiable gulph of covetousness: So it was with Agrippa, Acts 26:28 he stood at half-bent, dubious, and unresolved what to do: he saw the heavenly doctrine of Christianity evidently confirmed by doctrines and miracles, his conscience pleaded hard with him to embrace it, and had almost prevailed; almost, or within a little, as the word is, thou persuadest me to be a Christian: but Agrippa had too much wealth and honours to deny and forsake for Christ; the love of the present world overbore both the hopes and fears of the world to come. And thus that excellent fisher for souls, who had thoroughly converted so many to Christ, caught but a piece of Agrippa; almost is a great deal for so great a person. The gospel is a drag-net, and brings up all sorts, whole Christians, and half Christians. The conscience is caught, and the will begins to incline; but O the power and prevalence of sin! which, like the rudder, commands all to a contrary course.

If we come a little nearer, and enquire what are those Remora's that stop conscience in its course, bind and imprison, stifle and suppress its convictions; that although a man strongly suspect his foundation to be but sand, his hopes for heaven a strong delusion, yet will he not throw up his vain hopes, confess his self-deceits, and begin all anew. What is it which over-bears conscience in this case? Let men impartially examine their hearts, and it will be found that these three things bind and imprison these convictions of conscience, and hold the truth in unrighteousness, viz. Shame, fear, and pride of heart.

(1.) Shame. Men that have been professors, and of good esteem in the world, are ashamed the world should know the mistakes and errors of all their life past, and what deluded fools and self-deceivers they have been: this is a powerful restraint upon conviction; how shall they look their

acquaintance in the face? what will men think and say of them? "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?" saith Christ, John 5:44 q. d. What! you be Christians, and yet not able to endure a censure, or a scoff upon your names; that stand more upon your reputation than your salvation: how can you believe?

O what madness and exalted folly appears in this case! men will choose rather to go on, though conscience tells them the end of that way will be death, than suffer the shame of a just and necessary retraction, which yet indeed is not their shame, but their duty and glory You that are so tender of the shame of men, how will you be able to endure the contempt and shame that shall be cast on you from God, angels and men, in the great day? Luke 9:26. It is no shame to acknowledge your mistake, but to persist in it, after conviction, is shameful madness.

I knew an excellent minister, who proved an eminent instrument in the church of God, who in the beginning of his ministerial course was not upon the right foundation of regeneration. This man had rare abilities, excellent natural and acquired gifts, and could preach of regeneration, faith, and heavenly-mindedness, though he felt nothing of these things in his own experience. His life was very unblameable, and he had no mean interest and esteem among good men. It pleased the Lord, whilst this man was studying an excellent spiritual point to preach to others, his conscience first preached it in his study to himself, and that with such a close and rousing application, as made him to tremble, telling him, that though he had gifts above many, and sobriety in his conversation, yet one thing, and that the main thing, sanctifying grace, was wanting. Hereupon the pangs of the new birth seized his soul, and the Lord made him a most inward, searching, experimental minister, and crowned his labours with unusual success. This minister, to his dying day, was not ashamed in all companies to acknowledge his mistake, and bless God for his recovery out of it; and in most of his sermons, he would endeavour to convince professors of the necessity of a second conversion.

(2.) Fear is another pull-back, which with-holds men from executing the convictions of their own consciences, and obeying its calls in this grand case and concern of the soul. They are pretty easy and safe under the external profession, and duties of religion, and are afraid of throwing up

their vain hopes, and engaging themselves heartily and thoroughly in religion; and there be two things that scare them.

1st. The inward pains and troubles of Spirit attending the new birth; which they have read and heard of, and seen the effects of in others. O it is a dreadful thing to lie under the terrors that many have felt! and so it is with them as with one that hath a bone ill-set, who, if he have any ease, will rather endure a little daily pain, and be content to halt all his life, than undergo the pain of another fraction or dislocation in order to a perfect cure.

2dly, They are afraid of external sufferings. The form of godliness leaves men a latitude to take or leave, according as the times favour or frown upon the ways of religion; but the power of godliness will engage and put them beyond retreat: They must then stand to it come what will. But, soul, let me tell thee, if the just fears and apprehensions of hell, and the eternal wrath of God were upon thee, to which thy hypocrisy and formality will expose thee; all these fears of inward or outward troubles would vanish the same hour.

(3.) Pride of heart suffers not this conviction of conscience to work out its effects, but holds this truth in unrighteousness, to the hazard and ruin of many souls. Men that live upon their own duties and self-righteousness, are not easily brought to renounce all this, and live upon the righteousness of Christ alone for justification. Proud nature will rather venture, the hazard of damnation than such self-denial, Rom. 10:3. As you see it common among poor people to live meanly on coarse fare of their own, than upon the alms and bounty of another.

O but if once the day of God's power be come, and a man begins to feel the commandment come home to his conscience, as Paul did, Rom. 7:9 when he comes to realize the world to come, the value of his soul, and the danger it is in; then all these remora's are as easily swept away, as so many straws by the rapid course of a mighty torrent. Then let men say or think what they please, I must not throw away my own soul to maintain a vain estimation among men. Let inward or outward sufferings be ever so great, it is better for me to feel them, than to suffer the everlasting wrath of the great and terrible God. Let my own righteousness be what it will,

all is but dung and dross to the pure and perfect righteousness of Christ.

2. As this general conviction, with respect to men's state and condition, is held in unrighteousness, and men and women go with grumbling consciences, and frequent inward fears by reason of it; so there are many particular convictions bound and imprisoned in men's souls. Particular convictions, I say, both as to sins committed, and known duties omitted, against both tables of the law of God; called in the text, ungodliness and unrighteousness. Conscience labours and strives to bring men to confess, bewail, and reform them, but cannot prevail; contrary lusts and interests overpower them, and detain them in unrighteousness. What these are, and how they are with-held by those lusts, I shall give in some instances.

Instances

Instance 1. And first, for convictions of ungodliness. There are many that call themselves Christians, whose consciences tell them God is to be daily and duly worshipped by them, both in family and closet-prayer. It sets before them Joshua's pious practice, Joshua 24:15. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." They know God is the founder, the owner, the master of their families; that all family-blessings are from him, and therefore he is to be owned, acknowledged, and sought, in daily family prayers and praises. It tells them the curse of God hangs over prayerless families, Jer. 10:25 and that they live in the inexcusable neglects of these duties, seldom worshipping God with their families, or in their closets; and that therefore they live without God in the world. And dreadful will the account and reckoning be at the great day, for their own souls, which they have starved for want of closet-prayer, and for the souls committed to their charge, which perish for want of family-duties. This is the case of many, who yet will needs pass for professors of Christianity.

Lord, how sad a case is here? How can men possibly live in the daily neglect of so great, so necessary a duty? Certainly it is not for want of light and conviction; the very light of nature, if we had no Bibles, discovers these duties. But three things hold this truth of God dictated by men's consciences in unrighteousness, viz.

1. The love of the world,

2. Consciousness of inability.

3. A disinclined heart.

1. The love of the world chokes this conviction in the souls of some: and they think it enough to plead for their excuse, the want of opportunities, and many encumbrances they have, which will not allow them time for these duties. The world is a severe task-master, and fills their heads and hands all the day with cares and toils.

And must the mouth of conscience then be stopped with such a plea as this? No; God and conscience will not be answered and put off so. The greatest number of persons in the world, from whom God hath the most spiritual and excellent worship, are of the lower and poorer rank, Psal. 74:20. James 2:5. And it is highly probable your necessities had been less, if your prayers had been more. And what sweeter outlet and vent to all these troubles can you find than prayer? This would sweeten all your labours and sorrows in the world,

2. Consciousness and sense of inability and want of gifts, restrain this conviction in others. Should they attempt such duties before others they shall but expose their own ignorance and shame.

But this is a vain pretence to shake off duty. The neglect of prayer is a principal cause of that inability you complain of; gifts, as well as grace, grow by exercise. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. And besides, it is the fruit of pride, and argues your eye to be more upon your own honour than God's. The Lord regards not oratory in prayer; your broken expressions, yea, your groans and sighs please him more than all the eloquence in the world.

3. But the principal thing that restrains men from obeying their convictions as to family and closet prayer, is a disinclined heart; that is the root and true cause of these sinful neglects and omissions. You savour not the sweetness of these things, and what a man relishes no sweetness in, or finds no necessity of, is easily omitted and let pass.

But woe to you that go from day to day self-condemned for the neglect of

so known, so sweet, and so necessary a duty; if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, 1 John 3:20. He that lives without prayer is dead whilst he lives; and let men talk what they please of secret communion with God, I am sure, if religion did thrive in the closet, it would never be banished out of the family. The time is coming also when death will disband and break up your families, separate the wife from the husband, the child from the parent, the servant from the master; and then where shall you find relief and comfort, who have spent your time together so sinfully and vainly, I cannot tell, nor what account you can give to God in the great day. Think sadly on these things, they are worth thinking on.

Instance 2. A second instance of ungodliness continued in under the convictions of conscience, is formality in all the external duties of religion and ordinances of God. Have not the consciences of some of you often, and plainly told you, that though you be often engaged in the public duties of hearing, prayer, &c. yet your hearts are not with God in those duties? They do not work after communion and fellowship with him therein. It is nothing but the force of education, custom, and care of reputation brings you there.

Such a conviction as this could it work home, and do its work thoroughly, would be the salvation of thy soul; were power added to the form, as conscience would have it, thou wert then a real Christian, and out of the danger of hell. The want of this thy conscience sees will be thy ruin, and accordingly gives thee plain warning of it. O what pity is it such a conviction as this should be held in unrighteousness! But so it is in very many souls, and that on several accounts.

1. Because hypocrisy is so odious and abominable a sin, that men are loth to own and acknowledge it, how guilty soever they be of it. What, dissemble with God, and play the hypocrite with him! it is so black and foul a crime, that men cannot easily be brought to charge themselves with it. They may have the infirmities which are common to the best of men, but yet they are not hypocrites. Thus pride of heart casts a chain upon conviction, and binds it, that it cannot do its work.

2. It is a cheap and easy way to give God the external service and worship

of the body, but heart-work is hard work. To sit or kneel an hour or two is no great matter: but to search, humble, and break the heart for sin; to work up the dead and earthly affections into a spiritual heavenly frame, this will cost many a hard tug. It is no severe task to sit before God as his people, whilst the fancy and thoughts are left at liberty to wander which way they please, as the thoughts of formal hypocrites use to do, Ezek. 33:31 but to set a watch upon the heart, to summon in the thoughts of God, to retract every wandering thought with a sigh; this is difficult, and the difficulty over-powers conviction of duty.

3. The atheism of the heart quenches this conviction in men's souls. Formality is a secret invisible sin, not discernible by man; the outside of religion looks fair to a man's eye, and so long it is well enough, as if there was not a God that trieth the hearts and the reins. Thus, when a beam of light and conviction shines into the soul, a cloud of natural atheism overshadows and darkens it.

But, poor self-cozening hypocrite, these things must not pass so; thy conscience, as well as the word, tells thee that it is not the place of worship, but the spirituality of it that God regards, John 4:23, 21. That they are hypocrites in scripture-account who have God in their mouths, but he is far from their reins, Jer. 12:2 and that hypocrites will have the hottest place in hell, Matth. 24:51.

Instance 3. A third instance of convictions of ungodliness held in unrighteousness, is in declining or denying to confess the known truths of God, which we ourselves have professed, when the confession of them infers danger.

In times of danger, conscience struggles hard with men to appear for the truths of God, and upon no account whatsoever to dissemble or deny them; and enforceth its counsels and warnings upon us with such awful scriptures as these, Luke 9:62. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." And Matth. 10:33. "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." In this case conscience useth to struggle hard with men, yet is many times overborne by the prevalent temptations of the flesh: As,

1. By carnal fears. The fear of suffering gets the ascendant of the fear of God; men choose rather to adventure their souls upon wrath to come, than the present wrath of incensed enemies, They vainly hope to find mercy with God, but expect none from men. Thus the fear of man brings a snare, Prov. 29:25 and so the voice of conscience is drowned by the louder clamours and threats of adversaries.

2. As the fear of man's threatenings, so the distrust of God's promises, defeats the design of conscience. If men believed the promises, they would never be afraid of their duties; faith in a promise would make men as bold as lions, if such a word as that was minded, Isa. 57:11. "Of whom hast thou been afraid, or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me?" Men would say, as Zuinglius in the like case, What death would I not rather choose to die? What punishment would I not rather undergo? Yea, into what vault of hell would I not rather choose to be cast, than to witness against my own conscience?

3. The immoderate and inordinate love of the world, over-powers conscience, and drowns its voice in such an hour of temptation. So Demas found it, 2 Tim. 4:10. O what a dangerous conflict is there in an hour of temptation, betwixt an enlightened head and a worldly heart?

Lastly, The example of others who comply and embrace the sinful terms of liberty to escape the danger, embolden men to follow their examples, and Satan will not be wanting to improve their examples. Do not you see such and such men, beating the road before you? Learned men, and prudent men, who, it may be, have less heart, but more wisdom than you. Why will you be singular, why will you hazard all for that, for which others will hazard nothing?

But certainly such sins as these will cost you dear, it is a dreadful thing to betray the truths and honour of God for base, secular ends; and you will find it so when you and your consciences shall debate it together in a calm hour.

Secondly, There are also sins of unrighteousness against the second table, in which many live against the plain dictates and warnings of their own consciences, though they know the wrath of God is revealed from heaven

against all unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. To give some instances of this,

Instance 1. And first, let me instance in that sin of defrauding and going beyond others in our civil commerce and dealings with them: over-reaching, cozening, and cheating the ignorant or unwary, who, it may be, would not be so unwary as they are, did they not repose trust and confidence in your deceitful words and promises. Conscience cannot but startle at such sins, the very light of nature discovers the evil of it, and the sober Heathens abhor it: but we that live under the gospel cannot but feel some terror and trembling in our consciences when we read such a severe and awful prohibition, backed with such a dreadful threatening as that is in 1 Thess. 4:6. "That no man defraud, or go beyond his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such." The word is, *το μη υπερβαινειν*, that no man overtop, viz. by power, or by craft and policy. To this sin a dreadful threatening is annexed, the Lord is the avenger of all such. The word is, *εκδικος*, but once more, that I remember, used in the New Testament, Rom. 13:4 and is there applied to the civil magistrate, who must see execution done upon malefactors; but here the Lord himself will do it, he will be this man's avenger. This rod, or rather this ax, conscience shews men, and gives warning of the danger, and yet its convictions are over-powered and bound as prisoners, by

1. The excessive love of gain; 1 Tim. 6:9. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare; and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." When a resolution is made for the world, men will be rich by right or wrong; this powerfully arms the temptation. Set gain before such a man, and he will break through the law of God and convictions of conscience, but he will have it; this drowns them in perdition and destruction, that is, it surely, thoroughly, and fully ruins them: As he is a dead man that is only drowned; but to be drowned in destruction, yea, in destruction and perdition too, this must needs make his ruin sure, as sure as words can make it, and so all such persons shall surely find it, who persist in such a course.

2. Pinching necessities and straits over-bear conscience in others; necessity hath no ears to attend the voice of the word and conscience.

Here conscience and poverty struggle together, and if the fear of God be not exalted in the soul, it now falls a prey to temptation. This danger wise Agur foresaw, and earnestly entreated the Lord for a competency to avoid the snare of poverty, Prov. 30:8, 9. Poor wretch! how much better were it for thee to endure the pains of a griping stomach than these of a griping conscience? Such gains may be sweet in thy mouth, but bitter in thy bowels.

3. The examples of others who daily venture on such sins without scruple, and laugh at such squeamish consciences as keck at such things; this emboldens others to follow them, Psal. 50:18 and thus the voice of conscience is drowned, and convictions buried for a time; but it will thunder at last, and thy buried convictions will have a resurrection, and it shall be out of thy power to silence them again.

Instance 2. The truth of God is held in unrighteousness, when men's lusts will not suffer them to restore what they have sinfully, and unjustly gotten into their hands. This sin lies boking in the consciences of some men, makes them very uneasy, and yet they make a hard shift to rub along under these regrets of conscience. Now those things which make a forcible entry into the conscience, take the truths of God prisoners, and bind them, that they cannot break forth, into the duty of restitution, are,

1. The shame which attends and follows the duty to which God and conscience, call the soul. O it is a shame and reproach, they think, to get the name of a cheat; loth, loth they are, that these works of darkness should come into the open light; men will point, and hiss at them; and say, There goes a thief, a cheat, an oppressor: This keeps many from restitution.

But dost thou not here commit a greater cheat than the former? Which is the greater shame, thinkest thou, to commit sin, or to confess and reform it? To tie the snare upon thy soul by commission, or loose it off from thy conscience by repentance and restitution? to be the derision of wicked men, (for none else will deride thee for thy duty), or be the contempt and derision of God, angels, and all good men for ever? To attain inward peace at this hazard, or to lie under the continual lashes and wounds of thy own conscience?

2. Poverty, and inability, is sometimes pleaded, to quiet the troubled conscience; and indeed this is a just, and very frequent blast of God upon ill-gotten goods: The curse of God is upon them; they melt away. O what a miserable snare have you now entangled your souls in! Once you could, but would not restore, a worldly heart would not part with unjust gains; now you would, but cannot. Thus a worldly heart, and an empty purse, hold you first and last, under the guilt of a known sin. A lamentable case!

3. Vain purposes do often suppress and silence convictions: My condition may alter, I may be in a capacity hereafter, when I can better spare it, than, at present; or I will do it in my last will, when I die, and charge my executors with it. Thus do men bribe their consciences, to get a little quiet, whilst they continue under known guilt, and cannot tell how soon death shall summon them to the awful bar of a just and terrible God.

Sirs, as you value your peace, and, which is more, your souls; release the Lord's prisoner which lies bound within you with cords and chains of Satan's making; do it, I say, as you hope to see the face of God in peace: You know, without repentance there, can be no salvation; and without restitution no repentance: For how can you repent of a sin you still knowingly continue in? Repentance is the soul's turning from sin, as well as its sorrow for sin. You cannot therefore repent of sin, and still continue in it; "How shall we that are dead to sin, continue any longer therein?" Rom. 6:2. Trust providence for the supply of your wants, and the wants of yours, in the ways of duty, and righteousness. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. You will have more comfort in bread and water, with peace of conscience, than in full tables with God's curse. You will lie more at ease on a burden of straw, than on a bed of down with a grumbling conscience.

Instance 3. How many lie under the condemnations of their own consciences, for the lusts of uncleanness in which they live: And though they read, and their consciences apply to them such scriptures as that, 1 Cor. 6:9. "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God;" a dreadful sentence! And that, Heb. 13:4. "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge;" Yet convictions are overborne, and stifled by,

1. The impetuous violence of carnal lusts, which permit not of calm debates, but hurry them on to the sin, and leave them to consider the evil and dangerous consequences afterward. Thus they go, "As an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks," Prov. 7:22. Lust besots them. To give counsel now is but to give physic in a paroxism, or counsel to him that is running a race. Lust answers conscience as Antipater did one that presented him a book treating of happiness, οὐ σχολάζω, I have no leisure to read such discourses.

2. Others would fain solve their scruples with the sinful failings of good men, as David, Solomon, &c. not considering what brokenness of heart it cost David, Psal. 51 and the other, Sorrow more bitter than death, Eccl. 7:26. *Loeta venire Venus, tristis abire solet.* This is a presumptuous way of sinning, and how dreadful that is, see Numb. 15:30.

Instance 4. Truth is often held in unrighteousness by sinful silence, in not reproving other men's sins, and thereby making them their own. We are sometimes cast into the company of ungodly men, where we hear the name of our God blasphemed, the truth, worship, or servants of God reproached; and have not so much courage to appear for God, as others have to appear against him: in such cases conscience useth to instigate men to their duty, and charge it home upon them in the authority of such a scripture as that, Lev. 19:17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." O, saith conscience, thy silence now will be thy sin, This poor wretch may perish for want of a seasonable, plain, and faithful rebuke. Thy silence will harden him in his wickedness. No sooner doth such a conviction stir in the conscience, but many things are ready to lay hold on it. As,

1. A spirit of cowardice, which makes us afraid to displease men, and chuses rather the wrath of God should fall on them, than that their wrath should fall on us. We dare not take as much liberty to reprove sin as others do to commit it. They glory in their shame, and we are ashamed of what is both our glory and our duty.

2. Dependence on, or near relation to the person sinning. It is a father, an

husband, a superior, on whose favour I depend; and should I displease him, I may ruin myself; this is the voice of the flesh. Hence duty is neglected, and the soul of a friend basely betrayed; our interest preferred to God's, and thereby frequently lost: for there is no better way to secure our own interest in any man's heart, than to settle it by our faithfulness in his conscience, and by being willing to hazard it for God's interest and glory. The Lord blesseth men's faithfulness above all their sinful carnal policies, Prov. 28:23. "He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his lips."

3. Men's own guilt stops their mouths and silences them. They are ashamed and afraid to reprove other men's sins, lest they should hear of their own. Fear of retortion keeps them from the duty of reprehension. Thus we fall into a new sin for fear of reviving an old one. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot," Prov. 9:7.

But this is the fruit of our pride and ignorance. What we fear might turn to our benefit. The reproof given is duty discharged; and the retortion in return, a fresh call to repentance for sin past, and a caution against sin to come.

Instance 5. Another instance of convictions of unrighteousness imprisoned in men's souls, is not distributing to the necessities of others, especially such as fear God when it is in the power of our hands to do it, and conscience as well as scripture calls us to our duty.

Men cannot be ignorant of that text, Matth. 25:40, 41 where, by a Synecdoche, charity to the saints is by Christ put for the whole of obedience; and men's eternal states are cast according to their observance of this command; though I fear few, very few study and believe it as they ought. Thou canst, saith conscience, if thou wilt relieve such or such a poor Christian, and therein express thy love to Christ, yea, refresh the bowels of Christ; do it, God will repay it: if thou refusest, "how dwelleth the love of God in thee?" 1 John 3:17. This is the voice of God and conscience, but divers lusts are ready to lay hold on, and bind this conviction also as soon as it stirs, viz.

1. The excessive love of earthly things. The world is got so deep in men's hearts, that they will rather part with their peace, yea, and with their souls too, than part with it. Hence come those churlish answers, like that of Nabal, 1 Sam. 25:11. "Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, and give it to men whom I know not whence they be?"

2. Unbelief, which denies to give honour and due credit to Christ's bills of exchange drawn upon them in scripture, and presented to them by the hands of poor saints. They refuse, I say, to credit them, though conscience protest against them for their non-compliance. Christ saith, Mark 9:41. "Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." He shall gain that which he cannot lose, by parting with that which he cannot keep.

3. The want of love to Jesus Christ. Did we love Christ in sincerity, and were that love so fervent as it ought to be, it would make thee more ready to lay down thy neck for Christ, than thou now art to lay down a shilling for him, 1 John 3:16. It is our duty, in some cases, to spend our blood for the saints. So it was in the primitive times: behold (said the Christians enemies) how they love one another, and are willing to die one for another. But that spirit is almost extinguished in these degenerate days.

Instance 6. How many stand convinced, by their own consciences, what a sin it is to spend their precious time so idly and vainly as they do? When a day is lost in vanity, duties neglected, no good done or received; at night conscience reckons with them for it, and asks them what account they can give of that day to God, how they are able to satisfy themselves to lie down and sleep under so much guilt? And yet when the morrow comes, the vanity of their hearts carries them on in the same course again the next day; and whilst they keep themselves in vain company, they are quiet, till conscience finds them at leisure to debate it again with them. Now the things which master these convictions are,

1. In some men their ignorance and insensibility of the preciousness of time. They know it is their sin to spend their time so vainly, but little consider that eternity itself hangs upon this little moment of time: and that the great work of their salvation will require all the time they have;

and if it be not finished in this small allotment of time it can never be finished, John 9:4.

2. The examples of other vain persons that are as prodigal of their precious time as themselves, and entice them to spend it as they do.

3. The charming power of sensual lusts and pleasures. O how pleasantly doth time slide away in plays, ale-houses, in relating or hearing taking stories, news, &c.

4. Inconsiderateness of the sharp and terrible rebukes of conscience for this on a death-bed, or the terrors of the Lord in the day of judgment.

In all these instances you see how common this dreadful evil of holding the truth in unrighteousness is; yet these are but a few selected from among many.

Fifthly, In the next place I am obliged to shew, how and why the imprisoning of convictions, or holding the truths of God in unrighteousness so dreadfully incenseth his wrath. And this it doth upon several accounts.

1. Knowledge and conviction of sin is an excellent mean, or choice help to preserve men from falling into sin: There be thousands of sins committed in the world, which had never been committed if men had known them to be sins before they committed them. Every sinner durst not make so bold with his conscience as you have done. The apostle tells us the reason why the princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory, was, because they knew him not, 1 Cor. 2:8 had they known him they would not have dared to do as they did. And so it is in multitudes of lower and lesser sins than that, Satan blinds their eyes with ignorance, then uses their hands and tongues in wickedness; he is the ruler of the darkness of this world, Eph. 6:12. But when men do know this or that to be sin, and yet venture on it, then an excellent antidote against sin is turned into a dreadful aggravation of sin, which highly incenses the wrath of God.

2. Knowledge and conviction going before add presumption to the sin that follows after it; and presumptuous sin is the most provoking and

daring sin; from this way of sinning David earnestly beseeches God to keep him, "Keep back thy servant (saith he) from presumptuous sins". When a man sees sin, and yet adventures on it, in such sinning there is a despising of the law of God: a man may break the law whilst he approves, reverences, and honours it in his heart, Rom. 7:12, 13 but here the commandment is despised, as God told David, 2 Sam. 12:9. It is as if a man shall say, I see the command of God armed with threatenings in my way, but yet I will go on for all that.

3. Knowledge and conviction leave the conscience of a sinner naked and wholly without excuse or apology for his sin: in this case there is no plea left to extenuate the offence, Job 15:22. "Now they have no cloak for their sin." If a man sins ignorantly, his ignorance is some excuse for his sin, it excuses it at least a tanto, as Paul tells us, thus and thus I did, but I did it ignorantly: here is a cloak or covering, an excuse or extenuation of the sin: but knowledge takes away this cloak, and makes the sin appear naked in all the odious deformity of it, nothing left to hide it.

4. Light or knowledge of the law and will of God, is a very choice and excellent mercy; it is a choice and singular favour, for God to make the light of knowledge to shine into a man's mind or understanding; it is a mercy with-held from multitudes, Psal. 147:19 and those that enjoy it are under special engagements to bless God for it, and to improve it diligently and thankfully to his service and glory; but for a man to arm such a mercy as this against God, to fight against him with one of his choicest mercies, this must be highly provoking to the Lord; it is therefore mentioned as a high aggravation of Solomon's sin, in 1 Kings 11:9 that he sinned against the Lord, "after the Lord had appeared unto him twice."

5. This way of sinning argues an extraordinary degree of hardness of heart: it is a sign of little tenderness, or sense of the evil of sin. Some men, when God shews them the evil of sin in the glass of the law, they tremble at the sight of it: so did Paul, Rom. 7:13. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;" he sunk down at the sight of it. But God shews thee the evil of sin in the glass of his law, and thou makest nothing of it: O obdurate heart! When the rod was turned into a serpent Moses fled from it, was afraid to touch it; but though God turn the rod into a serpent, and discovers the venomous nature of sin in his

word, thou canst handle and play with that serpent, and put it into thy bosom: this shews thy heart to be of a strange complexion.

6. To go against the convincing, warning voice of conscience, violates and wounds a man's conscience more than any other way of sinning doth; and when conscience is so wounded, who, or what shall then comfort thee? it is a true rule, *maxima violatio conscientiae, est maximum peccatum*: the more any sin violates a man's conscience, the greater that sin is: the sin of devils is the most dreadful sin, and what makes it so, but the horrid violation of their consciences, and malicious rebellion against their own light and clear knowledge; Jam. 2:19. They know and sin, they believe and tremble; Φρισσοῦσι, they roar under the tortures of conscience like the roar of the sea, or the noise of the rocks before a storm.

O then, if there be any degree of sense and tenderness left in you, if any fear of God or regard of salvation; let go all God's prisoners which lie bound and are imprisoned in the souls of any of you this day Blessd be God some have done so, and are at ease and rest in their spirits by so doing: they could have no ease till they unbound them, and yielded obedience to them. It is said, Acts 16:38. That when the magistrates at Philippi understood that those men whom they had bound and imprisoned were Romans, they feared; and well they might, for the punishment was great for any man that injured a citizen or freeman of Rome: but every conviction you imprison is a messenger of heaven, a commissioned-officer of God, and woe to him that binds or abuseth it. Do you know what you do? Are you aware of the danger? Wast thou not afraid (saith David to the Amalekite) to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? So say I, Art thou not afraid to destroy the immediate messenger of God, sent to thy soul for good? Conviction is a kind of embryo of conversion; the conversion and salvation of thy soul would be the fruit of it, were it obeyed: thy striving with it causes it to miscarry, renders it abortive, and thy life must go for it, except God revive and recover it again; as you know the law is for striking a pregnant woman, Exod. 21:22, 23. Loose then every man the Lord's prisoners, I mean your restrained, stifled convictions, stifle them no longer; you see what a dreadful aggravation of sin it is, and that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men, that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

I. Use, for information

Infer. 1. This will prove a fruitful doctrine to inform us, First, That knowledge in itself is not enough to secure the soul of any man from hell.

No gifts, no knowledge, but that only which is operative and influential upon the heart and life, and to which we pay obedience, can secure any man from wrath, John 13:17. "If you know these things, happy are ye if you do them." The greatest sins may be found in conjunction with the greatest knowledge, as you see in the fallen angels: light is then only a blessing, when it guides the soul into the way of duty and obedience: there is many a knowing head in hell. Yet from hence let no man indulge himself in ignorance, or shun the means of knowledge, that he may sin more freely and less dangerously; for you must account with God for all that knowledge you might have had, as well as for that you had; for the means of knowledge he gave you, as well as for that knowledge you did actually attain by them.

Infer. 2. What a singular and choice mercy is a tender conscience! A conscience yielding obedience to conviction! A drop of such tenderness in the conscience is better than a sea of speculative knowledge in the head, 1 Cor. 12:31. Many poor Christians are ashamed to see themselves so out-stripped and excelled by others in gifts, and apt to be discouraged; but if God has blessed thee with a tender and obedient heart to the will of God, so far as he is pleased to manifest it to thee, thou hast no reason to be discouraged for want of those excellent gifts and parts others do enjoy. You cannot discourse floridly, or dispute subtilely; but can you obey conscientiously, and comply with the manifested will of God tenderly? Then happy art thou. Oh! it is far better to feel a truth, than merely to know it. It was the high commendation of the Romans, that they obeyed from the heart that form of gospel-doctrine which was delivered them, Rom. 6:17* or rather into which they were delivered, as melted metals into the moulds. Two learned divines travelling to the Council of Constance, were affected, even to tears, at the sight of a shepherd in the fields, mourning and melting at the sight of a toad, and blessing God that he had not made him such a loathsome creature; whereupon they applied

Austin's words to themselves, surgunt indocti, &c. The unlearned will rise and take heaven from the learned. Thy little knowledge made effectual by obedience, is more sanctified, more sweet, and more saving than other men's; and therefore of much greater value. It is more sanctified; for the blessing of God is upon it, Gal. 4:16. It is more sweet; for you relish the goodness, as well as discern the truth of gospel-doctrines, Psal. 119:103. It is not an insipid, dry speculation. And then it is more saving, being one of those better things that accompany salvation, as it is, Heb. 6:9.

Infer. 3. Learn hence, in the third place, What an uncomfortable life, knowing, but unregenerate men and women do live: They are frequently in wars and combats with their own consciences. Is 57:21. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God." They and their consciences are ever and anon at daggers drawing, they have little pleasure in sin, and none at all in religion; they have none in religion, because they obey not its rules; and little in sin, because their consciences are still galling and terrifying them for imprisoning their convictions.

It is true, some men's consciences are seared as with an hot iron, 1 Tim. 4:2 but most have grumbling, and some have raging, and roaring consciences; they seldom come under the word, or rod, but their consciences lash them: And when death approaches, the terrors of the Almighty do shake and terrify them. Altogether to neglect duty, they dare not, and how to escape a lash from their consciences, they know not: Fain they would have the pleasures of sin, but then, like Balaam, they meet a sword in the way; they plunge themselves into earthly diversions, like Cain, to be rid of a fury within them, but all will not do. Is this a life for thee, reader, to live? No peace with God, nor any with thyself? No; expect no peace whilst thy convictions lie bound, and imprisoned in thy conscience. Sin for a moment is sweet in thy mouth, but it is presently turned into the gall of asps within thee, Job 20:14. O that you did but know the pleasures of a pure, peaceable conscience, and how much it excels all the delights of sense and sin!

Infer. 4. Ministers had need often to repeat, and inculcate the same truths to their hearers; for the work is not half done, when truth is got into the minds and consciences of men.

Our work sticks at the heart, more than at the head; the understanding is many times opened, when the heart and will are locked, and fast barred against it: To open the passages betwixt the head and heart is the greatest difficulty; this is the work of Almighty power. There is knowledge enough in some men's heads to save them, but it hath not its liberty; restrained truth cannot do its office. It is much easier to convince the mind than to change the heart, or bow the will. The hardest part of the ministerial work is to preach truths into the hearts and lives of men. This makes the frequent inculcations of the same truths necessary and safe to the people's souls. Phil. 3:1. "To write the same things unto you, to me indeed is not grievous", but for you it is safe.

Infer. 5. How astonishing and wonderful is the power and strength of sin, which can hold men fast after their eyes are opened to see the misery and danger it hath involved them in.

One would think, if a man's eyes were but once opened to see the moral evil that is in sin, and the everlasting train of pnal evils that follow sin, together with a way of escape from both; it should be impossible to hold that sinner a day longer in such a state of bondage: the work were then as good as done: But, alas! we are mistaken; sin can hold those men and women fast that see all this. They know it is an horrid violation of God's just and holy laws; they know it brings them under his wrath and curse, and will damn them to all eternity if they continue in it; they know Christ is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, and that he is as willing as he is able; and yet no arguments can prevail with them to part with sin. Shew but a beast a flame of fire, and you cannot drive him into it, if he see any way to escape it. Tell a man this is rank poison, and will kill him; and you cannot make him swallow it, though wrapt up in sugar, or put into the most pleasant vehicle. But let a sinner see death and destruction before him, and sin can make him rush on, "as a horse into the battle," Jer. 8:9. He goes as an ox to the slaughter; his heart is fully set in him to do evil, Eccl. 8:11 as one said, when his physician told him, 'If he followed such a course of sin he would in a little time lose his eyes; then, saith he, Vale lumen amicum, Farewell, sweet light;" I cannot part with this practice: So it is with others, rather than forego their pleasures, and break their customs in sin, farewell heaven, Christ, and all.

O the enchanting efficacy of sin! Jer. 18:11, 12. "And they said, there is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices." When a man considers what visions of misery and wrath convictions give men, he may wonder that all convinced men are not converted; and, on the other side, when he considers the strong holds sin hath gotten upon the hearts of sinners, it may justly seem as great a wonder that any are converted.

Infer. 6. How dreadful is the state and case of apostates, who have their eyes opened, their consciences awakened, their resolutions for Christ seemingly fixed; and yet, after all this, return again to their former course of sin!

You see, brethren, sin hath not only power to hold men in bondage to its lusts after their eyes have been opened, but it hath power to recover and fetch back those that seemed to have clean escaped out of its hands, 2 Pet. 2:18, 19. The unclean spirit may depart for a time, and make his re-entry into the same soul with seven spirits worse than himself, Matth. 12:43. Restraints by conviction and formality do not wholly dispossess Satan, he still keeps his propriety in the soul, for he calls it my house; and that propriety he keeps under all those convictions, and partial reformations, opens to him and all his hellish retinue a door for his return. But oh how doleful will the end of such men be! and how just is that martial law of heaven that dooms the apostate to eternal wrath! Heb. 10:38. Such are twice dead, and will be plucked up by the root, Jude, ver. 12.

Infer. 7. To conclude this use, How sure and dreadful will be the condemnation of all those, in the day of the Lord, who obstinately persist and continue in sin, under the convictions and condemnations of their own consciences!

Poor wretches, you are condemned already, John 3:18 condemned by the law of God, and by the sentence of your own consciences. What thy own conscience saith according to God's law, God will confirm and make it good, 1 John 3:20. "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." His sentence will be as clear as it will be terrible; for in the last day the books will be opened, the book of God's omniscience, and the book of thine own conscience. Now the book of conscience is as it were a transcript or counterpart of God's book for thee

to keep in thine own bosom. Now when God's book and thy own book shall be compared, and found exactly to agree, there can be no farther dispute of the equity of the account. O when God shall charge thee, saying, Thou knewest this and that to be sin, and yet thy lusts hurried thee on to commit it; Is it not so? Look sinner into thine own book, and see if thy conscience has not so charged it to thy account. Thou knewest prayer was thy duty when thou neglectedst it; and over-reaching the ignorant, credulous, and unwary, was thy sin, when the love of gain tempted thee to it. You knew I had plainly told you, theft, uncleanness, drunkenness, and extortion, would bar you out of the kingdom of Christ, and of God, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10 and yet putting that to the venture, you have lived in those sins; is it not so? Examine the book in your own bosom, and see. The Lord make men sensible of coming wrath for those sins they live in under light; for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them.

II. Use

Is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all that hold the truth in unrighteousness? Then let me exhort and persuade you by all the regard and love you have for your souls, by all the fears you have of the incensed wrath of the great and terrible God; that you forthwith set your convictions at liberty, and loose all the Lord's prisoners that lie bound within you: Because there is wrath, beware, Job 36:18. O stifle the voices of your consciences no more, slight not the softest whisper, or least intimation of conscience; reverence and obey its voice. Motives pressing and persuading this are many, yet estimate them by weight rather than by number.

Motive 1. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them that hold the truth in unrighteousness; and because there is wrath, beware. Are you truly informed what the wrath of God is! "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath," Psal. 90:11. O, if the wrath of a king, (who in all his glory is but a mortal worm) be as the roaring of a lion, and as the messengers of death, Prov. 20:2. Prov. 16:14. What then is the power of his wrath, at whose frowns the kings of the earth tremble, the captains and the mighty men shrink like worms into their holes? If the lesser executions of it by providence in this world be so dreadful, that men, yea, good men have desired an hiding-place in

the grave till it be past, Job 14:13 then what is the full execution thereof upon the ungodly in the place of torments? If the threats and denunciations of it against others have made an Habakkuk, though assured of personal safety, to quiver with his lips, and tremble in his bowels, as you see it did, Hab. 3:16 how much more should those tremble and quiver who are to be the subjects of it, and not the mere heralds of it as he was? And, (which is more than all) if Jesus Christ, who was to feel it but a few hours, and had the power of the Godhead to support him under it, did, notwithstanding, sweat as it had been great drops of blood, and was sore amazed; think with thyself, poor wretch how shall thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong, when thou hast to do with an incensed Deity?

Motive 2. Till you let your convictions go, Satan will not let you go; he binds you whilst you bind them: Here is the command of God, and the command of Satan, in competition. Let go my truths, saith God, which thou holdest in unrighteousness; bind, and suppress them, saith Satan, or they will deprive thee of the liberty and pleasure of thy life. Now, whilst thou slightest the voice of God and conscience, (for the voice of conscience is the voice of God) dost thou not avowedly declare thyself the bond-slave of Satan? "His servants ye are to whom you obey," Rom. 6:16. Dare not to make one step further in the way of known sin, saith conscience; continue not, at thy peril, in such a dangerous state, after I have so clearly convinced and warned thee of it: Fear not, saith Satan, if it be bad with thee, it will be as bad with millions: God will wound the heads of such as go on in their trespasses, saith the scripture, Psal. 68:21. Tush, others do so, and escape as well as the most nice, and tender, saith Satan. Now, I say, thy obedience to Satan's commands plainly declares thee, all this while, to be a poor enslaved captive to him, acted and carried according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Motive 3. Nay, further, until you obey your convictions, you are confederates with the devil in a desperate plot against your own souls; you join with Christ's great and avowed enemy to dishonour him, and damn yourselves.

Two things make you confederates with the devil against your own souls:

(1.) Your consent to this project for your damnation; for so your own consciences out of the scriptures inform you it is: consent makes you a party. (2.) Your concealment of this plot brings you in as a party with him. Confess thy sin, and bewail it, saith conscience; not so, saith pride and shame, how shall I look men in the face if I do so? Do not you, in all this, believe Satan, and make God a liar? Do not you act as men that hate your own souls, and love death? Prov. 8:36. O it is a dreadful thing for men to be accessory to their own eternal ruin, and that after fair warning and notice given them by their own consciences. Satan (be his power what it will) cannot destroy you without your own consent.

Motive 4. Whilst you go on stifling your own convictions, and turning away your ears from its calls to repentance and reformation, you cannot be pardoned; you are in your sins, and the guilt of them all lies at your door. You may see what the terms of remission are, Isa. 55:7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon." So again, Prov. 28:13. "He that hardeneth his neck shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy." You see by these, and may see by many more plain scripture-testimonies, there can be no hope of remission whilst you go on in this path of rebellion; concealing, yea, and persisting in your known wickedness. There is a necessary and inseparable connection betwixt repentance and remission, Acts 5:31 and Luke 24:47 and can you endure guilt to be your bed-fellow during life, and your grave-fellow after death?

Motive 5. You can never have peace with your own consciences whilst you keep convictions prisoners. Now a man's conscience is his best friend, or his worst enemy: thence are the sweetest comforts, and thence are the bitterest sorrows. It is a dreadful thing for a man to lie with a cold sweating horror upon his panting bosom. *Tum pallida mens est criminibus, tacita sudant præcordia culpa.* And this (or which is worse) obduration and stupidity must be the case of them that hold the truth in unrighteousness. There can be no sounding a retreat to these terrors till Sheba's head be thrown over the walls; I mean, till that sin your conscience convinceth you of, be delivered up. As Israel could have no

peace till Achan was destroyed; so thou shalt have no peace whilst thy sin is covered and hid. Men may cry peace, peace, to themselves whilst they continue in sin, Deut. 29:18, 19 but the sharpest troubles of conscience are better than such peace. Deliver up thyself, man, if thou love peace, into the hands of thy own convictions, and thou art in the true way to peace. Thy rejoicing must be in the testimony of thine own conscience, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. 1:12 or thou rejoicest in a dream, in a delusion, in a thing of nought.

Motive 6. What dreadful charges are you like to meet with upon your death-beds, on the account of those sins you have lived in, against knowledge and conviction! conscience is never more active and vigorous than in the last hours and moments of life. Now it will be stifled and overruled no longer. It whispered before, but now it thunders. If a man have a clear and quiet conscience, his evening is clear, and his sun sets without clouds. See Psal. 37:37 The end of that man is peace. In contemplation of this felicity it was that Balaam uttered that wish, Let my last end be like his. This peace is the result of a man's integrity and obedience to the voice of conscience, this being the evidence we can most safely rely upon of our uprightness and interest in Christ; but the result of such violations and abuses to thy conscience, cannot be peace to thy soul. It is true, some wicked men die in seeming peace, and some good men in trouble, but both the one and the other are mistaken: the first, as to the good estate he fancies himself in, and the other as to his bad estate; and a few moments will clear up the mistake of both.

Motive 7. Obedience to conviction will not only produce peace at death, but it will give you present ease, present relief and refreshment in hand. No sooner did David resolve to obey the voice of conscience, in confessing his sin, but he had sensible ease in his own spirit, Psal. 32:5. So Isa. 32:17. "The fruit of righteousness is peace, quietness, and assurance for ever." On the contrary, you find in Job 20:20 wicked men have no rest in their bellies, that is, in their consciences: for guilt lies boking there as a thorn in the flesh. And what is life worth without ease? To live ever in pain, to live upon the rack, is not worth while to live. If then you love ease and quietness, obey your consciences; pull out that thorn, I mean that sin that sticks fast in thy soul, and aches in thy conscience. Who would endure so

much anguish for all the flattering pleasures of sin?

Motive 8. Convictions followed home and obeyed, are the inlets to Christ, and eternal salvation by him; they are the first leading work of the Spirit, in order to union with Christ, John 16:8. Till you obey and yield up yourselves to them, Christ is shut out of your souls; he knocks, but finds no entrance. At your peril therefore be obedient to their calls: all the while you parley with your convictions, and demur to their demands, Christ stands without, offering himself graciously to you, but not admitted; so that no less than your eternal happiness or misery depends on your obedience or disobedience to the voices and calls of your convictions.

Motive 9. Obey your convictions, honour their voices, and restrain them not; then shall your consciences give a fair testimony for you at the judgment-seat of Christ. You read, 1 Pet. 3:21. "Of the answer of a good conscience towards God;" than which nothing can be more comfortable: this gives a man boldness in the day of judgment, 1 John 4:17. Believe it, sirs, it is not your baptism, your church privileges, the opinion men have of you; but the testimony of your consciences that must be your comfort. I know men are not justified at God's bar by their own obedience, nor any exactness of life, it is only Christ's righteousness that is the sinner's plea; but yet your obedience to the calls and voices of God and conscience, are your evidence that you are in Christ.

Motive 10. Lastly, consider what a choice mercy it is to be under such calls and convictions of conscience as are yet capable of being obeyed; it is not so with men's convictions after this life. Conscience convinceth in hell as well as here, but all its convictions there are for torment, not recovery. O it is a choice mercy your convictions are yet medicinal, not purely penal; that you are not malo obfirmati, so fixed in the state of sin and misery as the damned are, but yet enjoy the saving benefit of your convictions; but this you will not enjoy long, therefore I beseech you, by all that is dear and valuable in your eyes, reverence your consciences, and let go the Lord's prisoners that lie bound within you.

III. Use

I next come to expostulate the matter with your consciences, and propound a few convictive queries to your souls this day: I cannot but look upon this assembly with fear, jealousy, and compassion. I am afraid there be many of you in this wretched case, men and women, that hold the truths of God in unrighteousness, though the wrath of God be revealed from heaven against all them that do so. Let me demand,

Demand 1. Do not some of you stand convinced by your own consciences this day, that your hearts and lives, your principles and practices, are vastly different from the people of God among whom you live, and whose characters you read in Scripture? Do not your own consciences tell you, that you never took that pains for your salvation you see them daily take; that there be some it may be in your families, nay, possibly in your bosoms, that are serious and heavenly, whilst you are vain and earthly; that are in their chambers upon their knees, wrestling with God, whilst you are in your beds, or about the things of the world? And doth not conscience sometimes whisper thus into thine ear, Soul, thou art not right; something is wanting to make thee a Christian; thou wantest that which others have; and except something further be done upon thee, thou wilt be undone for ever? If it be so, let me advise thee to hearken diligently to this voice of conscience: do not dare to venture to the judgment-seat of God in such a case: ponder that text, Mat. 21:32 and let the disparity your conscience shews you betwixt your own course and that of others, awaken you to more diligence and seriousness about your own salvation: how canst thou come from the alehouse, or thy vain recreations, and find a wife or child in prayer, and thy conscience not smite thee? It may be they have been mourning for thy sins, whilst thou hast been committing them. It may be there lives not far from thee a godly, poor man, who out of his hard and pressing labours redeems more time for his soul in a week, than ever thou didst in thy life. O hearken to the voice of thy conscience! else thou art he that holdest truth in unrighteousness.

Demand 2. Did thy conscience never meet thee in the way of sin, as the angel of the Lord met Balaam, with a drawn sword, brandishing the threatenings of God against thee? Did it not say to thee, as a captain once said to his soldiers about to retreat, he cast himself down in their way,

saying, If you go this way, you shall go over your captain, you shall trample him first under your feet? Stop, soul, stop, said thy conscience; this and that word of God is against thee: if thou proceed, thou must trample upon the sovereign authority of God, in this or that command; yet thy impetuous lusts have hurried thee forward: thou wouldst not fairly debate the case with thy conscience; and then did not thy conscience say to thee, as Reuben spake to his brethren, Gen. 42:22. "Spake I not unto you saying, Do not sin against the child, but you would not hear; therefore also his blood is required of you?" If this has been your course of sinning, verily you are the persons that have held the truths of God in unrighteousness, and against you the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

Demand 3. Have you not seen the wrath of God revealed from heaven against other sinners that have gone before you in the very same track and course of sin in which you now go, and yet you persist in it, notwithstanding such dreadful warnings? Thus did Belteshazzar, though he saw all that the God of heaven had done to his father, Dan. 5:20, 21, 22. You have seen great estates scattered, and their owners that got them by fraud and oppression reduced to beggary; and yet when a temptation is before you, you cannot forbear to take the advantage (as you call it) to get the gain of oppression. You have seen drunkards clothed with rags, and brought to miserable ends: adulterers severely punished, their names and estates, souls and bodies blasted, and wasted by a secret, but just stroke of God. Have you taken warning by these strokes of God, and hearkened to the monitions and cautions your consciences have thereupon given you? If not, thou art the man that holdest the truth of God in unrighteousness.

Demand 4. Do not you inwardly hate, and do not your hearts rise against necessary and due reproofs given you by those that love your souls better than yourselves? If you hate a faithful reprove, though you know you justly deserve the reproof, and are guilty of the sin he reproves; if you recriminate, or deny in such cases, you are certainly so far confederates with Satan against your own souls, and imprison your own convictions.

Demand 5. Have not some of you apostatized from your first profession, and are not those hopeful blossoms that once appeared upon your souls

blasted and gone? You had quick convictions, and melting affections, tenderness in your consciences, and zeal for duties: but all is now vanished; your affections are grown cold, your duties omitted, though conscience often bids you remember from whence you are fallen, and do your first works. You are the persons guilty of this sin.

Demand 6. Do none of you presume upon future repentance, and so make bold with your consciences for present, thinking to compound that way with it? This argues thee to be a self-condemned man, and one that boldest truth in unrighteousness: thy sin is present and certain, thy repentance but a peradventure, 2 Tim. 2:25. This is an high and a daring way of presumptuous sinning.

Demand 7. Lastly, Have none of you taken the vows of God upon you, to reform your course, and break off your iniquities by repentance, when you have been under dangerous sickness on shore, or dreadful tempests at sea? Have you not said, Lord, if thou wilt but spare and save me this once, I will never live at the rate I have lived any more: try me, O Lord, this once; and yet when that affliction hath vanished, your purposes and promises to God have vanished with it: you are the persons that hold the known truths of God prisoners in your souls; and to all these seven sorts of sinners, this text may justly be as the hand-writing upon the wall once was, even a Mene Tekel, that may make thy very loins to shake.

IV. Use

This doctrine winds up and finishes in directions for the prevention of such presumptuous sins in men for time to come, that truth may have its free course through your souls.

Direction 1. And to this end my first counsel and direction is, that you fail not to put every conviction into speedy execution. Do not delay, it is a very critical hour, and delays are exceeding hazardous: convictions are fixed and secured in men's souls four ways. 1. By deep and serious consideration, Psal. 119:59. "I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet to thy testimonies." 2. By earnest prayer; thus Saul, under his first convictions, fell presently on his knees, Acts 9:11 Behold, he prayeth: The warm breath of prayer foment and nourishes the sparks of conviction,

that they be not extinct. 3. By diligent attendance on the word. The word begets it, and the word can, through God's blessing preserve it, James 1:23, 24. 4. Present execution, falling, without delay, on the duty thou art convinced of. James 1:24. "Be not forgetful hearers, but doers of the word; otherwise a man is as one that looks into a glass, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was." Take the sense thus, a man looks into the glass in the morning, and there perhaps he sees a spot on his face, a disorder in his hair or clothes; and thinks with himself, well, I will rectify it anon; but being gone from the place, one thing or other diverts his mind, he forgets what he saw, and goes all the day with the spot on his face, never minding it any more. O brethren, delays are dangerous, sin is deceitful, Heb. 3:13. Satan is subtle, 2 Cor. 11:3 and this way gains his point. This motto may be written on the tomb of most that perish, Here lies one that was destroyed by delays. Your life is immediately uncertain, so are the strivings of the Spirit also. Besides, there is a mighty advantage in the primus impetus, the first heat of the soul. When thy heart is once up in warm affections and resolutions, the work may be easily done; as a bell, if once up, goes easily, but is hard to raise when down. See 2 Chron. 29:36 what advantage there is in a present warm frame! Beside, the nature of these things is too serious and weighty to be postponed and delayed. You cannot get out of the danger of hell, or into Christ too soon. Moreover, every repetition of sin after conviction greatly aggravates it. For it is in sinning as it is in numbering, if the first be one, the second is ten, the third a hundred, and the fourth a thousand. And to conclude, think what you will, you can never have a fitter season than the present: the same difficulties you have to-day, you will have to-morrow, and it may be greater. Fall on presently, therefore, to execute your convictions.

Direct. 2. If you would be clear from this great wickedness of holding the truth in unrighteousness, then see that you reverence the voice, and stand in awe of the authority of your own consciences; and resolve with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live," Job 27:6. There are two considerations apt to beget reverence in men to the voice of their own consciences.

1. It is our best friend when pure and unviolated.
2. It is our worst enemy, when wounded and affronted.

1. Conscience obeyed, and kept pure and inviolate, is thy best friend on earth. 2 Cor. 1:12. "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences." The very Heathens could say,

* Nil conscire tibi, nulla pallescere culpa,

Hic murus aheneus esto.

What comforted Hezekiah on his supposed death-bed but the fair testimonial his conscience gave in of his integrity? 2 Kings 2:3 "A good man (saith Solomon) shall be satisfied from himself; but the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Mark the opposition, conscience gives the backslider his belly full of sorrow, and the upright man his heart full of peace. He is satisfied from himself, that is, from his own conscience, which though it be not the original spring, yet it is the conduit at which he drinks peace, joy, and encouragement.

2. Conscience wounded and abused, will be our worst enemy; no poniards so mortal as the wounds of conscience. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Prov. 18:14. Could Judas bear it, or could Spira bear it? What is the torment of hell, but the worm that dies not? and what is that worm but the remorse of conscience? Mark 9:44. Oh, what is that fearful expectation mentioned, Heb. 10:27. See how you like that life described, Deut. 28:65, 66. The primitive Christians chose rather to be cast to the lions than into the paws of an enraged conscience; ad Icones, potius quam ad lenones. Every little trouble will be insupportable to a sick and wounded conscience, as a quart of water would be to your shoulder in a great leaden vessel.

O, if men did but fear their own consciences, if they did reverence themselves, as the moralist speaks, if they did herein exercise themselves to have always a conscience void of offence, as Paul did, Acts 24:16 then would you be clear of this great sin of holding the truth in unrighteousness.

Direct. 3. If you would escape the guilt, and danger of holding God's truths in unrighteousness, then keep your hearts under the awful sense of

the day of judgment, when every secret thing must come into judgment, and conscience like a register-book, is to be opened and examined. The consideration of that day gives your consciences a seven-fold defensative against sin. 1. It provokes every man to get real, solid grace, and not rest in an empty profession, Matth. 25. and this secures us from formal hypocrisy, that we be not found foolish virgins. 2. It excites us to the diligent improvement of our talents, that we be not found slothful servants, neglecting any duty God and conscience calls us to, Matth. 25:21. 3. It confirms, and establishes us in the ways of God, that we wound not conscience by apostasy, 1 John 2:28. 4. It is a loud call to every man to repentance, and not to lie stupid, and senseless, under guilt, Acts 17:30, 31. 5. It is a powerful antidote against formality in religion, the general, and dangerous disease of professors, Mat. 7:22, 23. 6. It excites holy fear and watchfulness, in the whole course of life, 1 Pet. 1:17. 7. It puts us not only to our watch, but to our knees in fervent prayer, 1 Pet 4:7.

And he that feels such effects as these, from the consideration of that day, is fortified against that sin my text warns of, and dares never hold the truths of God in unrighteousness. It is our regardlessness of judgment to come, and ignorance of the nature of it which so emboldens us to neglect known duties, and commit known sins, Amos 6:3. 2 Pet 3:3, 4. If our thoughts and meditations were engaged more frequently, and seriously, on such an awful subject, you would rather choose to die than to do violence to your consciences.

Direct. 4. Get right and true apprehensions of the moral evil that is in sin, and of the penal evil that follows sin; then no temptation shall prevail with you to commit a sin, to escape a present trouble, or neglect a known duty, to accommodate any earthly interest, and consequently to hold no truth of God in unrighteousness. It is fear of loss and sufferings that so often overbears conscience; but if men were once made thoroughly sensible that the least sin is worse for them than the greatest affliction or suffering, the peace of conscience would be well secured. And that this is really so, appears thus: 1. Afflictions do not make a man vile in the eyes of God. A man may be under manifold afflictions, and yet very dear, and precious, in God's account, Heb. 11:36, 37, 38 but sin makes man vile in

the eyes of God, Dan. 11:2. 2. Afflictions do not put men under the curse of God, blessings and afflictions may go together, Psal. 94:12 but sin brings the soul under the curse, Gal. 3:10. 3. Afflictions make men more like unto God, Heb. 12:10 but sin makes us more like the devil, 1 John 3:8. John 8:34. 4. Afflictions for conscience sake are but the creature's wrath inflamed against us; but sin is the inflamer of God's wrath against us, as in the text. 5. Afflictions are but outward evils upon the body, but sin is an internal evil upon the soul, Prov. 8:36. 6. Afflictions for duties sake have many sweet promises annexed to them, Mat. 5:10 but sin hath none. 7. The effects of sufferings for Christ are sweet to the soul, 2 Cor. 7:4 but the fruits of sin are bitter; it yields nothing but shame and fear. 8. Afflictions for Christ are the way to heaven, but sin is the Broadway to hell, Rom. 6. ult. 9. Sufferings for duty are but for a moment, 2 Cor. 4:17 but sufferings for sin will be eternal, Mark 9:44.

If such thoughts might be suffered to dwell with us, now would they guard the conscience against temptations, and secure their peace and purity?

Direct. 5. Be thoroughly persuaded of this great truth, that God takes great pleasure in uprightness, and will own and honour integrity amidst all the dangers that befall it, Psal. 11:7. Prov. 11:20. When he would encourage Abraham to a life of integrity, he engages his almighty power for the protection of him in that way. Gen. 17:1. "I am God Almighty, walk thou before me, and be perfect." So Psal. 84:11. "The Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

An upright man is the boast of heaven, Job 1:8 he is God's darling; and the reason is, because he bears the image of God. Psal. 11:7. "The upright Lord loveth uprightness;" yea, and if integrity brings them into trouble, they may be sure the Lord will bring them out. Psal. 34:19. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all." How safely then may they leave themselves in the hands of his infinite wisdom, power, and fatherly care? Nay, God is not only the protector, but he is also the rewarder of conscientious integrity, Psal. 18:20 and that four ways. 1. In the inward peace it yields them; Isa. 32:17. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness

and assurance for ever." But the effect of sinful shifts and carnal policies are shame and sorrow. 2. In the success and issue of it; it not only turns to God's glory, but it answers and accommodates our own designs and ends far better than our sinful projects can do, Prov. 28:23. 3. Great is the joy and encouragement resulting from it in the day of death, 2 Kings 20:3. Psal. 37:37. 4. In the world to come, Psal. 49:14. Were this duly considered and thoroughly believed, men would choose rather to part with life than the purity and peace of their own consciences. They would suffer all wrongs and injuries rather than do conscience the least injury.

Direct. 6. Do not idolize the world, nor over-value the trifles of this life; it is the love of the world that makes men warp from the rules of their own consciences, 2 Tim. 4:10 it is this that makes men strain hard to get loose from the ties and bonds of their own consciences. The young man was convinced, but the world was too hard for his convictions, Luke 18:23 the degree of his sorrow was according to the degree of his love to the creature. It is not the having, but the over-loving of the world that ruins us; it is a worldly heart which makes men twist and turn, shuffle and dissemble at that rate they do, in time of temptation. Could you once dethrone this idol, how secure and safe would your consciences be! The church is described, Rev. 12:1 as clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet; the most zealous age of the church was the age of poverty. Try these few considerations upon your hearts to loose them from the inordinate love of the world. 1. What good will the world do when you have lost your integrity for its sake, and peace is taken away from the inner man? What joy of the world had Judas, and what comfort had Spira? If you part with your integrity for it, God will blast it, and it shall yield you no joy. 2. Except you renounce the world, you are renounced by Christ: disclaim it, or he will disclaim you, Luke 14:33. No man can be admitted into Christ's service, but by sealing those indentures with him. 3. Whatever loss or damage you shall sustain for Christ and conscience sake, he stands obliged to repair it to you, and that with an infinite overplus, Mark 10:29, 30. 4. In a word, all the riches, pleasures, honours, and liberties in the world are not able to give you that joy and heart-refreshing comfort that the acquitting and cheering voice of your own consciences can do. Settle these things in your hearts as defensatives against this danger.

Direct. 7. Lastly, Beg of God, and labour to get more Christian courage and magnanimity; for want of this, conscience is oft over borne against its own light and conviction; Christian magnanimity is conscience's security. It is excellent and becoming a Christian to be able to face any thing but the frowns of God and his own conscience. All the famous champions of truth and witnesses for God, that came victorious out of the field with temptation, with safe and unwounded consciences, were men of courage and resolution: See Dan. 3:16. Heb. 11:27. Acts 21:13. And what is this Christian courage but the fixed resolution of the soul to encounter all dangers, all sufferings, all reproaches, pains and losses in the strength of assisting grace, that shall assault us in the ways of our duty; and so it stands opposed in scripture to the spirit of fear, Heb. 11:27 to shame, Mark 8:38 to apostasy, Heb. 10:39. He must neither be afraid nor ashamed, nor lose one inch of ground for the sake of whatsoever dangers he meets with, and that because he hath embraced Christianity upon those terms, and was told of all this before, John 16:1 because there is no retreating, but to our own ruin, Heb. 10:38 because he owes all this, and much more than this, to Christ, Phil. 1:29 because he understands the value of his soul above his body, and of eternals above and beyond all temporals, Matth. 10:28 and, in a word, because he believes the promises of God's assistance and rewards, Heb. 11:25, 26, 27.

O my friends, were our fears thus subdued, and our faith thus exalted, how free, and safe, would truth be in our consciences! he that owns any truth to live upon it, or accommodate a carnal interest by it, will disown that truth when it comes to live upon him, let conscience plead and say what it will: but he that hath agreed with Christ upon these terms, to be content to be miserable for ever if there be not enough in Christ to make him happy, this man will be a steady Christian, and will rather lie in the worst of prisons, than imprison God's known truths in unrighteousness.

THE CONCLUSION

I have now done my message. I have set before you the Lord Jesus in the glory of his free grace and condescending love to sinners, O that I had skill and ability to have done it better! I have wooed and expostulated with you on Christ's behalf: I have laboured according to my little measure of strength, to cast up and prepare the way by removing the

stumbling blocks and discouragements out of it. This hath been a time of conviction to many of you, some have not been able to hold their convictions any longer under restraints, but many, I fear, do so; and therefore I have in the close of all handled this startling and awakening scripture among you, to shew you what an horrid evil it is to detain God's truths in unrighteousness. I have also, in the name and authority of God, demanded all the Lord's prisoners, his suppressed and restrained truths at your hands: if you will unbind your convictions this day, cut asunder the bonds of carnal fear, shame, &c. with which you restrain them; those truths you shall so make free, will make you free: if not, but you will still go on stifling and suppressing them in your own bosoms, remember that there are so many witnesses prepared to give evidence against you in the great day. And O that whilst you delay this duty, the sound of this text may never be out of your ears, nor suffer you to rest: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

MOUNT PISGAH A SERMON - DEUT. 3:24, 25

Preached at the PUBLIC THANKSGIVING, Feb. 14th, 1688–9, for ENGLAND'S Deliverance from Popery &c.

Upon DEUT. 3:24, 25

THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY

To the Right Honourable GEORGE Earl of Southerland, Lord Strathnaver, Heritable Lord of Regality, and Sheriff in the Shire of Southerland.

MY LORD,

IT was a sweet refreshment to me in the days of our late exile, to be providentially cast into your Lordship's company and acquaintance. I savoured in yourself and your most accomplished Lady, those things which are rarely found in persons of your eminent station and quality in the world.

I have neither forgotten your tender sympathy with poor distressed Sion, nor my weak endeavours to prop up your faith, with respect to a more cheerful aspect of providence upon the churches.

And now, my lord, we that mourned for, and suffered with Sion, are this day called to rejoice with her. Yea, you are called to rejoice with a joy above the common joy, inasmuch as your Lordship is not only a partaker of the common mercy with others, but God hath honoured you in accompanying and assisting the glorious instrument of our deliverance.

My lord, it is a greater honour to be serviceable to the interest of Christ, than to descend from the blood of nobles. It is the honour of angels that they are ministering Spirits for the church's good. What my apprehensions of, and expectations from this providence are, your

lordship will measure from the following discourse.

Let England rejoice to behold a Protestant king upon her throne; a king that gives more honour to the throne than it is capable to reflect on him that sits thereon. His soundness in Protestant principles his prudence and equity in government, his zeal for the interest of Christ at the lowest ebb, speak him such a blessing to this nation as for ages past it hath not enjoyed: And now, my lord, we may expect, if ever, to find that glorious description of a just and holy king answered in him, that "he shall be to us as the light of the morning, when the sun ariseth, even a morning without clouds," 2 Sam. 23:4.

My lord, having in my place performed the duty of thanksgiving to God, enjoined by public authority with the same alacrity that Moses' mother obeyed the command of Pharaoh's daughter to nurse her own child; I am bold (notwithstanding the imperfections that attend it) to offer it in all humility to your lordship's hands; being confident the design of it will be agreeable to your spirit, though there be nothing of external ornament to commend it to your fancy. So heartily congratulating your lordship's safe and happy return, with your pious and ingenuous lady, in the memorable year of England's deliverance from the Romish yoke, I beg your honour's pardon for this, presumption, and remain

Your Honour's most obliged

Servant to command,

J. FLAVEL.

MOUNT PISGAH - DEUT. 3:24, 25

O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand; for what God is there in heaven, or in earth that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain,

and Lebanon.

IT is the observation of a learned^t man, that the revolution of a hundred years hath produced (especially in these latter times) new motions and alterations in the church, like unto those that fell out a hundred years before. So it was in Germany and Bohemia; John Huss, at the stake, about the year 1417, uttered this remarkable speech, After an hundred years, you Papists shall be called to an account. The Bohemians caused post centum annos to be stamp'd upon their coin for the preservation of so memorable a prediction; and accordingly in a hundred years, 1517, Luther arose, and with him the reformation. It hath been so in England. Our fathers deservedly set a signal remembrance upon the year 1588, Annus octogesimus octavus est annus mirabilis; the year eighty-eight is a wonderful year; and it was so indeed, for then the Lord defeated the formidable enemies of his cause and people with a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm upon the great waters: then did England sing his praises, saying, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" Exod. 15:11.

A full century is now run out since that year of wonders, wherein we have reaped the precious and inestimable fruits of that year's mercy. And notwithstanding the great ingratitude of this nation for all the civil and spiritual mercies it hath enjoyed in consequence of that mercy, whereby God hath been highly provoked to say to England as he did to Israel, Judg. 10:13. I will deliver you no more; yet, behold! another eighty-eight crowned and enriched with mercies, no less admirable and glorious than the former; a year for which the children yet unborn shall praise the Lord.

You are called this day to rejoice; I am not only called to rejoice with you in the public mercies of this day, but also to direct you to the best way of improving the mercies you rejoice in, that they may prove introductive to greater mercies than themselves. To that end I chose this scripture, which contains both parts of the work and duty of the day. The text contains the sum of Moses' prayer at Edrei, after the signal victory God there gave him over the last enemy that forbade his passage to the confines of Canaan. This Edrei was a town on this side Jordan, situate in the fruitful country of Bashan, near unto that famous river by which it was divided from the

land of promise, and afterwards fell to the lot of Manasseh. Hither Moses had led the people, and now it was but one remove more, (their passage over Jordan) and they should finish their wearisome peregrination, and arrive at the desire of their hearts, even rest and settlement in that good land the Lord had promised them. And here you may see how swift and strong the motions of Moses' spirit in prayer were, now it was come so nigh the centre, almost in sight of that pleasant land where God intended to settle his worship, and record his name. "O Lord, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness," &c. I pray "thee let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon." Wherein note,

1. The mercy prayed for.

2. The argument pleaded to obtain it.

1. The mercy Moses prays for, that he might go over and see the good land, &c. The good land was Canaan, called the glory of all lands, Ezek. 20:6. It was a glorious land in respect of its natural fertility and amenity; but much more glorious in respect of the presence of God in his ordinances. And therefore above all the pleasant sights of Canaan, he desires to see that goodly mountain, that is, Mount Moriah, on which Abraham offered up his only son Isaac, and whereon, by the spirit of prophecy, Moses fore-saw the glorious temple was to be built, whither the tribes should go up to worship, even the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel. There were to be the symbols of his presence, and the house of prayer for all people. There the ark was to rest, and all the promises made to Abraham and his seed to be fulfilled. This inflames the desires of Moses (now upon the very borders) to have a sight of that goodly mountain, and Lebanon, that famous forest so renowned in scripture, of whose stately cedars the glorious temple was to be built, 1 Kings 5:5, 9. This desire of Moses was not from any superstitious opinion he had of the holiness of the place, in respect of the patriarchs whose bones were laid in that land, (as some Popish glosses would have it) but he earnestly desired to see the accomplishment of the promises, now so nigh the birth, by the actual possession of that good land. This was the mercy he prayed for.

Objection. But how could Moses desire to go over Jordan into this good land, when God had before so expressly told him he should not? Numb. 20:12. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Did this holy man suffer his desires to transport him beyond his duty, to go further than God would have him?

Sol. No, he did not; not being sure the threatening was absolute, but might be such a one as was made of Hezekiah's death, 2 Kings 20:1 or of Nineveh's destruction, Jonah 3:4 there was room for prayer. You see the mercy Moses prayed for.

2. Let us next consider the argument by him pleaded for the obtaining of his suit, and that is taken from the whole series of former mercies, which were all introductive to this remaining and completing mercy, the planting of them in the land of promise. "O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand," &c. Where note,

1. His most thankful acknowledgment and magnifying of past and present mercies. His eyes were not so dazzled with the splendor of mercy to come, and in a near expectation, as to overlook the former or present mercies as small and inconsiderable. No, he lifts up the name of God in his praises for them, and tells him, he had begun to shew him his greatness in them. They are great in Moses' eye, and he expresses a suitable sense of them. He well knew the way to engage further mercies, is thankfully to acknowledge and magnify past and present ones. But,

2. He rests not there, but improves these beginnings of mercies, and pleads them in his argumentative prayer for the consummating and perfecting mercies yet to come; q. d. Lord, thy works are perfect, thou dost not use to begin and not finish as men do; to bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth; the gods of the heathen are a lie and vanity, but thou art the true God, and thy promises are truth itself. Now, Lord, in pursuance of thy promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thou hast begun to fulfil the mercy promised; Israel is brought with signs and wonders, and a mighty hand out of Egypt, and upon the very borders of the land? Lord, complete the work now, in giving them the possession of

it; and for me, Lord, I pray thee (if it be thy will) let me enter with them; and as I have had my part in the troubles of Egypt, straits and trials these forty years in the desert, let me take my part also in the joy, rest, and comfort of that blessed land to which I am now come so nigh. This seems to be the sense and meaning of Moses' prayer. Divers excellent points of doctrine naturally offer themselves from the text, as,

Doct. 1. That the rest and prosperity of the church is a very desirable mercy in the eyes of the saints.

If any thing will make a Christian desirous to abide on earth, next to the finishing of the works of grace on him, and the work of obedience by him, this is the thing: Psal. 106:4, 5. "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation: that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation: that I may glory with thine inheritance."

Doct. 2. How desirable soever it be to see the church's glory and prosperity on earth, yet the greatest and best of saints may be denied it

Moses, the saint of God, the favourite of heaven, earnestly desired the sight of this mercy, and was denied it. Get thee up to mount Nebo, saith God, and die there, thou shalt not go over Jordan; and yet Moses was no loser by it. Though God shut him out of Canaan, he took him into heaven. We read, Mat. 13:17 of that blessed day when Christ was among men in the flesh, preaching, praying, and working miracles, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see those things which they saw (among whom he walked) and saw them not, and to hear the things which they heard, but did not hear them. Demarathus of Corinth, was wont to say, that those Grecians lost a great part of the comfort of their lives, that had not seen great Alexander sitting upon Darius' throne. St. Augustine wished to have seen three things, Rome in its glory, Paul to the face, and Christ in the flesh. But we must not be our own chusers, it shall be given to them for whom it is appointed. But I stay not upon either of these, there are two other points in the text which invite my thoughts and discourse this day; viz.

Doct. 3. That great mercies received (though there be yet greater than

they to be expected) call for an answerable sense and acknowledgment in the saints.

Doct. 4. That the beginnings of mercy and deliverance to the church are convertible into some pleas and arguments in prayer for the perfection and consummation thereof. I begin with the former, viz.

Doct. 3. That great mercies received (though there be yet greater than they to be expected) call for an answerable sense and acknowledgment in the saints.

Moses magnifies the mercies received in Egypt, and in the wilderness, at the red sea, and at Edrei; as things wherein God had begun to shew him his greatness, and his mighty hand, things on which God had visibly stamped and impressed his greatness; though he still expected greater things to come. It was Elihu's counsel to Job, with respect to God's providential proceedings with him, Job 36:24. "Remember that thou magnify his work which men behold." Elihu thought it to be Job's duty (and doubtless it was so) to magnify or lift up the name of God, even under afflicted providences, to exalt God when God cast him down; but you are called this day to magnify the work of God in comfortable providences, and to lift up his name, whilst he is lifting you up in deliverances and cheerful providences. It is true we cannot magnify any work of God by making any addition to it, or making it greater than it is; but we should magnify every work of God by giving it its full dimensions in our considerations of it, and suitable affections to it. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein," Psal. 111:2. We then magnify them, when we search them out, ponder and weigh them in all their circumstances; and this must needs afford singular pleasure to a sanctified soul. O it is sweet to trace the footsteps of God along these pleasant paths of mercy and salvation, where in he hath walked towards his church, or ourselves in particular. Two things invite our thoughts to dwell upon them at this time.

1. What makes a work of mercy truly great.
2. What is that suitable sense we should have of such works.

1. What are the things that make any work of mercy truly great.

Now there are seven considerations or properties of a work of mercy, which make it great indeed. If but one or two of these be found upon such a work, it deserves the name of great; but if there be a concurrence of them all in any work of God, as there is in that work which we celebrate this day, O how great will it then appear!

(1.) Then doth a work of mercy or deliverance deserve the name of great and magnificent, when it involves our spiritual, as well as our civil and natural comforts and enjoyments in it, and rescues our souls as well as our bodies from ruin and misery.

Temporal mercies have their value, it is no small mercy to have our estates, liberties, and lives secured from rapine and violence. Deborah celebrated this mercy in her song of praise, Judges 5:6, 7, 11. "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the high-ways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased in Israel, until that I, Deborah, arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water; there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the Lord go down to the gates." It was a sad time in Israel, when they were barred from their fountains, and forced to creep through by-ways and woods by night, for fear of the enemy; when the course of justice was stopt, and there were no judges in the gates: Therefore the people are here excited to praise the Lord for their deliverance from these calamities.

But it is a far greater misery to be cut off from the wells of salvation, barred from the springs of ordinances; forced to creep through by and obscure ways to get bread to relieve our souls; to have our teachers driven into corners; which hath been the case of God's people for many years in England. Now to be delivered from such miseries, is a mercy above all value.

Liberty to serve the Lord without fear, liberty without a snare, or hook in it, and a well settled durable liberty, for such is that we may now (if ever)

promise ourselves; what soul can dilate itself wide enough, to take in the adequate sense of such a mercy? We were glad of liberty from our enemies, when we sought it not; we peaceably and thankfully improved it, though just fears and jealousies much darkened the lustre of it: But the Lord in this dispensation of his providence will, I hope, so establish the just liberties of his people, that it shall never be in the power of violent and wicked men any more to oppress them. There was a time when the witnesses of Christ lay dead, and their enemies rejoiced over them; the Lord hath begun to revive them, and the time (I trust) even the appointed time is at hand, when they shall hear a great voice from heaven *jussu supremi magistratus*, saith learned Mede) saying, come up hither; and both England and France shall rejoice together in their spiritual, as well as civil liberties and mercies. What soul that loves Jesus Christ in sincerity, doth not feel itself cheered and raised in proportion to the hopes and evidences it hath of the approach of so great and desirable a mercy?

(2.) Then is any work of mercy and deliverance to the church deservedly stiled great; when it is wrought out in an extraordinary way, and the finger of God evidently seen therein. Thus it was with Israel in their introduction into the land of promise, Psalm 44:3. "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance; because thou hadst a favour unto them." It was not by the strength of their own arm, or the length of their own sword, that they subdued and conquered; no, it was a smile of providence that did the work. The finger of God in providence appears in the secret influences of God upon the spirits of men, infusing courage into the hearts of some, and sending faintness into the spirits of others; so that the feeble become as David, while the men of might cannot find their hands. This lifts up the wheels above the earth, as Ezek. 1:19.

(3.) The sudden production of mercy magnifies it. Mercies are highly to be prized, how long soever we wait for them; but when they come surprisingly, they come with great advantage upon us, and have for that the more ravishing sweetness in them, Psalm 126:1, 2, 3. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion, we were like them that dream. Then

was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." The change was so great, so sudden, that it amazed them; they took it rather for a phantom that deluded their senses than for a reality. The deliverance was incredible, they could not believe themselves to be delivered, when they really were delivered. They fancied when they came to Jerusalem, that it was rather a pleasing dream of Jerusalem in Babylon, than so indeed. Are we indeed set at liberty to worship God at Jerusalem? Or are we mocked with a dream, and deluded with a pleasant fancy of such a mercy? So again we read, Isa. 66:8, 9. "Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Sion travailed, she brought forth her children." What, sow and reap in the same day! The birth to anticipate the pangs of travail! Who hath seen or heard such things, saith the prophet? Surely England hath seen it this day. Cardinal Pool once abused this scripture in his letter to pope Julius the third, applying it to the sudden change of England to popery in the beginning of queen Mary's reign. But we are called this day to sanctify the name of God in a work of providence, wherein the Lord hath indeed fulfilled it before our eyes! So great and sudden! "Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O thou King of saints." Generations to come will think we do but hyperbolize, when they shall read the one half of the wonders of our days.

(4.) When one mercy is an introductive leading mercy to many more that are greater than itself; that mercy which is so, though in itself it were never so small, well deserves the title of a great mercy, and may we not judge the present mercy to be such? In the rending off these kingdoms from Antichrist, the tenth part of the great city is visibly fallen. Rome hath paid her tenths to Christ already, and that as an earnest of the whole, which is shortly to fall into his hands. Rome's glass was turned up by Christ more than 1200 years past, and in the judgment of very learned and searching men, is now almost run down. Antichrist hath lately had a triumph, and said, I sit as a queen, and shall not see widow-hood, or loss of children any more. The kings of the earth hath: given *δυναμιν και εξουσιαν*, their force of arms, and power of laws unto the beast. But the

Lord hath begun to shake heaven and earth, that the things which are made may be shaken down, and so to ruin him by the same means he first arose. He is taking to himself his power and reign, that the kingdom and dominion under the whole heavens may be the Lord's; and that the work of providence which we celebrate this day appears to me a great step towards it. Call it Gad, for a troop follows it. The world hath found, and shall still find much truth in that observation of the learned* Dr. More: 'I am not ashamed (saith he) to profess that I think it clear, out of the Apocalypse, that the scene of things in Christendom will in a short time be very much changed for the better; the time of the church appearing, that is truly apostolical both in life and doctrine, appears by the computation of propheties to be very near at hand, when the witnesses shall arise, and the woman come out of the wilderness, and the kingdoms of the world shall be the kingdoms of the Lord, and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. There is no stability to be expected in the kingdom of men (but vengeance will ever and anon flow in upon them) till that city be raised, whose foundation is not only laid in twelve, but whose gates, tribes, angels, the breadth and height of the wall, and the solid continent of the whole city, are nothing else but a replication still of twelve throughout; That is to say, till that church appear which is purely apostolical in doctrine and worship.'

England is said to be the first kingdom that received the gospel with the countenance of supreme authority. This was its honour; and to be the first that breaks off from Antichrist, will be as great an honour as the former. The rest are to follow in their order. O what a leading mercy is the mercy of this day!

(5.) Then may a work of God be stiled great and magnificent, when the Lord carries it on through great difficulties and seeming impossibilities. The greater the difficulties in the way, the greater must the mercy be when it arrives to us through them all. Thus came the Israelites into the land of promise, Psal. 66:12. "Thou causedst men to ride over our heads; we went through fire, and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." To pass through fire and water is a proverbial speech, noting the greatest difficulties, and deadly dangers: such was that at the Red Sea. A deliverance out of such dangers may be called life out of

death, and such have our deliverances been. Our enemies had grasped all power into their hands, and were full of confidence; they were folded together as thorns, and drunk as drunkards, as the prophet expresses it, Nah. 1:10. Strong combinations, and answerable confidence, and security of the event; but when the time of mercy was come, armies, navies, counsels, foreign confederates, and all give way to the design of mercy. And what are all the mountains before Zerubbabel?

(6.) That which exceedingly greatens a mercy or deliverance is the seasonableness thereof, when it nicks the proper season, comes in the most opportune time. Deut. 32:36. "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants; when he seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left." The Lord suffers the danger to come to an extremity, and then in the mount of difficulties and straits he appears; if deliverance should come sooner, it would be less valued; and if later, it would come too late for our comfort. He is a God of judgment, and all his works are made beautiful by their seasonableness. How the case stood with the protestant interest in Europe when God began to stir up the spirits of the princes to commiserate and relieve it, we all know: our enemies looked upon us as their sure prey, and we could not but look upon ourselves in great hazard. The Lord suffered the mischief conceived to go to the parturient fulness of its time, and then gave it a miscarrying womb. Who is like unto the Lord? And what works are like his works?

(7.) In a word, then is a work of mercy truly great, when it brings forth invaluable blessings at a cheap rate, when enjoyments and comforts, more worth than our lives, come at easy rates to our hands.

You read, Isa. 9:5. "Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood." War is terrible and costly, especially civil wars. When a nation, like a candle lighted at both ends, quickly consumes and melts down in the middle. There are confused noises in battles, terrible to hear; the thundering of drums, and sound of trumpets; the neighing of horses, and shouts of armies; the roaring of cannons, and shrieks and groans of dying men; these are confused noises indeed: and yet it is worth enduring all this, to hear the joyful sound of the gospel, and preserve the pure reformed religion in the midst of us: it were better to part with our blood, than the gospel; exhaust our treasure, and leave our children poor,

than divest them of the best of blessings, and leave them to be trained up in idolatry, and stretch out their hands to a strange god.

But lo, what hath God wrought for England! you have those mercies that have cost others dear, and they have cost you nothing; you have sold yourselves for nothing, and are redeemed without price: your God hath been liberal in mercy, but sparing of blood. Such mercies, so many mercies without a stroke! according to this time, it shall be said, What hath God wrought.

Thus you see what these mercies are wherein God shews his greatness.

Secondly, In the next place, let us consider what that suitable sense, or those answerable impressions are, which such great mercies call for. Moses, in the text, expresses a very becoming sense of the great things God had begun to do for him and his people; O that there were such a heart in us this day. Now there are five things wherein the comely behaviour of our souls towards God, under great mercies, doth consist.

(1.) In our eyeing the hand of God in the mercy, and thankful ascriptions of all the glory and praise to his name. So doth Moses in the text, "Thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand." The Israelites were a great host, six hundred thousand men that marched out of Egypt, an army sufficient to invade and subdue a far greater country than Canaan was; but Moses looks off from them, and ascribes all their successes and victories to the hand of God: not my mighty host, but thy mighty hand. God affects not social glory; the dividing of the praise forfeits the mercy. He that doth all in us and for us, expects justly the praise and glory of all from us. Psal. 115:1. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name, give glory." Here is a double negative, and no more than need; for there is double danger of the creature's invading the rights of heaven and sacrilegious usurpation of God's peculiar praise. Let us therefore look off from armies and navies, from the prudent conduct and courage of men, and see the hand of God in all the great and marvellous things wrought in the midst of us this day.

(2.) It is decorous, and suitable to great mercies, to have our hearts filled with joy and cheerfulness answerable to them praise is comely for the

upright. As it would be our sin to mourn when God smites and rebukes us; so will it also, not to rejoice when he cheers and comforts us. It is not our liberty only, but our duty to rejoice in such works of mercy as these are. Isa. 65:18. "But be ye glad, and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy." Methinks joy should not be under a Christian's command, when he sees what God is creating for Jerusalem. As the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation of the world; so should all his sons and daughters sing, and shout at this new creation of the new heavens, and the new earth.

Mistake not here, I call you not to rejoice in the miseries or calamities that are upon any this day, much less at the calamities of our late sovereign. He that searcheth my heart, knows I commiserate his condition, and from my soul desire the Lord to bless his afflictions to his illumination and eternal salvation. But that which you are to rejoice in this day, is the advancement of Christ's interest in the world, and the salvation of his church from the imminent dangers it was so lately under; and the prospect the Lord now gives you of far greater mercies to his people, than ever yet they enjoyed. These are the proper objects of our rejoicing.

(3.) Then have we a becoming sense of great mercies, when those mercies kindly thaw, and melt our hearts into repentance for sin, and a sense of our great unworthiness of them; when we abase ourselves under exalting providences. We greatly mistake ourselves, if we think England hath obliged God to be thus peculiarly favourable to it. It is astonishing to think, that a nation so swarming with drunkards, persecutors, formalists in religion, yea, atheists and scoffers at all practical and serious piety, should nevertheless be thus favoured, delivered, and exalted in mercy above all the nations round about us. I know God hath a great number of precious and upright-hearted ones in England, that have sighed and cried for the abominations committed in the midst thereof; but so far are they from arrogating, that they are every where admiring the goodness of God in unexpected mercies. They think, if he had given them their lives for a prey in some obscure corner of the World, he had done more for them than they could justly have expected; or if he had furnished them with a

sufficient stock of faith and patience to stand quietly at the stake, and have glorified him in the midst of the flames, he had done more than they had deserved at his hands: but to be delivered from all those fears, to sit down in peace amidst pure gospel-ordinances, and to look on all these but as the beginnings of mercy, the dawning of a more bright and glorious day than ever yet this nation enjoyed; this, I say, is melting and humbling indeed to all gracious spirits. It is a lovely sight to see the tears of repentance overtaking the tears of joy and thankfulness; sighs and blushes for sin, mixed with smiles and rejoicings in mercies.

(4.) Then do we answer the voice of mercy, and discover a suitable sense of it, when it strongly obliges us to new obedience, and more exactness in walking with God, for the time to come. We find an excellent example of both these effects of mercy, viz. repentance for past sins, and resolutions for new obedience, in Psal. 79:8, 13. "Remember not against us former iniquities," saith Asaph; that was the frame of his heart as to past sins; and then, ver. 13 as to the future, if he would let "the sighing of the prisoners come before him, and deliver those that are appointed to die," as he speaks ver. 11 then, saith he, "We thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, will give thee thanks for ever, we will shew forth thy praise to all generations." O England! England! thy God this day calls thee to thy knees, though it be thy day of thanksgiving and rejoicing: he expects to see thy tears upon thy cheeks this day for thy former iniquities, and that thou bind thyself to thy God with these bonds of mercy, never to return any more to folly. It is not bells and bonfires, but repentance for thy past follies, and new obedience, thy God looks for at thy hands.

(5.) Lastly, Then do we act becomingly to the mercies of God, when mercies already brought forth, do encourage and strengthen our faith for those that remain still in the womb of the promises. So it was with Moses in my text, and oh that it might be so with us all! our greatest and best mercies are yet to come, but those we bless God for this day, are pledges and earnest of them: You see them not, neither did you see these you are now praising him for, six months ago; hath he caused these mercies to be brought forth, and will he shut up the womb? hath he done things we looked not for, and shall he not be trusted farther than we can see? Look as the head of Leviathan was served into the Israelites' table in the

wilderness, garnished about with rich experiences of the goodness and faithfulness of God, that it might be food to their faith in the wilderness: so, much so are the mercies and deliverances of this day to be improved, for the encouragement of faith for further and future mercies.

Use. The point before us is full of useful instructions, cautions, and counsels. Time will permit me to do little more than note them to you; because I have noted to you another point of doctrine, which, should I omit, I should be wanting to the duties of the day, and your just expectations. Well then, have the mercies of God already performed such great things? And do they require such a sense and improvement of them from us? Then,

(1.) Take heed of slighting and despising the mercies of God which are fresh and new before your eyes this day. There are two special duties incumbent on all the saints under such mercies as these, viz. to observe the Lord's providences, and to resound his praises; and the latter depends upon the former. God can have no praise, we can have no comfort from unobserved or slighted mercies, "Whoso is wise, and will observe those things, even they "shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord," Psal. 107:43. A due observation of mercies will beget a due valuation of them; and a due valuation of mercies is fundamental to all your praises of God for them. Look upon the other side of these providences, and think what your condition had been, if the Lord had left your estates, liberties, and lives, to the wills and mercies of your enemies.

(2.) Cheek all atheistical thoughts from this experiment of the hand of God so seasonably interposing betwixt his people and their destruction. "Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth," Psal. 58:11. Great and notorious is the atheism of these times: all serious piety is hissed and ridiculed; the very existence of a Deity, and Divine providence is denied by some. But would men open their eyes, and observe what it is before them this day, they would see enough to stop the mouth of atheism for ever. Are these fortuitous hits and accidents, or the effects and productions of the wise and steady counsels of heaven? "The Lord is known by the judgments that he executeth." But when his hand is lifted up men will not see. It is convincingly clear, the hand of God, not the power or policy of men hath done this. There was no power in the

prevailing part, but what might, with far greater probability have been repelled by the other; no policy in the one, but as great to countermine it in the other. But you see the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; it is the hand of God that disposeth these great events.

(3.) Be not staggered if you should see new difficulties arise in the way of mercy, after God hath begun to do great things for his people. Moses and his people encountered many such difficulties after God had lifted up his hand in great signs and wonders for them in Egypt: And so may we, even when we are come upon the borders of our expected mercies. Let us not say we shall never be moved more; there is a great deal of filthiness in England yet unpurged, many corruptions to be removed; and let us not expect much tranquillity till God hath refined and reformed us. When the morbid matter is not well purged out of the body natural, or politic, there is danger of a recidivation, or relapse into the old disease, which God in mercy prevent. Former sins and follies will cast us back into former straits and miseries. O let us not return again to folly. We are now upon trial once more how we will carry it under mercies and liberties: God forbid so great an opportunity as this for setting the church and state upon the true foundations of liberty and prosperity, should be lost. Take heed of a discontented spirit under, gracious providences, lest you provoke the Lord to turn his hand of judgment again upon you. Who could have thought that Jonah, who was so lately in the whale's belly, called the belly of hell, and was so greatly humbled there, and so miraculously and graciously delivered thence, should presently fall into a great pet of discontent with God, and that for a trifle, the withering of a gourd? Yea, and which was worse, for his mercy to others. O we know not what manner of spirits we are of. The greatest mercies and deliverances do not long please us unless our little by-interest be gratified.

(4.) Let England now study to do great things for God, who hath impressed his greatness upon the mercies it enjoys this day. O England, God hath done great things for thee, saved thee with a great salvation; and he expects returns from thee suitable to thy great mercies and obligations. Let me say to thee as Elihu to Job, chap. 36:2. "Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

(1.) A national reformation is now expected by the Lord; he hath strongly

obliged us to it this day by so glorious and unparalleled a national salvation. It is our reproach, that a land of ministers, a land of bibles, a land of peculiar mercies, should be a land swarming in every part of it with profane swearers, filthy adulterers, beastly drunkards, and heaven-daring atheists. Do we thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Thy God, O England, is pleading with thee this day by the voice of mercy, drawing thee out of these puddles and pollutions by the cords of love, whilst he is pleading against the same sins in the nations round about thee by fire and sword. He hath now set upon thy throne a great example of virtue to correct thy lewdness, and effect thy reformation. O England, wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be? When, if not now, under such strong inducements and signal advantages?

(2.) The loosing of every yoke and undoing of every heavy burden is now expected from thee. God hath loosed the yoke of Popery from our necks, which neither we nor our fathers could bear: and, God forbid we should lay any other yoke upon our brethren's neck, than what Jesus Christ hath laid, by his plain commands, upon all his disciples, or make any thing a term or condition of communion which himself hath not made so.

O let the groans and cries of oppressed consciences be heard no more from henceforth in England. did not the Lord lately shake the rod of our common enemies over us all? Had we not an ecclesiastical court erected among us, which made those to tremble, at whose bars others had trembled? If our God hath been so good to us, beyond all examples or expectations, to deliver us from our fears and danger; surely he expects that those who have found: mercy should be ready to shew mercy; else we must expect he will make good his threatening against us, James 2:13. "He shall have judgment without mercy that shewed no mercy;" or unmerciful judgment, as κρισις ανιλεως may be rendered; and the instruments and executioners of his judgments are not so far off, but he can quickly hiss for them again, if we answer not to the voice and call of mercy.

(3.) A hearty and lasting union amongst all that fear God, is now justly expected from us. I never expect union and coalition betwixt the godly and ungodly, it will be as much as I can expect to see the wickedness of men restrained and curbed by good laws that they persecute not; but

renewing grace must change their hearts, and destroy their inbred enmity before they close with the people of God in love. Nor do I think supercilious pharisees, or superstitious bigots, will inwardly and heartily affect the sincere and spiritual servants of Christ: it will be a mercy that they cannot afflict whom they do not affect: But I should hope that, in such a time as this, all that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and are animated by the same Spirit of grace and adoption, should now every where depose their wrath, compose their little differences; and that their hearts be now melted in the sense of these great and common salvations into more love and union than ever. Such returns as these will be pleasing to the Lord, and the only methods of lengthening out England's tranquillity. And though my infirmities, as well as age, cut off my expectations of being much longer serviceable, or of enjoying long the mercies God is preparing for his people; yet I should account it an extraordinary mercy to see these beginnings of mercy well improved, in order to those greater and better ones. Which brings me to the last observation which next comes to be opened and applied, viz.

Observation. That the beginnings of mercy and deliverance to the churchy are convertible into so many arguments and pleas in, prayer, for the perfection and consummation thereof.

The point lies clear and obvious in the text: To open it let us consider,

1. What the mercies were which are here called the beginnings of mercy?
2. What the greater mercies were, he expected beyond Jordan?
3. How the former strengthen faith in prayer for the latter?
4. Why the completing of mercies begun is so desirable to the saints?

1. What those mercies were which are here called the beginnings of mercy? And they were great and manifold: In this catalogue are to be placed all the mercies they had received for forty years, from the day they came out of Egypt, unto this great deliverance at Edrei inclusively.

(1.) God began to shew his great power in their wonderful deliverance out

of Egypt with mighty signs and an out-stretched arm. This deliverance from Egypt was a pattern or model of the future deliverances of his churches in New-Testament days, Mic. 7:15. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt, will I shew unto him marvellous things." Which seemeth to have relation to the time of the restitution, and saving of all Israel. After the manner of Egypt also hath God begun to save the Gentile churches from Rome, which is spiritually called Egypt, Rev. 11:8. And this begun deliverance from the mystical, is greater than that from literal Egypt, and so much greater, by how much spiritual bondage and slavery of men's souls, is worse than that on their bodies. The hand of God was evidently seen in that, and is no less admirable in this, The wonders of the reformation are, like those in Egypt, wrought out by the mighty hand and power of God.

(2.) The hand and power of God Was seen in making provision for them in all their wilderness-straits after they came out of Egypt. There were no tilled fields or barns, no store-houses in the wilderness, nor shops to furnish them with clothes for forty years in the desert; yet God took care to sustain them. It is said, Neh. 9:21. "Forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing, their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not." And certainly it would furnish an admirable history of Providence, if the instances of God's care over his poor, scattered, persecuted saints were collected, and how the Lord hath sustained them from the beginning of the reformation, though none were suffered to buy or sell that received not the mark of the beast in their foreheads, or right-hand, Rev. 13:17. Their enemies would have starved them, but their God hath wonderfully provided for them.

(3.) The Lord frustrated all the plots of their enemies to destroy them, and there was no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel: "Remember, O my people (saith God) what Balak, king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the "righteousness of the Lord." They built many altars, and offered many sacrifices; what would they not have done to have gotten but a word or two out of God's mouth against his people? But their God was true and faithful to them, and would not hearken to Balaam's insinuations against them. There have been plots upon plots to

destroy the begun reformation. Rome and hell have consulted our destruction, as they did theirs, but to no purpose.

(4.) The Lord discomfited and defeated the open force, as well as the great treachery of their enemies, and no weapon formed against them ever prospered. The kings, several kings, by whose lands they travelled towards Canaan, fell upon them in their way, but still to their own cost, they forfeited their lives and lands by their quarrel with Israel. And now the last of those kings and kingdoms that opposed their passage is fallen into the hands of Israel: These were the mercies wherein God had begun to shew his greatness to Moses and his people; and, after the manner of Egypt, unto us also.

2. But what were the greater mercies he expected beyond Jordan, which he so vehemently desires to see, and in comparison wherewith he stiles all these great things but the beginnings of mercy? Certainly Moses expected better things than these, as great and glorious as they were: And these were,

(1.) The full and free enjoyment of all God's ordinances, which the people had not enjoyed for forty years before. All that were born by the way were not circumcised, Josh. 5:5 and for the passover we find but three of them celebrated all that space, the first in Egypt, Exod. 12 the second at mount Sinai, Numb. 9 the third at Gilgal in Joshua's time, Josh. 5:10 and as for their other sacrifices and offerings appointed by the Lord, they were either omitted, or very disorderly performed, which, because of their many troubles, and frequent removes, they could not enjoy: and when they did, they were not performed as he required, which the Lord smartly rebuked them for, Amos 5:25. "Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" No, they had not, at least not in the due order as God required. But when they should arrive to a settled condition in Canaan, then the ordinances of God should be more frequently enjoyed, and that after the due order, for so Moses had told them, Deut. 12:8, 9. "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes; for ye are not as yet come to the rest, and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you." When they should be settled in Canaan, and the ark find rest, Moses knew that all things should then be reduced to the rule and

pattern God had given them. And truly nothing is more beautiful, more desirable in the eyes of the saints. For so much of God's order as is found in his worship, so much of his presence and blessing may be expected, and no more. And as he expected more purity in ordinances, so,

(2.) Rest and peace were expected in Canaan, mercies the people had long wanted. The ark had been ambulatory a long time, removing now here, now there: but in the temple it was to find rest. Therefore you read in Psal. 132:8 the temple called the place of rest: "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength," because there it was to have a fixed abode. And as the ark was there to find a place of rest, so the people also, who instead of tents, should now be placed in towns and cities.

(3.) But especially that which Moses desired to see in Canaan, was the fulfilling and accomplishment of the promises of God made to the patriarchs, in the faith and comfort whereof they lived and died. This privilege Joshua enjoyed, chap. 23:14. Not one thing hath Failed, all are come to pass. O what a lovely and desirable sight was this?

But in these latter days, we, for whom better things are provided, look for greater mercies than Moses and the people could expect in Canaan. For we, according to the promises, expect,

(1.) An abundant increase of the church, both extensively, in the number of converts; and intensively, in the power of religion. The best ministers every where complain with the prophet, that they labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought. They now and then, at best, hear but of a single soul wrought upon: but the time will come, when they shall not fish with angle-rods, but spread out their nets, and inclose multitudes, according to that glorious promise, Ezek. 47:10. And as to the intensive increase of the church in the spirit, and power of godliness, we expect to see a generation of more spiritual, active, and lively Christians to spring up, such as shall far excel those of this drowsy, lukewarm generation, according to that promise, Isa. 60:21. "Thy people also shall be all righteous."

(2.) Greater peace and quietness, from persecuting enemies, is yet to be expected. The poor church hath been afflicted, and tossed with tempests;

persecutors have broken in, ever and anon, upon it, and made havock of it; a tender conscience hath cast men upon great difficulties to preserve it; but the days are coming, when God will give his church rest, either by the conversion or restraint of all its enemies; The wolf shall lie down with the lamb. Antipathies shall be deposed, Isa. 11:6 not a pricking briar, or grieving thorn, that shall not be rooted up, Ezek. 28:24. Surely this is a sweet, and desirable mercy to the weary saints; and yet a far sweeter mercy than that is to be expected, viz.

(3.) The pouring out of the Spirit of unity on the people of God, to consolidate, and strengthen the poor dilacerated church. For the divisions of Reuben there have been great thoughts of heart; our divisions have darkened the lustre of religion, imbittered, and spoiled the communion of saints, prejudiced the world, and obstructed conversion. But God will melt the hearts of the saints into one, Jer. 32:39 they shall have one heart, and one way, and serve the Lord with one consent. Then shall religion shine in its native glory. One reason of our justlings one against another, hath been the darkness that hath been upon us all; but this darkness shall break up. For,

(4.) We expect a more spiritual, and excellent ministry than the church for many years hath enjoyed, Jer. 3:15. "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge, and understanding." It is a sore plague, and judgment upon the world, when men shall be set over the people, that are ignorant of regeneration, strangers and enemies to practical holiness, men that break their profane jests upon the very Spirit of prayer; but these unclean spirits shall pass out of the land, Zech. 13:2. O what a good riddance will this be! when God shall set up, in their room, laborious, faithful and godly ministers, full of experimental knowledge of Christ; watchmen that shall see eye to eye, as he speaks, Isa. 52:8. Then shall we see another most desirable and inestimable mercy performed to the church, beyond all it hath enjoyed since the primitive days; namely,

(5.) The purity of ordinances, and officers in the church, the whole worship, and œconomy of the church measured by the scripture-reed, according to Rev. 11:1, 2 and Ezek. 43:11 all reduced to the pure, primitive rule and standard, which will discover and correct the oblique and

corruptive super-additions of men; things under which men of tender consciences, and such as tremble at the word, in all ages have groaned. And then will the ordinances of God shine forth in their beauty, and be mighty in power and efficacy; especially when,

(6.) There shall be a more eminent presence of God among his people; for so it is promised, Ezek. 48. ult. And the name of the city (viz. the measured regulated church) from that day shall be, The Lord is there. This is the true glory of the church, this makes the new heavens, and the new earth, which according to his promise, we look for, and the great and marvellous things our eyes behold this day are the beginnings and introduction to it: Which brings us to the third general head, namely,

(3.) What influence these begun works of God have to strengthen and encourage our souls in prayer for these greater, and more perfect mercies: And this they do upon a three-fold account.

(1.) As these begun introductive works of mercy, are indications and signs that the time of mercy, even the set time, is come.

There is an appointed, or set time for the church's deliverance now, as well as for theirs out of Egypt; that was called "the time of the promise," Acts 7:17. Deliverance can neither come before it, nor will it linger when that time is fully come. Promises, like a pregnant woman, have their appointed months, Hab. 2:3 their set and appointed time, Psal. 102:13. Now, when we behold such things done, and doing in the world, as are at this day before our eyes; we may rationally conclude the time of mercy, even the set time is near; as our Saviour speaks, Mat. 14:32, 33. "Learn a parable of the fig-tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."

Now, it is a singular encouragement in prayer, when we know, or can but probably conjecture that the time is near for the accomplishment and performance of those very promised mercies we pray for; as we see in Dan. 9:2, 3 when Daniel understood, by searching and studying the sacred records, such prophecies as that, Jer. 25:11, 12 that the time fore-set was near at an end, then he set himself with extraordinary fervency to

prayer. And do not the generality of learned and good men agree, that the set time for Rome's destruction is now near, even at the door? It is near 1260 years since Christ turned up her glass, and you see this day all things working towards the accomplishment of the written word. This cannot but be a strong encouragement to seek God by prayer for the full accomplishment of what is so near us.

(2.) God hath ordered the deliverances and mercies of his church to be birthed out by the cries and prayers of his people. When, therefore, mercies are come to the birth, it is a special season, and singular encouragement to prayer. Ezek. 36:36, 37. "I the Lord plant that that was destroyed, I have spoken it, and I will do it: Thus saith the Lord God, Yet for this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." So again, in Jer. 29:11, 12. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil; to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me; and I will hearken unto you." In both these places, you see God will have prayer to assist the birth of mercy, and never is any mercy so sweet, as when prayer comes betwixt our dangers and deliverances, our wants and supplies. Hence it was that Hezekiah sent that seasonable message to the prophet Isaiah, 2 Kings 19:3. "Lift up a cry for the remnant that is left, for the children are come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth." If ever men will strive with God to purpose in prayer, it is when they perceive the greatest mercies are at the birth, and prayer is the midwife to bring it forth.

(3.) When God hath begun a work of mercy, it gives singular encouragement to prayer, because that time is the time of finding a proper and acceptable season; as it is Psal. 32:6. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found;" or in a time of finding. Courtiers, who have great requests to make to kings, do carefully observe their molissima fandi tempora, as they call them; their convenient seasons when they find the king most propense, and inclinable to acts of grace. That which is in motion, is the more easily moved. God is now in the way of mercy, his goodness is moving spontaneously towards us; and if ever prayer be like to speed and prevail, now is the time. And in the last place,

(4.) Manifold and weighty are the reasons and motives, that should fully engage the most fervent desires and prayers of all the saints, to see the full deliverance of Zion; and to pass over Jordan to behold that goodly mountain, and Lebanon, I mean those six glorious mercies and privileges before-mentioned.

First, The saints' love to Christ makes it above measure desireable to them; nothing is more dear and precious to a Christian, than the glory and interest of Christ, and answerable to the strength of their love, is the fervour of their desires. It is said, Psal. 102:16. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory."

Whilst the church groans under Antichrist, the glory of Jesus Christ is darkened and much eclipsed in the world. It hath been the chief part of the saints sufferings, to see his ordinances polluted, and the rights of heaven invaded by the usurpations of men; this is it that hath cost them more sorrow of heart, than their personal sufferings have done. But to see the accomplishment of that prophecy, Rev. 11:19 what will it be but as life from the dead? "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament," &c. As it was an exceeding joy to the godly in Israel, when good Josiah came to the crown, to see the temple opened, which had been neglected in the days of his predecessors, Manasseh and Ammon, in whose reigns the book of the law had lain in the rubbish, but now the worship of God was restored; so it cannot but ravish a gracious heart with singular delight and joy, to see the pure, primitive worship of God restored to its first purity and glory. And the more any man is sanctified, the more he is inflamed with desires after it, because, the glory of Christ is so much interested and concerned therein.

Secondly, Their love to the church, of which they are members, makes this greatly desirable. Moses was a man who excelled in love to the church, witness that transcendent rapture of his, Exod. 32:32 but though he be scarcely imitable therein, yet every real Christian doth, in his right frame, prefer Jerusalem to his chief joy, Psal. 137:5, 6 and, accordingly, their love to Zion is evidenced in their prayers for, and desires of its prosperity, Isa. 62:1. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as

brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." So again, Psal. 122:8. For my brethren, my "companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee." For when the church shall be delivered from the Antichristian yoke, and settled in peace and purity, great will its increase be, Her children shall say again in her ears, the place is too strait, give room that we may dwell. She will look forth as the morning and her glory be fresh in her.

Thirdly, The pity and compassion the saints have for the poor, miserable, perishing world, cannot but make this, a desirable thing in their eyes. For whilst the gospel is restrained in its full liberty, or the ordinances corrupted by the mixture of human inventions and traditions; it is not to be expected that the church should be much enlarged by an addition of converts.

The kingdom of our Lord Jesus is for the present confined within strait and narrow limits, and it is just matter of sorrow to consider how small a part of the habitable world is in subjection to him: So many millions bowing down to idols, the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty, Psal. 74:20. The sight of precious souls perishing for want of the word, made the bowels of the compassionate Redeemer to yearn within him, Matth. 9:36 and the same consideration and occasion cannot but affect and melt every soul in which is the Spirit of Christ: proportionably to the compassions men have for the miseries of the perishing world, will their desires be for the enlarging and perfecting of the gospel-privileges and mercies.

Fourthly, Love to ourselves will make us long for such a sight as this: for what is there in this world more pleasant to a Christian than to see Christ walking amidst the golden candlesticks? The peaceful and sweet enjoyment of God in his pure ordinances, Psal. 27:4. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." This was David's *hoc unicum*, one thing above all other things in this world in his eye, and so it is to all that see things with such an eye as David had; and next to that is the sweet and comfortable communion of saints with one heart and mouth glorifying God, and serving him with one consent. These are the things which make it worth

while to live on earth; the pleasure of life doth consist in them. Now all these desirable things cannot be enjoyed in any eminent degree on this side Jordan, I mean till the great promises now near their birth be accomplished.

Use I

The point before us frowns upon, and severely reprehends two sorts of persons, viz.

1. Wicked.

2. The godly.

(1.) It administers just reprehension to wicked men, who instead of thankful acknowledgments of the beginnings of mercies, and improving them in prayer for the obtaining of greater, do inwardly repine and fret at the work of mercy begun, and are afraid of nothing more than a full and complete reformation. Are there not such wretched creatures to be found this day in England, that would be better pleased to be at their old persecuting work again, and see good men destroyed, than to enjoy a due liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences, after they have seriously studied and prayed for reformation? Some there are who call themselves Protestants, but (blush O heavens at this, and be astonished) they have not been ashamed to say, rather popery than presbytery: And Haman-like, take no comfort in their own liberty, because those they hate enjoy theirs.

Thus it was with the ungodly murmurers in Israel, when God had brought them out of Egypt with signs and wonders, and a mighty hand; yet, their lusts being crossed, they would needs make them a captain, and return back to Egypt, Num. 14:4. What madness was here? Could they think God would divide the red-sea for them in their return to Egypt as he did at their departure thence? Or that they should find such welcome in Egypt, which they had deserted, disobliged, and brought so much ruin upon? What stupendous madness was here!

(2.) It justly rebukes the dead-heartedness and ingratitude of good men,

among many of whom is neither found that fervency of prayer, nor sense of present mercies which God expects, and the present dispensations of his providences call for.

How inexcusable at this time is a flat, discouraged, and dull spirit in prayer? To be found under such a temper as this, when the morning of so glorious a day is sprung up, and opened upon us, and such encouragements to enliven faith and hope are before our eyes, this is sad. The saints that are gone to heaven under the late and former troubles, were mighty wrestlers with God in prayer: They fasted and wept; they pleaded our cause heartily with God; wept and made supplication for the mercies now enjoy, though it was not their lot to see them: And shall we that are entered into the fruits and mercies they prayed for, and are under such signal encouragements, be now remiss and cold?

Or shall we ungratefully overlook the beginning of mercy as small and inconsiderable things? Shall we say, all this is nothing, because we have not yet all that we would have? God forbid! When Israel was in Egypt, then a little straw would have been esteemed as a great mercy; but afterwards quails and manna were despised and slighted. Brethren, three or four years ago, you would have accounted it a special mercy to have enjoyed an hour or two together in prayer, or to have had a little spiritual bread handed to you behind your enemies backs: and is it nothing in your eyes this day to behold the worship of God at liberty? Yea, to see the success of the gospel in the bringing home of many souls to Christ, the fears of Popery vanished, the witnesses risen, the tenth part of the city fallen, and such a prospect of far greater and more glorious things before your eyes? O let not the consolations of the Almighty seem small!

If wicked men envy and grudge at our mercies, and we ourselves undervalue and slight them, then is there a grievous provocation given to the Lord to turn his hand, and bring all our former miseries back again upon us.

Use II

Hath God brought us by a mighty hand out of spiritual Egypt by the reformation, and hath now led us so many years through the wilderness

until he hath brought us at last almost in sight of the good things he hath promised? Then let us be exhorted to the duties, and warned of the dangers of our present state.

(1.) Take heed of provoking God in the way: Moses did so, and for that was shut out of the good land, Numb. 20:12 his heedlessness of the command deprived him of the good of the promise. Unbelief, murmuring, and idolatry shut out many thousands of them that came out of Egypt, and for those sins their carcasses fell in the wilderness, 1 Cor. 10:6, 7, 8, 9, 10. And these are our examples, not for imitation, but caution. When seamen sail along the coast where abundance of wreck is floating, they sail the more warily. You are not yet so secure and safe, but that you may quickly fall into as great dangers and miseries as ever, if you provoke the Lord in the way of mercies. In the miscarriage of others we may get experience at a cheap rate. After great deliverances, the greatest judgments are to be feared if God be provoked by the abuse of them. So Joshua tells them, Josh. 24:20. "He will turn again and do you hurt after he hath done you good;" for one mercy can never be pleaded as an argument to obtain another, if it be abused and trampled under feet. So Josh. 23:15 and Jude 12.

(2.) Be not discouraged if you should meet with some difficulties, even on the borders of the land of promise. After all their wilderness straits, deliverance at the red-sea, and encounters with the neighbouring kings, there was a swelling Jordan at last betwixt them and the place of rest and mercy; and so it may fall out with us: But let not our faith be staggered; for look, as the ark of the covenant stood in the midst of Jordan, to secure the tribes in their passage through it, Josh. 3:8 so doth the promise stand this day in the midst of mystical Jordan; I mean the dangers and troubles of the church, to secure its passage through them all. Brethren, follow ye the Lord in the way of duty, and you shall assuredly find that Jordan shall divide when you come to it; and that all troubles, all fears, all difficulties do owe you a safe passage through them: The covenant, yea, Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, stands in the midst of them all to secure you.

(3.) Bless God for casting the lot of your nativity upon such a happy and extraordinary period of time as this is. Many saints have desired to see the days you are likely to see in a little time, and have not seen them. The

whole space of time, from the first to the second coming of Christ, is by the prophets called one day, Zech. 14:7 and the greatest part of this long day very doubtful and changeable; neither light, nor dark, nor day, nor night; peace and trouble, truth and error taking all along their alternate courses. But at evening-time it shall be light. And as the greatest darkness is a little before the dawning of the morning, so here the blackest and gloomiest part of the whole day is to be expected before this lightsome glorious evening: such tribulation, immediately before the fall and ruin of Antichrist, as ages past never saw. Lactantius speaking of this very time, says, 'That a little before it, the state of human affairs must necessarily be changed, and all things grow worse and worse; so that these times of ours (saith he) in which iniquity is grown, as one would think, to the height, yet in comparison with those days, may even be called golden times: The godly shall be every where distressed by the wicked, they shall flourish, and the righteous be in contempt: All right and law shall perish and be confounded; no man shall possess any thing but what is ill gotten, or valiantly defended; there shall be no faithfulness in men; no peace, humanity, shame, or truth left: Wars shall rage every where; all nations shall be in arms; neighbouring cities shall make war upon each other; then shall slaughters be in all the world, mowing down all like an harvest; of which confusions and destruction this shall be the cause: I tremble to speak it, (but it must be spoken, for it shall surely come to pass) that the Roman name, by which the world is now ruled, shall be taken away from the earth.

These things, in themselves, are exceeding dreadful, and yet I say, let the saints rejoice in that God hath cast their lot upon these times. For,

1. These are the last troubles the church is like to feel from the hands of that enemy; and there is much comfort in that. God never exercised so great patience and long-suffering towards any enemy of his church as he hath towards this. But the day is come to avenge the blood of the saints upon Babylon, and destructions are come, even come to a perpetual end.
2. The Lord will take care of his people in all these calamities and national confusions: They shall be reserved as a seed to continue and enlarge the church, which is to be the subject of all the promised liberty and glory.

(4.) Labour to get suitable frames of spirit to those good times you expect. Carnal hearts will not suit them, or find any pleasure in them. We look, according to the promise, for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness; and seeing we look for such things, O what manner of persons ought we to be! 2 Pet. 3:11. You that are parents, how are you concerned not only for yourselves, but for the religious education of your children: If you live not to see those good days, in all probability they will; the hopes of the next generation depends much upon your religious and zealous care and diligence. Never were children born in a more happy and encouraging time than yours is.

And for you young ones, I would leave one word of counsel this day. Get principles of grace implanted in your hearts betime: For the days are coming in which the world will be no place of pleasure for profane and carnal persons. As serious piety has been hissed at, and ridiculed in these late debauched times, so will profaneness in future times. "Holiness to the Lord shall be upon the bells of the horses," Zech. 14:20 that is, husbandmen shall have their hearts in heaven, whilst their hands are on the plow. Merchants and seamen shall drive a trade for heaven as well as earth. Isa. 23:18, Isa. 55:5. If you be profane and ungodly you shall at once be the contempt of heaven and earth.

(5.) Lastly, Bless God for those instruments by which you are brought out of spiritual Egypt to the borders of Canaan.

You must not ascribe more to instruments than is due to them, nor lean and depend too much on them. Many benumb their own arms by leaning on them. But on the other side, beware of ingratitude to the instruments by which God works out your deliverances, and conveys to you such excellent mercies. Some know no other way of expressing their joy, but by drunken healths and huzzas, a sacrifice suitable enough to Bacchus, but such as God abhors, and his vicegerent will not thank you for. There are other ways of expressing your joy in the mercy which will be highly acceptable both to God and the king; viz.

(1.) Pray for your rulers, that God would make kings to be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to the church, according to that

promise, Isa. 49:23. That he would preserve and secure the heart of the king by his wisdom and fear, from those dangerous temptations and snares that surround the throne: "That he may be just, ruling in the fear of God, and so be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain," 2 Sam. 23:3, 4. That the zeal of God may inflame his soul, and that he may be a second Hezekiah in restoring and reforming the worship of God: That God would lengthen the days of his life upon the throne for the peace and prosperity of his church. In this you will answer the great things God hath done for you and his church at this time.

(2.) Be loyal, peaceable, and obedient subjects. Convince the world that religion breeds the best subjects: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," Mark 12:17. Where you enjoy protection, you owe allegiance. Be not murmurers, as the ungrateful Israelites were, 1 Cor. 10:10. Understand and value the mercies you enjoy under the government, and bless God for them; lest he teach you by sad experience the difference betwixt his service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries, as he did them, 2 Chron. 12:8. Beware you exchange not the golden yoke of Christ for the iron yoke of Antichrist.

(3.) Take heed to order your conversation aright; let not your irreligious lives make the solemn religious duties of this day to blush, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God," Psal. 1. ult. And thus your present mercies, how great and glorious soever they be in themselves, shall be but as the dawning light of a much more glorious day springing up upon these nations, and all the churches of Christ, after so long and gloomy a night of afflictions and sorrows; which the Father of mercies grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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