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THE
RETURN

OF

P R A Y E R S :

BY
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I will watch to see what he will say to me.—*Hab. ii. 4.*

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THE
RETURN OF PRAYERS.

I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly.—PSALM LXXXV. 8.

THE CONNEXION OF 'THE WORDS'

THIS psalm was penned, in the name and for the comfort of the whole church of the Jews, both as a prophecy of and a prayer for their return from the Babylonish captivity, and the flowing in again of that ancient glory, peace, administration of justice, liberty of God's ordinances, plenty, and increase, which formerly they enjoyed, but had now suffered an ebb of seventy years' continuance. And first, he begins with prayer, from the first verse to this we have in hand,

putting the Lord in mind of and urging him with his gracious dealings in former times unto his church: this is not the first time (says he) that the church has been in captivity, and that thou hast restored it (as out of Egypt, &c.) and therefore we hope that thou wilt do so again: "Thou hast been favourable unto thy land." &c. His prayer being finished, and he having spoken, he now stands and listens, as you do when you expect an echo, what echo he should have, what answer would be returned from heaven, whither his prayer had already come; "I will hear what the Lord will speak;" or, as some read it. "I hear what the Lord doth speak;" for sometimes there is a present echo, a speedy answer returned to a man's heart, even before the prayer is half finished, as unto Daniel, Dan. ix. 20, 21. And, in brief, it is this, "The Lord will speak peace unto his people;" this answer he finds written at the bottom of the petition, but with this clause of admonition for

time to come, added, "but let them not return again to folly;" a good use to be made of so gracious an answer.

CHAPTER I.

God's people are diligently to observe the answers to their prayers: the reasons of it.

THESE words being especially spoken in relation to the answer of God returned to the Psalmist's prayer, therefore in that relation I mean principally to handle them.

The observation is this: that when a man has put up prayers to God, he is to rest assured, that God will in mercy answer his prayers; and to listen diligently, and observe how his prayers are answered. "I will hear what God will speak," that is, how he will accomplish them; and withal, he confidently expresses an assurance, that "God will speak peace." Thus does the church, "I will look to the Lord, I will

wait; my God will hear me." Mich. vii. 7, 8. She was sure of gracious audience with him, "my God will hear me;" and she will wait till he answers her, and observe how he does it, "I will look to the Lord;" and verse 9, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, till he plead my cause." So Habakkuk, having made a prayer against the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar, in the first chapter, having ended it, he begins the second chapter thus, "I will stand upon my watch-tower, and see what he will answer me;" and in the end an answer comes, verse 2. And as he thus waited for a vision (for sometimes their prophecies were in answer to their prayers), so should we for an answer to ours.

I. Because otherwise you take an ordinance of God in your hearts, which is to take God's name (with whom in that ordinance you deal) in vain; for it is a sign you think your prayer not an effectual means to attain the end it is ordained for; and say

secretly in your hearts, as they, "What profit have we, if we pray to him?" Job, xxi. 15. For if we use any means, and expect not the end, it is a sign we think the means not adapted to accomplish that end; whereas, every faithful prayer is ordained of God to be a means to obtain what we desire and pray for, and is not put up in vain, but shall have answer: "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us," 1 John, v. 14, 15. It is true, God heareth an enemy; but to hear with favour, is the hearing there meant, and is so used in our ordinary speech; as we say of a favourite, that he has the king's ear; and if a man be obstinate to a man's counsel, we say, he would not hear, though he give the hearing; so here, to hear, is a word of gracious inclination to do the things required; and thus God's ears are said to be open to their prayers; and so it follows there, that "If he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we

know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." As soon as we have prayed, we are said to have our petitions; that is, they are then granted, and we may be confident that they are assented unto by God, although, in regard of outward dispensation, the command for accomplishment is not yet come forth; even as a petitioner is said to have his suit, when the word of the king is gone forth that it shall be done, though it passes not the seal, or be not signed until a good while after. And like as when a wicked man sins, as soon as the act is committed, so soon sentence from God goes forth against the sinner, but the execution overtakes him not (it may be) until a good while after, according to Solomon, "Sentence against an evil doer is not presently executed," Eccl. vii. 11. It is presently sentenced, as the words imply, but not executed: so, in like manner, it falls out, when a godly man prays, that as soon as the prayer arrives in heaven, which

is in an instant, so soon is the petition granted (so Daniel, ix. "At the beginning of his prayer, the command came forth," verse 23; though the angel who brought the answer arrived not till towards the end in the evening, verse 21), but the real accomplishment of it may be deferred. So no prayer, in respect of an answer to it, is in vain; but where God has given a heart to speak, he has an ear to hear, and love to return an answer; which not to regard, is to take an ordinance in vain, which is God's name.

II. Not simply God's name, as in an ordinance made known, but also his name, that is, his attributes, are taken in vain; for it is a sign, you think of that God you pray to, that either his ear is heavy, that he cannot hear; or his hand shortened, that he cannot save; or his heart straitened, and his bowels restrained, that he will not. And thus you rob him, and despoil him of one of his most royal titles, whereby he styles

himself "a God that heareth prayers," Psalm lxxv. 2; who is so regardful of them that, in the 1 Kings, viii. 59, they are said to be "nigh the Lord day and night;" they are all before him, and he sets them in his view as we do letters of friends, which we place in some conspicuous place, that we may remember to answer them, or lay them not out of our bosoms, that we may be sure not to forget them. So the petitions of his people pass not out of his sight till he sends an answer, which is called "speaking" as in the text; God speaking as well in his works as in his word. But you, by your neglect herein, make an idol god of him, such as were the vanities of the heathen; as if he had "ears and heard not, eyes and saw not" your need. Such a god as Elijah mocked, "You must speak aloud (says he), he may be in a journey," &c. Even such a god do you make the God of heaven and earth to be, whilst you put no more confidence in him, or make no more reckoning

of your prayers to him, than the heathen did of their sacrifices to their gods. Petitioners do not only put up their request, but use to wait at great men's doors, and inquire, and listen what answer is given unto them, and it is part of an honour to great men that we do so: and for the same end are we also to wait on God, as an acknowledgment of his greatness, and our distance from him, and dependence upon him; "As the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, so do we (says David) on thee, till thou hast mercy on us," Psalm cxxiii. 2. And Psalm cxxx. after he had prayed, verse 2, he saith he "waited more than they that watch for the morning;" like those that, having some great business to do on the morrow, long for the daylight, and look often out to spy the day, so he for a glimmering and dawning of an answer. The same we have Psalm v. 3, "In the morning will I direct my prayer to thee, and look," that is, for an answer.

III. If God gives you an answer, if you mind it not, you let God speak to you in vain, when you do not listen to what he answers. If two men, walk together, and the one, when he has spoken what he would, is regardless of what the other answers, he exceedingly slights the man. Now our speaking to God by prayers, and his speaking to us by answers thereunto, and to study his dealings with us, by comparing our prayers and his answers together, which are as dialogues between us and him, is one great part of our walking with God. It is said of Samuel's prophecy, "that not a word of it fell to the ground," 1 Sam. iii. 19; and so it may be said of our prayers; and so it ought to be of God's answers; not a word of them should fall to the ground: as there does if you by your observation and listening thereunto, apprehend and observe them not; and by the same reason that you are to observe the fulfilling of God's promises, you are of your

prayers also. Now, 1 Kings, viii. 56, it is said, "there hath not failed one word of all his good promise." Solomon had observed this by a particular survey, and register made, of all that God had spoken and done for them, and found not a promise unperformed; and there is the like reason both of answers to prayers (for prayers are but putting promises into suit,) and for our observing of them. And therefore Solomon brings those words in there, to this very purpose: to confirm their faith in this, that no prayers made would fail, being grounded on a promise, thereby to encourage others, and his own heart, to diligence herein, as also as a motive unto God to hear him; for, verse 59, he infers upon it, "Let my words be nigh thee," seeing thou always thus performest thy good word unto thy people.

IV. Yea, you will provoke the Lord not to answer at all; he will forbear to answer, because he sees it will be thus in vain. When a man is talking to one that listens

not to him, he will cease to answer, and leave off speaking, and so will God. So as the Apostle says of faith, Heb. x. 36, that it is not enough to believe, but when you have done the will of God, you have need of patience, to eke out faith, "that you may inherit the promises," may be also said, and is alike true of praying; it is not enough to pray, but after you have prayed, you have need to listen for an answer, that you may receive your prayers; God will not fulfil them else. As one said, the sermon was not done, when the preacher had done, because it is not done till practised; so our prayers are not done when made, but you must further wait for and attend the accomplishment.

V. If you observe not his answers, how shall you bless God, and return thanks to him for hearing your prayers? "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplication," Psalm cxvi. 1, 2, and therefore he goes on to thank him through-

out the whole Psalm. You "are to watch unto prayer, with thanksgiving," Col. iv. 2; and therefore, to watch, to observe, and recollect your own wants, which you are to pray for, that you may have matter of requests to put up, so also to observe God's answer for matter of thanksgiving; and many fill that common-place head full of matter, to furnish them for petitioning, but as for this other of thanksgiving, they watch not unto it when they come to pray, nor study matter for that head also; and if any study will furnish you this way, it is the studying of God's answers to your prayers. The reason you pray so much, and give thanks so little, is that you mind not God's answers; you do not study them. When we have put up a faithful prayer, God is made our debtor by promise, and we are to take notice of his payment, and give him an acknowledgment of the receipt of it; he otherwise loses his glory.

VI. As God loses, so you also lose the ex-

perience you might get hereby. 1. Both experience of God, and his faithfulness, which will cause in you hope and confidence in God another time, when you have found him again and again answering your prayers. It was a speech of one eminent in holiness, upon occasion of the accomplishment of a great request made to God by him, that God had never denied him any request, "I have tried God often, now henceforth I will trust him." If the hearing the prayers of another will encourage us to go to God, as Psalm xxxiii. 5, "For this cause shall every one that is godly pray unto thee," much more when we observe, and have experience that our own are heard; therefore, says David, Psalm cxvi. 1, 2, "The Lord hath heard me," and "I will call upon him as long as I live; as if he had said, Now that God has heard me, I know what to do; this experiment, if I had no more, is enough to encourage me for ever to pray unto God; I have learned by it to call upon him as

long as I live. And also, 2. By observing God's answers to your prayers, you will gain much insight into your own hearts, and ways, and prayers; and may thereby learn how to judge of them. David's assurance that he did not regard iniquity in his heart, was strengthened by God's having heard his prayers; for thus he reasons, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me; but God hath heard me." Psalm lxvi. 18, 19. For, if God does not grant your petitions, it will put you to study a reason of that his dealing; and so you will come to search into your prayers, and the frame of your hearts therein, to see whether you did not pray amiss; "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss," James, iv. 3. As if you send to a friend, who is punctual in that point of friendship of returning answers, and uses not to fail, and you receive no answer from him, you will begin to think there is something in it; and so also here, when a petition is denied, you will be jealous of

yourselves and inquisitive what should be the matter; and so by that search, come to see that in your prayers, which you will learn to mend the next time. Or, if they be answered, yet, because that therein usually God deals in a proportion with you to prayers (as you might perceive, if you would observe his dealings with you,) you would by this means come to have much insight into God's acceptation and opinion of your ways. For you should see his dealings with you, and yours with him, to be parallel and correspondent, and in proportion to each other. So Psalm xviii. 6, "In my distress I called upon the Lord," and so verses 7, 8, he goes on to describe his deliverance, which was the fruit of those prayers; and then, at ver. 20, 21, he adds his observation upon both, "according to the cleanness of my hands hath he dealt with me." "For with the pure thou shalt show thyself pure."

VII. You will lose much of your comfort;

there is no greater joy than to see prayers answered, or to see souls converted by us; "Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." John, xvi. 24. The receiving answers makes joy to abound and overflow; yea, even when we pray for others, if our prayers be answered for them, our joys are exceedingly great, much more when in our own behalf; and therein, even in the smallest things which a Christian enjoys, does his comfort exceed another's, that he has them by virtue of prayers and promises; he knows how he came by them; "If stolen waters be sweet, and bread eaten in secret," Prov. ix. 17, to wicked men; begged meat is much more sweet to godly men; yea, in the very praying for outward mercies there is more sweetness than they have in enjoying them. As it is joy to a good heart to see any one converted, but much more to him that is the means of it, "I have no greater joy (says St. John,) than that my children walk in truth;" so to see God do

good to his church, and hear others' prayer is a comfort; but much more to see him do it at a man's own prayers. Therefore, when God restores comfort to a drooping soul, he is said, Isa. lvii, to "restore comfort to his mourners;" that is, to those that prayed and mourned for him, as well as unto that soul itself, it being a comfort to them to see their prayers answered. Comfort it is many ways: 1. To hear from God, as to hear from a friend, though it be but two or three words, and that about a small matter, if there be at the bottom this subscription, "Your loving father," or, "Your assured friend," it satisfies abundantly. So also, 2. To know that God is mindful of us, accepts our works, fulfils his promises. 3. How it rejoices one to find another of his mind, in a controversy? but that God and we should be of one mind, and concur in the desire of the same things, this rejoices the heart exceedingly. And thus it is when a man perceives his prayer answered. Therefore

you lose much of your comfort in blessings, when you do not observe answers to your prayers.



CHAPTER II.

Concerning Prayers for the Church.

Now, as for rules and helps to find out God's meaning towards you in your prayers, and to spy out answers; and how to know when God does any thing in answer to your prayers, this is the next thing to be handled: wherein, first, I will answer some cases and queries, which may fall out in several sorts of prayers, about the answering of them.

1. Concerning prayers put up for the church, for the accomplishment of such things as fall out in all ages to come.

2. Concerning prayers made for friends, kindred, &c.

3. Concerning prayers, whether for your-

selves or others, wherein others join with you.

1. For the first. There may be some prayers which you must be content never to see answered in this world, as the accomplishment of them may not fall out in your time: such as those you make for the calling of the Jews, the utter downfall of God's enemies, the flourishing of the gospel, the full purity and liberty of God's ordinances, the particular flourishing and good of the society and place you live in: all you whose hearts are right, do treasure up many such prayers as these, and sow much of such precious seed, which you must be content to have the Church (it may be) in after ages to reap. All which prayers are not yet lost, but will have answers: for as God is an eternal God, and "Christ's rightcousness an everlasting righteousness," and therefore of eternal efficacy, Dan. ix. 24, "being offered up by the eternal Spirit," Heb. ix. 14, so are prayers also, which are the work of the

eternal Spirit of Christ, made to that God in his name, and in him are eternally accepted, and of eternal force, and therefore may take place in after ages. So the prayer that Stephen made for his persecutors, took place in Saul when Stephen was dead. So David's prayer against Judas, Psalm cix. 8, 9, took effect above a thousand years after, as appears, Acts, i. 20. So the prayers of the church for three hundred years, in the primitive times, that kings might "come to the knowledge of the truth, and they lead peaceable and quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty," (which St. Paul, in Nero's time, exhorted unto, 1 Tim. ii. 2,) were not answered and accomplished till Constantine's time, Rev. xii. 11, when the church brought forth a man child. So Isa. lviii. after he had exhorted to and given directions for fasting and prayer in a right manner, he adds this promise: "Thou shalt raise up the foundation of many generations; thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach," name-

ly, for this, because his fasting and prayers might have influence into many ages yet to come, in the accomplishment of what was prayed for. And that which Christ says of the apostles reaping the fruit of John the Baptist's ministry, and the seed he had sown, is in like manner herein verified; "one soweth and another reapeth." John, iv. 37. And in this sense that which the Papists say is true, that there is a common treasury of the church, not of their merits, but of their prayers. There are bottles of tears filling, vials filling to be poured out for the destruction of God's enemies: what a collection of prayers has there been these many ages towards it? And that may be one reason why God will do such great things towards the end of the world, even because there has been so great a stock of prayers going for so many ages, which is now to be returned; and herein it falls out to us in our prayers as in their prophecies to the prophets of old; "The Spirit in them did signify the

suffering of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did minister the things that are now revealed :” 1 Pet. i. 11, and thus is it in the spirit of prayer, which is instead of the Spirit of prophecy : for we pray through the guidance of the Spirit who teacheth us what to ask, for many things that come to pass in after ages.

2. Only at present, it may be, in prayer thou hast revealed unto thee, by a secret impression made on thy spirit, that these things shall come to pass, and so hast thy faith confirmed in them, and withal an evidence, that even for thy prayers, among others, God will perform them ; and that the contribution of thy prayers helps to make up the sum ; and upon such prayers God usually, for the present, also testifies the acceptance of a man’s person, and reveals himself to him that he is his, as he did to Moses : he never revealed his love to Moses more than when he prayed most for God’s people.

And haply thou hast that, as one of thy best evidences of the uprightness of thy heart, that thou canst pray for the church's good, though for a long time to come, which thou mayest never behold with thine eyes, even as David also did, and rejoiced in it.

3. And when they are accomplished, and thou in heaven, thy joy will surely be the more full for these thy prayers; as at the conversion of those thou hast prayed for, so at the ruin of the church's enemies, whom thou didst pray against: for if there be "joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner" (as at the birth of a new prince and heir of heaven,) then in proportion he shall rejoice most whose prayers had most hand in it, and a special interest therein. And as thy other works, so thy prayers follow thee, and the fruit of them, as Jeremiah speaks, xvii. 10; and at the day of judgment thou shalt rejoice, as well as those that enjoyed the fruit of thy prayers in their times, thou having sown the seed of their happiness;

“both he that sows and he that reaps shall then rejoice together,” as Christ says, John, iv. 36.

CHAPTER III.

Concerning Prayers made for others.

THE second case is, concerning answers to our prayers for others, for particular men, as friends and kindred, &c. and likewise for temporal blessings.

Pray for others, you know, we must: so the elders of the church for those that are sick, James, v. 15, 16; “Pray one for another,” says St. James; as in case a man is troubled with a lust, tell some private friend of it, “Confess your sins one to another;” that when a man’s own prayers are not strong enough to cast it out, it may be done by the help of another’s prayers joined with his. So it follows, “that ye may be healed.”

For in that sense I understand healing, in ver. 16. So also, 1 John, v. 16. "If a man see his brother sin a sin, which is not unto death," that is, not against the Holy Ghost, "he shall ask life for him, and God shall give him life, that sins not unto death."

Concerning this case I give these considerations, how such prayers are answered.

1. Such prayers God often hears; why else are any such promises made, as that they shall be healed in their bodies, James, v. 15; healed of their lusts, verse 16; converted to life, 1 John, v. 16? God has made these to encourage us to pray, and to testify his abundant love to us; that it so overflows, that he will hear us, not only for ourselves, but for others also; which is a sign that we are in extraordinary favour. So God intimates concerning Abraham, to Abimelech, Gen. xx. 7, "He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live:" and as he was a prophet, so we are priests; as for ourselves, so also for others, to God our

Father: and it is a prerogative we have through the fellowship we have, of Christ's priestly office, "who hath made us kings and priests," Rev. i. 6, to prevail and intercede for others; and a special token and pledge of extraordinary love. For if God hears a man's prayers for others, much more for himself in his own behalf. So when Christ healed the man sick of the palsy, it was, as it is said, for the faith of the standers by. "He, seeing their faith, said, Thy sins are forgiven thee;" Matt. ix. 2; the meaning is, not as if for the sake of their faith he forgave that man his sins; for, "The just doth live by his (own) faith:" but to encourage them who, out of faith, brought that sick man to him; and us in like manner to bring others, by prayer before him: he therefore then took occasion to declare and pronounce forgiveness to that poor man; he therefore then said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

2. Prayers for others may often not ob-

tain the particular thing prayed for. So Samuel's prayer for Saul, 1 Sam. xv. 11, 35. So David for his enemies, Psalm xxxv. 13.

For it is in this as it is in the use of other means and ordinances for the good of others; God making such kind of promises to our prayers as he has to our endeavours to convert, when we preach to men: as we preach to many, and yet but few believe; for, "Who hath believed our report?" even as many as are "ordained to eternal life;" we become all things to all men, and win but some. So we pray for many, not knowing who are ordained to eternal life, which while we know not, we are yet to pray for them, 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4. Only where God hath set his ordinance of preaching, it is more than probable he has some to convert, and usually the word takes effect among some, though often but a few: so when he has stirred up our hearts to pray for others, it is a sign God will hear us for some of those we pray for. For God requires it as a duty

on our parts, because it is an outward means ordained by God, to bring things to pass; but yet not as such a certain and infallible means, as he has tied himself to, to bring the thing to pass on his part.

And though, indeed, his promise to hear and accept the prayer is general and universal; yet the promise to hear it, by granting the very thing itself prayed for, is but an indefinite promise; such as he makes to other means of doing men good, as to our admonitions and reproofs, and to our preaching. He makes such promises, because sometimes he hears and converts by them. For instance, that promise (James, v. 15) of healing the sick, cannot be universal; for it might then be supposed as a truth implied in it, that sick men might never die, whereas "it is appointed for all men once to die;" as it may be supposed, that the elders may, at all such times of danger of death, still come and pray with them; but the meaning is, that it is an ordinance to which God has

made a gracious promise because he often restores the sick at their prayers; and therefore, upon every such particular occasion, we are to rely upon God for the performance of it, by an act of recumbency; though we cannot with an act of full assurance that we shall obtain it, the promise not being universal, but indefinite.

Of a like nature are all other promises of things temporal and outward; as when God promises to give long life to them that honour their parents, riches and honours to them that fear him. The purport of which promises is not as if absolutely, infallibly, and universally God does always perform these to those that are yet truly qualified with the conditions specified in those promises; the contrary, both Scripture instances and common experience show. They are therefore indefinitely meant, and so to be understood by us; because whenever God dispenses any such mercies to any of his, he would do it by promise; all his ways, to his

own, being truth, that is, the fulfilling of some truth promised; also God having purposed in his outward dispensation of things here in this world, to bestow riches and honours upon some that fear him, though not upon all, for how then should "all things fall alike to all?" Eccles. ix. 2. Poverty and contempt upon them that fear God, even as well as those that fear him not. He has therefore indefinitely expressed his gracious dispensation herein: requiring answerably an act of faith suitable to his meaning in the promise; that as he intended not in such promises an absolute, infallible, universal obligation of himself to the performance of them to all that fear him; so the act of faith which a man is to put forth toward this promise, in the application of it for himself in particular, is not required to be an absolute infallible persuasion and assurance that God will bestow these outward things upon him, having these qualifications in him; but only an indefinite act (as I may so call it)

of recumbency and submission; casting and adventuring ourselves upon him for the performance of it to us, not knowing but he may in his outward dispensations make it good to us, yet with submission to his good pleasure, if he dispose it otherwise.

It is true, indeed, that that act of general assent, which faith is to give to this promise in the general abstract truth of it, is to be an assured certain persuasion and belief that God hath made this promise, and that he certainly will and does perform it unto some, according to his purpose expressed therein; which act of general assent is that believing without wavering, namely of the truth of the promise in general, which St. James calls for in prayer, James i. 6. But yet that special act of application (as divines call it) required in this faith, whereby I am to rest upon it for my own benefit, is not required to be such an undoubted persuasion, as to think that I shall certainly have this particular promise in kind fulfilled to me; for

the truth, purpose, and intent of the promise are not universal, but indefinite. So as it is but an "it may be" (as God elsewhere expresses such promises, as Zeph. ii. 3,) that it shall be performed to me: and yet because it may be God will perform it unto me, therefore my duty is to cast myself upon God, and ask him for it, with submission to his good pleasure for the performance of it to me. So that, so far as the truth and intent of it are revealed to be infallible and certain, so far a man is bound to have an answerable act of faith, of certain and infallible persuasion towards it, as to believe without wavering that God hath made such a promise, and will perform it according to his intent in making it, which is unto some: but yet withal because the tenour of it is but indefinite, and in that respect, whether it shall be performed to me or no, is not therein certainly revealed, therefore God requires not of me in the application of such a promise an absolute full persuasion that he will

perform it to me in such or such a manner, but only an act of dependence and adherence with referring it to his wise and righteous good pleasure towards me.

And yet again, if God should at any time give a man such a special faith concerning any such particular temporal blessing for himself or others, then he is bound to believe it thus in particular: as when he gave power to any to work, (as he did to his apostles, a commission to work miracles,) then they were bound to believe that such and such a miracle should infallibly be wrought by them, as that the devils should be cast out by them. And, therefore, in this case, Christ rebukes his disciples, for not believing thus upon such particular occasions, Matt. xvii. 20. And then it is also true, that if God give such a faith, he will infallibly perform it; and thus those words are to be understood, Matt. xxvii. 22. "Whatsoever ye ask in faith, believing, ye shall receive." He speaks it of the faith of

miracles; for, at ver. 21, he had said, "If ye believe and doubt not, ye shall say to this mountain, remove into the sea, and it shall be removed:" so that when God works such a faith, and we are called to it, we are bound to believe with a certain persuasion that such a thing will be done, and it shall be done; but unto such a kind of special faith in temporal promises for ourselves or others, God doth not now always call us. If, indeed, at any time we did believe and doubted not, by reason of a special faith wrought by God, that God would remove a mountain into the sea, or bestow any outward mercies, it should be done; for he that stirred up such a faith would accomplish the thing: but it is not that which God requires of believers, that they should without doubting thus believe concerning outward things, the promises thereof being not universal, but indefinite; and therefore, answerably, a man is not absolutely bound to believe that God will certainly bestow such a temporal bless-

ing on him: no, not though he should have the qualification which the promise is made to, the promise being not made universal, to all so qualified, but indefinite, to some of such so qualified. The case is the same of believing promises made to our praying for others, which is the thing in hand.

3. Where the prayers are thus made out of conscience of our duty for such, to whom God does not intend mercy, then they are returned again into our own bosoms to our advantage; even as Paul says "that his rejoicing that others preached," though they lost their labour, should "turn to his salvation," Phil. i. 20. So prayers for others, though to the parties we prayed for, they prove in vain, yet they turn to our good. So, in Psalm xxxv. 12, 13, when his enemies were sick, David prayed and humbled himself, and "my prayer" (says he) "returned into mine own bosom." David did, by this his prayer in secret for his enemies, testify the sincerity of his heart to God, and his

true forgiveness of them, (for it is the usual disposition of God's children to pray for them that are their greatest enemies;) and this prayer, though it did not profit them, yet it turned to David's own good; it came home again to him, with blessings to himself, God delighting in and rewarding such a disposition in his child, as much as any other; because therein we resemble Christ as truly, and show that God is our Father, and ourselves to have his bowels in us. God stirs up this praying disposition in his children for their enemies, not always that he means to hear them for them, but because he means to draw forth, and so have an occasion to reward those holy dispositions which are the noblest parts of his image in them, and wherewith he is so much delighted; and so their prayers return into their own bosoms, and it is taken as if they had prayed for themselves all that while. Thus, in like manner, when Moses prayed so earnestly for the people of Israel, God offered to

return his prayer into his own bosom, and do as much for him alone as he had desired that God would do for them. "I will make of thee a great nation," Exodus xxxii. 13, (says God to him,) for whom I will do as much for thy sake, as thou hast prayed I should do for these. As in preaching the gospel, Christ told the disciples, that if in any house they came to preach peace, there were not a "son of peace," on whom the message might take place, and their peace rest, "Your peace" (says he) "shall return unto you again." So is it, if your prayers take not place.

4. If we have prayed long for those to whom God does not intend mercy, he will in the end cast them out of our prayers and hearts, and take our hearts off from praying for them. That which he did by a revelation from heaven to some prophets of old, as to Samuel and Jeremiah, the same he does by a more undiscerned work; that is, by withdrawing assistance to pray for such;

by withdrawing the spirit of supplication from a man, for some men, and in some businesses. Now, thus he did with Samuel, "Why dost thou mourn for Saul?" 1 Sam. xvi. 1. So with Jeremiah, Jer. vii. 16. "Pray not for this people:" and this he does, because he is loath when his people pray not to hear them; and would not that such precious breath as that of prayer should be without its full and direct success, or be in vain: therefore, when he means not to hear, he lays the key of prayer out of the way, so desirous is he to give answers to every prayer. It falls out in this case of praying for another, as in reproofing another. One to whom God intends not good, God will lock up a man's heart towards such a man, that he shall not be able to reprove him; when towards another, God enlarges it as much, where he intends good; thus it is sometimes in praying for another: so in praying a man shall not be able to pray for, as not to reprove such a man, though his

heart was set to do both; but it fares with him as God threatens concerning Ezekiel towards that people, that he makes his "tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth," Ezek. iii. 26.

5. God will hear those prayers, and answer them in some others, in whom we shall have as much comfort as in those we prayed for; and so it often proves and falls out. God, to show "he looks not as man looks," nor chooses as he chooses, lets our hearts be set on work to pray for the conversion or good of one to whom he intends not mercy; and then answers them in some other, whom he makes as dear unto us. When God had cast off Saul, still Samuel's heart lingered after him, and he mourned for him; but God at the same time, when he bids him cease mourning for Saul, to show that yet he accepted his mourning as it came from him, says, "Go," "and anoint one of the sons of Jesse," 1 Sam. xvi. Samuel desired to see a good successor in that government,

and he having been their ruler, it was his special care; having anointed Saul, it exceedingly grieved him, that he should prove so wicked; God saw and answered the ground of his desires; and, therefore, immediately upon his prayers, sent him to anoint the best king that ever was upon that throne, who was the issue of those prayers. And again when Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, when he saw Eliab, ver. 6, "Surely" (says he) "the Lord's anointed is before me," if Samuel had been to choose, he would have chosen him, and would have prayed for and desired him: but "God seeth not as man seeth," ver. 7, "and chooses not as man chooses:" but in David was his prayer fully heard, and answered, and that better. So Abraham had prayed for Ishmael; "O let Ishmael live in thy sight!" Gen. xvii.; but God gave him Isaac instead of him. So, perhaps, thou prayest for one child more than for another, out of thy natural affection looking on his countenance and stature, as

Samuel did on Eliab's; but yet, thy prayers being sincere in the ground of them, in that thou desirest a child of promise, God therefore answers thee, though in another, for whom perhaps thy heart was not so much stirred; who yet, when he is converted, proves to thee as great a comfort, and this is as much as if the other thou didst pray for, had been wrought upon.



CHAPTER IV.

Concerning Prayers wherein others join with us.

THE third case to be considered is, when a man prays for something with others, or which others likewise pray for with him, so as he is not alone in it; how then should he know that his prayers have a hand in obtaining it, as well as theirs? For in such cases, Satan is apt to object, though the thing is granted indeed, yet not for thy pray-

ers, but for the prayers of those others joined in it with thee.

I. If thy heart did sympathise, and accord in the same holy affections with those others in praying, then it is certain thy voice hath helped to carry it; "if two agree on earth" (says Christ) Matt. xviii. 19, the word signifies, if they harmoniously agree to play the same tune; for prayers are music in God's ears, and so called "melody to God," Ephes. v. 19. It is not simply their agreeing in the thing prayed for, but in the affections; for it is the affections that make the concert and the melody. Now if the same holy affections were touched, and struck by God's Spirit in thy heart as theirs, then thou dost help to make up the concert, and without thee it would have been imperfect. When, therefore, the same holy motive and affections actuated thee in thy prayer, which did them in theirs, it was the work of the same Spirit, both in them and thee, and God has heard thee.

Especially if God did stir up the same secret instinct in thee, to sympathise with another in praying for such a thing unknown one to another, as sometimes it falls out; then surely thy prayers are in it as well as his. You shall observe sometimes a general instinct of the Spirit, put into the hearts of God's people generally, to pray for or against a thing, without stirring up one another. Even as Ezekiel, by the river Chebar, prophesied the same things that Jeremiah did at home at Jerusalem. 'Thus, at the time that Christ the Messiah came in the flesh, there was a great expectation raised up in the hearts of the godly people, to look and pray for him. Luke ii. 27, 28.

II. God usually and often evidences to a man, that his prayers contributed, and went among the rest towards the obtaining of it; as,

1. By some circumstance; for example, sometimes by ordering it so, that the man that prayed most for a thing of interest,

should have the first news of it when it comes to be accomplished; which God does as knowing it will be most welcome news to him. God does herein as we do with a friend, who we know is cordial in, and wishes well to a business; he sends him the first word of it, who was most hearty in it, and prayed most about it. Good old Simeon had surely been earnest in seeking the Lord, as well as the rest in Jerusalem, to send the Messiah into the world, to restore and raise up the ruins of Israel, for God revealed it to him, that he should see him before he died: and therefore, to evidence to him his regard to his prayers, God carried the good old man into the temple, just at the time when the child was brought into the temple, to "be presented to the Lord," Luke ii. 27, 28. And in like manner, of good "Anna, who had served God with fastings and prayers night and day," God ordered it so, that she should also come in at the same instant, Luke ii. 38. By some such peculiar circum-

stance or other, God often witnesses to a man's heart that he has heard him in matters prayed for in common with others.

2. By filling the heart with much joy in the accomplishment of what a man prayed for, which is an evident argument that his prayers did move the Lord to effect it, as well as the prayers of others. Thus good old Simeon, seeing his prayers now answered, was even willing to die through joy; and thought he could not die in a better time; "Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace." For when the desires have vented and laid out much of themselves, then when the return comes home, they have an answerable part and share in the comfort of it: and as desires abounded in praying, so will joy and comfort also in the accomplishment. As when a ship comes home, not only the chief owners, but every one that ventured, shall have a share out of the return, in proportion to the adventure. So here, though some one whom it mainly concerns has es-

pecial interest in the mercy obtained, yet thou shalt have thy prayers returned in joy from God that the thing is granted. Paul had planted a church at Thessalonica, but he could not stay to water it with his own preaching, yet when absent, he waters those plants which he had set, with prayers night and day. 1 Thess. iii. 10. "Night and day praying exceedingly for you," says he: and as his prayers were exceedingly abundant for them, so was his joy as abundant in them, when he had heard that they stood steadfast, and fell not back again; "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord," ver. 8. "And what thanks can we render to God for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes, before the Lord?" ver. 9.

3. If God give you a heart thankful for a blessing vouchsafed to another, prayed for by you with others, it is another sign your prayers have had some hand in it. Paul knew not what thanks to give for the answering of his prayers, as in that fore-men-

tioned place. Old Eli had put up but one short ejaculatory petition, that we read of, for Hannah, and that was, "The Lord grant thy petition;" and, for the return of that one prayer, when Hannah related how God had answered her, he returned solemn thanks, "And he worshipped the Lord there," 1 Sam. i. 28.

III. And, lastly, in case the thing concerned thyself, which was prayed for by others helping thee therein, what cause hast thou but to think that it was granted for thy own prayers, and not for theirs only? seeing God stirred up their hearts to pray for thee, and gave thee a heart to pray for thyself, and besides gave thee the thing that thou desired, which argues, thou art beloved as well as they. "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer," saith Paul, Phil. i. 19. Though their prayers went to the business, yet had not Paul been accepted himself, the prayers of all the men in the world would have done him but little

good. God may hear the prayers of the godly for wicked men, when they do not pray themselves, in temporal things; so he heard Moses for Pharaoh, Abraham for Abimelech; and he may hear godly men the sooner for others' prayers; so he heard Aaron and Miriam the sooner for Moses' sake. Num. xii. 13. But if God stir up thy heart to pray for thyself, as well as others for thee, then God that gave thee a heart to pray, has heard thy prayers also, and has had a respect to them more in it than to theirs, because it concerned thyself, as a more special mercy unto thee.



CHAPTER V.

Common directions, helpful in all cases and Prayers.
Observations made before, and in Praying.

HAVING premised these cases, I come now to more general and common directions to help you in discerning and observing the

mind of God, and his answers to you in your prayers: all which directions are such as may be helpful in all the forementioned cases, and in all sorts of prayers whatever; and they are taken from observations to be made upon your prayers, both before, in, and after praying.

I. First, before praying, when God bespeaks a prayer (as I may so speak,) that is, when God secretly speaks to the heart to pray much about a thing; I express it thus, according to that phrase of David, Ps. xxvii. 8, "Thou saidst, Seek ye my face;" and I said, "Thy face Lord will I seek." Now God speaks to the heart to pray, when he not only puts it upon the duty, by saying to the conscience, This, thou oughtest to do: but God's exciting to pray is such as his speech at first was, when he made the world, when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light:" so he says, Let there be a prayer, and there is a prayer; that is, he pours upon a man "a spirit of grace and

supplication," a praying disposition; he puts in motives, suggests arguments and pleas to God; all which you shall find come in readily, and of themselves; and that likewise with a quickening heat, and enlargement of affections, and with a lingering and longing and restlessness of spirit to be alone, to pour out the soul to God, and to form and vent those motions and suggestions into a prayer, till you have laid them together and made a prayer of them. And this is a speaking to the heart: and observe such times when God does thus, and neglect them not; then to strike while the iron is hot; thou hast then his care, it is a special opportunity for that business, such an one, as thou mayest never have the like. Suitors at court observe, their times of begging, when they have kings in a good mood, which they will be sure to take the advantage of; but especially if they should find that the king should begin of himself to speak of the business which they would have of him;

and thus that phrase of Psalm x. 17, is understood by some, that "God prepares the heart, and causes the ear to hear;" that is, he fashions it, and composes it into a praying frame. And sure it is a great sign that God means to hear us when he himself shall thus indite the petition.

And by the way, let me give this note of difference between these speakings to the heart, and those whereby Satan puts us upon such duties at unseasonable hours and times; as when we are otherwise necessarily to be employed in our callings, then to put upon praying is a device he uses, to try out new converts with. The difference will appear in this; the devil comes in a violent imperious manner upon the conscience, but enlarges not the heart a whit unto duty; but whenever God at such extraordinary times calls upon us, he fits and prepares the heart, and fills the soul with holy suggestions, as materials for the duty; for whatsoever he calls to, he gives abilities withal to the thing he calls for.

And thus usually when he will have any great matters done and effected, he sets men's hearts to pray, by a kind of gracious pre-instinct; he stirs them up and touches the strings of their hearts, by his Spirit sent down upon them. Thus against the return of the captivity he stirred up Daniel's heart. Dan. ix. 2. "He understanding by books," the time to be near expiring, was stirred up to seek good; and so he made this Psalm, "Salvation being then nigh," ver. 9, 10, then God stirred him up to pray, and pen this prayer for their return, which God had foretold he would do, Jer. xxix. 10, 11, 12. For having promised, verse 10, "I will cause you to return after seventy years: then" (says he, ver. 12) "shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you." He speaks it not only by way of command, what it was they ought to do, but as prophesying also what they should do; for then he meant to stir up their hearts; as then he did, as appears

by those fore mentioned instances. Therefore observe what things God thus, by an instinct, enlarges thy heart to pray for at times, and sometimes at extraordinary times, when haply thou didst not think to pray about any such thing, yet he then stirred thee up most, it may be as thou wert walking and having spare time, he draws thee into his presence, and moves thee in that manner specified.

II. Now, secondly, as God thus speaks to the heart to pray, so also in praying; and his speaking to the heart in prayer may be discerned by these particulars.

1. When God quiets, and calms, and contents the heart in prayer, which is done by speaking something to the heart, though what is spoken be not always discerned. If you see one who was an earnest and importunate suitor, and exceeding anxious when he went in to a great man, but behold him after coming out from him contented, and quieted, and cheerful in his spirit, you

would conceive that certainly something had been said to him, which gave him encouragement, satisfaction, and contentment in his suit; thus, when thou goest to God, and hast been importunate in a business, as suppose for Christ, "O give me Christ, or else I die?" and thy desires were exceedingly vehement for it: but thou risest up with thy mind calmed and satisfied, and feelest the anxiousness, the solicitude of thy heart about the things taken off and dispelled, this is a good sign that God hath heard thy prayer, and hath spoken something to thy heart, which makes it thus composed. When Hannah, out of much bitterness, and with strong desire, which by a long delay had been made more violent, so that her heart was much disquieted (for "hope," and by the same reason desire also, "deferred makes the soul sick,") when, out of the abundance of her grief, "she had poured her soul out before the Lord," 1 Sam. i. 16, Eli the priest joining in prayer also for her, "the Lord

grant thy petition:" after that prayer she found her heart so quieted "that she looked no more sad," she arose quieted and calmed; and it was that prayer that filled Eli's mouth with that word of prophesy, and her heart with quietness, a secret word from God accompanying it, that did still those waves: and accordingly God gave her a son, a son of her desires. And the like God does now, by speaking (as I said) something to the heart; as by dropping in some promise or other into the heart, or some like consideration; saying as it were to the heart, even as Eli from God did to her, "the Lord grant thy petition." So Paul, was earnest with God about removing his buffetings by Satan, "I besought God thrice," that is, earnestly, "that it might depart;" and to this he had an answer in the meantime given him till it should be taken away, enough to still and quiet him. The Lord put in this consideration and promise into his thoughts, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength

is made perfect in weakness:" this answer thus coming in, this promise thus seasonably suggested, stayed and quieted Paul's heart. In like manner thou hast (it may be) been long praying against poverty, or the like distress, and God lets fall this or the like promise into thy heart, Heb. xiii. 5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," which quiets and contents thy mind. This is an answer; and observe such answers, for they are precious.

2. If, whilst thou art praying, God draws nigh to thy soul, and reveals himself to it, in and upon such or such a particular petition. As in case thou didst mainly intend, when thou didst begin to pray, to set thyself to beg some temporal mercy at his hands, some great matter for the good and prosperity of the church, as Daniel, chap. 9, did set himself to seek God for the return of the captivity: and even before thou comest to ask it, or in asking it, God smiles upon thee, and welcomes thee, this thou art to observe

as a sign he hears thy prayer, and accepts both thee and it; when there is such a strong sense of God's favour and presence, whilst thou art upon such a suit and request, more than at other times, or than in other passages of the same prayer, this is a token God hears thee in that particular, and thou art to observe this his speaking to thy heart; when thus thou shalt no sooner come into his presence to inquire of him, but he says, "Here I am," as the promise is, Isa. lviii. 9. David says "Hear me speedily," "and (that I may know thou hearest me) draw nigh to me;" Psalm lxix. 17, 18, therefore, when God draws nigh to thee, it is a sign he hears thee. Daniel having fasted and prayed for three weeks together, (Dan. x. 2, 3,) then an angel came, and one of the three persons came and told him, he was a man greatly beloved, verse 11 and 19. When, in like manner, God by his Spirit comes down and meets thee, and tells thy heart in secret, that thou art his beloved, and he is thine,

then thy prayers are certainly heard ; for if he accepts thy person, much more thy prayers, 1 John, v. 19, 20. Men, false men will, out of cunning, use suitors most kindly when they mean to put them off, and deny them their requests ; but God, who is truth and faithfulness itself, doth not use so to deal, but when he means to answer the prayer ; he withal sometimes reveals his free grace most, to the end the man may see and acknowledge the fountain of all, to be his everlasting love, and so take the thing granted as a fruit of it, and thereby come to be the more abundantly thankful.

Only let me add this caution, which may be of great use to you ; that it is not always infallibly true, that when God draws nigh to you in a particular request, that that request in particular shall be granted in the manner you desired ; but it is a certain evidence that thy prayer is heard, and that the thing thou askest is agreeable to his will, and that he approves of thee and thy request

exceedingly, and he will give thee it, or something that is better. There may be herein, and sometimes is, a mistake of God's meaning, to think that always the thing shall be granted, when God draws nigh to a man; experience sometimes shows the contrary.

But you will say, Why does God draw so nigh if he means not to grant it?

First, He shows thereby his approving will of the thing prayed for. Now God approves many things he decrees not. There is his approving will, and his decreeing will. God may show his approving will of the thing thou askest (as suppose it be in view a matter which is of great consequence for the church,) which he does for thy encouragement; but yet it follows not, that his decreeing will is for the accomplishment of that very thing in particular.

Secondly, God may accept the person and the prayer, when he does not grant the thing prayed for; and by that drawing nigh, wit-

ness his acceptance of thy person and the prayer. Thirdly, that revealing of himself is oftentimes all the answer he intended to such a prayer; and it is answer enough too, to enjoy in the stead of a particular mercy the assurance of God's love. As, suppose thou didst pray against some evil coming upon his church, which he yet intends to bring, which he set thy heart to pray against, thereby, to manifest thy sincerity; and then he seeing thee thus sincere, draws nigh to thee, and tells thee, however, it shall go well with thee, and that thou art greatly beloved of him; thou art sometimes to take this for all the answer he means to give. And this he does sometimes also to content the heart, and prepare it for a denial in the things; whereas, otherwise, the denial of what a Christian has been earnest in, might occasion (as in many it does) a questioning and doubting of God's love.

3. When God stirs up in the heart a particular faith in a business, as sometimes he

does, and upholds the heart to wait for it, notwithstanding all discouragements. So he did in David; (Psalm xxvii. 3;) David was then in great hazard, by reason of Saul or Absalom, and that so great and frequent as that, to sense and outward probabilities, he was never likely to live quietly again at Jerusalem, and enjoy God's ordinances there in peace; but for this David had prayed, and had made it as the grand request of his whole life, "This one thing have I desired;" and, accordingly, God gave him a special faith in this thing above all others, because it was his great request, "In this will I be confident," and though an host of men should again and again encompass me, says he, yet in this I will be confident, that I shall still escape and see Jerusalem again, and enjoy the ordinances and live in peace. And though his faith failed him often, for he said, he "should one day perish by the hand of Saul," yet at other times, his faith was marvelously upheld, and he was confident in this.

He used not to be so, in other requests, thus absolutely, particularly, and distinctly, and therefore he says, "In this," &c. As there is a witness of the Holy Ghost immediately to the heart, sealing up adoption to a man's person, so in some cases there is the like testimony for the obtaining of some eminent thing we have asked; which particular special faith, in a kind of similitude, answers, to the faith of miracles of old, whereby a man had a particular confidence that God would do such a miracle by him; so, in and by means of prayer, in some things there may be a particular strengthening and assuring the heart that God will do such a thing for a man; which I confess is rare and extraordinary, as also that immediate testimony concerning our persons is, which many are destitute of who go to heaven. And this other, concerning the accomplishment of special mercies, is much more rare, and but in some businesses; and is a thing which many persons are not acquainted

with, but yet may be in extraordinary cases present to some men's spirits, as it was to David's in the thing mentioned.

And concerning this also, I will add a caution, as about the former; that it does not always fall out upon all such kind of evidences made to a man's spirit, and that by God, that the thing prayed for comes to pass. For these very persuasions, stirred up by God, may be and are often but conditional, though thus immediately made to a man's spirit, and so to be understood, and not peremptory and absolute. It cannot be imagined that all these should always be of greater absoluteness and peremptoriness, than were many of those revelations made by God to the prophets, wherein he manifested his gracious purpose towards such a man or people, either to vouchsafe them such a mercy or bring such a judgment; which forewarnings, though they were particular and express, were yet limited and intended with a condition, according to the

performance or failure of which it fell out. Either the judgment expressly threatened was diverted, or that good thing, which was as directly and fully promised, was not bestowed; as it was in the case of Jonah's threatening the destruction of Nineveh; and so in the promise concerning Eli's house, 1 Sam. ii. 30, "I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever;" but now the Lord saith, "be it far from me:" for they had broken the condition which was implied in it; they had despised the Lord, "and them that despise me says God, "I will despise." In like manner is God's meaning expressed towards us in such persuasions wrought in us by prayer, to be understood; as that such mercies will surely come to pass, but still under a condition of obedience, and performing of those vows which a man joined with those his petitions, to move the Lord to grant the things; which if a man fail in, or ceases to go on to believe, it may

and does often come to pass, that things fall out contrary to that persuasion, and then we are apt to question whether it was from God or no; which it might be, and truly wrought by his Spirit, and yet not always absolutely meant but conditionally only. For in such great requests of the soul unto God, there pass mutual covenants between God and us, and indentures are drawn and sealed by us; that is, we in prayer offer and promise to do thus and thus, if God will vouchsafe us such a mercy, and plead it to God to move him to bestow it; and God, thereupon (it may be,) seals a covenant on his part to grant the thing, and work such an undoubted persuasion: but if we, in the interim of waiting for that mercy, do deal falsely in the covenant which we made, and this even while we are yet in dependence upon God for it, whereby it appears, that we would have done so much more after we should have received it, in this case God denies the thing; and this notwithstanding, the persuasion and evidence was

from God that heard the prayer. He said, indeed, he would do thus and thus for thee, (as he told David, "I would have given thee much more,") because thou saidst to him, thou wouldst walk thus and thus, or didst vow this or that to him; thou failest in thy word, upon which God uttered his; and thereupon, says God, as to Eli, "Now it shall not be so;" and yet God had spoken it before, and not Satan, nor thine own heart only.

4. When God puts a restless importunity into the heart, in despite of all discouragements. So in that Psalm xxvii. 4, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;" that is, as I have sought it, so I will not leave seeking to God for it. When God maintains this in the heart, it is a sign he hears and will answer; for you know the parable, that the unjust judge heard her for her importunity; therefore, when God puts an importunity into the heart, he means to hear.

Only this likewise is to be observed, there

is a double importunity: one out of such an inordinate desire to a thing as the heart knows not how to be without such a mercy, and so continues to ask, but “asks amiss, and so receives not,” Jam. v. But there is also an importunity joined with a subjection to God’s will, which when it runs along with it, then God has stirred it up, and then look for something to come; otherwise you may be importunate, as “they seek me daily,” when yet God heard not, Isaiah lviii. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Further observations to be made on the frame of our hearts after Prayer, until the issue of thing prayed for.

NEXT, after thou hast prayed, observe what God does towards thee.

As first, how he guides thy feet and heart after praying; there is much in that. That which was the spirit of supplication in a man when he prayed, rests upon him as the spirit

of obedience in his course; so, the dependence he has upon God for the mercy he seeks for, is a special motive and means to keep him fearful of offending, and diligent in duty; to look to his paths, to walk and behave himself as becomes a suitor, as well as to come and pray as a sui'or. Thus David walked by this principle, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me:" Psalm lxvi. 18, that consideration still came in as a curb to sin; and without this a man provokes God, and so casts himself behind hand again, and by sinning loses what ground he had got by praying. Therefore David, Psalm cxlv. 8, 9, 10, when he was to pray, even as for his life, (it being a deliverance from his enemies he sought,) he specially prays God to direct him and keep him, that he might not sin against him: for he knew by sinning he should enervate and spoil all his prayers. Not only "Hear me speedily," says he, but also "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; teach me to do

thy will;" this he especially prays for, and more than for deliverance, for else he knew God would not hear him. Therefore, when thou art in treaty with God for any mercy, observe if God after praying keeps thee in a more obedient frame of spirit; it is a sign he intends to answer thee; as, in like manner, when he keeps thee from using ill means, &c. When he meant to give David the kingdom, he kept him innocent, and his heart tender, that it smote him but for cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment; he was not so tender after. Therefore, in Psalm xviii., when he was delivered from all his enemies, he says God dealt with him according to his uprightness; for "I kept myself from mine iniquity." So also Psalm xxvii. 11.

2. When God, after prayer, strengthens the heart to wait for the mercy. So David having prayed, says to his soul, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he will strengthen thy heart." Psalm xxvii. Hon-

est men, when they nourish hopes in one that is in dependence on them, who waits and is obsequious upon the hopes he has of a suit, do not deny him; it were dishonest in them to keep a man under hand, and then frustrate his expectations; therefore, when God keeps thy soul, after praying, in such a dependent frame, look for some good answer. And, indeed, when a man has prayed long, in the end he begins to wait (as I may so say) rather than pray, though he pray still, because now he looks that God should perform; before, and at first, he told the Lord he desired it, but now he can with some boldness tell him, that he waits for it and expects it. The hope of a godly man, and his expectation, "should make him ashamed," if it were not answered; therefore, in this case, answers use to come.

Both these two last we have joined together, "Wait on the Lord, and keep his ways, and he shall exalt thee," Psalm xxxviii. 3, 4."

CHAPTER VII.

Observations to be made after Prayer, upon the issue of what was Prayed for.

WHEN a man has thus waited, and kept his way, then let him observe the issue and conclusion of what he sought for, how things are cast of God. Now, of necessity, one of these two must occur, either the thing desired is accomplished, or not accomplished; and in either of these he may come to look for answers to his prayers: for prayers may be answered, though the thing be not done.

I mean to insist severally on these.

I. If the thing prayed for comes to pass, then what needest thou doubt of an answer, and whether God heard thee or not? For thou beholdest it with thine eyes; and so often it falls out that God grants according to the desires of a man's heart; and not only so, but also fulfils his counsel therein, as it is Psalm xx. 4; that is, fulfils not only the

desire and aim of his prayer, but in that very way, and by that very means, which his judgment and counsel pitched on in his own thoughts. The desire of the heart may be satisfied when God gives some other thing, but the counsel of the heart is then fulfilled, when a man is answered in that particular which his own judgment pitched on as best for him. For counsel is an act of the understanding, deliberating about means to an end, and directing to choose a particular means tending to an end; so Eliphaz says to Job, chapter xxii. 27, 28, "Thou shalt make thy prayer to God, and he shall hear thee; and decree a thing, and it shall be established to thee;" that is, a man is guided to decree and pitch upon such mercies in his prayers, as God makes good in particular; he says what he would have, and God performs it: and this privilege thou shalt have (says Eliphaz there,) if thou wilt turn to him, and be acquainted with him, and receive the law from his mouth; thou

shalt not err in praying, but what thou settest upon to pray for, shall be accordingly granted to thee. Such a man shall have the privilege, to be the chooser and carver of his own mercies: and as Christ said, "Be it according to thy faith," so God says sometimes, "Be it according to thy prayers." And Eliphaz speaks of it as of a special favour; that, whereas other men's prayers are answered obliquely, thine, says he shall be answered directly, which is more comfortable: as direct beams are, and have more heat in them than collateral and oblique. Thus, if a man will hear God and obey him, God will hear him; for if a man be subject to Christ's kingly office, his prophetic office shall guide him, and cause him not to err in his petitions; but, by an unerring providence and pre-instinct infused by his Spirit, God will so guide him as to ask even that very thing which God intends to give; whereas, of himself he knows not what, nor how to ask. So David asked long

life, and God gave it him, Psalm xxi. 2, 3, 4. God not only gave him his heart's desire, but "the request of his lips," verse 2. Hannah asked a son, and God answered her in the very thing she desired, and therefore she called him Samuel, 1 Sam. i. 20, "Because (says she) I asked him of the Lord;" and verse 27, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him." So, 1 Chron. iv. 10, "Jabesh called on God (it is said) and God granted him the thing he requested." And thus God often deals with his children. And to this end God has given us his Spirit, and made Christ wisdom unto us, who knows what is good for us, though we do not. And has therefore also commanded us to look out mercies for ourselves, and then come to him for them; and to this end has made such particular promises of particular mercies, which he would have us regard in our prayers: because often he means to bestow the very thing we ask.

And yet although we have the very things we asked and desired, such is the jealousy and infidelity of our hearts, that we often discern not nor acknowledge that it was our prayers that obtained them from God; but we are apt, when once we have them, either to look to things below, and the second causes of them, though before we did earnestly seek them of God, or else still distrustfully to question whether it was to our prayers that he granted them, or out of common providence. Thus Job in his distemper, (Job ix. 16,) "Although I had called, and God had answered me, yet," says he, "I would not believe that he had hearkened to my voice," that is, not that he did it in respect to my prayer and request, because he now deals so severely with me, "For he breaketh me with a tempest," verse 17. And thus do our distrustful hearts, (which are apt to be dissatisfied with all the clearest pledges of God's favour, and still to misconstrue and pervert them,) although God an-

swers us upon our calling upon him, yet we will not believe that he hearkened to our prayer in it. Therefore, that you may be further enabled to discern how and when things you prayed for come in answer to prayer, I give you these further directions.

II. When God does a thing in answer to prayers, he often does it in such a manner that his hand may be seen in it in a more than ordinary manner. There are few prayers, wherein a man has sought God much, but in the answers of them God discovers himself much, and turns many great wheels in the accomplishment of them, and manifests "His marvellous loving kindness:" and indeed, when God hears prayers that have been a long while a making, he shows usually half a miracle one way or other.

Now God discovers his immediate hand in the answers of our prayers many ways.

1. When he carries a thing through many difficulties, when there were a great many

in a business prayed for, the least whereof would have kept the key from turning; when God shall make (as it were) a key on purpose to unlock it; when God plots and contrives all the passages in a business thou didst pray for, and so accomplishes it; this is a sign it is a fruit of prayer, and that prayer had been making that key all that while: so in bringing David to the kingdom; Joseph out of prison; Mordecai to honour, and likewise St. Peter out of prison, which was done at the prayers of the church, Acts, xii. He was sleeping between two soldiers; if they had waked he had been discovered: and he was in chains, but they fell off, verse 6, 7. And the keepers stood before the door, but they mind him not, verse 6; and when one watch is past, he passes quietly through another; and when both those were past, an iron gate flies open of its own accord, verse 10. Now there will be various difficulties in many businesses, which yet in the end are accomplished by

prayer. Iron chains fall off, iron gates, enemies' hearts fly open of their own accord; and though not in that miraculous manner, by means of an angel, yet in a way no less wonderful.

2. When God facilitates all means to accomplish the thing which was prayed for, so that all means conspire and combine in it, that thou hast wind and tide, and a fair day, and all the way paved, or, as David says, "hast thy way made plain before thee;" and there falls out a great conjunction and meeting of many circumstances together to effect it, which had influence on it, whereof if any one had been wanting, perhaps the thing had not been done: when the thing prayed for is thus granted, then prayer has done it. Thus, when he delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, which was the accomplishment of their long desires and prayers (their cry came up, the text says,) how were all things facilitated? They that detained them to themselves, come and intreat them

to go out, "yea are urgent," says the text, Exod. xii. 31. 33. 35, and that at midnight; nay, hire them to go out, with their earrings: and Pharaoh himself then parts lovingly and fairly with them, and desires their prayers, Bless me also, verse 32. Yea to show there was no resistance, the text says, "a dog did not move his tongue;" the brute creature did not disturb them, though at midnight, when those creatures are most obstreperous.

3. When he does it suddenly and accomplishes the thing thou hast long prayed for, ere thou art aware of it; as the return of the captivity of Babylon, which was the conclusion of many prayers, was done in a trice; "they were as men in a dream," Psalm cxxvi. 1; they could scarce believe it was so, when it was done: it was because they had sown many prayers which came up on the sudden, verse 5, 6. So Peter; he was fast asleep, and did not so much as dream of deliverance. So Joseph's delivery

out of prison, and advancement to be the greatest man in the kingdom; the suddenness of it showed it was God's remembering him, and hearing his prayers.

4. When God grants the thing with an overplus, above what we asked, and casts many other mercies in together with that which we long prayed for; this also may be a sign that God heard our prayers in it; for when he does hear indeed, he often does above what we asked or thought, thereby the more to overcome the heart. So David asked long life, and he gave him more than he asked, Psalm xxi. 2, 3, 4, 5. So Solomon, asked but wisdom, and he gave him more than he asked, peace, riches, honour, all with it, 1 Kings iii. 12, 13. Hannah asked but one male child, 1 Sam. i. 10, but God gave her three sons more, and two daughters, chap. ii. 21. When prayers are answered, usually mercies come thick, the thing we prayed for comes not alone; as when sins are punished, then miseries also

come like armies in troops upon us; as temptations likewise come together, and we fall into many of them at once, as St. James speaks, Jam. i. 2, thus do mercies also.

5. When the thing is granted by prayers, there is often some particular circumstance of providence concurrent with it, which is a token for good, and seals to us that it is from God; such often as a man himself takes notice of, and which others take notice of also. "Show me a token for good," says David, Psalm lxxxvi. 17, "that others may see it and be ashamed;" and such tokens God often makes small circumstances to be. Things small in themselves, may be great signs and tokens: for example, Moses and Aaron, and the Israelities, had long cried to God for the deliverance of his people, and laid up many prayers; "their cry came up," as was said; and when God delivered them, what tokens were there of good, and of God's hand in it, and of his answer to their prayers? The text notes (as was observed before,) "that a dog

did not bark at their going out," Exod. xi. 7, which was a small circumstance, but it was a great sign and so intended by God; for the text adds, "That ye may know that God put a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians." This was a token of God's hand to overrule the tongues of rude brute creatures, that use to stir at such unusual noises, and at travellers especially, in the night. So when Isaac and Abraham, and his servant also, had prayed for a wife for Isaac, see by what a token God showed he had heard their prayers; Rebekah was the first that came out to the servant sent to bring a wife for him: and if she be the woman appointed for Isaac, (says the servant) "Let her offer me drink, and my camels also," Gen. xxiv. 13, 14: this was a small thing in appearance, but a great sign of God's hand in it, and therefore the servant bowed at it, and worshipped. And the sign in itself was such as argued a good nature in her, and a kind courteous disposition,

which therefore (it may be) he singled out, as a token of a meet wife, as a thing especially to be looked at in the marriage choice.

III. Again, the consideration of the time wherein the things we have asked are granted, may much help us to discern, whether it be in answer to our prayers. For God, who does all things in weight and measure, shows his wisdom and love, as much in the season, as in giving the thing itself. God considers all times of thy life, and still chooses the best and fittest to answer thy prayers in, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee." So Isa. xlix. 8. As David, in like manner, says, he prayed "in an acceptable time," Psal. lxxix. 13. So accordingly God answers in the best and most acceptable time to us; for "he waits to be gracious, for he is a God of judgment," Isaiah xxx. 18; that is, he is a wise God, that knows the fittest times and seasons, wherein to show kindness, and to deal forth his favours.

It may be, that at that very time when thou hast been most instant and earnest, yea, even whilst thou art praying, or presently after, the thing is done and accomplished. To this purpose is that of Isaiah lxx. 24, that as sometimes "he hears before they call" (which argues much love to give mercies unsought;) so also, "While they are speaking, I will hear," and grant the thing, which argues no less love; and he selects that time on purpose that they might rest assured it was in answer to their prayer. Thus, to assure Hezekiah that his prayer was heard, God sent the prophet unto him whilst he was praying and weeping, with his head turned towards the wall. So Isaac, going out to pray in the field, Gen. xxiv. 63, meets his Rebekah then coming; that blessing of a good wife, being surely the great temporal request he was then in treaty with God for; for this Rebekah was the fruit of many prayers. So when Peter was in prison, the church being gathered together to

pray for him, Peter comes and knocks at the same hour, Acts xii. So it often falls out herein as to the ruler in the gospel, John iv. 52, who, "inquiring diligently, found that the same hour that Christ has said to him, Thy son liveth, his son recovered; and so he believed, and his whole house." So also here, that sometimes the thing is done, or the news of it comes the same hour, or soon after, wherein a man was praying about it, and perhaps when the heart was most stirred about it, more than at any time else; this is a sign it was an answer of prayers, and may help to confirm a man's faith in it, as that also did his.

Or, secondly, when it is the most acceptable and every way the fittest time to have the thing granted. At that time, when thou hadst most need, and when thy heart was most fit for it. For in answering prayers, God aims especially at two things: first, to show his mercy, that a man might magnify and exalt that; and secondly, to have

the heart satisfied and filled with joy and contentment in his answer, and the thing made sweet, and a mercy indeed to him: in brief, that his goodness might be delighted in, and his mercy exalted. And for these two purposes he culls out such times when we have most need, and also when our hearts are most subdued, and our lusts mortified; for then we are fittest to relish his goodness alone, and not to be drawn away with the carnal sweetness that is in the thing. The one is expressed, Isaiah xxx. 18, "He waits to be gracious, to have his mercy exalted." The second is intimated, James v. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume it upon your lusts;" such prayers, while the heart is in this temper, the Lord denies, or defers in mercy till the heart be weaned.

For the first of these: as, suppose thou didst pray long for assurance of salvation and joy in the Holy Ghost, and when thou hadst most need of it, either when "thy

spirit would have failed" without it, as Isaiah lvii. 16; or against some great affliction approaching, or some great encounter with the world for the name of Christ; then God filled thy heart with it, that was the fittest time: now has God heard thy prayer. When Peter was in prison, and had been so for many days, as appears by the fourth and fifth verses, Acts xii. God could have delivered him at any time, while the church prayed for him; but God kept him there purposely till the very night, before Herod meant to bring him forth to execution, and then God delivered him in answer to the prayers of the church; then was the most fit time; as the Psalmist says, Psalm cii. 13, "The full time to have mercy on him was come." And thus, to receive an answer is a sign that God does it out of special love, which love he would have exalted by thee, as Isaiah xxx. 18.

If when thy heart was most fit for the mercy, it was granted, then art thou also

heard in an acceptable time: for God does not withhold mercies from those that are his, out of want of love, neither so much for what is past as for the present evil disposition of their hearts, whereby they are unfit to receive them, and in this sense likewise may that be understood, that God "prepareth the heart; and heareth the prayer," Psalm x. 17.

As, first, when thy heart is most weaned from that temporal mercy (supposing it such) granted to thy prayers, as David, when he had the kingdom in possession, and when he was as a weaned child, and had his high thoughts purged out, Psalm cxxxi. 2, so when thy heart has let all carnal ends go, and has betaken itself alone to God, for thy portion, then the thing prayed for comes to pass: this was the fittest season.

But you will be ready to say, to have a thing when my heart is taken off from it, and even contented not to have it, makes

it to be as no mercy; for where there is no desire, there is no rejoicing.

If thy desire be taken off the thing, then thou wilt rejoice the more in God now; and though the thing of itself should now give the less satisfaction, yet God by the thing will give thee more, and he will make it up, for thou wilt relish his love and sweetness in it now, which is "better than life," and therefore much better than that thing enjoyed; and indeed the violence of the desire before, would have made it less sweet, for the thing alone would not have filled and contented that desire, when it was an inordinate lust, and so thou wouldst have been vexed with it, rather than satisfied, and found a greater vanity in it: but now, when it is become a subordinate desire unto God, that the desire is down, and the heart quieted and contented with God in the thing, the heart says, "I have enough." So likewise thou mayest have an affliction thou

prayedst long against, taken off then, when thy heart was most willing to "accept thy punishment," Lev. xvi. 41, (as Moses' phrase is,) as to submit to God in it.

A third thing you are to observe concerning the accomplishment of the thing prayed for, whereby you may discern whether granted in answer to prayers, is, when thou seest God, in his dealings with thee, and answering thee, to deal in a kind of proportion with thy manner of praying and seeking of him, and of walking with him whilst thou wert dependant on him, for such or such a mercy. And as you may see a proportion between sins and punishments, which are the rewards of them; that you can say, such a sin brought forth this affliction, it is so like the Father: so you might see the like proportion between your prayers, and your walking with God, and God's answers to you, and his dealings with you. So did David, Psalm xviii. 24, "according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recom-

pensed me." His speech notes some similitude or likeness: as for example, the more by-ends or carnal desires you had in praying, and the more you mingled these with your holy desires, and the more want of zeal, fervency, &c. were found in your prayers, the more you shall (it may be) find of bitterness mingled with the mercy when it is granted; and so much imperfection and want of comfort in it. So David says in the same Psalm v. 25, 26, "With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure," pure prayers have pure blessings, and on the contrary, "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." And again, as you sometimes slackened and grew cold in your prayers, so you might see the business in like manner to cool and cast backward; as when "Moses' hands were down, Amalek prevailed;" but when they were lifted up, Israel had the better, Exodus xvii. 12. God let him see a proportion, which argued his prayer was the means of prevailing. A man finds in praying, that

his suit sometimes sticks, and goes not as he expected; this is because he is not so earnest as he was wont, and does not ply God and solicit him; but on the contrary, when he was stirred up to pray, then he found things go well: by this a man may clearly see, that it was the prayer which God heard and regarded. Thus likewise when a man sees hills and dales in a business, fair hopes often, and then all dashed again, and the thing in the end brought to pass, let him look back upon his prayers: didst thou not in like manner deal with God? When thou hadst prayed earnestly, and thought thou hadst even carried it, then dash all again, by interposing some sin, and thus again and again? Herein God would have you observe a proportion; and it may help you to discern how and when they are answered and obtained by prayer; because God deals thus with you therein in such a proportion to your prayers.

CHAPTER VIII.

The return of prayers ascertained by the effects produced on the heart.

THOU mayest discern whether they be in answer to thy prayers, by the effects upon thy heart.

As, 1. If the thing that is granted upon thy prayers draw thy heart nearer to God, it is then certain, that it was granted as an answer to thy prayers. Things granted out of ordinary providence only, do increase our lusts, and are snares to us: as Saul gave David his daughter Michal to be a snare to him: Psalm lxi. 22; so "their full tables are made snares:" so God gave the Israelites their will, the things they desired, but withal "gave them up to their lusts," Psalm cvi. 15, he gave them their requests, but sent "leanness into their souls;" the quails might fatten some of their bodies that survived, yet their souls grew lean: there

was a curse upon their spirits; this new delicate food made their bodies more lustful, they "did eat and drink, and rose up to play," Exodus xxxii. 6. But things obtained by prayer are sanctified to us; for every thing "is sanctified by prayer," 1 Tim. iv. 5, so as it shall not ensnare nor entangle our hearts. A thing obtained by prayer, as it came from God, so a man will return it to God, and use it for his glory: so Hannah having obtained Samuel by prayer, she returns him unto God, "For this child I prayed, and God gave me my petition; and therefore also I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth." 1 Sam. i. 27, 28. If therefore thou find this his dealing with thee, in answering thee, to be a kindly motive to cause thee to mourn for sin, and to be as a restraint against sin, it is a sign it was the fruit of prayer. Thus it wrought with David, Psalm vi. 8, "Away from me ye that work iniquity: God hath heard the voice of my weeping."

Also if thou rejoicest in God more than in the thing obtained : so Hannah begins her song when she blesses God for her child ; “ My heart rejoiceth in the Lord,” 1 Sam. ii. 1. She rejoices not so much in the gift as in the giver ; and his favour more in this, that her prayer was answered, than in the thing obtained : this is a sign of having obtained the mercy through prayers, when it is thus sanctified unto a man’s spirit.

2. Prayers answered will enlarge thy heart with thankfulness, and thus usually they do ; self-love makes us more forward to pray than to give thanks ; for nature is all of the craving and taking hand : but where grace is there will be no eminent mercy obtained with much struggling, but there will be a continued particular thankful remembrance of it a long while after, with much enlargement : and “ As prayer abounded, so will thanksgiving abound also.” Hannah makes a song, 1 Sam. i. 2. Great blessings that are won with prayer, are worn with

thankfulness; such a man will not ask new, but he will also give thanks for old. Thankfulness, of all duties, proceeds from pure grace; therefore if the Spirit stirs thee unto it, it is a sign he made the prayer: "What thanks shall I render to God, for the joy I have in you?" saith Paul, 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10. So in all his other Epistles, all those he writes to, as he prays for them, so he tells them, he gives thanks for them, and for their graces which he had prayed for. And if the answer of prayer for others makes Paul so thankful, what when for himself? Prayer and thanksgiving are like the double motion of the lungs; the air that is sucked in by prayer, is breathed forth again by thanksgiving. Is thy heart afresh enlarged, so as to mourn for past sins long since committed? So, in like manner, to give thanks for mercies won with long prayers, and this for a long while after, is a sign that they were obtained by prayer.

3. If the mercy obtained encourages thee

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to go to God another time, to pray again the more confidently and fervently, it is a sign thou hast got the former in that way: for the Holy Ghost having once showed thee this way of procuring mercy, thou art thus ready to take the same course another time, Psalm cxvi. 2, "The Lord hath heard me, and I will call on him as long as I live." I know (says he) now what course to take if I be in any want, even to call upon him; and he calls upon others to do so too.

4. When God having heard thy prayers upon solemn vows made by thee, thy heart is made careful to pay those vows which thou didst make in the time of thy suing to God for that mercy, this may be an argument to thee, the thing being granted, that thy prayer was heard. For, 1st, it argues, that thy heart itself secretly makes such an account, that upon them God granted the thing, and thou dost therefore make conscience to return all again to God in service, as the condition of thy indentures made with

him ; and as a homage due, and an acknowledgment for ever, that such a mercy was won by prayer ; and by this preservest the memory of the receipt of that mercy : vows being of the nature of homage. And, 2dly, in this also it is an evidence that the thing was obtained by prayer, in that God calls for those vows from thee, by his Spirit in thy heart, and stirs thee up to perform them ; it argues that in relation to thy prayers answered, he takes them as dues from thee, that having despatched thy suit, he now calls for what was agreed to be given him when it should be performed. And, 3dly, in that also he accepts the payment of these thy vows of thee, he acknowledges that those vows and prayers were heard ; for as Manoah said in another case, Jud. xiii. 23, “ If he meant to have destroyed us, he would not have accepted a sacrifice : ” so in this case it may be said, if God had not heard thy prayers, he would not have accepted thy vows after thy praying. Thus David,

Psalm lxvi. 13, 14, "I will pay thee my vows which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in my trouble;" the reason follows, verse 17, 19, because that "Verily God hath heard me, when I cried to him:" and so Eliphaz, in Job, connects and hangs these together, Job, xxii. 17, "Thou shalt make thy prayer to him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." This which he speaks of paying his vows, was not only as it was to be his duty, but also as a consequent that would follow the other, that when his prayers should be heard, he thereupon would perform his vows; for his scope is to move Job to turn God, showing what benefit would accrue to him by it, and among others this, the hearing his prayers, and performing his vows.

5. When thou art enabled, by faith, to see clearly God's hand showed forth in the effecting of that mercy over and above the power of second causes, and to acknowledge

it to his glory: for the truth is, one main cavilling reason in our blind hearts, whereby we are usually hindered and put by from apprehending our prayers to be answered, when yet the thing is done, we shall find to be, that our eyes are terminated on second causes, and not raised to see God's hand in the thing: therefore, on the contrary, when God enables thee to see that he has done thee this kindness, so as thy mind is clear in it, this is a fruit of his hearing thy prayers: and this you will usually find to be true, that "so much faith and dependence" as you had upon God in prayer for the obtaining of a mercy, so much faith and acknowledgment you will have in the accomplishment of it. Parallel with this rule, is that other, which in another case is usually given, that in performance of duties, so much as the soul did go out of itself to God for strength to perform them, so much when they are performed, will the heart acknowledge God's assistance, and be humbled: and this is a

sign of prayer being heard upon this ground, because God's end in hearing prayer is, that we might glorify him. So Psalm l. 15, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me." Therefore, when the heart has prayed much for a mercy, with dependence before the obtaining of it, and then is enabled to exalt God when it is obtained, it is a sign that God did it in relation to those prayers. For there is that connexion made between these, as between the cause and the effect, "I will hear thee; and thou shalt glorify me." David, when he was delivered out of all his troubles, (as he was when he made the 18th Psalm as appears by the title of it,) then, at the 6th verse, he relates how he had prayed and how he was heard; and see thereupon how his heart was enlarged in the rest of that Psalm; to acknowledge God alone to have done all, so from the 27th and also from the 31st verse. When we see angels from God beyond the power of second

causes descending, it is a sign that prayers, as angels, first ascended, and obtained that mercy. Thus also the church, Isaiah xxvi. having obtained those deliverances by prayer, verse 17, (for which there she makes that song by way of thankfulness) she ascribes all unto God, verse 12, "Thou hast wrought all our works for us," and verse 18, "Verily we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth."

6. When with the mercy there comes the assurance of God's love, and evidence of his favour; when God sends not a bare token only, but a letter also with it, to bear witness of his love, in which the token is wrapped. I need not make that a sign, for when this comes with a mercy, it carries its own evidence; you will then know well enough that is the fruit of prayer.

7. Lastly, it will be evident by the event; things obtained by prayer have few thorns in them, the curse is taken out: but what comes but by ordinary providence, comes as

it were up of itself alone, and, like the earth untilled, is full of thorns and briars, and many vexations. The reason is, that what comes in by prayer comes as a blessing, and so no sorrow is added to it: and also because prayer killed those inordinate lusts, which is the cause of that vanity and vexation which is in the things enjoyed. "But when the blessing of God maketh rich, he addeth no sorrow with it," Prov. x. 22. / Things long deferred, at last obtained by prayer, prove most comfortable, and in a settled manner such; they prove standing and stable blessings: and what trouble the heart was put to in the deferring, it is recompensed by the more settled constant unmixed sweetness in the enjoying; prayer having long perfumed it, and the thing being steeped therein, it proves exceedingly pleasant. So Prov. xiii. 12. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes it is a tree of life," and heals that sickness, and abundantly comforts the heart. Thus

Isaac found Rebekah a great blessing and a comfortable wife to him, Gen. xxiv. Such a comfort also was Isaac to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 18, 19; a son indeed, "a son of laughter," as his name signifies. And such was Samuel to Hannah; she had not only a son of him, but a good son, a blessed son, a prophet, and the judge of the people of God. Whereas Jacob getting the blessing, but without prayer, how embittered was it to him (though a blessing to him in the event) by twenty years banishment from his mother's house! When Israel themselves set up a king, but not by me, as God says, what a punishment was he to them! "given in wrath, and taken away in anger," Hos. xiii. 11.

CHAPTER IX.

Considerations to quiet the heart, and to help it to discern the answer and acceptance of prayer, when the thing is not accomplished.

BUT now the next and more difficult question is, when the thing is not granted, how shall we then discern and know that God, notwithstanding, hears the prayer?

Concerning which, I must premise that it is true, that the very thing itself desired is not always granted, when yet the prayer is heard. Christ prayed that the cup might pass from him; which though some interpret the word passing, for the short continuance of the brunt, and that, therefore, in that respect, he was heard directly in what he asked; yet, if so, why was that clause, "if it be possible," added? That argues his petition was for a total removal, yet with subjection to God's will; for he knew there was no great impossibility in a short removal of

it: nay, it was impossible but that it should pass, Acts ii. 24. But, however, it is plain in Moses, about his going into Canaan: Deut. iii. 26, "I besought the Lord," says he, verse 23, "and he was angry with me, and would not hear me, verse 26. Likewise, before I come to resolve the case, an objection is also to be removed; which is,

That if the Spirit of God makes every faithful prayer in us, as, Rom. viii. 26, it is said he does; "we know not what to pray for, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities," and he "searcheth the deep things of God," as it is said, 1 Cor. ii.; that therefore, he knowing that God will not grant such a thing, you may think that he should not stir up the heart to pray for that which God means to deny, but always guide the heart aright, and not let us err or miss in the things we pray for. To this, in brief, by way of answer:

1. The Spirit makes not prayers in us, always according to what God's secret will

and foreknowledge is, but according to his revealed will to us, both in his word and in his providence, as things therein are presented to us, and lie before our view, and so not always according to what he means to ~~elc~~ but according to what it is our duty to pray most for; for he concurs to assist us to pray, as he doth in preaching or using other such like means and ordinances, wherein though the Spirit knows whom God means to convert, whom not, yet he assists his ministers in their spirits oftentimes as much to preach to those he means not to convert, as to those he means to convert: he dealing, with them therein according to what is their duty, not according to what is his decree.

2. Again, that phrase helps to answer this, when he is said to "help our infirmities," and therefore not according to his own vast knowledge does he frame our prayers, but as he applies his assistance to our infirm, weak, and narrow apprehensions; and stirs

up desires in us to such things, as according to our knowledge we conceive, and which by all we can see, by what is revealed to us in his providence, we think to be most for our good and his glory; and God accepts such desires as from us, but yet does for according to the largeness of his own love.

And so now to come to the case propounded, and therein unto helps to pacify and direct the heart about those prayers at which the things are not granted.

I. And first, how didst thou frame thy prayer for that thing which is denied thee? Didst thou pray for it absolutely, and peremptorily, as simply best for thee? thou must not then think much, if such a prayer be denied, for therein thou wentest beyond thy commission: but if thou didst pray for it conditionally, and with an 'if,' as Christ did, "if it be possible," (which instance is a strong ground for such kind of prayers) and, "not my will, but thy will be done," so, as thou didst refer it unto, and trust God's

judgment in the thing, and not thine own; only didst put him in mind, as thy duty was, of what was represented to thee as best for thee in view, and so left it to him to cast, and didst refer it to his will and wisdom: then thy prayer may be most fully answered and heard, and yet the thing denied; and thou art to interpret, and take God's meaning and mind revealed in the event in the best sense, which way soever it falls: for otherwise, Christ had not been heard, when yet the text says, "He was heard in that he feared," Hebrews, v. 7.

II. Observe if there were not a reservation in that denial, for some greater and further mercy, whereof that denial was the foundation. Thus, oftentimes some great cross is prevented by the denial of a thing which we were urgent for; if we had many of our desires, we had been undone; so it was a mercy to David that his child was taken away, for whose life he was yet so earnest, who would have been but a living

monument of his shame. It was also a mercy to David that Absalom was taken away, (whom surely he prayed much for, for he loved him much,) who, if he had lived, might have been the ruin of him and his house. As a wicked man's deliverance, and the granting his request, lays a foundation, and is a reservation of him to a worse judgment; so the denial of a godly man's prayer is for his greater good, and is laid as a foundation of a greater mercy. And again, oftentimes the very denial breaks a man's heart, and brings him nearer to God, puts him upon searching into his ways and estate, and in his prayers to see what is amiss therein, which alone is a great mercy, and better than the thing asked for; seeing, by the loss of that one thing, he learns how to pray better, and so obtain a hundred better things afterward. Christ desired the cup might pass; it did not; and that was the foundation of our salvation, and the way to his glory; he having to pass through that

suffering into his glory. The woman that had the bloody issue, though she used many means, and perhaps prayers among the rest, and all in vain, yet none took effect, that in the end she might come to Christ, and have both body and soul healed at once.

III. Observe if there be not a transmutation and a translation or turning of the thing desired into some other great blessing of the same kind: for God (whose ways are mercy and truth to his people) improves, husbands, and lays out the precious stock of their prayers, to the best advantage, in things whereby the greatest returns and gains may accrue; as old Jacob laid not his hands of blessing as Joseph would have guided them, but laid the right hand upon the younger son, whom Joseph did set at his left. So often God takes off his hand of blessing from the thing we prayed for, and lays and discovers it in another more for our good; and as God giving Isaac the power and privilege to bless a son, though Isaac

intended it for Esau, yet God unknown to him transmitted it to Jacob, yet so as the blessing was not lost: thus it is in our prayers for a blessing both upon ourselves and others. There is often a transmutation, never a frustration of them, which may as truly and directly be called an answer to the prayer: as if a factor beyond sea, when the owner sends for such and such commodities, supposing them more vendible and advantageous; but the factor, knowing the state of things and the prices, sends him over, instead of them, such as will sell better, and bring in more profit, may be said to answer his letters, and that better, than if he had sent those very commodities he wrote for. Thus Abraham's prayers for Ishmael were turned for Isaac; David's for the child to Solomon.

IV. Observe if in the end God does not answer thee still according to the ground of thy prayer; that is, see if that holy end, intention, and affection, which thou hadst

in prayer, be not in the end fully satisfied, though not in the thing thou didst desire; for God answers according to the hinge which the prayer turns upon. As when a general is sent out with an army by a king or state, who gives him many particular directions, how to order and dispose and manage the war, although, in many particulars that fall out, wherein they could not foresee to give so punctual and particular directions, he swerve from the directions; yet if he keeps to the intent of their commission, and does what is most advantageous for their ends, he may be said to keep to his commission. For as they say of the law, the mind of the law is the law, not the bare words it is printed in; so the meaning of the spirit is the prayer, Rom. viii. 27, and not simply the things desired, wherein we express those our desires; and still the meaning, the intent, the ground of our prayer shall be answered. To open this, the main ends and meanings of our hearts in our re-

quests are God's glory, the church's good, and our own particular comfort and happiness; we can desire but comfort, and a man looks out such a particular mercy, which he thinks tends much to God's glory, and his happiness, and yet that thing is denied: yet notwithstanding God will answer him according to the meaning of his prayers. God's glory shall certainly be advanced, even for that prayer of his, some other way, and his comfort made up, which is the common desire of all mankind; and thou canst have but comfort, let the thing be what it will that conveys it to thee; and God will take order that the comfort thy soul desired, thou shalt have in one way or other, which when it does thou canst not but say thy prayers are heard. For as God fulfils his promises, so hears prayers; there is the same reason of both. Now God hath promised, he that leaves father and mother shall have an hundred-fold; not as we say, in kind, this cannot always be fulfilled; for an hundred

fathers he cannot have. God fulfils it not therefore always in the same kind, but in some other things, which shall be more than an hundred fathers would be.

Moses prays that he might go into Canaan; God answers the ground of his prayer, though not in the manner expressed and desired, and that both for Moses' comfort and his own glory; for he takes him up to heaven, the true Canaan, whereof that Canaan was but a type; and he appoints Joshua, a fresh and a young man, coming on in the world, and one whom Moses himself had tutored and brought up, and who was his pupil, servant, and attendant, Num. vi. 11, 28: and this was more for God's glory; for Joshua was therein to be the type of Christ leading us to heaven, which the law (of which Moses was the type) could not bring us unto by reason of the weakness of it; and he being young did it better; and it was not so much also for God's glory, that one man should do all: and whereas

Moses desired to have the honour of it, in that his servant that attended him, and had been brought up by him, and had all from him, that he was the man should do it, was well nigh as great an honour to Moses, as if he had been the leader himself. And so David when he desired to build the temple and house to God, for the like reasons God denied it, but yet honoured him to prepare the materials, and to draw the pattern; as also in that his son did it, who was therein also the like type of Christ, being a prince of peace, but David a man of blood and war; and likewise God accepted this of David, as if he had built it, and will recompense him as much.

V. If the thing which thou hast prayed much about, be denied thee, yet if God does not give thee all satisfaction that may be, even as if he were tender of denying thee, and therefore does much in it for thy prayers' sake, though the conclusion proves otherwise, as being against some other pur-

pose of his for some other ends: as when he denied Moses to go into the land of Canaan, he did it with much respect (as I may so speak with reverence) to Moses; he yielded as far as might be, for he let him lead them till he should come to the very borders; and he let him see that good land, carrying him up to a hill, and (as it is thought) by a miracle enabled his sight to view the whole land: and the man he chose to perform this work was his servant, which was a great honour to Moses, that one brought up by him should succeed him. So when Abraham prayed for, Ishmael, "O let Ishmael live in thy sight," Gen. xvii. 18, God went as far in granting his request as might be: for, says he, verse 20, "I have heard thee; and I have blessed him, and I will make him fruitful, and multiply him exceedingly, and he shall beget twelve princes; but my covenant, I will establish with Isaac." So likewise, when in casting the thing thou didst seek at his hands, he shows an extra-

ordinary hand in turning it, it is a sign he had a respect to thee, that he should vouchsafe to discover his hand so much in it: let the thing fall which way it will, if God's hand appear much in it, thou mayest comfortably conclude, that there is some great thing in it, and that prayer wrought that miracle in it to dispose it so; and that there is some great reason why he denies thee, and a great respect had to thy prayers, in that he is pleased to discover so extraordinary a providence about it.

VI. Lastly, look into the effect of that denial upon thine own heart; as,

1. If thy heart be enlarged to acknowledge God to be holy and righteous in his dealings with thee, and thine own unworthiness the cause of his denying thee. Thus we often find the saints expressing themselves in their prayers; the twenty-second Psalm, though it was typically made of Christ, yet as it was penned by David, and as it may concern his person, it may serve for an

instance for this, "I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not." This might have made him jealous of God; "but," says he, "thou art holy," and dealest now with me in an holy manner, and art just in it: "others have called on thee," and have been heard, though I now for my unworthiness am denied; "but I am a worm." It might have put a man off, when he should think, others are heard, but not I; but it puts not him off, but humbles him; "I am a worm," and "Thou art holy."

2. If God fill thy heart with a holy contentment in the denial; if he speak to thy heart as he did to Moses, when he denied him, Deut. iii. "Let it suffice thee;" if, as to St. Paul, when he was so earnest about removing that buffetting, if thou gettest but such an answer as that to him, "My grace is sufficient;" or that some such like consideration is dropped in that stays thee. It was the effect of David's seven days' fasting, that he did so contentedly bear the loss

of the child, which his servants thought would have overwhelmed him, 2 Sam. xii. 19, 20, 21. But a consideration was dropped, in which was the fruit of his prayer, "That he should go to him, not he return hither;" and his mind was comforted thereby, insomuch, as it is said, verse 24, "that he comforted Bathsheba also."

3. If thou canst be thankful to God, out of faith that God has cast and ordered all for the best, though he has denied thee; and although thou seest no reason but that the thing prayed for would have been for the best, yet art thankful upon the denial of it, out of faith resting in God's judgment in it: as David, in all those fore-mentioned places, was, "Thou art holy that inhabitest the praises of Israel:" he praises God for all this. David, before he did eat, after his seven days' fasting for the child, arose, "and went first into the temple and worshipped," 2 Sam. xii. 20; and of what kind of worship it was, appears by his anointing himself and

“changing his raiment,” which was in token of rejoicing and thanksgiving; and it fell out to him according to his faith, for presently after Solomon was begotten, verse 24.

4. If thou canst pray still and givest not over, although thou standest for mercies which thou missest; if, when thou hast mercies granted thou fearest most, and when denied lovest most, and art not discouraged, thy prayers are heard, Psalm lxxx. 4. Though God seemed angry with their prayers, yet they pray and expostulate with him, and give not over, for they made that Psalm as a prayer, “And how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?” So, Psalm xliv. 17, “Though we are cast among dragons, yet we have not been false in thy covenant.” So say thou, I will pray still, though I never have an answer in this life. It moves ingenuous natures to see men take repulses and denials well, which proud persons will not do; and so it moves God.

CHAPTER X.

A reproof of those that pray, but look not after the return of their prayers:—the causes of this neglect.

THE use of all is, to reprove those who put up prayers, and are earnest in begging, but look not after them when they have done, no more than if they had not prayed: who still venture, and have a great stock of prayers going, but look not after the returns that are made, cast not up their comings in and gainings by prayers; and, when they have prayed, sit down discouraged; as not making account in earnest, that ever they shall hear of their prayers again, even as if they had been but as words cast away; “as beating the air;” as “bread cast upon the waters,” which, they think, sinks, or is carried away, and they shall find it no more: but herein you despise God’s ordinance, and err, not knowing the power of the prayers; and you contemn the Lord. But you will

say, as they in the prophet said, "Wherein do we contemn him?" If you asked a man a question, and, when you had done, did turn your back upon him, as scoffing Pilate asked in scorn of Christ, "What is truth?" but would not stay for an answer, would you not contemn him! As not to answer when a question is asked you is contempt, so not to regard the answer made, when you have been earnest in begging, is no less contempt also. If you had written letters to a very friend about important business, and had earnestly solicited him for an answer, and he were careful in due time to send one, if you should make account to hear of him no more, should you not wrong him in your thoughts? Or if he did write, if you should not vouchsafe to read over his answer, were it not a contempt of him? So it is here, when you have been earnest with God for blessings, and regard not the answer. And, because verily this is a fault among us, I will therefore endeavour to discover to you the causes

and discouragements, which, though they keep you not from praying, yet from this earnest expectation, and real and true making account to hear of answers of your prayers; only my scope is, not to show you so much the reasons why God denies you many requests, as why even in your own hearts you are discouraged after you have prayed, as if they would not be answered, although God doth answer them. These discouragements are partly temptations, partly sinful impediments, wherein we are more faulty.

I. Because your assurance that your persons are accepted is weak, therefore your confidence that your prayers are heard is weak also. For, as God first accepts the person, and then our prayers; so the belief that God accepts our persons is that which also upholds our hearts, in confidence that our prayers shall be granted; this you may find in 1 John v. 13, 14, 15; in the 13th verse he says, "These things have I written to you, that ye may know you have eternal

life;" and upon that assurance this will follow, verse 14, 15: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us. And if we know he hears us, we know we have the petitions we desired of him." Mark how he links these three together, as effects and consequences each of the other. 1st, "These things I write unto you, that you may be assured," that life and heaven are yours, as in 12th and 13th verses. And upon that, 2d, this confidence will follow in your hearts, "that God hears you;" that is, that you have his ears open to you, and his heart enlarged towards you. And the 3d, if you be assured that God hears you, then from this will follow an assurance, that "you shall have any thing granted" you desire; yea, and he makes this one of the main and immediate effects of assurance of justification; therefore he says, "this is the confidence" that we have in him; that is there is this effect of this confidence, for whereas

they might say, what benefit will accrue to us by this assurance? Why this, says he, which is one of the great and main privileges of a Christian, even assurance that God will hear him; and not only so, but grant him all his prayers. For when a man is assured God has given him his Son, he will then easily be induced to believe and expect, "How shall he not with him give me all things?" Rom. viii. 32. If once he looks upon God as a father, he will then easily conceive that which Christ says; "If fathers that are evil can give good things to their children, how much more shall your Father give his Spirit, and all good things, to them that ask him?" And if he gave his Son, when we did not pray to him, how much more shall he with him give us all things we pray for? If a man comes to sue to any man whose mind he knew not, whether he loved him or not, he would have small hope or expectation of having his suit granted, though he came again and again;

but if he be assured he is in favour with him, according to that degree of favour he supposes himself to have with him, he is assured and confident of obtaining his request.

II. Discouragement in the weakness of their prayers: though a man thinks his person is accepted. yet, alas! says he, my prayers are so poor and weak that surely God will never regard them. To remove which, let me, 1st, ask thee this question: Dost thou pray with all thy might? then, though that thy might be weak in itself, and in thine own apprehension such, yet because it is all the might which thou hast, and which grace has in thee, it shall be accepted. "For God accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not," 2 Cor. viii. 12.

2. Thou art to consider that God does not hear thee for thy prayers' sake, though not without them, but "for his name's sake," and his Son's sake, and because thou art his child; as the mother when her child cries

(suppose it to be a weak child) does not neglect to hear and relieve it, but tenders it; not because it cries more loud, but because it cries, and pities it the more, the weaker it is.

3. Again, though the performance in itself be weak, yet considered as a prayer, it may be strong, because a weak prayer may set the strong God to work; as faith in the act of it, may be weak, yet because its object is Christ, therefore it justifies: so it is in prayer, it prevails, not because of the performance itself, but because of the name in which it is put up, even Christ's name; and therefore as a weak faith justifies, so a weak prayer prevails as well as a stronger; and for the like reason in both, for faith attributes all to God, and so does prayer: for as faith is merely a receiving grace, so is prayer a begging grace; and therefore dost thou think thy prayers are accepted at all, notwithstanding their weakness? If that they are accepted, then they must be ac-

cepted as prayers; now if they be accepted as prayers, then as effectual motives to prevail with God to grant the thing you ask; for if he should not accept them to that end for which they were ordained, it is as if he accepted them not at all. As, therefore, when he approves of any man's faith as true and sincere, he approves and accepts of it to that purpose for which it was ordained, which is to save and justify, and to this end does as fully accept the weakest act of faith as the strongest: so it is with their prayers, which being ordained as a means to obtain mercies from him, if he accepts them at all, it is with relation to the accomplishment of them, which is their end.

4. Men are mistaken in judging of the weakness of their prayers; they judge of the weakness of their prayers by their expressions, and gifts in performing them, or by the stirring and overflow of affections; whereas the strength and vigour of prayer

should be estimated from the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the desires expressed in it. As it is not the loudness of a preacher's voice, but the weight and holiness of the matter, and the spirit of the preacher, that moves a wise and intelligent hearer; so not gifts, but graces in prayers are they that move the Lord. The strength of prayer lies not in words, but in that it is fitted to prevail with God; one prayer is not more strong than another, further than it is so framed as it has power with God more or less; as of Jacob it is said, "he had power with God," Hosea xii. Now prayers move God, not as an orator moves his hearers, but as a child moves his father: two words of a child, humbled and crying at his father's feet, will prevail more than penned orations, Rom. viii. It is the meaning of the Spirit that God looks unto, more than the expressions: for the groans there are said to be unutterable. Hezekiah's expressions were so rude and broken, that he says, Isa. xxxviii. 14,

that he did but chatter, (he being then sick) even as a crane, yet God heard them.

III. Another discouragement is failings of answers. I have prayed often and long, and I have been seldom or never answered, and therefore I make little account of my prayers, that they are heard: others have the revenues of their prayers coming in, but I miss almost every thing I stand for: therefore say they as those, "Why have we fasted, and thou regardest it not?" Isa. lviii. 3.

1. To remove this, consider, 1st, That thou hast the more reason to wait, for thou hast the more answers to come: for as wicked men treasure up wrath, so do godly men mercy, and especially by their prayers: and therefore mercies and answers often come thick together, even as afflictions also do.

2. Suppose thou shouldest have few answers concerning the things thou seekest for here, either in praying for thyself or others, yet thy reward is with the Lord.

It is in praying as in preaching, a man may preach faithfully many a year, and yet not convert a soul; and yet a man is not to give over waiting, but to observe after every sermon what good is done, and whether God will give them repentance. And if none be converted, yet a man's reward is with the Lord; every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour, and not according to the success of his labour only. So it is in praying; though thou missest again and again, and nothing succeeds that thou prayest for, yet be not discouraged, for thy reward is with the Lord, which will one day come.

3. God does it, not that he hears thee not, but to try thee: for a man to say as David says, Psalm cxvi. 1, 2, "God hath heard my prayer, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live," that is nothing so much as to be able to say, well, I have prayed thus long, and for these many things, and never sped, and "yet I will call upon him

whilst I live," though I find no answer in this life. To find profits in a trade, and yet to hold out trading still, argues not so much faithfulness in a man's calling, as when a man has losses and failures, and yet follows it.

4. God usually stays so long, that we have done expecting; "The elect cry day and night," but God stays so long, that when he comes "he finds not faith," they have done expecting, have forgot their prayers, and then he does things they looked not for.

Other discouragements there are, wherein we ourselves are more faulty, and which are our sins, more than our temptations, but which yet weaken the expectation of having our prayers answered; as,

1. Slothfulness in prayer, when we do not put to all our might in praying, and then no wonder we do not only not obtain, but that our own hearts misgive us, that we look for little success and issue of such prayers; he that shows himself cold in a suit, teaches

him he sues to, to deny him. If we see one seeking to us faintly and slightly, we are not then solicitous to deny him, but think he will be easily put off; so, also, when we see ourselves slothful in praying, and praying as if we prayed not, no wonder if, by reason of that consciousness, we look not after the success of such prayers, which in the performance we slighted. When we pray as if we were willing to be denied, we knowing that the Scripture says, that the fervent prayer alone prevails, *that* prayer which sets all the faculties on work, James v. 16, how shall we then expect that God should grant any good thing to us? For though God sells nothing to us for our prayers, but gives freely, yet he would have his gifts accepted: now, without large desires and longings they would not be accepted; and what is fervent prayer, but the expression of such fervent desire? Jacob wrestled when he obtained. "Many seek to enter," says Christ; "but you must strive."

Now, when we know these things, and yet are slothful, how can we expect any answer at all? will not the consciousness of it quell all our expectations? and hence it comes to pass that God proportions his dealings with us to our prayers; because we seem to pray, and yet pray not to purpose, therefore God sometimes seems like one asleep, and then sometimes to wake, and make fair offers to help, and yet falls as it were asleep again, because we were thus drowsy in our prayers. Those prayers that awaken God, must awaken us; those prayers that stir God, must first "stir us to lay hold on God," as Isaiah speaks: as obedience strengthens faith and assurance, so fervency in praying begets confidence of being heard. In all other things slothfulness discourages and weakens expectation. Does any man expect that riches should come upon him, when he does his business negligently? for it is the diligent hand that maketh rich: does any man expect a crop and a harvest, if he takes

not pains to plough, and sow his corn? No more, if you do not take pains with your hearts in prayer, can you expect an answer, or indeed will you?

2. Cause for sinful discouragement herein, is looking at prayer only as a duty to be performed, and so performing it as a task, and not so much out of desires stirred up after the things to be obtained, nor out of faith that we shall obtain them; which is as if a physician having a sick servant, to whom he prescribes and commands to take some physic to cure him, and his man should take it indeed, because it is commanded and prescribed by his master, looking at it as an act of duty, as he obeys him in other things. but not as looking at it as medicine, or means, that will have any work upon him to cure him, and therefore orders himself as if he had taken no such thing. Thus do most in the world pray to God, take prayer as a prescription only, but not as a means; they come to God daily, but as to a

Master only in this performance, not as a Father, and thus doing, no wonder if they look for little effect of prayer; for our expectation never exceeds or reaches further than our end and intention which we had in any business. If I perform any ordinance but as a duty, then I rest therein, and expect no further; as when a man preaches for filthy lucre only, he performs his duty, and then looks for his hire, but looks not after any other effect of his sermons: so neither will men after their prayers look for answers to them when they perform them as duties only. Now, to help you in this, you are to look to two things in prayer: First, to a command from God: Secondly, to the promises of God: and so to consider it in a double relation, first, as a duty, in respect to the command; secondly, as a means to obtain or procure blessings at God's hand in relation to his promises. Therefore, in prayer, first an act of obedience, secondly an act of faith, is to be exer-

cised: "Ask in faith, nothing wavering," James i. 6. Now the most in the world perform it as an act of obedience only, and so rest in the present performance and acceptance of it; but if a man pray in faith, he will pray with an eye to the promises; and look on prayer as a means for time to come, to obtain such or such a mercy at God's hands; and if so, then he is not satisfied till he has an answer to his prayers, and till then will wait, as the church says, she would wait till he would arise and plead her cause.

3. A third sinful discouragement, is returning to sins after prayers: when a man has prayed for some mercy, and rises full of much confidence that his prayers are heard, and so awhile he walks, yet falling into a sin, that sin dashes all his hopes, frustrates his prayers (as he thinks) and calls them back again, meets as it were with the answer, which is God's messenger, and causes it to return to heaven again. How often when

God had even granted a petition, and the decree was coming forth, and the grant newly written, and the seal setting to it, but an act of treason, coming between, stops it in the seal, and defers it, blots and blurs all, both prayer and grant when newly written, and leaves a guilt in the mind, which quells our hopes, and then we look no more after our prayers. This especially is so if when we were sinning such a thought came in, as often it does to restrain us: are you not in dependence upon God for such a mercy, and have prayed for it, and are fair for it, how then dare you do this, and sin against him? When in this case the heart goes on, this blots all the prayer, and discourages a man; for, says the conscience, will God hear sinners? And so far it is true, that sinning thus between, interrupts and hinders the obtaining our petitions; that as we thus betray and undo our prayers, so, in proportion, we find in the way to our obtaining the thing we prayed for, as

many rubs and difficulties arise. For as we lay blocks in God's way of coming towards us to do us good, so he in ours: therefore, often when a business goes prosperously on, and we think we shall carry it, comes some accident between the cup and the lip, that casts all behind hand again, because we dealt with God in like manner. For when we had prayed, and were encouraged and in good hopes, then by some sin or other we spoiled all, and bereaved ourselves of our expectation. But yet this you are to consider, that as in the end praying overcomes sin in God's children, so also God in the end overcomes difficulties, and brings the matter to pass: and remark, it is not sins past so much that hinder the prayers of God's people, as the present unfitness and indisposition of their hearts for mercy.

God will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints, &c.
PSALM lxxxv. 8.

THE main thing intended to be insisted upon out of these words is despatched; yet, that I may not leave so fair and fruitful a crop still standing upon the ground unreaped, I will go on more briefly to get in the rest of that harvest the text affords.

This Psalm (as was said) was penned as a prophecy of, and prayer for, the return of God's people out of the captivity of Babylon, and the settling and establishment of that church and state upon its former basis; yet there is therein a further and more especial aim had to the peace and glory to be brought in by Christ; till when, this prophecy had but a poor and slender accomplishment, in regard of much outward glory or peace that that church enjoyed.

And therefore the peace here spoken of, and promised for the present, is to be ex-

tended further than to outward prosperity, or a happy issue out of that calamity, even to speaking peace to drooping and weather-beaten consciences: and accordingly we find this kind of peace to have been especially promised by the Prophet Isaiah to the people at their return out of the captivity, both in Isaiah xlvi. from verse 20 to the end, and Isaiah lvii. from verse 14 to the end, there being many broken hearts that had wanted the light of God's countenance long; having been during the captivity, banished from the ordinances of the temple, hanging up their harps mourning, whose thoughts were as if God had meant to destroy them, as appears, Jer. xxix. 11, who afterwards were refreshed with inward peace, at the restoration of those ordinances, as well as with outward, as by those passages doth appear. Therefore, in relation to this kind of peace only, I will at this time handle the words.

In them you have a discovery of God's

proceedings in treating of peace, or proclaiming war with his people and subjects.

I. You see that sometimes God does not speak peace to his own children. This was their state for the present, when this Psalm was penned: he will speak peace, therefore at present he did not; yea, it may incline us to think that God at present spoke the contrary for the prophet speaks this by faith; as, contrary to sense and present experience, he believes God intends to come again to a treaty of peace, though now he seems to have nothing but anger and blood, and war in his looks, and speeches, and actions; and to threaten and proclaim war, and take up arms. And thus God often deals with his own children, whether a people or a particular man: so with a nation, Isa. lxiii. 10, "They rebelled, and he fought against them:" so with a particular man, God frowned upon his child Ephraim, "spake bitter things against him," (it is the phrase used Jer. xxxi. 20,) though

yet "Ephraim is my pleasant child," says he. David had not a good word from him a long time, Psalm li. 8, "Make me to hear again joy and gladness;" and Psalm l. 7, "Hear, O my people! and I will speak," but not against them, they might hope, because he owns them for his people, "Hear, O Israel! and I will testify against thee;" and yet it follows, "I am the Lord thy God." Job says, he did not speak only against him, but wrote bitter things; he wrote as it were books against him, Job xiii. 26, he writing over in his conscience the sins of his youth in letters of blood, and wrath, and terrors for them.

II. There must needs be some great reason for this, they being his people, which is the second thing that is intimated, and may be observed out of these words; namely, the reason, or moving cause provoking God thus to interrupt the peace of his people: they had fallen into some gross folly or other; some sinful or inordinate dispositions had

been indulged, and nourished in them, which is usually, though not always, the cause of this his dealing. 'This is evident by this, that the conclusion of their peace, when it is made up again, has this clause, as the only article of reconciliation between them, that they return no more to their folly; implying they had formerly run out into some inordinancy, which to reduce them from, God took up arms against them, and thereby taught them wisdom, to take heed of losing, and then buying, peace at so dear a rate again. And, indeed, all the quarrels that God has against a nation, a particular place, or person that belongs to him, begin there; "They rebelled, and he fought against them," Isa. lxiii. 8. "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth," Isa. lvii.

The reason is, that anger is out of love as well as hatred, which therefore he expresses, though with grief that he should be put to quarrel with those he has set himself to love. And as wicked men, whom he always

hates, may out of his patience have a truce; so on the contrary, with his own, God may take up a quarrel, although he loves them and remembers them with everlasting kindness.

The uses of both are these:

1. As peace with God is dear to you, so take heed of turning unto folly; only take this advertisement, that they are not mere follies or ignorances, that do interrupt or break the peace: as it is not simply the outrage of some pirates that will cause two states at peace to enter into a war, unless that state consent to their act, and maintain them in their rapine. So it is not simply the rising of lusts, that war in our members against the law of the mind, that break the peace between God and us, unless they be approved of, and consented unto, nourished and maintained with some presumption: whilst we maintain, and take up a constant fight against God's enemies in us, and disavow the outrageous risings of our lusts, the

peace may hold, and often does; for whilst we are not at peace with sin, God may be at peace with us and our spirits; but so much peace as we give them, so much war God takes up.

2. Does God take up quarrels against his own? then upon any breach made, go forth to meet him. It is St. Paul's exhortation, not "to let the sun go down upon thy wrath," but to reconcile thyself ere night with thy offended brother; but I turn the exhortation, "Let not the sun go down upon God's wrath" towards thee, but every day make and renew thy peace with God, ere thou sleepest, that, as David says, thou mayest lie down and sleep in peace, Psalm iv. 8.

3. If the peace of God's own people be thus often interrupted, who yet are the sons of peace, Luke x. what wrath is reserved for the "children of disobedience," Eph. ii. 2, and open rebels, that are children of wrath, because of disobedience? "There is

no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," Isaiah lvii. 21. God is preparing against thee, whoever thou art, that goest on in "sin, if thou turn not," Psalm vii. 13; thou art pressed for hell, and art thither bound, to encounter the wrath of the great God; thither where no truce is to be had; "there is no discharge in that war," as Solomon says, Eccles. viii. 8. Think of this, you that sin, and will sin; whose peace is not struck up between God and you; who never yet so much as entered into any treaty of peace with God, who never apprehended God and yourselves at variance.

III. The third thing to be observed out of the text is this, that when the child of God wants peace, he can have no peace till God speak it. God must speak peace, if ever his people have it; therefore, says he here, "I will hear what God will speak:" he speaks in opposition to the voice of man, and the help of second causes, and of all

means whatever, which in time of distress, of themselves, can do no good.

First: Because God is the King of all the world, the Sovereign Lord of all. Now, treaties of war and peace are the prerogative of kings, and of them alone: they may consult with their subjects about establishing good laws, as they use to do; but the proclaiming war and peace with foreign states, they have ever held in their own hands: and so does God, who is the King of kings.

Secondly: Because God is the Judge of all the world, and the party offended, at whose suit all arrests and controversies come. Now when a condemned man stands at the bar, let all the standers-by say what they will, bid him be of good comfort, and tell him that his cause will go well, yet till he hear the judge himself speak as much, he cannot be at rest in his mind; the judge can only acquit him and absolve him, the

king alone speaks pardons; and so does God peace; all afflictions are his arrests. Thou must therefore make thy peace with him, if thou wilt be at peace.

Thirdly: Peace, especially of conscience, is a thing that must be created, for our hearts themselves are full of nothing but turmoil, as the "raging sea, which cannot rest." "I create the fruit of the lips, peace," Isaiah lvii. 19, men may speak it, but I must create it. A word of power, such as went forth when light was created, must go forth from God, or else there is no peace; for otherwise our hearts are as the sea, that rests not.

Fourthly: The wounds of conscience which are in God's people, are of that nature, that nothing but God alone can cure them; for the chief thing that wounds them is the loss of God's favour, not simply his wrath: for it is the glory of God, not self-love only, that makes them seek him; therefore nothing gives peace, but the restoring of his favour, and the light of his countenance; the same

dart that wounded, must heal again; Isaiah lvii. "I smote him—and I will heal him." And as one that is sick with love; when love is the disease, no physic, no persuasion of friends, can cure it, nothing but the love of the party beloved; so when a soul is wounded for the loss of God's love, one word from him, one good look, one promise from him that we are his, will quiet the heart, more than all things in the world, and can alone give peace. Like a poor child, that cries for its mother; let who will dandle it, and play with it, and use it ever so kindly, yet it will not be stilled, till the mother comes; so it is with a poor soul that cries after God day and night.

1. Use. In case thou art in distress, especially of spirit, and want of peace of conscience, wait upon God, in the use of means, for peace; friends may come to thee, and say, Why shouldest thou be troubled? thou hast no such cause to be cast down; but all these are miserable comforters, (as

Job said) unless God speak peace. David heard by the prophet Nathan that his sin was pardoned; but yet his soul was not at quiet, till God would second it immediately by his Spirit; therefore, says he, when Nathan had been with him, Psalm li. 8. "Make me to hear joy and gladness." Art thou beset with hellish blasphemies cast into thy soul? God must speak peace, and rebuke Satan for thee; all thy friends, all the men in the world cannot do it; they can only say, as the archangel said, "The Lord rebuke thee;" and he can as easily do it, as he rebuked Laban, and forbade him to speak roughly to Jacob; the same charge he can give in an instant to Satan: therefore wait upon God, and look up to him.

2. Consider this against the time you come to die; all your desire is to die in peace, and "O let thy servant depart in peace!" is the speech and desire of all; but who is it that must speak peace to you then? God only. At death you will send for a

good minister, or a good friend, to give you some comfort (as you call it;) but, if God will not speak it, how can they? if you could call all the angels out of heaven, and all the saints both in earth and heaven, and they should desire to comfort you; yet if God will not speak it, who is able to do it? Job xxxiv. 29, "When he hideth his face, who then can behold him?" None can see his face, as the opposition shows. False daubers may come to you, and say, Peace, peace, as they did of whom the prophet speaks; but listen to what God will speak, he only must, and can do it; and be sure that you secure his peace before you come to die. Would any wise prince defer the treaty of peace with his enemy, till he come into the field, and the battle is begun? how foolish then are those, who neglect seeking after God, till the assault of death comes, and the king of fears, with all his terrors, hath encompassed them round?

IV. Observation is, that let God's people

be in never so great distress, yet it is an easy thing for God to give peace to them. Mark the expression used here, it is but speaking peace, that is, it is as easy for him to give peace, as it is for you to speak a word; it is no more to him: then, our comfort is, that as he only must do it, so he easily can do it, even with a word.

First, because his speaking is creating; if he speaks, he makes things to be, even with a word; as at first, he did but say, "Let there be light, and there was light," so still, if he but say, Let there be peace, there is peace: He made all, and upholds all, by the word of his power. As, therefore, when the storm was at its height, and the waves most raging, yet at one word of Christ's they were all still: "the sea and the winds obey him:" so when temptations are most fierce, and the doubts of thine own heart most tumultuous and raging, a word from him can still them.

Secondly, because the light which God

gives to a man's spirit, when he speaks peace, is a sure and infallible light, and therefore a satisfying light; so that when it comes, it must needs give peace; and no objection, no temptation can darken or obscure it, when it shines: "When he gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" says he, in Job, xxxiv. 29. No creature is able to separate from his love, or the assurance of it.

1. It is a certain and infallible light, which God gives when he speaks peace. The anointing from above, which enlightens a man's eyes, "is truth, and is no lie," 1 John, ii. 27; that is, in teaching a man (of which he there speaks; for he speaks not only what he is in himself, but what he is in teaching us) he does it so, as that a man is not deluded by it, and therefore it is added, none else need teach that man; for did not the Spirit, (when he spoke peace,) speak so, as that that man, to whom it is spoken, must infallibly apprehend it, he

should speak in vain ; for so the Apostle reasons in the case of unknown tongues, that if a trumpet give an uncertain sound, or a man speak so, as it shall not be known what he speaks, " he beats the air," 1 Cor. xiv. 9. Now, therefore, surely God, when he speaks peace, speaks it so infallibly and distinctly, that the soul knows the meaning of it ; it is not a voice else ; for, says the Apostle, verse 10, the end of all voices is to signify ; and, therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice, he shall be as a barbarian that speaks to me, verse 11, especially, if the speaker undertakes to be a witness, as the Holy Ghost in speaking peace is, 1 John v. 6. Now to witness, is such a testimony, as is taken for infallible ; for the end of it is, to put an end to the controversy, and it ends the strife between man and man ; now the Holy Ghost, when he speaks, speaks as a witness, and therefore puts an end to a man's doubts ; he speaks infallibly.

2. Therefore, in the second place, it is

a satisfying light also; it is such a light, as dispels darkness, as answers all objections; and so speaks peace home. As in a question and controversy in divinity or logic, when some one important truth is understood, a man has a light, which goes through all the objections, and answers them all; now such a light the Spirit gives to a poor distressed soul, about the great controversy of his own salvation; and when he speaks peace, he gives such a light, as satisfies the mind, as lets him see *that*, in God's free grace, and in Christ's, which answers to all, which he or all the devils can say against him from wants or objections that are in himself. He opens, and no man is able to shut; and therefore when he speaks peace, his testimony is taken and believed. If we receive the witness of men, and rest in it, 1 John v. 9, the witness of God is greater; that is, of more power and efficacy to persuade and satisfy the soul.

1. Use, is a use of comfort to poor souls

that are in distress, and in such distress sometimes, as to think and say their cause is desperate, and past recovery, so far are their souls sometimes thrown into despair. Consider how easy it is for you to have your condition altered, and changed even in a moment. I tell thee, though (it may be) thou hast been cast down these twenty years, and thy soul is battered, broken, hardened, settled, fixed in serious thoughts of thy ruin and reprobation, yet one good look, one good word from God, shall in an instant dispel all thy distress and apprehension. God can and often does more with one word, in one moment, than Satan could do in many years, with all the objections he could muster up. The truth of this in experience, we often find and observe in ourselves and others. Yea, and sometimes when he speaks peace, he gives such satisfaction to a man's soul in that particular, that he would be content to be as many years more in his spiritual conflicts, to enjoy but the

like light one half hour. Thus easy is it for God to speak peace. Though thou thinkest thyself never so far off from peace, yet he can speak peace to them that are afar off, as well as to those who are near, Isaiah lvii. 19, for, says he, it is I that speak it. And when he does it, then all thy doubts and distresses will be forgotten, as the pains of a woman in travail are when a man-child is born.

2. Is the church in any distress? (as the church here at this time was) he can redeem it out of all with a word. A word spoken to the heart of Cyrus, did set them in their own land again, so you have it expressed, Isa. xlv. 26, 27, 28. "The God that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited, and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built;" you see his manner of doing it, it is but speaking a word; speaking, "he says to Jerusalem, Be built;" and though there be never so great impediments in the way, he will say to the deep Be, dry, that his

people may pass over; he dried up a whole nation, a sea of people, namely the Babylonians, to make way for his deliverance; and when they are conquered, and Cyrus a new king, comes to have the sway of things, God speaks to his heart also; that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd: and causeth him to say to Jerusalem, Be thou built. Therefore go to him, and trust in him in all the distresses of the church, as the church also did, Psalm xliv. 4. Thou art my king, command deliverances; a mandamus from God does it, and will do it at any time.

Let God be never so angry, and his people's distress never so great, yet will speak peace in the end to them; you heard before, that if we have peace, he only must give it; and then, that he could, and was able with ease to do it; and now you shall hear, that he will certainly do it in the end.

The reasons the text suggests are these:

First, If we but consider who this God is, that is to speak peace; I will hear what God

the Lord will speak; he is the Lord, and therefore able to speak what pleaseth him; he is peculiarly the God of peace, and therefore willing to speak peace. Now, first, when it is said, he is the God of peace, and the God of comfort, the meaning is, he is full of it, infinitely full of it, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks: thoughts of peace, and love to his people, rise within him, as hatred or malice does in a malicious man towards his enemy, so that he cannot contain and forbear expressing it towards him; that as David says, his thoughts did burn within him, and at last break forth; so in God, "I know the thoughts I think towards you" (says he to them of the captivity,) Jer. xxix. 11, they are "thoughts of peace, and not of evil." And, secondly, besides that these his thoughts of peace, are taken up of himself, his Son also has bespoken peace for us and therefore God will speak it. Even as Joseph, though he speaks roughly a while to

his brethen, yet could not in the end contain, Gen. xlv. 1.

Secondly, Let us consider who they are to whom he is to speak it, they are his people, as the text has it; and to them there is no question, but he will speak peace, though he seems angry for a while. They are his people, that is the reason given, 1 Sam. xii. 22. "He will not cast off his people;" as also Isa. lxiii. 8, 9. "When they rebelled, he was wroth, yet he said, Surely, they are my people, so I was their Saviour." They? why they are the sons of peace, Luke xii. 6, ordained for peace; and, therefore, shall be sure to have it; and, although some differences may arise betwixt God and them, yet there is a natural *στοργη* in the Lord, that moves him to speak peace in the end to them; as the dumb son of Cræsus, when he saw his father likely to be killed, though he had never spoken before, yet then out of an impetus of spirit, the strings of his tongue were unloosed, and he cried out to the mur-

derer, Kill not King Cræsus; so, when the enemies of the church of God are ready to devour his people and Satan is ready to swallow his child up in despair, then he cries, save my child, save my church. "Is Ephraim my pleasant child?" says God, Jer. xxxi. 20. "For though I spake against him, and chastised him, yet I do earnestly remember" my child, says he, and my fatherly affection for him, "and my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him."

Thirdly, if God did not in the end speak peace, they would indeed return to folly, which is the third thing in the text. For this end of speaking peace, is that they might not return to folly, Psalm cxxv. 3, "the rod of the wicked shall not always lie upon the righteous, lest they put forth their hand to iniquity." Therefore, at the last verse, "peace shall be upon Israel." As for this cause he speaks outward peace, so also inward, and suffers not the rod of Satan,

and of his own heavy displeasure, to lie upon their hearts; for else they would return to the pleasures of sin; for every creature must have some delight, their spirits would fail and be tired out else, and wearied in good duties, if God should not in the end speak peace, Isa. lvii. "The spirit would fail before me." As it is a rule in physic, still to maintain nature; and, therefore, when that shall be in danger of being destroyed, they leave giving purging physic, and give cordials: so doth God with his people; though he often brings their spirits very weak and low, yet he will uphold and maintain them, so that they shall not fail, and be extinguished, but will give cordials to raise them up again.

3. What good heart that bears a child-like affection to God, would offend such a God, that be thy distresses what they may, will certainly speak peace? then do not put him to it, spend not upon that precious stock of his free grace and love. It is true, he is

married to thee ; and, therefore, though thou hast followed after many lovers, Jer. iii. 1, 2, 14, still he says, "Return, for I am married to thee;" as, therefore, when man and wife are fallen out, they consider, we must live together, and therefore they reconcile themselves again: so consider, it must be between God and thee, and make it a means and motive to recover thee, as Samuel did to the Israelites, 1 Sam. xii. 22. "You have committed this great sin; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, for God will not cast you off, you are his people." Go home to him again, he will speak peace. Think thus: The time will come wherein God will be friends again with me, he and I cannot be strange long; though I would, he will not, Isa. lvii. 18, 19: though he went on stubbornly, yet God healed him, and would not lose his child, therefore I will return of myself.

But let them not turn again to folly.—PSALM lxxxv. 8.

THE fifth observation is, That peace being spoken to their hearts by God, they should return no more to folly. See Ezra, ix. 13, 14, “Thou having punished us less than we deserve, and given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments, wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us?”

I. Reason: Because it will be a greater aggravation in sinning. It is made the aggravation of Solomon’s sin, 1 Kings, xi. 9, “That God had appeared to him twice:” they were especial appearances and manifestations of mercy; and though such have now ceased, yet we read of such as are analogical to them, as John xiv. 21, Christ promiseth to manifest himself, which is by shedding abroad his love, and his Father’s love into the heart, which is evident by the

former words, "he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him;" and after he says, "We will come to him, and make our abode with him," verse 23, and 27, "My peace I give unto you." Now such appearances will be set upon the score of every sin many years after, as they were upon Solomon's. And the reason is, because nothing wounds an ingenuous loving nature more than matter of unkindness: "If it had been my enemies, says David, "I could have borne it," Psalm lv. 12, 14, "but it was thou, O mine acquaintance, we took sweet counsel together," a bosom friend to whom I had committed my secrets and opened my heart. Thus when God has unbosomed himself as it were to a man, and told him what was in his heart towards him, it goes nigh him if he lifts up the heel against him. And the reason of that further is, because of all things else, a man cannot endure to have his love abused; you come nigh him when you do so, for his love is himself, and

commands all in him, so that abuse his love, and you strike at his heart. It is less to abuse any excellency in a man, to reproach and extenuate his parts, learning, &c., though these are dear to him; but his love is his bowels. And, therefore, when God has opened his heart to a man, and set his love upon him, and revealed it to him, and he carries himself unworthily, it pains him at the heart. Besides, it is against the law of nature and of nations, to seek out for a peace, and get it concluded, and then secretly to prepare for, and enter into a war; nothing more hateful, or that can exasperate two nations one against another more than this. It was the aggravation of Absalom's sin, that being newly reconciled with his father, and taken into favour again, after two years discountenance, he then began to rebel more closely.

II. Reason is intimated in the word folly: as if the Lord should have said, Set aside the unkindness and wrong you do to me, yet

therein you befool yourselves, you will have the worst of it. And, indeed, when God afterwards draws nigh to a man again, upon his recovery of his peace, it appears to be folly, even in that man's own apprehension. When he has tasted how sweet God is, then come and ask him, What, will ye return to sin again? he will then say, Ask me if I will wound or cut my flesh: it is impossible, thinks he, I should any more be so besotted; if there were no more motives, he thinks it the greatest folly in the world. And therefore God on purpose chooses out that expression, and places it here, because it is indeed the greatest folly in God's sight, and is so apprehended by ourselves, when we look upon sin after peace is spoken to us. It is folly to sin against God at any time, but especially then; and that will appear by these particulars.

1. Because, before a man had that peace, he felt the bitterness of sin, for God never speaks peace, till that be felt: now that is

an argument even to sense, never to return to it again, which a fool will be warned by; a burnt child dreads the fire, even as a child will take heed, being taught by sense. When a man shall be in great distress, and his conscience shall suggest to him, as Jer. iv. 18, "Thy ways and thy doings have produced these things to thee; this is thy wickedness;" a speech like that when you say to your children, when they have gotten any cold, or sickness, this is your playing and going in the snow, and your eating of fruit, &c. so God speaks to them when they are in distress, "this is your wickedness, for it is bitter, it reacheth to the heart," it wounds the conscience, the wounding of which, of all else, is the greatest misery. When once a man, after this, has peace restored to him, and comes newly out of such a distress, ask him then how he likes turning to such a sin again, and he will tell you, it is the greatest folly in the world. Ask

David if he will murder any more after his bones have been broken, and set again.

2. Thou wilt easily acknowledge it is folly to return to sin again, if thou considerest the terms upon which thou didst obtain thy peace. Reckon what pains it cost thee, to wash out the guilt and stain which sin had made, what vows and resolutions thou madest, what bonds thou didst seal unto, what promises never to return, what prayers and tears, ere thou couldst get an answer, or God to speak one word. Why, is it not folly now to lose that in an instant, thou hast been seeking so long, perhaps many years, and with so much pain and cost? You use it as an excuse to prodigals to say, things lightly come by, lightly go; and yet you count them, and call them fools for it, as not knowing what it is to earn a penny. How much more folly is it, when a man, having once mortgaged his peace, and God having restored it again after much

suit, and waiting many a term, then comes home, and ventures to cast all away at one throw at dice? Such a fool art thou, when thou returnest to sin; to drink that at one draught which thou hast been getting many a year, what madness is it? When thou hast taken much pains to wash thyself, then to wallow in the mire again, and make thyself new work, what folly is it? who but children and fools will do thus? That which the church said in another case, may well be alluded to in this, Cant. v. 31, "I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"

3. Consider, what it is thou dost hazard losing by returning to folly: thy peace. David lost it, as appears Psalm li. 12, therefore, says he, "restore to me the joy of thy salvation." In losing of which, thou wilt be so much a loser, that if the sin thou choosest were able to give thee all the world, it could not recompense thee, no not the loss of one hour's communion with God, which in a moment will bring thee in more

sweetness, than all thy sins can do to eternity. If all the pleasures of sin were concentrated, and the quintessence of them strained into one cup, they would not afford thee so much joy as one drop of true peace with God does, being let fall into the heart. "It is peace which passeth understanding." Few pleasures here exceed the senses, nay, the senses are capable of more than the things can give; but this passes understanding. "God's loving kindness is better than life." If it were propounded to thee, that thou must lose thy life the next moment if thou didst commit such a sin, wouldst thou venture, if thou didst believe it? Now, "the loving kindness of God is better than life," and wilt thou lose the enjoying of it, though but for a moment?

4. It is folly to return again, because the pleasures of sin will be much less to thee after thou hast had peace spoken. Take them at the best, when they are freshest, and when thy palate was most in relish and

taste with them, when thou wert carnal, and ere thou knewest what sweetness was in God, and they then were but poor sorry pleasures. But now, they will prove far more empty than before; they are empty vain pleasures even to him that has them in their flower, and in his season of sinning; and therefore all wicked men, are weary, and inwardly complain of their condition, only they cannot find sweetness in God, and so are fain to keep themselves to their husks. But alas! to thee they are far less worth than to another man, who knows not God, and therefore thou art like to have a worse bargain of it; another man can make more money of a sin, and get more pleasure out of it, than thou art able to do.

For, first, thy conscience, having been scorched with sin, is become of a quicker sense; as scald flesh fears more, and is more sensible in coming to the fire, than other parts of the body; whereas wicked men's is seared, and so they commit all "unclean-

ness with greediness;" but thine is tender and galled in the act, which alloys much of the pleasure of thy sin, and mingles the more bitterness with it.

And 2. Besides this galling of conscience, which is common to thee with many an unregenerate man, thou hast a principle of grace, an inner man, which is dead to such pleasures, that tastes them not, that is like Barzillai, who through age, could not taste either what he ate or drank, as young men do; no more can that new man in thee: and therefore it can be but half as pleasant to thee as to another man. If one side of a man be taken with a palsy, what pleasure is it to that man, to exercise his limbs in the actions of life? He is but half a man, and lives but half a life; so it is with thee, when thou hast grace in thy heart; but half thy heart can take pleasure in sinning; that new man, the other half, strives against it, grieves for it, hates what thou doest; and all this must needs strike off much of the pleasure.

But 3. If we add to this, that this new man in him, having once tasted what sweetness is in God, and "how good the Lord is," is then like a man that has eaten sweetmeats, other things are out of taste with him, and therefore also it is folly to return. "No man," says Christ, "having drunk old wine, desireth new, for he saith the old is better:" A man used to high fare, cannot agree so well with thin diet; so the soul having been used to taste of great pleasures in God, the impression and remembrance of them leaves his soul less satisfied than another man's; a stomach that hath been enlarged to full diet, looks for it, and rises more hungry from a slender meal. Now, communion with God enlarges the faculties, and widens them, and makes them more capable of greater joys than other men have; and, therefore, the creature is less able to fill them; still he remembers with much grief, whilst he is eating his husks, what fare he had in his father's house; and O!

then it was better with me than now. "Call me not Naomi, but call me Marah," as she said, "for I went out full, and am come home empty;" so does he say, when he comes from the act of sinning; he went with his heart full of peace, and meeting with a bargain of sinning, thought to eke out his joy, and make it fuller, but he comes home empty.

I. Use is to those who have had peace spoken to them; let them at such times fear themselves and God most, for then comes in this, as you see here, as the most seasonable admonition that can be given, to "return no more to folly." Fear God then most; for, of all times else, then sins provoke him most; to come and call him Father and the Guide of your youth, and yet to fall to sin, this is to do as evil as you can; you cannot do worse. Jer. iii. 4, 5. So Ezra, ix. "After such an escaping, should we again break thy commandments, wouldst thou not be angry till thou hadst consumed us?" In

times of affliction it is the property of a good child to love God most; in times of speaking peace, to "fear God and his goodness," and to fear to offend him for his goodness' sake. Did I only say, that God is provoked most then, if you return to folly? Nay, I add further, he is *grieved*, which is more than to be provoked; and, therefore you shall mark that the expression and admonition not to grieve God's Spirit then comes in, when the "Spirit has sealed us to the day of redemption," Ephes. iv. 30. Then by sinning, we are said more properly to grieve him than before, when he has so far engaged himself to love a man, and expressed himself to him, and set his seal upon him for his. God is angry with wicked men's sins, but he is grieved for yours. To grieve him is more than to anger him. Mere anger is an affection that can ease itself by revenge, and by coming even again with the party; and when we can or intend to do so, our minds are not so much grieved, but please

themselves rather to think of the revenge which we mean to execute. So when wicked men sin, whom God means to meet with, he is said to be angry rather than grieved; and says, "I will ease myself of mine adversaries, and avenge myself of mine enemies." But here, as when a man's wife that lies in his bosom, or his child, shall wrong him; so is it when one sins whom God has set himself to love, and done much for, and made known his everlasting kindness, and sealed to the day of redemption; this goes to his heart, grieves him rather than angers him, and such are the truest and deepest griefs. What should he do with you in this case? if he afflict you, and by that means go about to turn you from your iniquity, therein he shall but afflict himself, as it were, for "though they rebelled, yet when they were afflicted, he was afflicted," Isa. lxiii. 9, 10. As when a father that is a magistrate, or as one that maintains a student in a college, if he pun-

ish a child or pupil in his purse, punishes himself, so must God afflict himself to afflict you. Put not the Lord into these straits, if you have any love in you. As thou art therefore to fear God most then, so thyself most, and to be more watchful over thy own heart; thou art then apt to return to folly, if thou takest not heed; as when a man has been very hot, he is apt to take the greatest cold. Hezekiah, after God sealed peace to him, and answered his prayers, and renewed the lease of his life, grew cold, and returned to folly. The reason is because then the heart is apt to grow less watchful, and to think itself fortified enough against any temptation; as Peter, having seen Christ transfigured in the mount, grew confident in his own strength. And know, that the devil watches such an opportunity most, for he gets a great victory if he can foil thee then, after he has been foiled himself, and when thou art most triumphing over him. How many battles have been lost through

security of victory and reviling of the enemy? and besides, our corrupt nature, so far as unrenewed, is apt to gather heart to itself, to slight sin, as thinking its pardon easily gotten.

Therefore when thou art tempted, labour often to renew those thoughts which thou hadst of thy sin at that time, when thou wert suing for peace, before thy peace was gotten; when thou wouldst have given a world for God's favour; and also what thoughts thou hadst of it when God spoke peace, how thou didst abhor it, yea, thyself, and look what sin was most bitter to thee, and an enemy to thy peace; as uncleanness, idleness, neglect of prayer, ill company; and preserve in thy heart those bitter apprehensions of it, and say of it, Thou hast been a bloody sin to me; and though I have got peace, and my life saved, yet it was a bloody sin to Christ; his blood was shed to purchase this my peace, and shall I return to it?

And when tempted to it again, have recourse to the kindness God shown thee in pardoning, and say, How shall I do this, and sin against God? Say as he said, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" 2 Sam. xvi. 16: and what! shall I, Absalom-like, now I am newly reconciled to my father, fall to plotting treason again? What! shall I make more work for prayer, more work for God, break my bones again, and lie roaring again? Think thus: I was burnt in the hand afore, I shall be racked surely now. "Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."

II. Use. The doctrine of assurance, (if not abused) and of God's speaking peace to men, is no dangerous doctrine to make men secure and presumptuous in sinning. When peace is preached in any man's heart, this use naturally flows from that doctrine, "Return no more to folly." The very scope of the whole epistle of John is to help all believers to assurance, as appears by 1 John i. 4. 5, and chap. v. 13, "These things I

write to you, that ye might have communion with God, and that your joy might be full." But this will open a way to all licentiousness. No, says John, chap. ii. 1, "These things I write unto you that you sin not;" nothing guards the heart more against temptations, than the peace of God; it is said to guard the heart, Phil. iv. 2. Yea, and if you do sin, the assurance of God's love is the speediest way to recover you; so it follows, "If any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father," &c. "And he that hath this hope in him," that is, to live with Christ, and knows what manner of love the Father bears us, "purifies himself as he is pure," 1 John iii. 1, 2, 3. If there were no more but self-love in a man, it were then no wonder if he abuse it; for self-love, where the love of God is wanting, is unthankful and ungrateful, willing to take all the love and kindness which is afforded, and abuse it and work upon it for its own advantage: and it is true also, that because we have too much

of this principle unmortified in us, therefore God trusts so few with much assurance, because they would abuse it. But where true love to God is seated, and much of it implanted, there the love of God, and the peace of God, as kindly and naturally enkindle, and inflame, and set it to work even as arguments suitable to self-love work upon and stir that principle. For grace is more for God than ourselves, it being the image of God's holiness, whose holiness consists in this, to aim at himself in all; and, therefore, when God's free grace towards a man is revealed, it raises him up to higher strains of love to God, and hatred of sin. And therefore it is observable, Psalm li. 12, that David, when he prays for the restoring of the joy of his salvation, prays not simply for it, or alone, but withal prays for a free spirit—"Uphold me with thy free spirit;" that is, an ingenuous spirit, which is kindly, sweetly, and freely wrought upon: therefore when we have a free spirit wrought in

us, then that free love that is in God toward us, will work most kindly upon it, and constrain to love him that loved us first. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if Christ died for all, then they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them." Paul gives the reason why this love of Christ thus constrained him, because he thus judged, that is, this consideration of Christ's love, he having a principle of love in his heart to Christ, he found to be a powerful prevailing reason to persuade him to live to Christ. Having a new judgment, he saw force and strength in the argument: and so shall we if we thus judge; and it will have this consequence as naturally to follow upon it in our hearts, as any reason in any other kind has, that is brought to enforce any other conclusion. And therefore as the mind is constrained (as it were) to assent to a truth proved by force of reason, that if you grant this, then this or that will follow; so, be-

cause we judge this reasonable by an argument drawn out of love's topics, that if Christ died for all, who otherwise must themselves have died, that then they should live to him, this will constrain us to love him, and live to him.

This text and admonition gives a just occasion to consider a little of that so often questioned case of conscience, concerning relapses of God's children into the same sins and folly again; and whether, after peace spoken, God's people may return again to folly. Some have held, that a man after a second repentance could not fall into the same sin again; others, if he did, that it excluded him from mercy for time to come. For the comfort of some poor souls whose case and temptation this may be, I will speak somewhat, though sparingly, and with caution.

1. The Scripture no where excludes those from the state of grace, or bars mercy from those that have relapsed into the same sin, especially so long as, in regard of the man-

ner of their sinning, it be but folly, not wickedness, or wilful sinning; that is, rather proceeding out of error of understanding, and heat, and impetuosity of foolish affections, than obstinacy and malice in the will, and with "despite of the spirit of grace," Heb. x. 29.

2. In Scripture we meet with such passages and promises, as may undoubtedly uphold any soul that has so fallen, after peace received, into the same sin, and preserve him from apprehending himself excluded therefore from mercy and the state of grace; as Hosea, xiv. 4. "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely;" unless they had fallen after repenting and former healing, it could not have been called backsliding; and yet this he promises to heal, and withal shows the ground that moved him to it, his loving them freely; for if in any thing his free love is shown to any of his children, and drawn out, it is in healing again such a backsliding soul after re-

covery and peace given. For their falling into the same sin which had been repented of and healed, provokes God more than a thousand other acts of sin formerly committed, though of the same kind. And therein also, to show his free love, that he can pardon even the abuse of love itself, he leaves some thus to sin after his love shed abroad in their hearts. Some he shows his free love, in keeping them from sinning; to others, in pardoning them, and giving them repentance; they are but several ways of drawing it forth: so that if in any thing, herein his free love is shown, for if it were not free, it would never endure itself to be abused. And likewise the sure mercies of David are then shown, when God multiplies to pardon; so Isa. lv. 3, having mentioned the promise of the sure mercies of David, he promises to *multiply* pardon, as it is in the original, verse 7, which are thus joined, because the sureness of his covenant is therein shown, and because we might

haply multiply to sin; and at least it supposes the possibility of it again. God likewise runs upon such a supposition in that expression of his, to his own people, Jer. iii. 1, 2. They say, "If a man put away his wife, and she becomes another man's, shall not the land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me," saith the Lord. He speaks to her, as to one who had been his wife, who, though she had not been put away by him, had put away herself and run away, not once, but often, and that with many lovers; and sometimes in the midst of her whoredoms had come in and made challenge of his former love, and pleaded his former mercy to her, and yet fallen back again, verse 4, 5, (where he adds) "Wilt thou not from this time cry, My Father, thou art the Guide of my youth?" that is, I know, says God, you will come now and cry as heretofore you have done, and say, O! thou art my father and my Husband! and

confidently still claim an interest in me upon my former kindness, and yet do as evil as you can, for you cannot do worse than thus to abuse my love; yet for all this, "Return thou backsliding Israel," saith the Lord, "for I am married to you." That which he does thus to a nation, he may do to a particular man who is his child.

Again, there are not wanting examples for this.

1. We find Sampson a godly man (whom yet we would scarcely have thought such, but that we find his name in the list of those worthies, Heb. xi) ensnared with a Philistine woman, against the counsel of his parents, Judges, xiv. 3, who clearly laid open his sin to him, and he was in the event reproved for his folly; for his wife deceived him, told his riddle to his enemies, which he in the end perceived; and further to reprove him, in the issue she was given away to another, verse 16, 17. 20; from all which passages of reproof, a holy man that had

his eyes in his head could not but see his error; and yet again, a long while after this, twenty years after, Judges xv. 20, (when certainly ere that he had repented of this his sin, for which his parents before, and afterwards God, had so clearly rebuked him,) he went to Gaza, Judges xvi. 1, "and saw a harlot, and went in unto her," and there escaped narrowly with his life at midnight. And after that also it came to pass he fell in love with another, as bad as any of the former, Delilah, who was his ruin. But his returning thus to folly cost him dear; for in the end he was taken as a captive by the Philistines his enemies, and that through her falsehood; deprived of the strength he had spent upon these women; had his eyes put out, those betraying lights, that had ensnared him; and himself made a fool of, to make his enemies sport. So that no child of God can take any great encouragement thus to return to folly for the future, by his example; though comfort they may have

therefrom, in case they have returned, for the time past.

2. Another example may be that of Jehoshaphat, who committed a great sin in joining with Ahab, that wicked king "that sold himself to work wickedness," 2 Chron. xviii. 1, 2, 3. He was forewarned what would be the success of that confederacy and journey, by Micaiah, before he went with him to battle. Afterwards in the battle itself, he hardly escaped with his life, and that by an extraordinary providence in answer to his prayer. And as if that were not sufficient, God sends another prophet to him, who with open mouth reproves him and discovers to him his sin: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from the Lord:" which message to so good a man doubtless was not in vain, but humbled him for his sin, and wrought repentance in him to avert that wrath. And yet after that great and miraculous deliverance

of him and his people, we find him relapsing into the same sin, "After this did Jehoshaphat join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly, and he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish:" which another prophet in like manner reprov'd, and likewise God himself rebuked by the like ill success of that league to the former, "the ships were broken."

3. Peter, a man who seem'd by other of his carriages bold enough, was yet three several times surpris'd with base fear: once when he tempted Christ not to hazard himself at Jerusalem, where Christ had told him that he was to suffer: Matt. xvi. 21, 22, 23, "Master," says he, "spare thyself:" upon which speech Christ calls him "Satan," and rebukes him more sharply than at any other time, for which surely there was a more than ordinary cause. Peter thought that if his Master should suffer at Jerusalem, himself and the rest would not be safe. That speech, therefore, proceeded from fear,

and therefore Christ immediately thereupon calls for self-denial, and taking up the cross, and this was immediately after peace was spoken, verse 16—18. Christ had never more comfortably given testimony to Peter and his faith than there. Again, after this Christ took him up into the mount, and transfigured himself, to strengthen him against that trial to come, which made him so confident; yet then he denied him at his arraignment: when again Christ immediately looked back upon him with so sweet a look, as broke his heart for this his folly. So he returned again, and it cost him many a tear; and Christ after his resurrection owned him again more than any of the rest, and bade them that first met him, “Go, tell Peter.” He mentions him by name, and in special, Go tell him the first news of it: and then also asked him, “Peter lovest thou me?” and he said, “Lord, thou knowest I love thee.” “As if he had said, ‘Though I have played the wretch, yet I love thee:

upon this, though he grew more bold, yet Gal. ii. 11, 12, we find him falling into the grudging of the same disease, which cast him into another fit. He “dissembled, fearing them of the circumcision.” This was a spice of the former sin, though not so gross; and though the outward acts in these sins were divers in their occasions, yet they were all acts and buds of the same root of bitterness; and may as well be called sins of the same kind, as the committing different acts of uncleanness are reckoned falling into the same sin.

In the fourth place, if the Scriptures had been utterly silent in examples, yet reason consonant to other principles and grounds of divinity, and of the Scriptures, might persuade the same.

1. If a believer may, after the most serious and thorough repentance, fall again, into as grievous a sin of another kind, and return, why not into the same again? I confess there is some disparity, which might

make him more averse, and set him in some more remoteness from the same sin he has particularly repented of, than another, which shall be considered in its place; yet the difference cannot be supposed such, as should make the one possible, and not the other. All true repentance works the heart to an abominating every sin, as well as any; and therefore if it were true, it was for that particular sin, as sin; and then it would work the like against all and every sin, according to the measure of the sinfulness. And though it may and does work a more keen and special hatred against that particular sin a man has been most stung with, yet still, this is but so far as this aggravation (to fall into the same sin again) may cause such a relapse to be more sinful than another sin: and so far, that upon that ground he is, and may be, more set and strengthened against it than against another sin. But then, if the supposition fall upon another gross sin, never before committed,

the sole and single act of which other circumstances make as heinous, even as this reiterated act of a sin formerly committed can be, then the one is equally as possible as the other. But still the difference is but in degrees: namely, in that the heart is drawn off a degree or so further from that sin formerly committed, than any other: which will not therefore so vary the case, that it should be made impossible to fall into the one and not into the other.

2. If he may fall into some gross sin which at first conversion he above all others humbled himself for; and yet, that same repentance did not put him into such an impossibility of falling into that sin again; why then should a renewed act of repentance of the same, or for some other reiterated sin, be supposed to have such virtue in it, as to make him free for ever from the same fiery dart.

3. Let it be considered, from whence it should be, that a renewed, or indeed any act

of true repentance, though ever so great and intense, should have such a transcendent, eternal, and invincible virtue in it, and privilege annexed to it; for how is it that repentance strengthens, us against sin, but by restoring the decayed frame of grace to a better constitution and greater degree of strength than before; and by raising it above a man's lusts, and above that lust more than all others? As in David. When he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart," which, through his sin of uncleanness, was in an especial manner defiled with a proneness to that sin. But yet withal remember, that the new frame of heart and strength gotten by that renewed repentance, and the increase of hatred against, that sin wrought by it, is only a creature; as grace, and every new degree of grace, is; and therefore for preserving us, it has but the power and force of a created habit, which may be prevailed against by the sin that is in us; and can no more, nay much less, put us into a

state of confirmation against any particular sin, than the grace of the angels could of itself confirm them in a state against all sin. And as for the impression of that bitterness which, in our repentance for that sin fallen into, was made upon our hearts; that also can be supposed to have but the like force upon our spirits, that the impression of joy unspeakable and glorious, has upon the heart, in those heavenly raptures which believers sometimes enjoy; yea, and the latter of these will easily be supposed to be of the greater efficacy of the two. Now those ravishing joys do not put such spirits into a man, as to preserve him from faintings of spirit for ever: and though, while they abide and are present to the heart, they raise it above all things here below, yet when a man has been awhile off from that mount, and has conversed, again with things here below, then that lustre wears away, as the glory in Moses' face did. And after a while, the sense and present taste of those

joys wears out ; and when that is gone, the bare remembrance of them which is left, has not in their absence such an infallible efficacy to preserve his mind in an abiding disrelish of former delights, but he may, and often does fall in love again too much with them : although, indeed, whilst the present sense of them abode upon the heart, it abstracted the mind from all things here below. And hence a man is apt to “fall from his first love,” Rev. ii., and from that high esteem of spiritual things, as the Galatians did. “Where is the blessedness you spake of?” says Paul to them. Therefore the remembrance of the bitterness of any sin is not so lasting, nor the scars and wounds of conscience so fresh, as everlastingly to preserve and deter us from falling into the same sin again. For both are but creatures, and at best but arguments drawn from sense and experience within ourselves, and have but human created power, which is not always efficacious ; especially seeing God has ordained us “to

live by faith, more than by sense," for faith is appointed by God to be our most constant keeper, 1 Peter i. 5. "We are kept through faith unto salvation," and by it more surely and more constantly than by impressions of joy or sorrow, which are made to sense. And yet we are not kept by it of itself, but "by the power of God." So then we are kept by "the power of God" as the principal supporter and guardian, "through faith," as the instrument, and by it rather than by sense, or any other grace of sorrow or repentance, because faith carries the heart out of itself wholly into the hands of God as a faithful Creator, as not being able to secure itself against any sin, through the power of any mortification or strength of any other grace, no, not for one moment; and therefore he is as dependent upon God after a fall, and a renewed repentance out of it, yea, and more than before he fell, and his own woful experience has reason to make him so.

An instance to illustrate the truth of this, we may draw from the assurance of faith itself, which strengthens us as much against doubting, when it is joined with joy unspeakable and glorious, as repentance can do against any other sin: and while it is upon us, in the strength of it, a believer is apt to think himself armed, and strengthened, and so established, as that he shall never question God's love any more, or the pardon of his sin. And yet experience shows, that the guilt of sin prevails sometimes again, after this, and the same doubts arise, and prevail as much as ever; neither will the remembrance of the former assurance be always of force enough to resist them; for he may come to question that assurance itself; and so forget that he was purged from his old sins. And if the guilt of sin prevail in the conscience again, against such a renewed and settled act of faith, why may not the power of a lust prevail in the members, after a renewed act of repentance?

4. If it be said, that a renewed act of thorough repentance keeps a man, not by any peculiar virtue in itself alone, but by the power of God concurring with it; then I demand to see the promise wherein God has infallibly engaged his power upon such a renewed act of repentance, to preserve from falling into that sin forever; without which promise, no man in faith can affirm it, and without which there is a supposition of such a possibility, as it sometimes falls out. God indeed has said, that if we fall, he will put under his hand to break that fall, that it shall not ruin us; but not so to keep us in his hands, that we shall be out of danger of falling again. A renewed act of repentance is indeed an ordinance sanctified to preserve a man; yet, in the same manner that other ordinances are, as prayer, and the word preached, and admonition, with which God does not always so infallibly co-operate, as efficaciously to work always that which they serve to.

5. If there were not such a possibility, as might and does sometimes fall out, then every regenerate man, after such a renewed act of repentance, might secure himself against the committing of that gross act again for ever; but so he can never do against any particular act of sin, but that sin against the Holy Ghost. Paul therefore exhorts, when a brother is fallen into a sin, "to restore such an one with the spirit of meekness;" upon this consideration, "considering thyself lest thou also be tempted;" and he lays the exhortation upon those who are most spiritual; "ye that are spiritual, restore such an one, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted," Gal. vi. 1. And so he speaks of such as have their hearts raised up to the best frame, through the most deep and serious repentance. And now we may suppose one that has formerly fallen into the same sin, but himself is returned by repentance out of it, (for indeed such a spirit-

ual man is of all others like to be the meekest bone-setter of a man fallen,) and even him does Paul exhort to consider that he may, for the time to come, be also, or in like manner, tempted; that is, fall as this man fell, and therefore so be tempted as to fall into the same sin that he was fallen into. And if any man after the like fall could be secure from the like fall again, he would be out of the reach of this exhortation upon that ground mentioned, as not capable of it. But the Holy Ghost has elsewhere, 1 Cor. x. 13, told us, that there is no temptation that is common to man, but that is incident to befall any man at any time; and therefore, exhorts him "that standeth to take heed lest he fall." Indeed, that temptation which is common to devils with men, the sin of final despair, and the sin against the Holy Ghost, &c. a regenerate man may, through the grace of Christ, secure himself against; but no man in any state can, with-

out an extraordinary revelation, secure himself from the commission of such sins as are common to man.

Only I add these cautions concerning this case.

1. There are two sorts of corruptions. First, more gross corruptions, which the apostle Peter calls, the "defilements of the world," 2 Peter ii. 20, being the common mire, or kennel, wherein the unclean swine of this world wallow, and which the apostle calls such works of the flesh as are manifest, Gal. v. 19, even to the light of nature; such as are adultery, fornication, drunkenness, &c., which are distinguished from a more spiritual and refined kind of lusts. But, secondly, there are corruptions more spiritual, as pride, secret love of the world. Now, as to those gross corruptions which are contrary even to common honesty, and (to use Job's phrase) "are punished by the judges," Job xxxi. 11, which profane men wallow in, a godly man hath more strength against

them, so that it is not so ordinary for him to be entangled again and again with these, for where but moral principles are, these are abstained from; as we see in the Pharisee, "I am no adulterer," &c.; therefore, where grace is, much more. And some sins are more opposite to the spirit of holiness, and less compatible with grace, as uncleanness, of which Paul says, "God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness," 1 Thess. iv. 7. It is in an especial manner there opposed to holiness, and such as these are works of the flesh, which are manifest even to nature, and, therefore when they are often fallen into, they manifest that the heart is but flesh. And although the limits, how seldom or how often, cannot be set concerning relapses into these or any sins, yet in an ordinary course it may be said, that few godly men fall into such sins again and again. God keeps them from such in an ordinary providence, that scandals should not arise, they being sins which all the

world take notice of. But those other sins, of rash anger, and love of the world, and spiritual pride, &c., being less manifest, and sitting more close to our spirits, godly men are more subject unto.

Yet, secondly, concerning these we must again distinguish.

1. There are the inward listenings to these outward acts. Now, though grace weakens the very lustings within, yet it takes them not wholly away: "The spirit that is in us," that is, in us saints, says James, "lusteth to envy; and as to envy so to all other sins.

2. The weakness of sin and strength of grace shows itself most in preserving a regenerate man from the outward gross acts of such sins. For as "to will what is good" is present with him, yet how to perform it he knows not, Rev. vii. 18. So, on the contrary, the heart may be tempted to lust, but yet, when it should come to the act, there is a weakness discovered. They

come to the birth, and want strength often to bring forth, the contrary prevailing of grace being then seen, and discovering itself. It fareth with a regenerate man in this case often, as with a man that is mortally wounded, who rises up to strike his enemy, and thinks to run him through, but sinks down again, when his sword is at his enemy's breast, through a deficiency of spirits; or as a man in a palsy or the gout, who thinks he is able to walk, till he comes to try, and then he finds a weakness, which makes him fall back again: thus, even when the whole forces of lusts are mustered up, yet the weapons fall out of their hands. In Gal. v. 17, the apostle seems not to deny but that, in the most regenerate, lustings may arise, for "the flesh," says he, "lusteth against the spirit," but yet, as for outward acts, he tells them, "if ye walk in the Spirit," that is, in the prevalency of the Spirit, keeping up a holy frame of heart above the flesh, then "ye

shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh," for that frame of heart so kept up will hinder the outward fulfilling of the lust, which is never done till flesh and corruption is actually raised above the spirit, and gets more voices to carry it, otherwise, the lusting of the spirit against the flesh will hinder the outward doing and fulfilling of a lust. For the reason he gives, "so that ye cannot do what ye would;" which implies, that not only lustings, which arise without consent, may be in such a man; but further, much of the will may be won to consent to them to like them, when yet there is not strength enough to carry it on to the outward act; "ye cannot do what ye would." And what those works of the flesh are which are manifest works of the flesh, and which Christians, whilst they walk in the Spirit, fulfil not, he mentions and reckons up in the following words. And this is the more ordinary frame of a Christian's heart; for, says he, "They that are Christ's have crucified

the affections and lusts;" that is, so far as not to fulfil them.

3. He may more easily fall into a gross sin of another kind, than into the same after special repentance for it, and peace spoken in the pardon of it, because true repentance especially fortifies the heart against that sin which a man has most repented him of, and sincerity lies more in watching over that sin than any other, so says David, Psalm xviii. 23, "I was upright, and kept myself from mine iniquity,"—that especial sin which was eminently his sin. A man's arm that is broke will, if well set, rather break in some other place than where it was broke at the first. Hence, sometimes it falls out, that that which was a godly man's bosom sin before conversion, continues not to be so after; but another steps up in the room of it, by reason that he endeavours then to wash out that great stain most, and spends the most of the fuller's soap to purge himself from it; and so becomes ever after most

watchful over it, and sets in this his weakest place, the strongest garrison, and a watch, to prevent the enemy. And, as an act of some presumptuous sin, though it inclines the heart more to all sin than before, yet especially to commit that kind of sin again, rather than any other; so, on the contrary, is it in a sound and solemn repentance for some especial sin, and in the endeavouring to mortify some especial member of the body of sin. Though thereby the whole habit of the body of sin is purged and weakened, yet that particular sin, which we aim especially to have mortified, is through God's blessing, more subdued than any other. We see idolatry was the sin which the people of Israel relapsed into again and again; yet, when they were once thoroughly humbled by the captivity for it, they never returned to it, of all sins else, not to this day: so that it may be said, as was foretold happily in another case, Ezek. xvi. 43, "Thou shalt not commit this lewdness of all thy

abominations." Jonah, though he would never run away from God again, after his goal delivery out of the whale's belly; yet, immediately after peace spoken to his heart, falls into a sin of another kind, into a passion of extreme anger and peevishness, and quarrelling against God. The reason of this especial tenderness against falling into the same sin is, because the conscience looks upon a relapse into that sin to be more heinous than into any other sin of another kind, because of that aggravation of it, which would stain and dye it; and although a sin of another kind shows the variety of corruption more, yet this is more against the power and work of repentance itself, which was particularly exercised about that sin, and also breaks and dissolves all bands of a man's vows, covenants, prayers, &c., made against it in particular, and so is made more grievous. And this we may see in Ezra humbling himself for that great sin of the people, in joining themselves in mar-

riage with the people of the land, when he set himself to humble himself for them, together with those "that feared God," Ezra ix. 4. What a hideous apprehension of the heinousness of that sin, if they should again fall into it, did that day's repentance excite in his heart; as appears, verse 14, "Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with them, wouldst thou not destroy us, till thou hadst consumed us, and till there was no escaping?" Into which sin yet the people again fell, after they had repented of it with a solemn confession and promise of amendment, which is recorded, chap. x. 11, 12, &c.: yet they returned to it again the second time, as we find in Malachi, who lived the last of the prophets, and after this prayer of Ezra. Now, Mal. ii. 12, the prophet says, "An abomination is committed in Jerusalem, for Judah hath married the daughter of a strange god:" and then follows the aggravation, "This ye have done again;" that is, the second time;

and in that respect are challenged with dealing treacherously, inasmuch as they had repented of it the first time, "covering the altar with tears, with weeping and crying out," as Malachi there speaks, so that "God regardeth not your offerings any more." And therefore, also, Psalm lxxviii. 40; How oft did they, saith he, aggravating their sins by murmuring, provoke the Lord? and Numb. xiv. 22, God reckons up, and mentions the times of their sinning, how often they had thus sinned: "They have tempted me these ten times."

4. He may fall into the same sin again and again, until he has recovered himself by a thorough repentance, and fully recovered his peace; but yet seldom after that. Lot committed incest two nights together; but the orifice of his lust was not yet stopped by repentance; the wound was not closed, and so bled again afresh: but when it is healed once, and the heart made perfect with God, and divorced from that sin,

and entered into communion with God again, then, though it *may* fall out, yet a man more hardly returns to that sin. A woman, that is gone from her husband, may play the harlot a long while with him she ran away with, till her husband fetches her again; but to run often away, after receiving again, is intolerable. That is not so ordinary in God's child.

5. Though we can hardly set limits to say when, or when not, this shall fall out, from the degrees of men's repentings, that if they have such or such a degree of repentance, they fall no more; yet we may further consider a difference of their returnings to God, and repentings, and of God's speaking peace.

1. Of repentings: Some are more imperfect, and, as it were, but thawings of the mind a little, by means of a little sunshine of God's love; some are more thorough and deep, that recover a man, and put him into a sound and healthful estate. As, for ex-

ample, a man in an ague has well days; yet his fits return, and it may be they leave him for a month or so, and yet they take him again, as at spring and autumn; which is because all this while his body is not thoroughly recovered to a state of health. So is it with a man's heart in respect of his lusts; though he may have many well days, wherein he may eat his meat, and receive sweetness in the word and ordinances; yet at times his distempers and aguish fits return, he being aguish still; but, in the end, after the peace of God has more thoroughly established his heart, he attains to some settled, constant victory over it; and, when it does not prevail to victory, such aguish fits ends usually in consumptions, in which long agues often end; as in temporary believers, in whom, sin overcoming God's striving with them, eats out all good beginnings; but, if they belong to God, then usually that aguish distemper is in the end, by a more thorough repentance, so healed, that

they attain to more victory and security against it than any other sin. As in those other kind of temptations, it often falls out, that what a man doubted of most, he comes in the end to be most assured of, and to doubt no more; so, also, here a man becomes most freed from that sin he was long exercised with of all others.

2. In God's dealings with his, there is also much difference to be found. There are kinds of speaking peace by God, and melting the hearts of his people, which yet are not of that force to overcome, but wherein God does but (as it were) strive with them; which strivings ever and anon work their hearts to a repentance, and that true and serious; which yet is not so deep and thorough, nor so healing the heart at the bottom, as it should be: for God sometimes uses more imperfect kinds of striving, even with his own children, about some particular sin they are to leave, which do not so fully at first prevail and overcome in

them; which God does, to let them see the running issue of their natures, how grace would run out at it, and overcome grace in them, if he should let it alone; and so lets out upon his child, after many years, some lust, which had been long down, which puts him to it exceedingly, so that he is in hazard to be undone, and put into fears of it; and yet God visits his spirit by fits, and, at times strives with him; and though he falls, yet he puts under his hand, and gives him well days, and some comfortable visitations, yet such as are not deep enough to work him fully off from it. For, as God strives with wicked men, so he sometimes strives with his own also, which may seem to be the true meaning of that speech, Gen. vi., where, having mentioned the sin of his own children, that the sons of God took to them wives of that wicked seed of Cain, he says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is but flesh:" he means not this of all mankind; for he says, "He also

is but flesh." Now, with what other creatures does he join them in this comparison, but with others of the sons of men? So as the meaning is, I see my children, they also are corrupt and degenerate, as well as the rest of mankind, and my spirit has striven with them. In which striving God lets them see, how, if he did not in the end show forth his free love to the full, in the rescuing of them, and healing their backsliding, they would be undone: so that, in the end, through his grace, which is sufficient, they obtain the greatest conquest over that lust of any other, when the heart is once thoroughly awakened, and settled in a thorough peace. And as those doubts they were most troubled with once (which though they had at times some light, yet by fits still arose,) are yet in the end so overcome as to arise no more, but they enjoy the greatest freedom from them; so is it often herein. And these strivings I compare to the thawing of the ice, in a great frost, as when in the day-time

the sun shines, and in the sunshine it thaws a little; but yet, at night, or in the shade, it freezes, when sometimes the weather also begins to change for a night, and yet falls a freezing again: so here, there is not such a thorough shedding abroad the love of God in the heart, as should make a thorough general thaw, and so, when that is withdrawn, it freezes again; but in the end there comes a more thorough and general thaw and change, that carries all away, melts the heart, and so alters the temper and constitution of the weather (as I may so speak) that it freezes no more; and such a thawing had David when Nathan came to him, and not before; though it may be he had those lesser relentings often before.

But let those that are in such a case take "heed they be not hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin;" and of all the times that pass over you in your lives, these are the most critical, and most dangerous. For God "will not always strive." If thou art

his child, if such thawings will not do it, he will use some great afflictions, in the end, to divorce thy heart and thy sin; his love will one way or other overcome thee, and in the end prevail. As when "Israel went on stubbornly in the way of his heart," God says, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him and guide him," Isa. lvii.; and the Lord may so heal thee, that those lusts shall not, in that gross manner, break forth any more. And in those times, when God deals thus with him, a man will afterwards say, that in such passages of his life he had more free love spent on him, in them, than in all his lifetime before or after; and when he is freed and healed, he will be more thankful and fearful than ever before, or than otherwise he would have been, and so get ground by his stumblings. If at present thou maintainest a constant fight against thy sin; if those breakings and meltings of thy heart by God gain ground of it; if the comforts and hope which at times are vouchsafed,

strengthen “and establish thy heart in well-doing,” and make thee more fearful every time thou risest than ever; if thou look upon another fit, if it should come (which, knowing the deceitfulness of the heart, thou fearest,) as the fit of some great sickness, lest it should return again, esteeming it as the greatest cross that can befall thee, which thou wouldst buy off with thy blood, and bleedest most of all to think that thou hast so unconstant a heart, so if thus thou go on to fight it out, the love of God will in the end overcome in thee. But if thou find that those encouragements from God do, through thy corruption (which turns God’s grace into wantonness,) nourish thy lusts, and make thee less fearful against the next time; if thy heart grow harder and more secure, and so slight sin more, because thou hast been so oft visited from on high, and pardoned; thy case is dangerous, and may prove desperate.

6. Though he may return, yet not pre-

sently. He that hath tasted old wine does not straightway desire new; not whilst the love of God, and the taste, and relish of it are fresh in his mouth. When the impression is worn out indeed, and begins to be forgotten, then perhaps he may return.

To conclude with the use of this point: If it be folly to run into the same sin, though we repent of it afterwards, then what folly is it in them that utterly fall away? and, after they 'have been enlightened, and tasted of the good word of God, then fall again to the pleasures of sin, and never repent of them, as many do that come and try a little what is in religion and the ways of God, and then return again to their vomit, and never return to piety again. "Foolish souls, who hath bewitched you! are ye so foolish, that having begun in the spirit, ye end in the flesh?" Gal. iii. 3. Folly indeed! to spend the harvest of your time in seeking God, and then to leave him when you are about to take leave of the pleasures of sin. Alas!

poor souls, whither will you go? do you ever think to have such a God again? "Thou hast the words of eternal life," said the disciples to Christ; and as Saul said to his servants, to keep them from falling away unto David, "Can the son of Jesse give you vineyards, and make you captains of thousands?" 1 Sam. xxii. 7: so, can the world give you that peace that I can give? may Christ say to you; yea, and heaven besides hereafter? Is the devil, with all the wages of sin, able to make you amends? You thereby dishonour God in returning to sin, and bring an evil report upon the good land, and discredit your Master, in changing your service; but withal you befool yourselves most, you return to folly; for even that which you think to gain the world's good word and opinion by, even that you lose; for, though they make a spoil of you, and triumph in such, "and glory in their flesh awhile," yet they never inwardly think well of such a one, nor truly love him. A backslider is like luke-

warm water; for, what use can indeed be made of it? "Like salt that hath lost its savour, it is good for nothing but the dung-hill:" Like one that has been married, but lives divorced, she is undone for her marriage ever after. Such is the condition of those that fall away and repent not. You who have but turned unto folly, and are not grown to a despising and despiting God's ways, "Return, O Shulamite, return." And you that have peace and communion with God, take heed you do not lose him; for you will never have such a God again.

THE END.







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