

GOSPEL INCENSE

by Thomas Cobbet

Cobbet's Puritan treatise on prayer, written by the seventeenth-century minister known for his remarkable prayer life and prolific religious writings. The work explores the nature, practice, and power of prayer as a vital element of the Christian's communion with God.

26 Chapters

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02. To the Reader

TO THE READER.

Courteous Reader,—

I have adventured twice already into the press, in matters controversial, and (through grace) what I have written has found good acceptance in the eyes of the godly wise; and now upon the earnest persuasion of godly and worthy friends here, unto the Lord, and unto me, I am sending forth this discourse, which respects a matter practical. It is not a little exercise unto godly minds, and much more grievous is it in the sight of the God of truth and peace, that there is so great and confused a noise of axes and hammers now-a-days in the Lord's temple; and when will that blessed time come, when unto all the Lord's people whatsoever, "there shall be but one Lord, and his name one." Verily, it is strange to see, that in these days the Lord according to his promise, should so graciously afford to his people the means; even turn to the people a pure lip, a pure ministry; and yet the promised end thereof is not attained, namely, the serving of the Lord with one shoulder, or with one consent. I know there are many lets thereunto, but surely this is not the least, that the word held forth by the purer ministry thereof, has, not had such effectual force upon their hearts, who enjoy the same, as to bring them to be conscionable in calling upon the name of the Lord, which is the more immediate end of such a ministry. For so saith the Lord, I will turn to the people a pure lip or language, that they may call upon the name of the Lord; for then the next effect would follow, which there also is promised, they would come to serve the Lord with one consent. But the subtle enemy to all purity and power of godliness, bestirs himself what in him lies, to heighten and increase as many differences in judgment in Christians as may be, and that may breed and feed distances in affection, and so undermine any such unanimous attending to serve the Lord. The heads and hearts both of preachers and professors shall be so busily and continually taken up with endless disputes, that they shall have little leisure or list to attend the practicals of religion, wherein the life and power of pure religion does mainly consist. Disputing times about the speculatives of religion, are wont to be declining times in the practicals, and vitals thereof. Witness former ages, wherein the schoolmen and their notions flourished, but purity and power of religion withered. And, ah, that this present age, which yields so many skeptics in religion, had not withal increased decayed, unsound, spiritually sick, lame, blind, deaf, dumb, yea, dying, and twice dead Christians. Surely, if Christians had maintained acquaintance with God in prayer, they had never fallen in thus with so many delusive fancies, and so come to have fallen out with the weightier matters of God, so as to be at such distances from them in their spirits. If they had faithfully repaired to the Lord for his counsel, their ears and hearts had not been so open to satanical whisperings. How much was that man of God in prayer, to be kept sound in the faith? witness his frequent requests this way, mentioned: "O, let me not wander from thy commandments," and "remove from me the way of lying, (doctrinally, as well as practically considered,) and grant me thy law graciously." "Take not away utterly the word of truth out of my mouth, so shall I keep thy law continually." "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments." "Make my heart sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed." The corrupt prophets and priests of

old, who seduced the people from the truth, were persons that made no conscience of prayer. "The pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord." Those apostatizing neuters in religion of old, were men that were careless of seeking of God, and counseling with him in their prayers. "And them that are turned back, and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him." The like may be well feared in Christians in these apostatizing times from the truths and ways of God; that they do not talk much with God in prayer, and he as little delights to speak to their hearts. They grow loose-hearted, and strangers to God; and Satan espying this distance betwixt them and God, falls in with them, enters other delusive discourses with them; and at length withdraws them yet further from the Lord. But thou, Christian reader, ply it with the Lord in prayer, that he would draw thee after him, and he will bring thee into his chambers. He will bring thee into the secret of his counsels, presence, and protection, where thou shalt be kept safe in judgment, heart, and life, in the worst times. Fervent and faithful prayers would also help very much to cast the unclean spirit out of the land, and to dispossess the spirits of many Christians, who are even possessed by an erring spirit. If there were also but more men of God, who might Moses-like, continue, holding up their hands in prayer, no doubt but Amalekite spirited seducers would soon be put to the worst; yea, though Philistine-like, they had even routed the churches of Christ, yet a few such blessed worthies of God, who are mighty with God in prayer, would like so many Shammahs or Eleazers, soon prevail for a blessed day over them. If Jonathan had not wrought with God (in prayer), Israel had never had so glorious a day, as they had against those Philistines. If men had even given themselves to the Devil, as too many now have to spirits of error, yet if Luther-like, we were more in prayer, there might be help that way, and they rescued, and those spirits discarded. And what gracious heart can bear it, to see so many poor Christians even drawn to death, and forbear crying to the Lord for their deliverance! Mystical Babylon devoted to ruin, hastens to its downfall, and shall not we be up and doing iii prayer now to help dispatch her, as they of old did that other Babylon? "The violence done to me be upon Babylon, shall the inhabitants say. My blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say," namely, in their earnest prayers. The time approaches, when the promised mercies to the poor blinded Jews shall be accomplished; and what more seasonable work of love can we do for the Lord, or them, than to be now much in praying? Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! In a word, let all the enemies of England, old or new, to commonwealth or church, know, that churches of praying believers, are terrible as so many armies with banners, as so many thundering Legions. Let them tremble to think, that whatever breaches they have occasioned amongst the Lord's people, yet that there is a considerable stand of resolute ones left, right bred Israelites, notable good wrestlers, and as special prevailers with God, I believe that the church's enemies have been forced to see or feel the force of saint's prayers. We may set God to work, (pardon the expression,) in these dangerous times for church and commonwealth by our prayers; as he did of old in like case: "It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they make void thy law."

Wherefore, Christian reader, albeit others have written worthily about this subject of prayer in their times: yet let it not seem unseasonable to thee, or be unaccepted by thee, that I also, (though the most unfit and unworthy to attempt so great a work,) do at this time likewise, bring in evidence with other witnesses to the same truth, concerning the nature, necessity, excellency, and efficacy of holy and spiritual prayer; and that I also, according to that small measure of light and grace received of the Lord, do hereby endeavor to stir up thy pure mind, by way of remembrance, that thou mayest be mindful, not alone of their writings, but especially of the words before spoken, both

by the propheta and apostles concerning this subject of prayer, that as in preaching upon it here, the Lord was pleased to bless that discourse of prayer to sundry souls, so (if it may be his gracious pleasure) it may be of lively and effectual use to thy soul's welfare and peace; which shall be his prayer, who is Thine in the Lord Jesus,

THOMAS COBBET. Lynn in New England, the 24 of October, 1653.

03. Introduction and Biography of Cobbet

INTRODUCTION.

If the author of the following treatise needs an introduction to readers of this generation, it is not his own fault. For he wrote books enough, and wrote well enough, to entitle him to be known by all generations succeeding him. Among the first generation of ministers in New England, so prolific in authorship, few exceeded him in the number and value of his published works. Cotton Mather Bays, that he “wrote more books than most of the divines, that did their parts to make a Kirjath Sepher, (city of letters,) of this wilderness; in every one of which he approved himself one of the scribes mentioned by our Savior, from his rich treasure bringing forth instruction.” He further says, that “we might write the story of his life merely in giving an account of the immortal books, wherein he lives after he is dead.” One of his books, that on Infant Baptism, received the highest commendation from John Cotton. The commendation was written in Latin, which we translate as follows:—

“Cobbet, when he saw that some of Christ’s sheep, committed to him, were caught in the snares and brambles of antipedobaptism, inflamed with zeal for God, and moved with Christ’s compassion towards erring disciples, collected what books he could of Antipedobaptists, and weighed their arguments in the balance of the sanctuary. He carefully examined cart-loads of their productions, and seizing on the arguments by which they had their success, with great acumen, sagacity, and labor, he left nothing untouched that could contribute to illustrate the truth and disperse the clouds of error.”

Such testimony, from such a source, should satisfy us, that the work before us comes from the hand of a master. Cobbet’s work on Prayer, exceeded all his other productions, from the fact, that it is so eminently the product of his own experience. Few men of any age have been in this respect so well qualified to give forth instruction to the world, touching the prime duty of prayer. But of this, let Cotton Mather speak in his own peculiar style. He says — “Of all the books written by Mr. Cobbet, none deserve more to be read by the world, or to live till the general burning of the world, than that of prayer; and indeed prayer, the subject so experimentally, and therefore judiciously, and therefore profitably therein handled, was not the least of those things for which Cobbet was remarkable. He was a very praying man, and his prayers were not more observable throughout New England, for the argumentative, the importunate, and I had almost said, filially familiar strains of them, than for the wonderful success that attended them. It was a good saying of the ancient, —“*Homine probo orante niliil pot entiits.*” And it was a great saying of the Reformer—” *Est quadam precum omnipotentia.*” Our Cobbet might certainly make a considerable figure in the catalogue of those eminent saints, whose experiences have notably exemplified the power of prayer unto the world. That golden chain, one end ‘whereof is tied to the tongue of man, and the other end unto the ear of God, (which is as just, as old, a resembling of prayer,) our Cobbet was always puffing at, and he often pulled to marvelous purpose. A son of this man of prayer was taken into captivity by the Indians — from whence there was little expectation of redemption. Whereupon Mr. Cobbet

called about thirty — as many as could suddenly convene, of the Christians in the neighborhood to his house, and there they prayed together for the young man's deliverance. The old man's heart was now no more sad. He believed that the God of heaven had heard his supplications, and because he believed, therefore he spoke as much to those that were about him, who when they heard him speak, did believe so too. Now within a few days after this, the prayers were all answered, in a return of the young man unto his father, with circumstances little short of a miracle. But indeed, the instances of surprising effects following upon the prayers of this gracious man were so many, that it was generally supposed, that the enemies of New England owed their wondrous disasters, as much to the prayers of this true Israelite, as to any other cause. Mr. Knox's prayers were sometimes more feared, than an army of ten thousand men, and Mr. Cobbet's prayers were esteemed of no little significancy to the welfare of the country, which is now therefore, bereaved of its chariots and horsemen. If New England had its Noah, Daniel, and Job to pray wonderfully for it, Cobbet was one of them." The son of Mr. Cobbet spoken of above, was Thomas Cobbet, Jr., then a seaman at Portsmouth. He was taken by the Indians and carried to Penobscot, and was kept there nine weeks.. Meanwhile prayer was made for him without ceasing, in the church of God — in Mr. Moody's congregation in Portsmouth, in Mr. Shepard's in Charlestown, in the churches in Boston, and in many others. When Mr. Moody first sent the information to Lynn to Mr. Cobbet, he caused one of the deacons to call into his house as many praying people as could be easily assembled. About thirty met and prayed through several hours. Mr. Cobbet began and ended the service. He had at the same time a son sick at home, and they prayed that that son might recover, and that his recovery might be to them a pledge of the deliverance of the other. Cobbet said, "I was sweetly guided in the course of that service, and was even persuaded, that the Lord had heard our prayers, and could not but express as much to some of our godly friends." His sick son began to amend at once. The reader cannot fail to be the more deeply interested in Mr. Cobbet's treatise on prayer, from the knowledge of his remarkable experience in prayer. Such are the men best entitled to give us instruction on such a theme. For God has qualified them to speak, in the rare grace conferred upon them. A brief sketch of the life of this remarkable man, will not be out of place here. Thomas Cobbet was born at Newburg, England, in 1608, of poor parents. Providence having a great work for him to do, opened the way for him to secure the needed qualifications. In nothing does God more illustrate his independence of human resources, than in the ways in which he often brings up the instruments of his most difficult and most honorable works from the humbler ranks in life; and appropriates to his use the sometimes superior energies of body and mind, that have been gathered in early years, in conflicts with poverty. In that way, he lifts the poor from the dung. hill, that he may set him among princes. Mr. Cobbet found means to secure an education at Oxford. Being driven from thence by the plague before he had quite completed his course, he finished it under the private tuition of Dr. Twisse, afterwards the moderator of the Westminster Assembly.

Mr. Cobbet commenced preaching in England. But he was soon compelled to flee from persecution to New England. He came over in the same vessel with Mr. Davenport of New Haven, in 1637. After his arrival in Boston, Revelation Samuel Whiting, who was just before settled in Lynn, moved by a special friendship which he had for Cobbet when in England, induced his people to call him to take a part of his labors as a colleague. Mather says, "They continued here a sweet pair of brothers, till on the removal of Mr. Norton to Boston, and Mr. Rogers to heaven, Mr. Cobbet was translated to Ipswich. The rays with which they illumined the house of God, sweetly united.

They were almost every day together, and thought it a long time if they were not so. The one rarely travelled abroad with. out the other. And these two angelic men seemed willing to give one another as little jostle, as did the ascending and descending angels on Jacob's ladder." Mr. Cobbet was colleague pastor of the church in Lynn nineteen years; when he removed on a call to become the pastor of the church in Ipswich, where he spent twenty-nine years, and died. Mr. Whiting was called the pastor of the church, and Mr. Cobbet the teacher, according to the distinction of those times.

Mr. Cobbet's work on Prayer bears on the face of it proof, that it comes from the treasures of a mind, that had large and rich experience in prayer. It has a remarkable fullness of thought, a rare unction, fervor, and force. There is a lucid and logical arrangement of materials, and a great compactness and condensation of thought. The intricate and difficult points are illumined by a mind deeply experienced in prayer, and richly stored with divine truth. The thoughts come out all warm and glowing, from a heart deeply moved by the Spirit of God. We know of no book on prayer now in the course of general reading that can compare with it. The preface to the book, written by the author, which we have not thought it worth the while to reprint, was dated Lynn, New England, October 24, 1653, near the close of his ministry in Lynn. But the title-page of the printed book bears the date of 1657, that is, after his removal to Ipswich. In preparing the present edition of this work, we have taken the liberty to divest it of some obsolete forms of expression, and omit most of the quotations of chapter and verse of the Bible, which disfigured the page, and obstructed the reading, without a compensating advantage, and a few repetitions and obscure sentences. But in no instance have we omitted or altered the thought. The book is now commended to the reader as a rare treatise, and one that should be generally read.

04. Part 1, Chapter 1. Prayer in General

A DISCOURSE ON PRAYER.

PART I.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. —1 Thessalonians 5:17.

CHAPTER I.

PRAYER IN GENERAL.

Without spending time in analyzing the chapter, we find in this text two parts, — the duty enjoined, and the modification of the duty of praying without ceasing. Then in the former part, you have the Sovereign commanding this duty,—even God the Father; yea, Jesus Christ his Son, who by his Spirit, sent Paul, the apostle, to deliver this command, to pray without ceasing. Then you have the persons on whom this duty is enjoined, to wit, the church of Thessalonica, jointly and severally and through them, all other churches of Christ, and all Christians whatsoever.

Whence we deduce this doctrine: that incessant prayer, or prayer without ceasing, is a duty which the Lord requires of all, and every one of his people, in a special manner. Christ spoke a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint. He requires us to continue instant in prayer, and to be praying always with all prayer. For the better handling of this important matter of prayer, we may speak first of the duty itself, which is prayer; secondly, of the modification of it, in that it must be without ceasing; thirdly, of the conditions required, in order to incessant prayer; and fourthly, of some cases of conscience respecting it.

Touching the duty of prayer itself, we may speak first, more generally as to the nature of it, and then more particularly of the several kinds of prayer, — as sudden or ejaculatory, or as set and solemn prayer, — whether it be public prayer, or family prayer, or secret prayer. Prayer also consists of several parts. Of these we shall consider only these two, that of intercession and that of imprecation.

Prayer is a duty very many ways ennobled and honored of God and his people, and as that which is of large use and extent, whose worth is not known nor easily deciphered; whose nature is not readily conceived or described, and yet that which should be most familiar to the saints. It is set forth in Scripture by many names. Let us then read over the titles of this royal work.

It is called an offering. “My suppliants shall come and bring mine offerings;” or they shall in a solemn, reverent, and cheerful manner - pray unto the Lord, even as the godly used to bring the Lord’s offering to him. Isaiah 19:21. The converted Egyptians will do sacrifice and offering; make prayer their spiritual work and business. And prayer may well be so called; for, as that was, so this is, to be presented by all sorts, poor or rich; none are exempted from it. As those offerings were costly to all sorts, considering their several abilities, so are these spiritual sacrifices, as in case of the suppliant’s tears, sighs, strivings, and pleadings. As they were free services, so are these.

Christ's suppliants are free sacrificers; their spirit is forward to pray; to will is present with them; their prayer is their gift. Matthew 5:24. As those were to be clean and pure, so are the saint's prayers. Job 16:17. Also my prayer is pure. If we should compare prayer with their particular offerings, it would answer to this name: as, their Mincali, or meat-offering. All the subjects of Christ's kingdom must bring an offering (Miticah) into the courts. The converted Gentiles will bring an offering to the Lord; meaning, especially, this holy offering of prayer, which, as that of old, is to be of fine flour, and well sifted, tried, and refined in all the particulars and parts of it, and men's aims in it. We should not ask amiss, either unlawful things, or, though lawful, yet to spend upon our lusts. It must be mingled with the oil of grace and gracious affections, and perfumed with the sweet frankincense of Christ's merit and mediation, applied by faith, and all seasoned with that holy salt of gracious expressions outwardly, and with mortified desires and affections inwardly; avoiding the honey of human eloquence, or affectation of expression, but especially of inordinate desires or lusts.

We might also compare it with other of their offerings, but shall forbear, remembering this only, that we speak thus in reference to these, as part of their worship, and not as types of Christ.

Prayer is called incense. "Let my prayer come before thee as incense;" "in every place pure incense shall be offered to thy name;" "vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints." As that was compounded of very costly materials, so is a spiritual prayer; as they were small beaten, so in this. Matters in prayer are not rudely, but deliberately and very particularly presented before the Lord. The saints in their prayers have also their hearts broken and bruised, and parceled out suitably to the very particulars mentioned in prayer; nor is the fire of the spirit, and of holy zeal wanting therein, which causes them to send out holy vapors of fragrant spiritual sighs and desires before the Lord; and whilst these spiritual priests are through faith exercised, offering up this their holy incense upon the altar Jesus Christ, there is but a step, as it were, between them and heaven, that holy of holies.

O how near are the saints, so exercised, to Jesus Christ, as that covering mercy-seat! What precious answers of grace receive they oftentimes from the oracle of God! How speedily do their holy odors pierce and pass into the holy of holies into heaven!

Prayer is called a lifting up of the soul and of the heart. "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul," that is, to thee do I pray. The work of prayer being not so much to lift up eyes and hands and voice, as to lift up the heart and soul; and we have not prayed, when our spirits are not elevated. Surely that work whereby the souls of God's suppliants, when sinking, when cleaving to the dust, are raised up, is a great work; yet Hannah's prayer did it; "she looked no more sad." The like elevation was David's prayer to him, in that sad plight, from under those grievous weights upon his spirit; yea, hereby God's suppliants do get above worldly cares, fears, and distractions. "Be careful for nothing, (meaning inordinately,) but in every thing make your request known by prayer," etc. "And the peace of God," etc., "shall keep your hearts and minds." The work of prayer is not to move or remove God; he is in one mind, he is still the same; but to move and remove our hearts near to the Lord; and then have we prayed to purpose, when by prayer our hearts and spirits are in a more sublime and celestial frame; when we are more above natural, carnal, and formal self; when more off and above the world, and all the encouragements and discouragements of it; when in and by prayer we have recovered, yea, haply exceeded our former lively apprehensions of, and

affections to the Lord Jesus, our former strength and bent of spirit to his favor and ways, etc. For then our hearts are indeed lifted up: yea, prayer is not only a lifting up of the heart effectively, because when duly performed it doth thus lift it up, but it is so formally, because the very form, nature, and essence of a spiritual prayer lie in the heavenly movings, workings, and approvings of the mind and heart, as spiritual toward God and Christ, in the several expressions of their desires. Gracious suppliants, as such, “mount up with wings as eagles.” They approach to the Lord; draw near to the Lord; they fly to heaven for refuge; they fly to the Lord for refuge, like David, who, in Psalms 143:8, pleads for favor and salvation, because he lifted up his soul to the Lord; in the ninth verse renews his plea in this expression, because he did fly to the Lord to hide him.

Prayer is called meditation. “Consider my meditation,” that is, my prayer. Isaac went out to meditate, or to pray; so that prayer is not lip-labor, if rightly performed, but it is a work of the mind exercised herein. It is blamed in hypocrites’ worship and prayer, which is therefore accounted null and vain, that they draw near with their lips, but their hearts are far from God. Prayer in the rise of it is a studied work; many a thought spent beforehand about the sins which the saints confess; about the wants which they express; upon the mercies which they do acknowledge; upon the purity, majesty, immensity, all-sufficiency, fidelity, and bounty, etc., of the Lord, to whom they pray; the beauty and fullness, etc., of the Lord Jesus, in whose name they pray; yea, immediately before they pray, they have their preparatory musing of what, of whom, and through whom they are to ask, and as they are praying, their minds are attent and intent upon what they pray for; yea, they usher in their expressions in prayer. The saints in prayer do familiarly commune with the Lord, as Abraham did in his petitioning of the Lord, Genesis 18:1-33. But yet are they very serious, and intent in this their holy discourse with the Lord, and though they do wrestle with the Lord in their pleas, in prayer, yet do they not tumultuously wrangle with him, but their spirits are stiff and calm, as but talking with the Lord.

True suppliants are so sensible of their own vileness, and troubled about their own unworthiness, that they are in a holy sense afraid, and ashamed to speak out to the Lord, as sometimes Ezra was, Ezra 9:6. Yet through faith do they eye the Lord as one so near them, that it sufficeth them to whisper to him the desires and ails of their hearts; and as one so faithful that he will wisely consider of what they thus impart to him.

Prayer is called a wrestling with the Lord. There was a mutual wrestling of the Lord with Jacob; which God intended for a trial of him, and in which he prevailed, and that wrestling was his supplication, as Hosea has it: He prevailed over the angel, he wept and made supplication, always wrestling for you in prayers, αγωνιζομενου, striving, as they did for masteries in the Olympic games, and “striving together with me in prayer.” Praying work is wrestling work; cross and harsh to the flesh and blood. The saints are put to it by their unregenerate part to strive with that, to get into a praying frame: “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh”; yea, with Satan too. And when once in such a frame, there is much need of conflict with the enemies of prayer, to keep in it; but, as if this were a small matter, a suppliant hath God himself to wrestle with: “And who is sufficient for these things?” We had need, indeed, with praying Jacob, of God’s strength, that thereby we may prevail with him. Hosea says, “by his strength he had power with God.” The Lord is willing to forgive, ready to help, yet he delights to try his own strength of grace in his people; the strength of their faith in Christ, and in his covenant; the strength of their holy desires and pleas. When such holy strength is put forth in prayer, then we pray indeed, for then we

wrestle. When in prayer we close with the Lord, get fast hold of him, of his grace, goodness, power, and truth, or the like; and keep our hold so fast and so long, that we are got within him, (so to speak,) that we have him where we would have him; that we get our spiritualized wills of him; that he expresses a holy yielding to hear and help us, so that thereby our very hearts are cheered, quickened, and quieted by it. Now have we prayed, for we have wrestled to purpose. And for this end, that our praying may be such indeed, or that it may be wrestling, conscience is to be made of preparation, as for wrestling. We are to be temperate in all things, forbearing any inordinacies of cares, fears, desires, delights, employments, and to diet ourselves, feed and delight ourselves in such sort as may fit us for prayer. To exercise ourselves in holy ejaculatory prayers, and holy meditations, and to get our souls well oiled and supplied by the praying grace of the spirit beforehand.

Prayer is a serving of God, and a serving of God in the spirit: "Our tribes instantly serving God night and day;" that is, praying. "My God whom I serve in my spirit," that is, to whom I pray. A suppliant's prayer is to him his only work and business, such as if he had then nothing to do beside; yea, it is his Lord and Master's business, which he in obedience to his command is ready to attend, a business to be done with all his might; he loveth to make something of it before he leaveth it; if he seems sometimes to idle out his time in distractions and distempers, how grievous is it to such a one to seem to have lost such a morning or evening without doing any thing of moment for the Lord, for his own soul, or others? He loves to pray whilst his heart be well warmed; nor is the Lord wont to be behindhand with any such as so serve him; he pays them best in holy recompenses of his grace, in them which pray most to him. The people concluded that Jonathan had wrought with God that day (wrestled, prayed hard) when they saw so apparently the stamp of God imprinted upon that victory given in to him, and by him. Yea, verily, it is no small reward to the suppliants of God, that the Lord doth account, that when they are praying to him, they are serving of him; when they are telling him of their spiritual wants and inabilities to do him service, confessing their failings in his service, and what unprofitable, unthankful servants they have been to him; how the Lord reckons they are doing him very acceptable service; the poor saints are ready to complain that they can do God no service, etc. No; Can you beg? Can you pray? This is service of God indeed.

Prayer, in the manner of carrying it on, is a holy serving of the Lord; how reverent is a suppliant! he serves the Lord with fear and trembling whilst praying; how humble is he! he is careful to keep his distance even in talking thus with the Lord. Abraham then tells the Lord he is but dust. Prayer, also, in the intents and desires of the suppliant, is serving the Lord; all that which a true suppliant fetches of God in prayer, if you resolve it into its last end, is service. He prays for outward things, as Jacob, Genesis 28:1-22. For parts and gifts, as Solomon, 1 Kings 3:1-28. For life and health, for deliverance out of divers afflictions, outward and inward, as Hezekiah, Isaiah 38:1-22, and David oft; but in all, it is that he might serve the Lord, and glorify him the more thereby; he comes, with an obedient spirit, for mercy from God, ready pressed to do any work of his, to attend any command of his. A praying frame is an obedient frame, a command of God bringing a true suppliant upon his knees, and on his knees he waits for a command from him.

Prayer is called knocking, namely, at the door of God's grace and mercy in Christ, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Prayer is a holy approaching to the door of mercy for all manner of supplies of grace which the saints stand in need of; the saints rest not in this, that there is a door of

grace, that there is mercy for sinners to be had in Christ, but they are careful in the use of this holy means of opening the same; mercy is freely promised to the people of God, yet may none rush into the door of God, under pretence that it is open, without knocking, Ezekiel 36:25-27, etc. The door of grace is set very open: "I will pour clean water upon you," etc.; but verse 37, "For this will I be sought by the house of Israel." Prayer acknowledges the Lord's prerogative royal: "In all thy way acknowledge him." True suppliants eye the Lord as a great God, as well as gracious, and therefore are willing to keep their due distances: though the saints be the friends of Christ and of God, who may assume a holy boldness with him, yet it is becoming them not rudely to press upon his favor, or challenge: this or that benefit of it without asking leave. Indeed, pinching extremities will make them put a good face upon it, and not continue walking to and fro, within some general view of mercy, but to knock and knock, again and again, at mercy's door, to pray often for the opening thereof to them. True suppliants are in haste of earnest and weighty affairs in their converse with the Lord, they have much to do with him, much to say to him, much to receive from him, and therefore they must, they will knock; they are sure that a gracious Father of theirs is within, yea, within bearing; and therefore they cannot but thus knock and pray. True it is, sometimes this door of grace seems to be shut against them in some displeasure, but yet this makes them the more earnest: "Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" "Trouble me not, for I am in bed," saith the friend within; but yet see what prevailing importunity he uses, so that for his importunity the friend rises, opens, and gives what is desired.

What is prayer, but a spiritual knocking, a special means of opening of the gate and door of grace; and so of all the lesser wickets (as it were) thereon depending. Hence Psalms 119:169, "Let my cry come before thee," (saith the Psalmist,) "Let my supplications come before thee;" as if he would say, open, Lord, to prayer, let it come in, let not that stand without: Lord, prayer is at the door, therefore open. So Psalms 88:2, "Let my prayer come before thee," or come where thou art. David prays that the Lord would not "hide himself from his supplications." Prayer will come in where the Lord is, will look him out (as it were) in all corners. Psalms 66:20, David "blesses the Lord that he had not turned away his prayer." Prayer stands still at God's door, it will not away without its errand and answer.

Wisdom's out-doors, even the ordinances, are opened by prayer. Outlawed Gentiles fare the better for that prayer: "Let thy way be known among the people, thy saving health among all nations." "Pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would thrust out laborers into his harvest." Prayer helps people to a fruitful ministry, prayer helps to open the minister's mouth, opens a door of utterance, Colossians 4:3. Pray that God would open my mouth. Prayer opens a door of faith, 1 Corinthians 16:8-9. The "mystery of salvation may be made known" by it, Ephesians 6:19. The word may come to have an open and effectual passage into people's hearts by it. Hence that request, "Pray that the word may have a free course and be glorified," etc. The door of liberty, the church's liberties, may be opened to the prayer of the saints, as to Paul, upon his prayer, Acts 11:1-30: Those strong and secret doors of death may be opened by prayer. Hence the prophet's raising of the dead child by prayer. So Jonah by prayer had the belly of hell, the whale's belly and jaws, opened to him, to let him out. By prayer the doors of the womb are opened, as in Hannah's case, and Rebecca's, and Elizabeth's. By prayer the doors of heaven are opened: "If I shut heaven, and my people pray," etc. "I will hear," etc. By prayer the "prison doors are opened," as to Peter, upon the church's prayer, Acts 12:5; Acts 12:10. Secrets which otherwise are not to be

opened, yet are to be unfolded by prayer, Daniel 2:18-19. Then was the secret revealed, upon prayer for the mercies of heaven that way. As in other knocking there is a hand, there are fingers which make a noise and help open the door; so here there is a hand of faith which knocks, and that will open that large gate and door of mercy, and any of the lesser wickets depending: "O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Come into all my treasures of grace, and take even what thou desirest. Godly desires knock and make a noise in God's ears, and he opens to them: "He heareth the desire of the humble." They will come in where the Lord is: "Lord, all my desire is before thee." The saint's sighs make a noise at heaven's gates, and God comes forth to them: "For the sighing of the prisoners, I will arise, saith the Lord." "Let the sighing of the prisoners come before thee;" room for the sighing of the prisoners, Lord; yea, their very tears too make a loud noise at this door, and they have their voice also in prayer: "Thou hast heard the voice of my weeping." No wonder, then, that effectual prayer consisting of all these, be indeed a knocking, and means of opening of the gate and door of mercy in Jesus Christ. We pass by other names given to prayer, as that of seeking, asking, calling, opening of the mouth wide, running to the Lord for counsel, referring one's case to him, and the like. We come, now, to give a description of prayer.

Prayer is a spiritual and faithful opening of the heart to God in the name of Christ, with an eye to seasonable help and relief from him. By heart we mean thoughts, desires, affections; these wants and weaknesses and sins to which the heart is privy, and of which it is sensible. We call it an opening of the heart in opposition to hypocritical covering, and attempts to hide any thing from the Lord, whereby their prayers become no prayers, their worship yam, whilst digging deep to hide the counsels of the heart from God, Isaiah 29:13; Isaiah 29:15, compared with Psalms 119:26, "I have declared my ways to thee," that is, prayed, "and thou heardest me." Prayer is a showing of our way to God, or as the Hebrew word imports, a telling or counting them one by one, as if we pray indeed, when we do from our hearts deal plainly and punctually with God therein, when we leave out nothing which we know by ourselves untold before him, even in a particular manner, whether respecting our wants, our sins, or the like; so Psalms 38:18, "I have declared mine iniquity," meaning all and each of his sins, there were some more special sins, sins which were chiefly his; the Hebrew word signifies a telling of some new thing. David's prayer and confession is not a highway, or one track of confession, but it is a telling of him of any new, fresh acts of sin. Jeremiah 20:12, "To thee have I opened my cause," or prayed to thee. Prayer is an opening of the soul's corners and cases to the Lord; the same word in another conjugation is used for uncovering, making bare and naked. The saints in prayer do, or should nakedly present their souls' causes without any covering, or so much as a rag of self or flesh cleaving to them. But it will be objected that all things are naked to him with whom we have to do; he is privy to our secrets; how is prayer an opening of the heart to him?

Suppliants are said in prayer to open their hearts to God.

1. In that they do not, dare not, go about to hide, or desire that ought in their hearts should be hid from the Lord. It is their desire he should, and they are very glad that he does, know all their heart; their hearts are ready to break when they, through temptation or desertion, want vent in prayer.
2. In that it is their desire and endeavor to present all within their hearts, which God by a general eye of wisdom and omniscience seeth, unto a more special, energetical view of the eye of God's

compassion and love: "Behold and visit this vine." "Look upon me as thou used to do on those that fear thy name." "Look down from heaven," etc. "Where are the sounding of thy bowels?"

3. In that they do thus in way of an ordinance of God, which be doth observe and own, as opening of their heart to God: "Pour out your heart to him," or pray to him. And although their hearts are open to God before, yet they are not actually opened, in this way of required expression of the same, till they do thus pray.

4. In that when prayer is duly performed, as their minds and hearts are uttered and poured out as before the Lord's face; so are they, in a lively manner, quickened to behold God's merciful and energetical view of the same; hence that persuasion of David:

"All my desires are before thee."

It is a spiritual opening. Spiritual, in respect of the efficient and working cause, God's Spirit actuates and works therein. It is prayer in the Holy Ghost. The spirit maketh intercession in us: the spirit of prayer is wrought in it. Prayer is called *εωεργοθμενη*, inwrought, our spirits also as actuated and improved thereby, are at work in it: "My God, whom I serve with my spirit." Our hearts are as water poured out to waft along each petition and confession, or as oil to anoint these messengers of the soul, that they may fly the faster to God's throne. It is spiritual in the matter of it, things of God's kingdom, or if other things, yet under a spiritual consideration, as according to God's will, and for his glory. Spiritual in the manner, namely, in a sublime and elevated manner of performance, Isaiah 37:4, "Lift up thy prayer." Spiritual in the end, a calling upon God whereby he is exalted. Spiritual in the motive and groundwork, a command of God requiring, a promise in encouraging: "Thou saidst, seek my face; my heart answered, Lord, thy face will I seek." "For thou revealedst to thy servant, saying, I will build thee a house, therefore bath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer." It is a faithful opening, that is, unfeigned, without reservations; prayer from unfeigned lips

It is an opening to God, not to saints and angels, which neither know our hearts, nor can help us. Though Abraham know us not. And it is to God, not as into the air, or as at an uncertainty, where, or to whom.

It is an opening in the name of Christ. There is a holy renouncing of ourselves, and our own worth and strength, and a resting and trusting upon the Lord Jesus only, through whom we come to the throne of grace, and for whose sake alone we plead for, and expect audience and acceptance, yea, an assistance.

It is an opening of the heart, with an eye to seasonable help: "Our eyes are unto the Lord, until he show us mercy."

Thus much concerning prayer in general.

We might give sundry reasons to enforce this duty; taken,

First, from God, absolutely and relatively considered, who is thereby honored. And secondly, from Christ, whose office it is to take these offerings from his people, and present them before his father; and who bath through many difficulties made this way for his people, that they may freely and familiarly thus talk with God, and open their wants to him. Thirdly, from the Spirit of God,

whose office, among other things, it is, to help and enable the saints to the careful performance of this duty. Fourthly, from the saints themselves.

1. Their necessities call for it.
2. Their manifold engagements to the Lord require it.
3. They have praying graces as, first, faith.

Prayer is in this respect also the prayer of faith, James 5:15. Faith is an emptying grace; gives the most sensible and lively view of the soul's wants and nothingness; presents the Lord in all his freeness, fulness, and faithfulness, for the soul's suitable supply.

Secondly, love. "I love the Lord, therefore will I call upon him," or pray; love of the Lord fills the soul with desires, and breathings after union, and communion with him whom the soul loves. "Let my beloved come into his garden." Love is open-hearted, would open the soul to her lover, Jesus Christ, and to the Father, by him: love is fruitful, and in a holy way eloquent in its gracious expressions to him.

Thirdly, zeal. This is attended with vehement desires: "Yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal?" that blessed fire will cause such holy smoke in the weakest Christian, and that will soon sparkle out in holy supplications, that will be mounting upwards, spiritualizing and lifting up the heart thus heavenward.

Fourthly, holy jealousy and fear of God. Thou castest off fear, thou restrainest prayer: unless fear be thrust out of doors, that will put the soul upon prayer; other jealousy fills men's heads and hearts with motions, so doth holy jealousy with praying motions and matter. The more we suspect ourselves, the more are we in these holy inquiries of God. Holy jealousy is an utter enemy to carnal security; presumption, selfishness, and confidence, the very bane of prayer.

4. Their spiritual calling as saints, calls for their drawing thus near to God for their offering up these spiritual sacrifices and offerings, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. As being spiritual priests, yea, as sons and children, they must thus own their Father, in crying Abba, Father, and as subjects honor their blessed king by becoming his humble petitioners; the believing penitent thief upon the cross performed this as his homage to Jesus Christ, as king of saints, he prayeth, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The fifth reason may be taken from the enemies of prayer;— the devil, flesh, and world; which oppose the same upon all occasions, and seek in special sort to hinder the careful practice of it, (as might be showed in many particulars,) so that it the more concerns us to attend it, else would not they be so busy to divert us from it, or distract or discourage us in it. The sixth reason may be taken from prayer itself as spiritually performed, in that it is so acceptable to the Lord, so prevailing with him to admiration, for any thing which is according to his will. But inasmuch as in handling the particular kinds of prayer, we have more occasion to press upon the conscience, we shall here but name such things as might enforce to the duty.

Let us only now make one use of what has been said, and that in way of reproof of God's own professing people, who are too ready also to neglect and omit this duty of prayer: "But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob." That was very grievous to God, when a people whom he hath severed into church estate, with an aim at his praise; yet they should neglect to honor him in

careful calling upon him. Such as we are, are looked upon by others as a praying people; but ah, that the world were not mistaken in us! what wonder is it if many professors excel no more in the things of God, if they are not much in prayer! One of the ancients used to say, If I see a man not delighting in prayer, I conclude he is one of no inward excellences; nay, is it any wonder to see many congregations rather hospitals of poor, decrepit, decayed, diseased Christians, than gardens where are goodly, fragrant, thriving plants? As the body without the soul is dead, unserviceable, yea, is an offence in others' nostrils, so are we as loathsome in God's sight, without the true exercise of prayer, which, (as some have called it,) is, as it were, the soul of our souls. Some of the ancients have called prayer the physic of the soul; and truly such it is; it will, by the blessing of God, purge, heal, recover, quicken, and strengthen a very weakly Christian, as experience witnesseth. But what will become of other distempered, relapsed professors, who use not this holy course of physic, is it wonder that such die, become twice dead? Some have called prayer the sun and light of the soul, and truly in a sense it is so; but how darkly and sadly must they needs walk, and how often will they be stumbling and falling dangerously? How little spiritual work will they do for Christ, in whose horizon this sun of prayer is setting, if not already set, and from whom this lightsome and lifegiving ordinance is removed? Others have called prayer the nerves and sinews of the soul, and truly so it is; prayer holdeth altogether in us, keepeth all in due place and strength; and they must needs grow loose and weak, who make not continual use thereof upon all occasions. But that this admonition be not as an arrow shot at rovers, let us show first some symptoms of this spiritual evil of omission of prayer; and so who are the persons concerned herein, and show some particular branches of the evil of it.

Touching the former, —1. Such are surely of drawing near to God, who are not pliable the whole will of God: "She obeyed not the v she drew not near to her God." Earnest prayer would inure us from our hearts to say, "Thy will be done," and accordingly in heart to endeavor it.

2. Those omit prayer, who walk not humbly in afflictions; such as are full of impatience, discontent, tumultuousness of spirit, and the like: "She received not correction, she drew not near to her God." Eliphaz gathered that Job was neglectful of prayer, because so querulous, and (as he thought) repining at God's dealings with him: "Surely thou casteth off fear, and thou restrainest prayer; should a wise man dispute with words not comely?"

3. Those omit prayer, who are ready upon every occasion to distrust God in his promise or providence: "She trusted not in the Lord, she drew not near to her God."

4. When professors are so very hard to be convinced of a sin, as sins of worldliness, pride, oppression, error, impatience, and the rest: "Thou casteth off fear, thou restrainest prayer, for thy mouth declareth thine iniquity, seeing thou hast chosen the tongue of the crafty." To evade and avoid the just imputations (as he thought) of hypocrisy. This argues also omission of prayer.

5. So is oppression one of another, an argument thereof: "They eat up my people, they call not upon God."

6. Backsliding and lukewarmness in religion, also argues the same; these two are joined, Ephesians 1:6, Such as are turned back from the Lord, and those that have not sought the Lord. So is that of not inquiring after him, namely, of his servants. I fear these backsliding times are not such praying times as formerly.

7. The sad temptations which are too rife among professors, argue omission and neglect of prayer:

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” Yea, but it appeared, that against that third admonition of Christ, they did neglect to do it; yea, Peter who was personally admonished. “What, Peter, couldst not thou watch?” But ah, the advantages which presently Satan got against the disciples, and against Peter above all the rest; witness his third denial of Christ. In a word, the little success we oftentimes find in our weighty endeavors, argues that we ask not, and therefore have not any choice blessing thereon: “Ye war and get nothing, because ye ask nothing.”

Touching the second thing, the case of such persons is bad, both in respect, I. Of evils of sin, accompanying the same.

1. Such are far from experimental knowledge of God, and of his ways: “The heathen that know not God, who call not upon him,” Jeremiah 10:24.

2. Such are secretly hypocrites, yea, very atheists,) who make not conscience of prayer. It is the atheist in heart, who in his heart saith, “There is no God,” “Who calleth not upon God.”

3. Such are under some deep measure of hardness of heart, yea, of wilful hardening themselves; the cast out all motions in them, arising from any fear of God, who restrains prayer.

4. Such are in a ready way to blaspheme God and his ways: “What is the Almighty that we should fear him, or what profit should we have if we pray to him?” they are in a ready way to cast God quite out of their thoughts. These two are joined. “He will not seek after God, God is not in all his thoughts.”

5. But at best, such are surely weary of God:

“Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.” And what a sin and shame is it to be carelessly weary of God, the God of our mercy?

II. The case of such who omit and neglect prayer, is sad, in respect of the evil of sorrow. Such as call not upon God, are oftentimes in causeless horrors, and have little quiet, or peace in their spirits: “They call not upon God, and then are they in fear where no fear is.” And to say no more, such will in time come under that dreadful imprecation: “Pour out thy wrath upon the families which call not upon thy name,” and so may come to lie open to a more full measure of the wrath of the Almighty than other men. And so much of Prayer in General.

05. Part 1, Chapter 2. Ejaculatory Prayer

CHAPTER II. OF THE DIVERSE KINDS OF PRAYER. AND FIRST, OF EJACULATORY PRAYER.

Having spoken of prayer in general, we come now to speak of the species and sorts of prayer; and therein first, of sudden or ejaculatory prayer; in respect of which, we may be said to pray, and must also “pray without ceasing.” He who enjoins us indefinitely to pray without ceasing, commands us also to pray in an ejaculatory way: “Pray with all prayer,” or all manner of prayer, and so this also. Ejaculatory prayer is either mental only, or vocal also.

Ejaculatory prayer mental, is a short, yet serious and sincere lifting up of the heart’s desires and ails unto the Lord; the mind, as it were, inwardly uttering the same to him. Thus Jehoshaphat cried to the Lord. And thus Samson called upon the Lord, and said, (in God’s hearing, not in the lad’s hearing that led him): “O Lord God remember me,” etc. Thus Nehemiah prayed unto the God of heaven, yet the king, then present, neither hears a whisper, nor sees any motion of his lips, whilst Nehemiah is thus speaking a word or two of moment to the King, 1 Kings. Moses’ mental speaking to God, was a loud cry in the Lord’s ears; he spake nothing vocally, yet “Why criest thou,” saith the Lord? Believers are to God through Christ a spiritual temple and house, that within this house, also, in the most part thereof, this holy incense of ejaculatory prayer may be offered to the Lord with acceptance.

Ejaculatory prayer vocal, is a holy apostrophe, or turning one’s speech to God prayer-wise, in some short, yet pithy expressions, from what a gracious person is thinking, saying, doing, or suffering. Thus Jacob breaks off his continued speech in blessing his sons, turning himself to God: “O Lord, I have waited for thy salvation.” So Isaiah, from threatening the Assyrians, turns prayer-wise to God: “O Lord be merciful unto us.” So Micah, in like sort: “Feed thy people with thy rod.” Thus Christ breaks off his speech to his disciples, and turns it to his Father: “Father, glorify thy name,” etc. From reproving his fellow does the penitent thief turn his speech to Christ: “Lord remember me in thy kingdom.” Thus Nehemiah, amidst his reforming work, oftentimes turns him to God thus: “Remember me, o my God, concerning this,” etc.

Let us now speak a little of the excellency and necessity of prayer without ceasing in an ejaculatory way, give reasons for it, and apply it. The excellency hereof may appear, both by the nature and by the rise of it. It is the first breath of a regenerate man. As soon as a man is born again, he thus at least crieth: “Abba, Father. In that ye are the sons of God, be bath sent out the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” And when his body breathes its last, this is a gracious person’s last breathing. Hence such parting cries of God’s children at the stake, in the flames, amidst the stones, or on a cross: “Lord receive my spirit; into thy hands I commend my spirit.” And such were Stephen’s, who was stoned, calling on the Lord, and saying “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” The last words of the worthies oil God, we account to be most memorable, and to have some spiritual excellency enstamped upon them, and these words are such like ejaculations. If it were possible to hear the last whispers of the saints’

souls, as ready to leave their bodies, they would be found to be such like breathings of their desire to him to whom they are going. Ejaculatory prayer, also, is the first and last of set and solemn prayer, when rightly performed. God prepares the heart of the humble to pray acceptably, even by these preparatory liftings up of the heart prayer-wise. The heart is first thus prepared, then the hand that way stretched out. Look upon Solomon in that presidential prayer of his; his hands spread to heaven before he spake, showed where his heart was lifted beforehand. The last also of solemn prayer is issued in an ejaculation, an ejaculatory amen, comprehending the closing desires, and feeling motions of faith to all before pleaded for. All the prayers of a gracious suppliant are not ended with his continued speech in prayer; no, his heart is lifting and lifting; as you see a bell-rope oft hoisting up after you have done ringing the bell. Many a long look, and heart-wish follows such a one's desire to heaven, and all together come before the Lord for mercy. Hence the Lord, as he is nigh to them that call upon so he fulfilleth the desires of them that fear Solomon's heart was as well left in heaven after the end of his prayer, whereof his fixed eyes there a speaking sign, as gotten thither before he began.

Ejaculatory prayer is the very quintessence of solemn prayer; it is the very spirit into which that is distilled and resolved. When a gracious person's heart is left in heaven, uttering its after-requests, now prayer is well carried on. These shorter postscripts, written after the other longer letter indited by the Spirit, and directed to the Lord, have ever something of note and worth. This epitome of prayer, how solid is it? So much for a taste of the nature of it.

Let us withal consider this holy duty of ejaculatory prayer in the spring and rise thereof; and especially those lively and forcible rebounds of the gracious spirit of a saint of God, moved by the hand of the Spirit of God. Ejaculatory prayer is the harmonious, sweet-sounding echo of the Spirit, fore-speaking to the heart. When thou saidst, Seek my face, there is the Lord's voice; my heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek; there is the echo. David, before he is solemnly praying, as afterward he is, turns his speech to the Lord, telling him what his heavenly desires say, I will seek thy face, or my heart's desires are so to do. Ejaculations are the spiritual ventings and breathings of a gracious heart, filled with the wine of the spirit, very precious, very pleasant to the taste of the Lord. Sometimes the saint's hearts are so filled with a spirit of holy joy, sometimes of praise, sometimes of love to the Lord, that variety of holy desires pressing fast on, they are forced to give them vent by short ejaculations. Ejaculations are the holy evaporations of a heart thoroughly warmed with some special workings of faith and love of Christ. When David's heart is thus boiling hot, he breaks off his discourse from Christ, and breathes out holy desires unto Christ Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, and ride prosperously. Ejaculations are the holy sparks ascending up one after another, from the stirring of the fired coals of the Spirit in the heart. From the holy admiration of God and his goodness, power, wisdom, faithfulness, etc., proceed holy ejaculations. From that transcendence of God's dispensations to Asaph's reason, who had his heart's fore discourses about the same, proceeds, that verily, or nevertheless God is good to Israel. From Micah's admiring at the unparalleled grace of God, Who is a God like unto thee? He tells the church what God will do; he will turn again, and will subdue our iniquities, and then makes his apostrophe to the Lord: Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea; and, Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob. God calls for these holy apostrophes from this ground of admiration at his marvelous providences: Say unto God, how terrible art thou in thy works! The excellency of this fruit must needs partake of the excellency of such a root as is an admiring frame.

Ejaculations arise from the spiritualizing of the heart upon any occasion. As when David is spiritual in contemplation of the works of God: "When I consider thy heavens," etc., his heart being ejaculatory, saith, "Lord, what is man that thou art thus mindful of him?" So, when he was in a likely manner musing upon the immensity of God, he breaks out thus, "How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God!" From the view taken of God's justice or mercy, or from any holy discourse with others about the same, or from singing, and sounding forth God's praises, wherein the saints are spiritual, arise some holy ejaculations or other. In all these, and each of these, was Deborah so spiritual to the last, whence that ejaculatory prayer of hers, "So let thine enemies perish, Lord; but let those that love thee be like the sun in its might." If the Lord breathe upon our hearts at his table, or in his word, the Spirit of God draws out our hearts to send some ejaculatory lift of prayer, either in the way of petition, or thanksgiving, or the like. When the Lord Jesus speaks effectually to John's heart, "I come quickly," thence springs his ejaculatory "Amen, even so come Lord Jesus, come quickly;" Christ effectually preaching that hard lesson of brotherly forgiveness, it caused that ejaculation from them, "Lord, increase our faith." If David hear that word twice, "That all power belongs to God," his spirit is elevated to make this short, hearty speech, "Also to thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." From the angel's lively discourse with Mary about Christ, who was to be incarnate, and to be formed in her, her heart being warmed, she turns her speech to the Lord, who sent that his angel, "Be it to thy servant according to thy word." So, then, holy ejaculations are the very spirits of the spiritual workings of God, or at the leastwise from the Lord's spiritualizing of his saints in his providences or ordinances, and therefore great in their excellency.

Let us add another infallible argument of the excellency of this duty of ejaculatory prayer, and that is from the high esteem, and real respects which God himself has expressed thereof. Habakkuk's discourse, though mostly doctrinal, and only something mentioned in a short way of petition and of praising God, yet as from the most excellent part in God's account, it is all called his prayer. The penitent thief's ejaculation, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," is graciously owned and answered by Jesus Christ, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The publican, ejaculatorily praying, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," goes away justified, yea, that ejaculatory apostrophe of Moses to God, "Why hast thou so evilly entreated the people?" yet hath its gracious return from the Lord. Then said the Lord, "Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh." The Israelites at the Red Sea were so afraid with a distrustful fear, that Moses bids them not to fear, yet being thus afraid, they cried unto the Lord, and both Nehemiah and Joshua testify, that God heard that cry of theirs, and put darkness between them and the Egyptians, and drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea. David, when in such a hurry of distrust that he said to God, "I am cut off from thy sight," yet says, "Nevertheless thou hast heard the voice of my supplications." Ejaculations are but short breathings of the saint's spirits, but being breathed once, they scarce ever expire in respect of the efficacies and issues of them. These short speeches are best remembered, their memorials are of a very long date with the Lord. That grey-headed ejaculation of Noah, "God establish Japhet to dwell in the tents of Shem," has had, now has, and still will have its answer, in the Gentiles, of Japhet's coming into the fellowship with the church. The day of judgment, although not a season of praying, yet of full answers of such like prayers made with respect to the day. Paul's short prayer, "The Lord show mercy to the house of Onesiphorus," at that day shall have then a full return. At that day when the saints' treasures laid up in heaven shall be opened, these lesser pieces shall have their weight, worth, and use, when it shall be said, these and these have been the prayers of such and such of the saints, and these and these are the issues and fruits of them to such and

such.

Thus much touching the excellency of such ejaculations; now of the necessity thereof. The saint's sudden straits require prayer, but will not afford time for continued prayer. Then is the time for ejaculatory prayer. At this dead lift, now, Moses' cry will do well, Exodus 14:15. Then Jehosaphat must hie to heaven, when begirt with bloodthirsty men; in continued prayer he cannot, but by ejaculatory prayer he may. Then Jehosaphat cried to the Lord. Scribbling is but a poor shift for David, when known in the presence of the king of Gath, and when there is no place for solemn prayer, then he must use ejaculatory prayer:

"I sought the Lord, and he heard me." This poor man cried, and the Lord beard him and saved him. Asa, when about to join battle, thus cried unto the Lord his God with marvellous success. David in that strait prays against Ahithophel's counsels:

"Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness," and the issue shows it took. Moses, among a company of murmurers, has none lit to join in prayer in a more solemn way; though he spake nothing vocally, he cried thus effectually, he cried to the Lord, and he showed him a tree to make the bitter waters sweet; Philistines are upon the Israelites; then is only room for Samuel's ejaculatory cry; and Samuel cried unto the Lord, and he heard him. Hezekiah's deadly sickness will only give him leave to pray thus. He turned his face to the wall and prayed, "O Lord, remember me." Sudden and strong temptations disable David to make such coned prayer, but he will then make many of these ejaculatory requests. Nevertheless "thou heardest the cry of my supplications when I cried to thee." Great griefs and presages fill the saints' hearts, and lay their speech, but then their hearts burst forth into unutterable sighs and groans, whose meaning the Lord knoweth, Romans 8:26.

Surely saints, as men of tender consciences, ever and anon offending in deed, but as frequently smitten in their hearts for it, cannot but be often put upon it, in the interims of continued prayer, to bespeak mercy and pardon whilst their hearts are thus afflicted. And David's heart smote him for numbering the people, and David said unto the Lord, "I have sinned, I beseech thee take away the iniquity of thy servant." And as sudden faults of ours, so sudden strokes of God put the saints upon this. When David saw the angel smiting the people, he said, "It is I that have sinned, what have these sweep done?" Sudden injuries from men cause an injured Jephthah to make his short appeal to the Lord, saying, "The Lord be judge between Israel and Ammon." Israel injuriously begirts Judah, and no other help for them but this, Judah cried unto the Lord. Pharaoh with a huge host, has Israel at an advantage, and they must needs then thus cry out unto the Lord. Enemies' unexpected scorns of the saints, put the saints upon these short appeals, Nehemiah 4:5, "Hear, O our God, for we are despised." Their sudden affrighting of them, doth as much; they all made us afraid: "Now, therefore, O our God, strengthen my hands." The present hearing of the prince's good-will to the commonwealth, put forth goodly subjects then present, to affix their ejaculatory amen thereto: "Amen, the Lord thy God say so too." A sudden hand of God upon others, put godly Moses upon it thus to pray for Miriam:

"O Lord, heal her," and godly Hezekiah to pray for his people: "The good Lord pardon every one that prepares his heart to seek the Lord, though not so prepared. And the Lord hearkened, and healed the people." Any sudden notice of some special service of God, unto which some of the saints are addressing themselves, must needs put others that hear thereof, by such sudden lifts of

their hearts, to give them a lift therein. Is David going to a solemn sacrifice, godly Araunah will thus wish him good speed: "The Lord thy God accept thee." Eli perceiving Hannah's prayer business, cannot but add his fiat also: "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition." Sudden weighty changes of some of the saints in their outward condition, put others that hear of it upon this holy service of love to them, as Boaz his godly neighbors: "The Lord make this woman like Rachel and Leah." Sudden and unexpected kindnesses shown to the saints, will put them to speed such a kind of messenger as this to heaven, presently to tell their father of it. Naomi seeing Boaz' kindness to his daughter Ruth, saith "blessed be he of the Lord, that hath not left off his kindness to the living, and to the dead." Besides, even one ejaculation of the saints, puts them into making more, upon praying thus also without ceasing. One ejaculation begets another: "With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early;" because they had thus prayed, they will pray yet more. Psalms 62:1, "Hear my cry, attend to my prayer;" and Psalms 62:2, "From the end of the earth will I cry." He had thus cried, and he will therefore cry again and again. As billows of temptation ever and anon stop his mouth and interrupt him, so as he now and then does but peep above water, and get breathing space, he will thus cry, lead me, or guide me, or carry me to yonder rock which is higher than I. Hence Jonah, in his perishing condition, mentions his prayers; there were many of these short prayers like messengers sent post in some great and present stress one after the other, to speed succor from heaven.

Yea, these holy traders with heaven, using to make as quick returns, as speedy dealings thus with the Lord; as they gain upon the Lord, they are suddenly sending for more, and bespeaking yet more blessings from him. When Moses by his short prayers has got a grant of God, "My presence shall go with thee," then does he in holy way grow upon God. He has one short, yet no small request more:

"I beseech thee show me thy glory." And he has another request yet more: "Pardon our iniquities, and take us for thine inheritance." So Abraham's short requests as they are granted, so they multiply: "if there be fifty, Lord, in Sodom, wilt thou not spare it?" and then if but forty-five, then if forty, then if thirty, then if twenty, then if ten.

Thus much also be spoken to show the necessity of this duty in sundry respects. Let us now briefly add a reason or two, yet further to enforce this duty. The first is taken from the nature and property of this duty, which honors the Lord in a special manner, as a glorious spirit which needs not any words of ours to express what we would to him. He can hear the holy language and speech of our spirits; he understands the meaning of sighs not to be expressed. Ejaculatory prayer proclaims the Lord, that He is not as the idol gods, who needs not to be awakened by loud outcries, as Elijah derided Baal's priests, wishes them to cry aloud. No, this proclaims to all the world, that the God of the saints is an all-seeing God, espying the least moving of their desires to him, that he is in all, and through all, and fills every place; yea, that he is a very present help at any dead lift; that he is a God hearing prayers, the shortest of them. If Ephraim but lisp and whisper out, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned," God saith, "I have surely heard him." If Israel take unto them words of prayer, though but short, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," God can, and will say, "I have surely heard him, and observed him." This glorifies him, as one who assuredly waits to be gracious, that any such cry and whisper as this is of the saints, is attended by him. "The Lord waits to be gracious;" and verse 19, is a demonstration thereof, "The Lord will be very gracious at the voice of thy cry." The second reason is taken from the precious fruits of the earnest performance

of this duty; of such sudden and short lifts of the heart to the Lord.

1. It is a very special means to keep our heart⁸ very spiritual and savory, when so often in heaven, taking some short turns with God and Jesus Christ. When so oft with God, distances will not so easily grow when conversing so with God, there is more of his brightness, more of his image upon such a one's face and heart. When gracious persons are ever and anon making such holy stands and pauses of spirit, they are kept closer with God. Take two professors, the one careless in this, the other diligent in attending to it. Alas, what sad bruises and falls upon the very shadow of a temptation? If he get some kind of hold of a promise, this sword of the spirit hangs loose and dangling (as it were) like Amasa's sword, yea, all the rest of his spiritual armor, is answerable; yea, but the other keeps himself that the evil one toucheth him not, enters not into temptation. He hath gospel promises made known, and made over to him to use at any time, he has them by him, he keeps a holy edge upon them, by which he cuts asunder many temptations. He has his faith and hope in its strength; his "bow abides in his strength, and his arms are not broken." If temptations to unrighteous or guileful dealings be- girt him, his heart cries out, God forbid; O Lord, how dare I so sin against thee! If foiled at any time, he presently cries, O Lord, ah my vile heart, Lord, Lord, help! or if unexpected afflictions be ordered to him, hereby ties his shoes of peace ever and anon closer, patience (Lord) do me good thereby; and so is not galled or grieved, as the other when meeting with such hard ways. Paul was much that way with God, learned contentment in all conditions, knew how to be full and how to be hungry, to abound and to want, and to glory in infirmities.

2. It is a special means to fit us for more solemn and continued prayer. They are ever good proficient in that holy art of pleading, they are ever and anon thus plodding upon it; their minds thus exercised in it upon all occasions. Such as will be ever and anon thus whetting their praying spirits and graces, will make work of it when they come to it. They that are good at these running pulls and trips, are surely good wrestlers with God. It is no new or strange work to such to pray, that when they come to pray more solemnly they know not how to set about it; their hearts are not so out of tune as are those of idle professors. No, these that have been so oft in a day at work with God this way, have not their tools to seek, but at hand, and all in good plight, fit for use. Praying thoughts and desires are in a holy readiness.

3. It is a means to meet oft with God. If Abraham's servant be thus walking with God in his journey, God will be with him, he will meet him. No sooner hath he done speaking to God in his heart, than he discerneth that God is with him, and accordingly blesseth him, that being in the way he led him. God is oft with the minister and his study, who is thus praying oft in his heart for good speed in his work; oft with the laboring man in the field, whilst at his work, if thus employed spiritually.

Now let us make some brief use hereof, and close this with some cautions.

Let it humble us, that we are so careless in lifting up such ejaculatory prayers to the Lord upon every occasion. 'What strangeness grows oftentimes betwixt God and our souls, for want of these more transient and occasional talkings with the Lord! How many precious things in private communion of saints, and edifying discourses are lost for want of some forelifts, and present lifting up of our hearts for the presence of God therein, and blessing of God thereupon? How many precious words of grace spoken by God to us will warm and affect us at present hearing of them, yet are lost in respect of the abiding light and life of them, for want of serious and thankful committing of them to the Lord by such short ejaculatory prayer, that he might keep them for us?

Moses did otherwise when God spake home to him, he hasteth to bow before him, and by a short prayer improves that particular spoken, that God was one pardoning iniquity. Let my Lord pardon our iniquity and our sin. He presently retails and puts to holy use that blessed treasury of grace delivered of God to him. But we oftentimes, intending haply to tell God of it more solemnly, in the mean time lose it, for want of present improving of it this way. Yea, many affecting providences, respecting ourselves or others, which are unexpectedly ordered, lose their kindly work upon us for want of a present lifting up of our hearts in some suitable though short ejaculations. How much of God in our particular callings, how many quickening motions of the spirit suggested to us therein, e in a God, forgive, arise, we beseech thee, by whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?" or as the sudden stroke of God forced Pelatiah, while Ezekiel was prophesying, turned his speech to the Lord, "Ah, Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel!" Yea, will not variety of afflictions, some outward, some inward, which once in every four and twenty hours are wont to befall us, put us upon it to cry as sometime tile church did in hers, "Behold, O Lord, see and consider." As Jesus Christ did in his, when inwardly loaded, as well as outwardly afflicted: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And whither also will our spirits wander betwixt our solemn praying in the morning and that at evening, if we do not now and then, each day try whether our hearts be gone out of call after vain objects? will they not else be too fast wedged in worldly affairs, unless flow and then hereby loosened a little? But for the fastening of this exhortation, and the right managing of the duty exhorted unto, let us lay down, 1. Some motives to it. 2. Some helps and means for it. 3. Some cautions about it. Touching the motives consider,

1. That this precept and duty enjoined of God, is a very precious privilege to the saints, they of all others may well be forward to this duty; in that it is well for them that ejaculatory prayer is acceptable prayer, a choice service which the Lord himself appointeth and delights in: it is well for us, brethren and sisters, that we may thus speak and converse with our God, when none either thinks or knows of it; we may ever and anon talk thus with our heavenly and gracious Sovereign, and others in our very company, neither hear nor mark it; as Nehemiah did in the king's presence, he prayed to the Lord of heaven, and the king was not privy to it, Nehemiah 2:4. As we walk in the way with others, we may exchange a few of these holy speeches, and yet keep our way and discourse with them; little do carnal persons think how many of these holy lifts sometimes gracious and spiritual persons (occasionally cast into their company) have, while they are with them. It is meat and drink which they know not of, communing with one that is invisible. They may have sweet answers and returns also thereof, which fill their hearts with heavenly joy, wherewith a stranger doth not intermeddle. Yea, in their sleep, the saints may thus be talking with God; it was in a dream when God said unto Solomon, Ask what I shall give thee; and he did so and awakened, and behold it was a dream, a sign, then,, that he was that while as in a sleep, when praying, and yet so graciously accepted, and answered. And alas, what else would have become of God's Asas and Jehoshaphats, Davids and others, of whom you heard, if this were not prevailing prayer? what should desolate Jonah in the whale's belly also do? He prayed but in this sort. What shall poor Jeremiah in the dungeon do? but hereby you see he does well enough: "I called upon the name of the Lord out of the low dungeon, and thou heardest my voice." Some friends would sometimes give a world to exchange a word or two with a choice friend of theirs in their extremity: If I could but send or speak with such a one, will such say, I need not, I should not lie here thus. If my father, if my brother did but know of it, I am sure they would relieve me in my straits: though I am now a Turk's slave, yet I have such and such friends in such a country which would ransom me. Yea, but

the saints need not say so, but if they want opportunity for more formal prayer, yet in this way they may tell their heavenly Father and friend, Jesus Christ, how it is with them. And is not this well for them? Alas, what should dumb ones do, whose tongues the enemy cut out, if yet there were no means left of speaking with their heavenly Father? but blessed be God there is this way left to such. It may be malicious persecutors will throw the saints into a jail, amongst a company of rogues, which will scoff at the very mention of prayer; now see the use of this part of God's revealed will, enjoining ejaculations for prayers also: the poor saints may then pour out these prayers to their God, in which such a hellish crew cannot well interrupt them; they may hear them sigh, it may be, or see them weep, but judge that as arising from other causes, which indeed and in truth is some sigh of love, holy longing, admiration, or the like; a precious melting of faith in their hearts, amidst these short heart-speeches with the Lord. Sometimes the saints are like Hezekiah, as well oppressed inwardly as outwardly, that they cannot pray, but only, in an abrupt and broken way, chatter, and that within themselves, and at length get out, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me;" and they are like babes in Christ, and can but brokenly stammer out their minds to the Lord, or like the publican, not daring in a manner to speak much; but, in short, to bespeak mercy as to chief of sinners: is it, then, not well for such, that, O Lord be merciful to me a sinner, is such an acceptable prayer with God? yea verily, it is well for the saints when to leave the world, when neither they can speak to be understood of any friend, nor their friends to them, albeit both may desire it with their minds and spirits, and have audience and acceptance; and indeed if this were not so acceptable a duty, many a blessed soul soliloquy with God of the saints living and dying, were made null and useless. And is it not well, then, for the saints that ejaculatory prayer is acceptable prayer? yea, it is very well in these and other respects: and truly, though it be as I may say, ifi for some notorious enemies of God, yet this is so: for the saints can soon do their errand, and in a very few words too. As David did Ahithophel's. It is well, also, for many a man who is yet in his sins, or at least under captivity to some distemper, that ejaculatory prayer of the saints is of such a nature; they at Taberah had otherwise been consumed, when once the fire of God was kindled amongst them; if Moses' ejaculatory cry had not been a prayer of the right stamp, and full weight, to pass for current with the Lord: "Moses cried to the Lord, and the fire was quenched;" sundry think Paul fared the better for Stephen's ejaculatory prayer at his death: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And assuredly many of the blinded Jews, who ignorantly crucified the Lord of glory, fared the better for the ejaculatory prayer of Christ, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," witness the conversion of thousands of those, who had a hand in crucifying the Lord Jesus. Other saints likewise fare the better for this, that the ejaculatory prayers of others of their brethren for them, are acceptable prayers to God; Onesiphorus will fare the better for the short prayer of Paul, at the very day of judgment: "The Lord grant that he may find mercy at that day." How well, then, is it in all respects, that God will have his saints praying continually with ejaculatory prayer also?

2. In that it is a service which the Lord by special motion of his spirit puts his saints upon oftentimes, as well as by general command requires the same:

"Let me hear thy voice," saith Christ to his people, Song of Solomon 2:14, to which the church answers in an ejaculatory prayer, verse 17, "Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe." The Lord puts them upon speaking to him, "Let me hear thy voice;" to which they return an ejaculation, verse 14, "Make haste, my beloved." Now it will not be safe to neglect any such motions made by

the Lord, and by his spirit, lest being grieved, he withdraw from us.

3. In that the most spiritual persons have been, and are thus exercised in those holy ejaculations, as was Christ, as "When he was baptized, he so prayed;" when those disciples returned with that success, he lifts up his heart: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." So John 3:1-36 : "Father, glorify thy name." "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." So "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" So when about to leave the world: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Thus David and Nehemiah and Moses and others, who were most spiritual, how oft were they thus praying?

4. In that ejaculatory prayer has prevailed with God for great things; persons have been healed of plagues. As upon such a prayer of Hezekiah: "God hearkened, and healed the people." Wonders have been done by it: "Isaiah cried unto the Lord, and the sun went back ten degrees." Such wonders were done hereby at the Red Sea, as formerly was shown.

Now, in the second place, consider of some helps to us in this way.

1. Get and maintain a spiritual frame of heart, walk much with God in meditation, and the like; and frequent occasion will be offered of such like talking with Him. A heavenly heart will be often lifted thus heavenward. When Simeon was in such a frame, then he said: "Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." So when John is in a like frame, then, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." One ejaculation or other arises out of the heart in such a frame; and as a branch thereof, get our hearts weaned from the things of the world; be as one leaving the world, and then an old Jacob will be mounting thus: "Lord, I have waited for thy salvation." David, as a weaned child, was much in holy ejaculations; so was David's Lord, who was so much above the world, such have most to do in heaven, and therefore so oft moving that way.

2. Get a humble heart, sensible of sins, and selfemptiness. Broken hearts will be often breathing out ejaculatory sighs and requests. The humbled thief upon the cross, publican in the temple, had their ejaculations.

3. Keep in life and light, as much as may be, the sense of the love of God in Christ. When the church is in Christ's arms, and as in his bosom, then she has her ejaculatory request: "Set me as a seal upon thy arms." This stirs up holy love in us to God, and that will be making ever and anon abrupt expressions of its desire to Him.

Touching the third thing, consider these cautions.

1. Content not ourselves, that more rarely we have some one lifted this way, but be ever and anon sending up some short requests unto the Lord. Four times in one chapter is Nehemiah doing thus upon several occasions.

2. Look that we do it not in a petitionary way only, but praising way as well: So David: "When I consider thy heavens, I said, what is man that thou art thus mindful of him!" So Jesus Christ: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes," and "Father, I thank thee, that thou always hearest me."

3. Look that it be not a bare formal cry, for fashion's sake, a customary Lord have mercy upon me, or Lord bless me, or the like, in a morning, or at going to bed, resting therein, as if now some

goodly service were done, or that suffices; or a more forced outcry to God, occasioned from sudden terrors or distrusts, and the like; or an hypocritical semblance of a heart lifted to heaven, by an affected lifting up the eyes when in others' company, or in a seemed squeezing out a hollow-hearted sigh, instead of such cordial ejaculations, to which we have been all this while exhorting.

Lastly. Look that none under this pretence lay aside the due and constant exercise of public or private prayer in a more continued way. Let not one duty jostle out another. Continued prayer, in solemn manner, is our duty, as well as ejaculatory prayer, as God willing we shall see in the following part of this discourse; we are the rather to make conscience of ejaculatory prayer, that we may be fit for solemn prayer. And we are so to pray in a continued prayer, as it may leave us, sending up our after ejaculations unto heaven.

06. Part 1, Chapter 3. Solemn, Continued Prayer; Public Prayer

CHAPTER III.

TOUCHING MORE SOLEMN CONTINUED PRAYER. — AND PARTICULARLY PUBLIC PRAYER.

WE have spoken of ejaculatory prayer; we proceed to consider of solemn and continued prayer, which is either public or church prayer, private or family prayer, secret or closet prayer.

Begin we now with the consideration of public, or church prayer, which is also included in this indefinite precept, written to the church of the Thessalonians, collectively as well as distributively considered. Whence, also, in this chapter he exhorts them to a due esteem of their officers, verse 12 and verse 20 of the ordinance of the ministerial dispensation of the word. So, then, public or church prayer is a duty also which we ought seriously to attend in its season. Paul exhorts that in the first place, “prayers be made for all sorts of men, namely, public prayers, and makes the same very good and accept and in the sight of God. It is emblematically set forth under the notion of “four living creatures, and four and twenty elders met in way of worship of God.” For our better proceeding herein, consider, 1. The requisites to public prayer. 2. The reasons of it. 3. Some use of it.

Touching the first, some things are required of such as are to be the mouth of the church in prayer, some things in such as join with them. Of the former sort of requisites are,

1. A public call. So it was of old. “The priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for them hath the Lord thy God chosen to minister to him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; “which was in prayer. “On this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel, saying, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee.”

Now this call to become the people’s mouth to God, as it respects God, so it is, amongst other things, God’s fitting them with abilities, as for preaching, so for prayer; and his sequestering them accordingly thereunto, as to their work. Whence that word, “We will give ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word: “ namely, as we are ministers, and, in an authoritative way, both alike are ministerial acts, and gifts for the one, as well as for the other, are a choice part of a ministerial call. That which we render consecrate, as applied to Aaron and his Sons imports fullness. As if such men by their calling, were very full, men of all abilities, for their ministerial works; yea, as if it were one main part of their call, be that way as complete as may be. The elders in the apostle’s days called to that office, were gifted upon any occasion to make an inwrought prayer: “Let them send for .the elders, and let them pray over him.” *δεησις ενεργουμένη*, the inwrought “Prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Both the officers, yea, and members also of pure churches, in the days of the gospel, are represented as gifted for prayer: “Having vials filled with odors of prayers.” And surely, such as are to be the chosen, constant speakers of the assembly to the Lord, they need have choice skill in all holy and heavenly praying oratory; such as are to be the chosen champions (as it were) of the congregation, to wrestle it out with God on their behalf, they had

need to have the art of holy wrestling, or prayer. Such as are the chosen solicitors for this or that corporation, as they had need to be acquainted with the people well, that they may be able to make every one's prayer, and plea, and complaint, and the like; so had they need to have the choice skill, and holy art of pleading with the Lord, as the cause shall require. This call of such as are to be the officers, and more constant mouth of the congregation in prayer, consists in their free election, and full approbation, for that and other ministerial work, some way manifested and expressed by the people, together with their own free consent thereunto. Thus the Levite, set apart of God to the ministry of old, and among other things therein, to bless in the name of the Lord; or to pray, and praise God, publicly. The elders of the congregation, on the congregation's behalf, are to impose hands upon them, in testimony of their solemn call of them to ministerial work. God will have no one to be the mouth of any church, who shall be a burden, or grievous to it; he will have none forced upon it, but rather have such a mouth, as the body shall desire gladly thereby to breathe out its requests and desires to the Lord. Nor was the Lord more tender of old, of the orderly administration of his public worship, than he is now; then the people's call was God's call: he set the Levites apart to bless in his name, in their setting them apart for that end. And so it is now, public prayer is the public act of the church, there should, then be a public hand in it, not only in joint consent to the petitions, but by solemn call of him, which prefers the same in the court of heaven. It is of great concernment to every one in the church, as what words, and how, so by whom the same are spoken in the Lord's ears, as their words. They who draw so near to the Lord to deal in Christ's name for so many others, had need be approved of God for that end; and that they are not, if not approved of his people. in a word, it is no small encouragement to such so called, against all inward and outward discouragements, which they meet with in their work; that as they are in God's way, so in the place, and about the work in special, to which the Lord by his people did call them. A second requisite to him who is to pray as the mouth of the assembly is, that he "pray in the Spirit." Praying with all manner of prayer in the Spirit; not alone with our hearts or spirits, but "praying in the Holy Ghost." Or by a gift, and by the immediate help of the Holy Ghost. Even such as are to edify others in their most holy faith, privately, are to pray thus; and much more such as are by office to give themselves to the ministry of the Word. There is great danger when this tabernacle, temple, church-incense, or prayer, is of human composition. And in offering of so public a sacrifice with fire of man's kindling, and such as comes not down from heaven, but much indeed needs not to be spoken to this, now that the Lord by his grace has so cleared up his mind to his servants of all sorts in these days. Yet let me briefly confirm this truth, and thereby the hearts also of the saints in the present truth. Public prayer must be in the spirit, or by an immediate gift and help of the Holy Ghost.

1. Because public prayer being part of public worship, it should be performed with greatest beauty. It is twice repeated, "Worship the Lord in the beauties of Holiness." And surely experience seals it, that there is more lively efficacy to such as are present when prayers are put up to the Lord in the assembly, from the immediate help of the Spirit, than any other way.
2. Because by such a manner of prayer God has most glory (which is that, which in public worship is mainly intended), for he has most glory of the precious gifts of the Spirit, enabling ministers to pray thus: of his glorious wisdom also, in the variety of the measures thereof bestowed upon his servants. Those church officers which have their vials full of such odors, which, as those of old, were only of divine invention, composition, and direction, they in special sort have "their harps

sounding forth the praises of God.” These ministerial stars in the firmament of the church, do then in special manner declare the glory of God, when they shine, as in preaching, so in prayer publicly, not with borrowed light from others, but by an innate and natural light in them, considered as spiritual, and spiritually gifted of the spirit.

3. Because such manner of praying in the spirit consists best with the church’s perfection. The lips of such a spouse or church of Christ which is most fair and complete, they drop, both in public prayer and preaching, as the honeycomb. Song of Solomon 4:10-11. There is an immediate inward principle, there is an holy store of sweet and savory graces of the spirit within, such as are the church’s mouth, when without stint, restraint, or constraint, they do freely drop out wholesome expressions, sweet to the taste of the Lord Jesus.

4. Because such a way of carrying on public prayer is most suitable to the church’s liberty, and to the spiritual liberty also of the officers of the church, as part thereof. The church is now no bond-woman, but a free-woman, and so are her children sharers with her in that freedom as from ceremonial injunctions, which sometimes God ordained, so much more from human inventions, which the Lord never instituted. The church’s ministerial mouths have most bold liberty of spirit in such conceived prayer, to receive such drops of the spirit of prayer poured out upon the saints, and the renewed influences thereof. Yea, to improve the holy variety of seasonable motions, even then made by the spirit interceding in them. Yea, they are more free to improve the various measures of their gift of prayer received, which in divers ministers are very various; yea, they are freer to express the various statures (as it were) or pitch of their respective churches, being not all of one size, but some more eminent for grace than others. Yea, they are freer to express the various conditions and failings of their churches. The church’s and her ministers’ liberty is in both alike preserved entire, when they are left to the free use of all holy liberty to utter the mind and case of the church to the Lord, as when left to like liberty to speak and deliver the Lord’s mind to the church.

6. Because that way of prayer is most suitable to the nature of acceptable and prevailing prayer; as is inwrought prayer. That prayer which is the very suppliant’s own meditation by the help of the Spirit: “Give ear to my words.” “Consider my meditation.” That prayer which is the pouring out of the very suppliant’s heart or soul: “I have poured out my soul to the Lord;” that is, made each one’s prayer. “Pour out your hearts to him, or pray.” That which is a serving of God with the suppliant’s spirit: “My God, whom I serve with my spirit.”

6. Because such prayer is most costly to him who is the church’s mouth, and so a sacrifice most suitable to a saint’s own desire and best accepted of the Lord; such an one will say, as David in another case, “I will not offer to the Lord that which cost me nothing.”

7. Because such as are the called, officed mouths of the church, are gifted to public prayer in their names as well as preaching to them; wherefore they ought, upon all occasions, to be exercising that one talent, as well as the other.

8. Because this way of prayer, as it hath clearest warrant from the word, as before proved, so is least scandal to the choicest of the saints, as experience of former and latter times abundantly witnesses. A third requisite unto such as are the mouth of the assembly in prayer, is holy wisdom and diligence in observing, as their own souls’ special occasions, so those of the congregation. A

fourth requisite is sympathizing affection with the people in their cases, as if their own. So the people of old, Hebrews 5:1. Other requisites might be mentioned, but I forbear.

Requisites of the second sort in such as join in public prayer, are, —

1. Assent of faith, with oneness of mind and heart, suitable thoughts and affections. All the precious strings of the gracious minds and hearts of such as are present, should be tunable and symphonize in this lesson of their chief musician, Matthew 18:19, if they agree in one, or symphonize (as the Greek phrase is). Those holy suppliants, in Acts 2:14, “They continued with one accord in prayer.” Hence, that resounding of a -redoubled amen at the public blessing. Nehemiah 8:6. Hence such care had, that public prayer may be expressed in a language understood by all, that the people may annex their amen thereunto.

2. A gracious and serious attention and intention of spirit thereon. God puts such of his officed solicitors upon the mention of the several cases of his people present, and every one had need attend the calling out, and handling, as it were, of his case, not neglecting other. Each one’s spirit has need to write his name to such a corporation-petition, and be ready in heart to say, Lord, this indeed is the desire of my soul, this is my very grievance and burden.

3. Amity and sweetness of spirit and of affection, both towards him which prays in their stead, and them which join with them therein in public prayer, all and every one must lift up pure hand without wrath and doubting; for then, all are as one in their joint desires, and are as persons put in each other’s stead and cases, expecting the love and forgiveness of God for each other, and had need be in such a frame, as to yield love and forgiveness each to other. Matthew 6:17, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

4. Holiness and heavenliness of heart. Public prayer must have pure hearts as well as hands. The vials from which both officers and members of the congregation offer up such odors must be golden vials.

5. Faith. Hands lifted up (in public prayer) without doubting. Every one should put in his amen of faith, as well as of assent or desire.

Lastly, reverence. Hence, in one representation of public church worship, all fall down and worship. “O, come, let us worship and bow down, and let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

What gesture is most meet in public prayer?

Such a gesture as may best express much holy reverence, as kneeling or standing up, not sitting. And that for these reasons :—

1. In that in public prayer there is a more solemn presence of God and of his holy angels. We are in special manner before the Lord our Maker, and regard is to be had to our carriage in prayer, because of the angels. The very angels cover their faces when the Lord is in His temple, as on His throne, much more cause have we, who in public prayer do all come a begging, to come with a public petition to our glorious King, to offer it up to Him, upon our bended knees, to be very reverend in our gesture.

2. Iii that God gives it in most special charge in public worship of prayer, that it be very reverent; for that charge of each other recorded, "Let us bow down and kneel before the Lord our Maker," respects not any other part of worship so properly as public prayer, as is evident; and that mutual charge of God's people, each of the other, is but the echo and result of God's charge first given to them so to do. If Daniel in secret prayer will be kneeling, much more should we in public prayer: "He kneeled upon his knees three times a day."

3. In that the examples of the saints exercised in public prayer, is either standing, —" and Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation, and said, O Lord," or (mostly) kneeling, "the king rose up from kneeling on his knees." "Paul kneeled down and prayed;" and in secret prayer it was his constant gesture. Hence putting bowing of his knees for prayer, "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father," that is, I pray; and less reverence should not be expressed in public prayer.

4. In that in public prayer we should all edify one another by our reverence in gesture, as being too apt naturally to commonness and slightness therein. Hence God's people are presented as calling one upon another, "to bow down and kneel before the Lord their Maker."

5. In that all care should be had by the saints, that they give no occasion of stumbling to others, who savingly know not the Lord Jesus Christ. Our irreverent gestures before them will harden them in their careless, yea, haply affected irreverent carriage.

"David sat before the Lord," 2 Samuel 18:1-33.

1. That was private prayer of himself alone, none else (that we read of) joining with him therein; and in sundry cases more liberty may be used in our gestures in private than in public prayer.

2. The Hebrew word is oft used for staying and abiding; and so it may seem here to hold forth rather the time of his continuance in prayer than his gesture.

3. It is not probable that he who professes that his knees were weak through fasting or praying on fast-days, that he did now sit in prayer. At the best, then, this instance of David's sitting is but a may be, and no other instance that I know of, of the like in Scripture; but both rules and examples of the other gestures are clearly set down in Scripture; therefore these are most safe and suitable gestures in ordinary course in public prayer; extraordinary cases of bodily infirmities (wherein mercy pleases God, rather than the strictness of this or that gesture in sacrificing or praying) not varying or nullifying the ordinary rule.

We come now to the reasons enforcing this duty of public prayer.

Public ordinances being sanctified also by prayer, call for public prayer. Wherefore God's house of public worship is called an house of prayer, as if that were one most choice part thereof: "They continued as in the apostle's doctrine and breaking of bread and in prayer," sanctifying the rest.

Because public occasions call to it. The cases of public persons in commonwealths, of churches, call thereto. Public wants call for public petitions; public sins for public confessions. The land must repent. So every congregation in it must down oii their knees to ask the Lord's forgiveness. Members of congregations must sometimes give themselves to church fasting and prayer, as well as family or closet fasting and prayer.

Because gracious persons are of a public spirit. "God be merciful to us," was the church's prayer of old. Wherein? "Make thy way known to all nations." The church moves Christ to do something for her sister church, being ready, for her part, for them otherwise: "What shall we do for our sister?" Christ teaches all to pray, "Give us this day, forgive us our trespasses, and lead us not into temptation," etc. As holy priests in Christ, they offer up severally and jointly sacrifices of prayer and praises respecting others, the public good: "By the blessing of the upright, (or the prayer of the upright, pleading and prevailing for a blessing that way) the city is exalted." Now, in public prayer, there is a holy confluence of the breathings of such public spirits; and the Lord in wisdom, faithfulness, and mercy to all sorts, will have this for a stated ordinance, that such gracious dispositions in his own may be exercised and exerted.

4. Because public prayer is a public profession and confession of God, of the only true God, and that one mediator, Jesus Christ; yea, of the oneness of the saints with each other in the same Father and Savior. Nor is it the least honor to the Lord, as a great King, to have so many several companies of subjects waiting on him with petition for his royal favor; it is a holy joint homage and service for many to join as one man in prayer. Calling upon the name of the Lord, and serving Him with one shoulder, are joined. Public prayer is a public profession and expression of one and the same faith, of many in one and the same Father, in one and the same Mediator of the covenant, and in one and the same covenant of grace; it is a joint cry of one and the same spirit, in and from many children's hearts, calling one Abba Father; it is a common meeting of the several desires of several good hearts in this one common center. It is a holy burning-glass, wherein the several bright and warm rays of the faith of many suppliants being in an holy wise contracted in one point, breaks forth into a holy fire of love expressions to the Lord, and their own and other souls' welfare; it is a joint outcry, by reason of a serious sense of the same grievances of many; if others' sorrows, sufferings, wants, burdens, be not the same with thine or mine, yet in praying thus, we make each one's ails ours, as they do make ours theirs. We come to pray in public with variety of cases differing from each other in sundry respects; but in public prayer each one's soul is put, as it were, in another's stead. Public prayer is a common cry made out by the joint consent of this or that embodied people against some common enemies of their souls and dangerous enemies to their blessed King, his crown, and his dignity. Public prayer is a public condemnation, therefore, voiced by our own mouths against any private discords and divisions, if any such should be amongst us.

Because public prayer is in a special sort delightful to the Lord, he puts his people in special manner of it: "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." He is therefore troubled, if public prayer as well as private be neglected: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob." Jesus Christ is very ready to present and perfume public as well as more private prayers of His saints. The Lord is ready to reward it in His people. "Let all the people, or Gentiles, praise Thee," was the church's prayer, and then shall God, even our God, bless us." They praying for a blessing upon others, triumph for a blessing as upon others, so upon themselves⁴ It is good and acceptable to Him that public prayer be made for saints. Christ took it kindly, that the multitude opened their mouths to beseech mercy for one that had an imperfection in his speech, and beseech him to lay his hands upon him. Upon which he cured him.

6. Such approaches of assemblies to the Lord are a fruit of Christ's purchase; that way to God's throne, is made by the rending of the vail of Christ's flesh. It represents the very spirit of Christ, which is all for the public good of his people. There are in public prayer the special influences of

the Spirit, which was scattered in many, compacted and gathered as it were in one; the waters of various graces running in several gracious hearts, as in sundry channels, do here disburden themselves as iii pleasant and mighty stream. One instrument alone well tuned will make good music in God's ears; but He delights much in these prayers in consort; where sundry, two or three symphonize in what they ask, it shall be done: "For there is Christ in the midst of them when thus gathered together in his name."

7. Because public prayer is a public engaging and compacting of the hearts and spirits of God's faithful ones: "They continued steadfastly in prayers; and all that believed were together, and had all things common; that they may all call upon him, with one consent," as if the former were means of the latter. The joint exercises of mutual graces in the common work breed and feed love and mutual respect. As it is with any two or three ministers, or other godly persons used to pray most together, they love and cleave most together; as musicians that use to play often in consort together, they use to be most friendly to each other. So is it in an assembly of persons earnestly exercised in public prayer. Let us now consider of this public prayer as our duty.

First. In way of reproof of such who come not constantly, or if they do, they come not seasonably to public prayer, but they come dropping in when the duty is half, or almost finished. These write not after their copy set them in that representative of pure worship in gospel churches, when the four living creatures (representing the officers) are to lead the rest, and to begin and carry on the public worship, the rest of the congregation, (represented by twenty-four elders for their gravity and experience in matters of the gospel,) they are also present, ready to fall down in testimony of their joint accord in the worship. And observe it, none of the number are wanting. There is not a third, or fourth part, or half, or three parts of the company, (as too oft with us, when to give glory to God in prayer and thanksgiving,) but there are the whole assembly of God's spiritual priests by profession and holy calling, the whole twenty-four. This also is not according to the express pattern of the primitive church and the members there, they continued steadfastly as in other parts of worship, so in prayer; and the word [προσμαρτερουντες] notes their ready attendance upon the same, as well as their continuance therein. The same word is used Acts 10:7, for the soldiers waiting upon Cornelius, and of rulers attending on their work. But for the further sharpening this admonition, consider, —

1. That it is a sin of omission, such do not join in a duty of public worship, to which each of the assembly are bound; being therefore public, as that which concerns all, such do not give the Lord this holy sacrifice in the time of it. God is not now less interested in the time of his worship, as well as in the worship itself, than of old: "You shall observe to offer them in due season." The very prince, of all other, has weighty occasions lying upon him to withdraw, or delay his coming into the assembly, in the time of public worship under the gospel, (allusively represented under notions proper to that of the law,) yet, it is said in Ezekiel, "and the prince in the midst of them when they go in, shall go in, and when they go forth, shall go forth." He is to be there with the first, and stay till the last; all the professed subjects and lovers of Jesus Christ are to "watch daily at His gates, and wait at the posts of His doors." They are therefore to be in readiness, as those who watch and wait for an holy opportunity of Christ's public ordinances and worship, and so of this of prayer among the rest, or else they break rule, neglect their duty. How unsuitably do such walk to the example of other godly people abroad, mentioned in Luke 1:21, "The people were there all waiting till Zacharias had done offering incense;" and in Exodus 35:1-35, mention is made of troops of

women assembling at the door of the tabernacle. Yet women in regard of family occasions of children, and the like, if any, might have been excused. Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer. The tabernacle and temple then, where they were wont to assemble had public prayers offered up among other services; and not less diligence in ready attending public worship and prayer, among the rest, is prophesied of, as in these days of the gospel; witness that, "Thy people shall be willing (or free and forward sacrificers) in the day of thy power; who are these that fly like doves to windows? let us go speedily to pray before the Lord (say the Gentiles) and to seek the Lord: I will go also."

2. A scandalous evil, offending the godly part of the assembly which are there seasonably to join in the duty, and the officers also, whose spirits they are not to grieve. Is this unseasonable coming in of some, and then of others, disturbing ministers and people present? It occasionally hinders their continued fervency, and interrupts attention upon that worship in hand; it occasionally hardens lukewarm and backsliding Christians in their neutrality of respect to the parts of public worship, and profaner persists in their grosser neglects and contempts thereof, when they see professors, haply of note and name, be so slack and slighty in their attendance thereon.

3. The ordinary practice of such careless coming to join in public prayer, before other public worship performed in the assembly, is a speaking symptom of an evil estate in persons guilty of it. Christ has but little power on their hearts, who are no more ready and forward sacrificers. Such upon whom He has power, being willing and forward that way, it strongly argues that such want a public spirit, love to the public good, through sense of public evils, and that they have little love to public ordinances, or delight in public fellowship with the saints, as being so constantly careless of seasonable addressing themselves to public prayer, wherein all those are to the life expressed.

4. Such cannot on such good grounds expect a blessing upon other public ordinances then dispensed, as the word preached, or the like, which regard not to join in public prayer for the same. Wherefore let all such who profess the fear of God, be afraid any more to grieve his Spirit, or the spirits of his saints, by any such remissness and slackness in attending upon an ordinance so precious and prevailing with the Lord; yea, let them blush that in Popish times of superstitious blindness, so many should from blind zeal be so forward in awaiting Latin service, (to say nothing of other service, and common prayer lately discarded, in attending whereupon too many have placed their main religion,) and Christians in these precious times of gospel light and liberty, should be no more forward to improve that liberty of pure worship of God, as other ways, so in public prayer, which both Christ hath purchased so dearly, and for which the saints have wrestled so much with God, and conflicted with so many difficulties with men. The second use, therefore, may serve to exhort all the people of God to seasonable attendance upon public prayer, presented in a holy manner in his churches, by such as the Lord calls thereunto. Let not God have any cause to complain that public calling upon God is out of request with us. He accounts we are weary of him, if neglectful of that: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." Surely, the Lord has magnified his faithfulness in bringing us strangers into his holy mountain, and is as ready to make us joyful in his house of prayer, if we are not wanting to our own souls. God honors this part of his worship before others; and therefore by a synechdoche, puts it for his whole worship; his house of worship he calls a house of prayer, as being a choice part of his worship. Neglect that, neglect all; as being that which instrumentally puts life and luster into all other parts of worship, their burnt-offerings, says God there, shall be accepted: "For my

house shall be called an house of prayer." Look, then, that we put special honor upon this ordinance; yea, these instrumentally occasion more honor to God. Prayers made in Zion have their answer; God is a God honoring church prayer also, and therefore has church praises too: "Praise waiteth for him in Zion; as gifts are bestowed by occasion of many, so thanks come to be given by many." And who would not, then, if they loved the Lord, be ready to give a lift to such honor of his name? Yea, we shall come to have more abundant honor by it, in the eyes of others, to be styled and owned as, under God, helpers to them in the attaining of such and such begged blessings; you also helping by your prayers, says Paul to the Church of Corinth. In a word, it is the privilege of the saints, purchased at a dear rate by Jesus Christ, by whose cause it is "their enmity being slain, both such as were nigh, and such as were afar off, through him have both an access by one spirit, unto the Father, and are fellow-citizens." And as such, they made with God publicly, as well as privately, in prayer, for the furtherance of the whole city's good, and every part thereof. There is a city treasury of prayers, from which oft times, even other decayed citizens, instrumentally, get relief. Many a decayed parish, as I may call it, in the great city of God, in the church universal, is raised again by it, and many a backsliding Christian raised up again by it; as others keep that blessed stock going for us, so should we for them. And as a means the more to further us this way, let every gracious person make conscience to quicken up each other to this duty. So these converts do: "Come, let us go speedily to pray before the Lord; I will go also."

07. Part 1, Chapter 4. Private and Family Prayer

CHAPTER IV. OF PRIVATE, OR FAMILY PRAYER.

Having spoken of the first branch of continued prayer, even public prayer, we must now speak of private, or family prayer, required also implicitly in this injunction, “pray without ceasing;” respecting the families in the church of Thessalonica, as well as the whole church collectively considered. Family prayer is either extraordinary or ordinary, both are duties in their seasons. Of extraordinary family prayer, such as to which fasting is joined, is that 1 Corinthians 7:5, “That ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer,” namely, considered as members of the family privately, as of the church publicly, whether upon occasion of removal, which may and must be done by one family alone, sometimes as well as by many families joining together at other times, Ezra 8:25, “That we may seek a right way for us, and our little ones,” etc. upon occasion also of public loss of some pious rulers as those of the Jews did for Josias, 2 Chronicles 34:24-26, unto which allusion is made, Zechariah 12:11. Occasional private prayer is when divers godly acquaintance of sundry families meet in some one family to pray and to edify one another unto which such places look, Malachi 3:16. Jude 1:20. Colossians 4:12. James 5:13-16, of which I might declare the manifold precious uses and benefits, but I forbear; that which we intend chiefly to speak to, as our duty implicitly here enjoined, is not that which is prayer in the family, but that which is properly economical, or prayer of the Christian family. “Pray with all manner of prayer,” reaches also this manner of prayer by the family. Christian families are or should be churches, wherein the master of the family should offer up acceptable prayers and praises to God. Paul, writing to Philemon in his Epistle, mentions not his prayer alone, but others with him, “I trust through your prayers I shall be given to you,” he mentions the church in his house. Cornelius is commended for his prayer alway, or upon all occasions. He prayed to God alway, namely, as in his house alone, so with his family; hence such care had, that the prayers of man and wife be not hindered, meaning their joint prayers together in the family, as well as those severally made in their closets: “Pour out thy wrath upon the families which call not on thy Name.” Which notion of families comprehends households, as Joshua 7:14. “The families shall come by households,” and a sad curse, then, is upon the households which are not conscionable of this duty of household or family prayer. God would have the “houses of his people dedicated,” Dent. 20:5, namely, to holy uses, and this of household prayers especially; and Psalms 30:1-12 :title, David therefore mentions the dedication of his house; hence such care also in the godly Patriarchs in the removals of themselves and household, still to be building altars to call upon God; so Abraham, Genesis 12:8; Genesis 13:18. And thus did Isaac, Genesis 26:25. Thus did Jacob, Genesis 33:20; Genesis 35:1. “God charges Jacob to go up to Bethel, and there make an altar to him, and Jacob applies the charge to his household, saying, “let us arise and go up to Bethel ;” and as a godly man, Jacob must pray alone, and did, Genesis 32:25-28, with Hosea 12:3-4, he made supplication; but considered as a master of a family, it is not enough to send away his household over Jabbock, and make supplication alone; but he must pray, and offer up sacrifice with his family; yea, in that sense Jacob rightly expounds the charge of God, bidding him to arise, and go up to Bethel, to refer to his

household too, “let us go up to Bethel,” Genesis 35:1; Genesis 35:3, compared; his whole household, wives, children, sojourners, servants, all must go up to Bethel, and join in the worship; none must be absent. Reasons enforcing this duty:—

1. Because God promised actual respects, and acceptance of his people’s prayers indefinitely, are extendable to his people’s prayers with the family, as well as congregation, or those in their closets. While they speak there also he will hear. His ears are open to their cries. Cornelius’s prayers then also came up in remembrance before God. Paul is given to the prayers of Philemon and his household church.

2. Because the Lord pours out a spirit of grace and supplication to be exercised with the several households in their tribes, as well as alone by the husbands and wives apart: “They shall mourn (in their prayers which with contrite hearts they pour out) the families apart, and their wives apart,” whether in an extraordinary way of prayer with fasting, or in an ordinary.

3. Because family occasions being also sanctified by prayer call for it; as Saul with his military family would first seek God for good success. So should the guides of other families before their families set about their occasions. Out of fear Job would sanctify his family day by day, when to go abroad a feasting, “He sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus did Job continually.

4. Because family prayer is a special means to season the family with a religious fear and respect to God and his ways. Cornelius, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, prayed to God alway. Godly Onesiphorus’ house is a very seminary to the church. He who is so much exercised this way, bath a church in his house as before showed. A godly praying Abraham, the master, will come to have a gracious praying Eliazar, the servant, who is the fittest for choicest service.

5. Family prayer is a special means to prevent family disorders, and to keep every one in his station and duty. When the apostle had enjoined husband, wife, father, child, master, and servants, the several parts of the family their general duties, he closes all with this, as an help and means to all the first, “Continue in prayer.” When each one in the family hears their several sins confessed, pardon thereof begged, grace against them pleaded for, it is a quickening admonition and help against them. It helps to wean their hearts from inordinacies in matter of cares, fears, or desires, and the like, respecting worldly matters or occasions: “Let your moderation appear to all men. Be careful for nothing.” But what means should we use for that end? In every thing by prayer, make your request known to God. The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds. These are sacred fruits of prayer in the family, as well as congregation or closet.

6. Because servants usually want frequent opportunities of secret prayer, and this way, by the advantage of family prayer, they are much helped.

7. Because Christ himself is a pattern herein, of whom as we read, that he was oft exercised in secret prayer alone; so twice it is recorded of him as thus praying with his family privately, or with his disciples which ordinarily abode with him: “As he was alone in a certain place praying, when he had done, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.” It is a sign that his disciples were with him then in private at his prayer; and that his praying in such sort was a lively means to

do them more good, and to quicken and enamor them with holy desires to pray in like sort. Now let us proceed to consider some questions touching this.

Question. Who must pray in the family?

Answer. The master of the family especially. Husbands must dwell with their wives as men of knowledge, that their prayers be not hindered by any defects of theirs in the business of praying with them. The apostle, writing to masters of their duty adds, in the next place, (as next concerning them as heads of the family,) continue in prayer. Only Cornelius, of all the house who feared God, is mentioned as praying always. If the rest feared God, surely they prayed oft alone. But in the family Cornelius himself was more constantly employed as the mouth of the rest. For indeed every gracious master of a family is an holy priest to God, not as a gracious man only to offer for himself, but as a gracious master also in relation to his family, to offer up sacrifice of prayer and praise on their behalf. And the priests of old, as masters of families, had their offerings for themselves and families, as well as officers to the church, had their offerings for the congregation.

2. Prayer, being one special part of God's service and worship, a godly master undertakes for himself and household to attend it: "But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord;" namely, jointly as well as severally, and so to pray together as well as asunder. And if the master be the chief undertaker, it is fit he should be the chief actor.

3. Masters of families ought to teach their children diligently the word and precepts of God, and speak of them in their house when they lie down, and when they rise up, namely, the first that they do daily at morning, and the last thing at evening. Now if it be so in instructing their family, then so also in praying for a blessing on them. Yea, practically they will instruct them in obedience to the first and fifth commandments, when they give such good examples to their families of praying to the Lord with them and for them. Abraham had both ways instructed his family, Genesis 18:19, and so had Christ and John their respective families, [disciples.] Teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples, practically as well as doctrinally. But must not the wife in some cases pray with the family?

Yes, in case of absence or sickness of her husband, for she is to be a help-meet Genesis 2:18; namely, in all such communicable duties and services respecting the family: "So is the law of kindness to be in the good wife's mouth, to instruct them as occasion is offered." In which, as in sundry other respects, her husband must trust to her. If God call him from home, he has a gracious wife to whom he can safely leave the trust of his family for matters of religion, such as family worship of God is, as well as those of this life. Godly matrons should really make conscience of that which the others hypocritically pretend. The godly wife will look well to the ways of her household, that they be well exercised this way, as well as any other way. The wife is compared to the moon, the husband to the sun, so Jacob and his family are represented. Now the wife, then, as the moon, may and must chiefly give forth her spiritual light and influence in the family, in the absence of her husband, who is as the sun thereto.

2. In case of the unregeneracy, and spiritual in- abilities of the husband, she is to supply his defects. May not a godly servant perform this duty of prayer? Yes, in case of the absence or sickness of both the family guides. A godly Onesimus may this way, amongst many others, be profitable to his master, and in case of special praying abilities given such an one, and denied the

guides of the family. In this respect, also, such a servant may be owned and improved as a brother. This way also God may, and often does make such of his saints a blessing to the places and houses where they are. May not one not of the family be occasionally desired to pray in it?

Yes, every one's spiritual gift being given of God with respect to others' good as well as their own, and members being to lend help to the rest, as occasion is offered; yea, as Paul's and Cephas', and Apollo's gifts arc the saints to improve occasionally, so are other gifts likewise: "Many were met together praying," Acts 12:12. Now one and then another of other families prayed by course in Mark's mother's family. Only as the church in that case intimates her case to those she would have seek the Lord for her, Song of Solomon 5:8-10, some hints would be given to such, of some special things respecting the family, which they should in prayer with them commend to the Lord. Who must be present at family prayer with the master thereof praying?

All the whole family must join with the master of it, as wife, children, servants, sojourners; none should ordinarily be absent. All Jacob's household were to join with him and set themselves to worship God with him in Bethel, only he is principally to act therein: "Arise, let us go up to Bethel, and there I will build an altar to the Lord," etc.

Reasons hereof: 1. From the care of all, and each of their souls which lies upon the masters of the family. It was typed of this that they were to provide manna for all their households according to their eating, and they were to provide a lamb for their household according to their eating. So the priests as masters of their families, were to offer up sacrifice, as for themselves, so for the cleansing of their household sins. David as a king prays with, and for his people first, that the Lord would bless them, but as a guide of his own household, his care is to return thither to bless them, 2 Samuel 6:20, or pray for a blessing upon them, verse 20. And hence by the blessing of God on such godly care of guides of families, as well as on other means, families have become churches, Romans 16:4-5. The second reason is taken from the proportion of ordinary private worship, and seeking of God in an ordinary way, to that of seeking the Lord in an extraordinary way. Many causes might exempt sundry of the family in this case rather than the other. Yet in such a case Esther will have all the maids to fast and pray with her. The whole families apart do also in an extraordinary manner humble themselves thus before the Lord. The third reason from the proportion of our private worship, and seeking of the Lord in a private manner to that of seeking God in public with our families. All and every one as far as any way capable, are therein to be present, as Deuteronomy 12:7, Deuteronomy 14:26. Deuteronomy 16:11, and other Scriptures show, and there also herein. The fourth reason, because the whole family do or may share in the blessings upon the family; and, therefore, it is meet they should join in family prayer and praises for them. Both children, servants, and sojourners were thankfully to rejoice before the Lord upon this ground, because God blessed his people's increase, and the labors of their hands. The fifth reason, because the whole household is something involved in the guilt of the sin of the guides, who thereby trouble their houses, as Achan did his. It is meet, therefore, that all of them should partake in the good gifts and services of their guides, and with them seek to divert the evils which may else bring judgment on the family.

Suppose some of the servants be ungodly, must a godly guide pray with them?

Care would be had that we look out the most faithful to dwell with us.

If others be cast upon us, yet we are to join with them at this family worship, because they are not to be denied the help of any appointed means which may further their spiritual good, as in public so in private; we may, and must pray with, and for all sorts, who have not sinned a sin unto death, as one means of their being saved. A sinner may thereby be turned from the error of his way. Only prayer with such would be shaped in many particulars, so as their particular cases may be laid open before the Lord.

Suppose some one of the family be more obstinate, and either refuse to join with the family; or if present, does occasion usually wrath and disturbance there,

1. That rule, 1 Thessalonians 6:14, respects all in either relation, and so masters in theirs, to admonish the unruly, and when they have done, to have patience towards all sorts; as ministers in their places towards their people, are in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves, if peradventure God may give them repentance. So are masters in their lesser assemblies; Christ the master of his household, as he calls himself, did not refuse to pray with them, though Judas was amongst his household disciples, and he knew him to be a devil.

2. The help of the magistrate is seasonably to be used, if patience in the use of fairer means avail not, "For he is a terror to evil-doers," Romans 13:4.

3. If neither means work amendment, such as make deceit their work and trade in lying, ever and anon telling lies, notwithstanding all means used to reclaim them, should not abide in any godly David's house. The bond-servant's child, who will be scoffing at the promised seed, and persecuting him, must out with his mother, and all from Abraham's family.

What is to be done in case of occasional scattering of the family, as when many of Jacob's family are occasioned to be in Dothan, divers miles distant from the rest of the household; or that Moses must be in Egypt, and his family in Midian? In answer hereunto, let us show some cases wherein it may be lawful for the guides of the family to be absent from the whole or part of the family for a season. Let us annex some cutios about it. To the rest, I answer, such absence may be lawful.

1. When it is occasioned by zealous attendance on the means of grace which they want where they are, as when those of the tribes are fain to travel far to the worship of God at Jerusalem. Divers there were for divers days absent from their families attending upon Christ's ministry, and not reprov'd for it, but encouraged to it, as appears by the miraculous provisions made for them.

2. When it is occasioned from the persecution by the enemies of grace; as those priests and Levites were forced to fly from Jeroboam's to Rehoboam's jurisdiction, there to provide for their families, which shortly after followed them with other people.

3. When it is occasioned from personal callings and offices to be exercised in places distant from part of their families, at least as those Levites and priests, leaving their suburbs, and part of their families, with their flocks in their fields. So Moses for a time disposed of his wife and children to be in Midian with her sons, whilst he more fully attends his work in Egypt, in which case seafaring men of Zabulon, merchants and mariners, are encouraged by the Lord to rejoice in their goings out, Deuteronomy 33:18. So military men, albeit they had dedicated their houses to holy services; yea, the rather because they had done it, they must go out to the wars, Deuteronomy 2:1-5.

4. When it is occasioned from necessary travel and journeying, as in that parable of the nobleman journeying far off, and leaving matters to his servants. So Jacob's sons go into Egypt once and again from their wives and their children to buy corn. So upon more weighty occasions of public messages from States, or of changes, as Epaphroditus, teacher at Philippi, yet sent to Rome to minister to Paul's necessities. The cautions are two: First, That all wise and lawful means be used for a seasonable compacting of the family in such sort, that neither they nor we live too solitary, lest that befall us which did Lot and his daughters in the mountain.

Second. Let us appoint some godly servants or sons over that part of the family where neither of the guides can be usually present. When is family prayer to be performed?

Morning and evening, as of old they had their daily sacrifice respecting the household morning and evening, Numbers 28:8; Numbers 28:4, the two special seasons of household instruction, fittest to be so sanctified and honored, Deuteronomy 6:4. The widows which show their piety at home in prayers, there also, as well as otherwise, are to do it night and day. Should not family prayer be first performed in the morning, as much as in us lies, before any other thing be done?

Yes, when we rise up it is best doing it. For, first, it is meet that God, and not ourselves, or others should have the first of our daily time, and the first fruits of the services of our souls and bodies daily, which are preserved and daily laden with his blessings by him. The first day of the week is now his day and the first of each day should be, as much as may be, devoted in this sense to him. And if it cannot be so soon in the family, yet let them have it in the closet. David would not put off God till noon, as too many of us do, and make no morning of it, for prayer in family as well as closet, "But at morning and evening, and at noon be will be praying and praising God."

2. That at our uprising the family is unscattered, which haply severed, is not easily gathered in any season.

3. Then if at all, before heads and hearts are actually busied in outward occasions and employments, are minds and hearts fittest for God.

4. It is most seasonable, sanctifying, and begging thereby of a blessing upon the day's occasions, before we have begun to meddle with them.

5. In the interim of some few hours' space, wherein morning family prayer is deferred, some sad disasters may befall some of the family, which then must needs be the more grievous. Job fearing this, through some miscarriages of his children at their festivals, sends for them each day, and, as it is, day by day sanctified them.

Let us now wind up all in a word of exhortation to an earnest performance of this duty, and the rather, —

1. In that the Lord hath honored family prayer also as well as other prayer, with special respect; as to those of Cornelius's prayers with his household, as well as to those in his house alone, whence he and his, got more clear knowledge of Jesus Christ, as that promised Messiah, in whom they more confusedly believed before. Besides the gift of the Holy Ghost, which they also attained, as the sequel in the chapter shows.

2. Even family prayer hastens ruin upon the church's enemies bent to destroy them. When God will seek to destroy nations which will come up against Jerusalem, there is a mighty spirit of prayer shining in good families. He then pours out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem such a spirit of grace and supplication, as that they are mourning in prayer before him, both privately and secretly; families apart, and wives, godly persons apart.

3. Family prayer is a very good means to clear even the house from any secret curse, which as a leprosy by reason of sin, may take hold, as it were, of the very timber and walls thereof. Let us hereby dedicate the house to God; but in the practice hereof, observe these things :—

1. Look that the household be beforehand cleansed of any known and grosser evils, which may lie upon it, or any in it; as upon Jacob's. Household gods must be put away before he go up to Bethel with them, there to worship the Lord.

2. Let the guides of the family, as the husband and wife, look to it, that their mutual carriage be amiable and regular, that so the family prayers be not hindered.

3. Let there be some little space of withdrawing from other words or works before we set about the duty; with one breath, to be speaking carnally; or to be but then talking of a very swine, and forthwith, without any more ado, rudely and unprepared to begin so solemn a speech to the great God, is very unseemly and irreverent.

08. Part 1, Chapter 5. Closet Prayer

CHAPTER V.

CLOSET PRAYER.

We come now to the third branch of solemn prayer; namely, secret and closet prayer. The injunction reaches, as the church of Thessalonica, collectively considered as a church, and the families there as Christian families; so each particular Christian there personally considered, what he is to do apart, as well as what he is to do as a member of the congregation or family; and by analogy every other Christian is bound by this precept, to pray alone also, and that without ceasing: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut to thy door, pray to thy Father which seeth in secret," etc., he says not when you pray, but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, etc., as speaking not so much of a joint duty of many together, as of a duty which each person is to do alone, as in the other verse, "When thou doest thine alms." It is an injunction not so much of what the godly are to do in some joint way of charity, but what each gracious person is to do apart and alone as occasion is offered, even when or where none else haply can, or will do as they do. And though the intent of Christ be not merely to prescribe closet prayer in that Scripture, as each Christian's proper duty, and much less to prescribe it as all the prayer which he commands his people; yet we may safely conclude, that he therein commends and commands closet prayer of each Christian alone by himself, as one special way of praying to him, who seeth in secret, and as that wherein they shall give a special testimony of their sincerity, and avoid that vainglorious affectation of men's praise; which the Lord Jesus there blames in the Scribes and Pharisees.

Touching this duty, then, we consider, 1. Who must pray thus alone? 2. Why? And, 3. What use we are to make thereof.

First, we say, none are excepted who are of understanding to know what they are to do therein; whether young or old, high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, as they are all one in point of dignity and privilege in Christ Jesus, as they have and profess each of them an interest in him, who seeth in secret, as their Father, "Pray to thy Father which seeth in secret," etc. Every one severally apart, as well as jointly together, is to cry in secret also, Abba Father; the very wives apart must be improving their spirit of supplication in an humble and contrite manner, as well as together with their family; yea, sometimes in an extraordinary manner must they thus mourn, even pray and fast apart; and therefore much more may they, must they pray contritely in an ordinary way, when apart from the rest of the family; the wives who have so many occasions more than others, from little ones, and other household affairs, to take up their time above others, yet are not exempted from this holy exercise, and therefore obviously none else are exempted from it.

Second. The reasons enforcing this duty, are, —

1. Taken from the promise of God, partly undertaking that his people shall be enabled and disposed to pray apart by themselves, He promises to pour upon them the spirit of supplication,

and that they should mourn or pray in humble and contrite manner, by themselves alone; and partly from his promise to his people, when at any time thus exercised in secret prayer when none else sees them, when, or how, or how long they pray, He will reward them openly, partly in this life. All shall manifestly perceive by the fruit thereof, that Isaac, Hannah, and Zacharias did pray alone to their Heavenly Father for the fruit of the womb. The Holy Ghost records it in the Scriptures, and thereby holds it forth to the view of every eye to whom the word shall come, how honorably God has accepted and rewarded secret prayer. All shall see, that Moses is wont to be with God alone by his manifest and notable prevailing with God; if he but go aside and pray to the Lord, blinded Pharaoh himself shall do it, and therefore is often entreating his prayers for him and his people, so the Jews could not but perceive it, whence they apply oft to him to pray for them, and the places show a manifest reward of that his praying. How openly did God reward Daniel, who was wont to pray to his God in secret, with manifest deliverance from so great a death, and with the notable ruin brought upon those who would have forbidden and hindered him from that holy exercise. The more the saints do thus secretly acquaint themselves with God, the more notable good shall come to them, the very light of God shall shine upon their ways; the very island, where they are, shall fare the better for them. And as in this life, so in that which is to come, will God reward them openly, when God will bring every secret work to judgment of remuneration, when the saints shall receive according to the good they have done in the body. Then shall their secret seeking of God's face come to light. It shall be shown before the whole world, how many a time, such and such of God's hidden ones have been serving him with their spirits, and that they have been, and now fully are, thus and thus graciously rewarded; not a tear of theirs shed in their pouring out their souls thus before God, but he bottles up, and at that day it shall appear they were not lost; their waters at that wedding day will be turned into wine. The second reason is taken from divine Providence, ordering closet occasions, fit only for secret expressing and opening them before the Lord, as some secret personal heart plague. Some secret snares laid for this or that saint of God by men or devils, as by so many cursed fowlers. But in the use of this means of calling thus personally and particularly upon God; he delivers both Christ the Lord, and his members in particular: "He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, etc., and he shall call upon me, and I will answer him." The saints by secret prayer do countermines the secret stratagems of their subtle enemies. The third reason may be taken from the approved examples of the choicest of God's saints. As that of Daniel three times a day; that of David as oft; that of Isaac using daily to go out into the fields alone, there to meditate or pray, (as the Geneva Bible reads it,) Genesis 24:63. That of the Lord Jesus. Early in the morning, before he healed the leper, he was praying alone in a secret place. And (Luke 5:12-15, compared with Luke 5:16,) instances in a like practice of his, after that cure which he wrought. He withdrew himself, and went into the wilderness and prayed, yet not much space of time between the one and the other. Luke 6:12, "He went out into a mountain, and continued all night in prayer;" and he was then alone; for, verse 13, "When it was day, he called unto him his disciples." Matthew 14:22, he sends away his disciples first by ship; and verse 23, "He goeth apart into the mountain to pray." Luke 21:27, when he had been employed in the daytime in preaching, in the night time he went apart into the Mount of Olives; namely, to pray and meditate. Luke 22:41, "He was withdrawn from his disciples about a stone's cast, and prayed," and verse 44, "He prayed more earnestly," etc., and verse 45, "He rose up from prayer and came to his disciples." And how he prevailed by these very solitary but strong cries and tears in these days of his flesh, or human infirmity, is testified. He was heard. The fourth reason is taken from the

suitableness of the presence and favor of God, which he is wont in secret to exhibit to them unto their aims and desires. Their desire is, "Lord, lift up thou the light of thy countenance upon us." And when is the Lord more with his saints then when in secret? When Jacob is alone praying, then Jehovah, the Son of God, that angel, is in a glorious manner with him. This being one special way of the saints walking with God, he cannot but be much in company with them; the nearest and dearest fellowship with God is mentioned by these secret communings with God, and holy whisperings in his ear; the secret chamber is the most suitable and freest place for these spouses of the Lord, to be telling their secrets to him; and there is the place where most ordinarily and usually he is wont to meet and secretly commune with them.

Now let us come to such objections as are made against this holy exercise; for man's carnal heart is ready to cavil against it, and to ask, for what purpose is it, what profit is it if we pray to him? verily, it is an ordinance wherein the Lord is wont very graciously to communicate himself to his saints, and therefore so long as Satan's wily head, and man's deceitful heart can find out cavils and quarrels against it, it shall not want for objections. Many a deadly wound is given to sin and Satan by these prayer-darts, which the saints thus secretly cast at them: besides, it is a most spiritual service, requiring a special measure of sincerity and self-denial, and no wonder that of all other duties man's heart be so backward to this. In prayer with others, there is more to bribe even the carnal heart to be speaking; but here is little or nothing to move from man's applause. It is a duty very costly if rightly performed; in secret are the choice wrestlings and weeping, and man's carnal heart would take the easiest and cheapest way: we are too apt to be objecting against our main spiritual foundations, and no wonder then if against this building work. We are too prone to failings and falls, and no wonder if so backward to this closer closet way of making up personal and particular accounts unto the Lord. It were rather a wonder if there were not, than that there are, so many objections against this.

If we must both pray with the assembly, and with the family, and yet also in our closets too alone, will not this too much prejudice our ordinary callings and occasions, and intrench upon that charge of laboring six days. The Lord, indeed, will not have now any more solemn days in the week to be ordinarily set apart for his service, besides the Lord's day, but yet as of old, when the Jewish Sabbath was in force, the saints made conscience of constant seeking of God in secret, and are commended for it by the Lord. So now the Jewish Sabbath is abolished, and the Lord's day appointed of God in its stead; yet Cornelius is commended, and graciously rewarded for his constant praying to God alone day and night; for as he was praying in his house, by himself alone, a man in bright clothing (or an angel) appeared to him, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, not that prayer alone which he made in that day of humiliation; but his prayers which he made alone, whether with his household or by himself alone, none else were with him praying then, for he only saw that man in bright clothing; to him alone the angel addressed his present speech, saying, Cornelius thy prayers are heard. God would not have the handmaid above the mistress, or ordinary particular callings to thrust religion out of doors, or so to straiten it, that scarce any leisure is afforded to worship God in public, private, and secret. Nay, rather Christians, typified by those clean beasts, which rightly part the hoof, Leviticus 11:3, rightly divide their time, giving a due share thereof to God in matters of his worship, and a meet proportion of it to God in their particular calling.

2. It is the express charge of God that we redeem or buy out time, and that for prayer as well as other holy exercises, Colossians 4:2—4, the Lord wishes us to continue in prayer, and verse 5, bids us redeem the time; which exhortation is directed to all sorts, husbands, wives, parents, children, servants, and masters. All of them, are to buy out time for instant prayer, as altogether in the family, so apart in secret, as occasions are offered; the charge is not limited to church or family prayer only. Yea, but how shall we get so much time, will they say? redeem the opportunity (χαίρος) says God. If the Lord offer you any opportunity, to pray together or asunder, be at any cost for it. Christians must be wise and frugal market-men and women of praying opportunities. Let not the devil or world outbid us for such seasons which are so gainful to our souls. A wise Daniel will be willing to hazard the loss or parting with either honor or pleasure or profit, yea, life itself, rather than be debarred from taking his time this way, for God, and for his soul, to satisfy the wretched desires of the wicked therein, or to yield to Satan's wily suggestions and plots, in his instruments for that end.

3. This is a main part of our spiritual trading with God, by improvement this way of the gift of prayer. This is a part of our πολιτευμα, our city employment. Having thereby commerce and converse with God in Christ, and it is a rich trade. God is rich in mercy to all that call upon him in secret as well as to others that pray together in assemblies and families. God's saints and suppliants, which often come alone to the door of grace, and most frequently do thus knock by prayer, speed best God allows them this private key, that they may freely get in and take of all his precious treasures of grace as they need: Knock and it shall be opened, ask, and it shall be given; whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, I will do, be it publicly, privately, or secretly, that you ask the same. If others have not, it is because they ask not.

4. Prayer in secret by ourselves, as well as that with others, doth expedite our weightiest temporal affairs. Jacob did more this way to issue his great affairs, respecting his family's welfare and safety, when about to meet his brother Esau with his warlike troops, than if he had an equal or greater warlike power, or military skill. Thou hast prevailed with God, and with men thou shalt prevail. It is the way to have the beauty or glorious blessing, presence, and protection of God upon us, and the prospering of our handiwork, to set God thus on work for us by prayer, whence it was, that they of old were taught to pray for that end: "Let thy beauty be upon us, prosper thou the work of our hands." This oils the wheels for any work, quickens and quiets our spirits, sanctifies our works. If we can but pray well beforehand, we may be sure we shall study well, or preach well, or work well, as our calling requires, yea, and speed well afterward.

Some may object, their condition as being servants, and so think themselves excused and exempted from this duty of closet prayer. The charge of the text is indefinite, not limited to any sort of persons, no more than the passage. "Render not evil for evil, but ever follow that which is good," or that, "rejoice evermore," or that "in every thing give thanks," in which godly servants as well as others are concerned. A godly servant is faithfully to attend his master's business; but as he is also the Lord's servant, so this is one part of his business. When David had said, "I am thy servant, Lord, thy servant," he adds, "I will call upon the name of the Lord." "To them that are called to be saints in Corinth, with all such as call upon the name of the Lord Jesus in every place," that is the saint's character, be they of what calling or condition soever, or wherever they call upon the Lord. God is no respecter of persons; every one who calleth him Father, is to do this service and honor of a child to him. Thou, whoever thou art, bond or free, when thou prayest enter into thy closet, (or

into some retired place,) and pray to thy father which sees in secret.

2. Every one whether bond or free, they have this part of the new man, resembling Christ the creator of it, even his holy knowledge, to know how to call upon God as a father in secret, as he also did, and to cry in solemn wise, themselves alone, Abba Father.

3. Godly servants, also, who have the grace of God which brings salvation appearing to them, are as well as others to be peculiar ones unto the Lord, zealous of all good works, and so of this also, wherein God's choicest servants have been wont to be thoroughly exercised. Other servants will go to pray with their masters in public and 'private, but godly ones must do somewhat more, they must improve their peculiar interests in the Lord in such a way of peculiar serving of him with their spirits.

4. Bond as well as free, being alike interested in the dignity and privileges of saints, they are alike concerned in such duties as these are, which respect and lie upon the saints. Godly servants are the Lord's freemen, they must not abridge themselves, nor may be abridged by others of this liberty of secret access to the throne of grace, as the Lord affords them opportunity. To be mere servants of men, so to attend their masters' commands, as to neglect this, or any other command of God, they ought not, yea, observe it, that the apostle speaks of servants to infidel masters also. Either then they must not pray at all, which was to make them as profane as their infidel masters; which to them would be matter of disdain or distaste; or they must content themselves alone with public prayer in the congregation of Christians, which none will affirm; or they must as holy priests to God, offer, as the priests did theirs, this holy incense to God, in a retired place, from view of others. Yea, suppose forbidden by an infidel master to pray in secret, yet they are no more to forbear; then Daniel, servant of king Darius, did forbear it upon his decree to inhibit the same.

5. Be that child bond or free who prays thus in secret, and not before others to his Father, he will reward him openly.

6. Godly servants are to sanctify their work by prayer. Though Abraham had prayed for his servant Eliazar's good success in his business, about which he sent him, yet Eliazar himself alone prays for good success that day.

7. The work which godly servants do sanctify by prayer, is wont to speed best, as did that business of Eliazar, so sanctified. And surely godly masters, which are to express special love to such servants, will not refuse to encourage them to take some seasonable time to pray thus, knowing how profitable such servants will be to them.

Some will object, that they are apt to meet with temptations when alone.

1. You may and will be annoyed with temptations as David, 2 Samuel 11:2; had he been praying alone, it had been well for him. And though Joshua, praying alone, was assaulted by Satan, yet the issue was good, Christ the angel took part with him, pleaded for him, and put more honor upon him. Christ himself met with many temptations from Satan, when alone in the wilderness, but came out as a glorious conqueror, and full of the Spirit; he went thither full of the Spirit, he came out full, he lost nothing thereby in the conflict; no more do his members proportionably.

2. It is Satan's cunning to present such scarecrows in our way of drawing near to God in prayer, but we must resist him in them. It is a sluggard's trick to fancy such lions in the way to deter us

from the same.

3. Prayer of itself is rather an occasion to prevent and remove, than to raise up temptations: "Pray, lest ye enter into temptation." It helps us to put on and improve our spiritual armor against them.

Some will object their want of ability to pray alone.

1. If children of God, you have in you a child's spirit enabling and putting you upon praying to God, as to a father. The particular daughters of Jerusalem, though not so fully acquainted with Christ, yet the church looks at them as able to pray in some measure, and therefore commends her case to their prayers: If ye find my beloved, tell him, namely, in your prayers, that I am sick of love.

2. In case of great inabilities and infirmities, yet the Spirit will help the saints to groan out their complaints to the Lord, in such sort as the Lord will accept.

3. Let the weakest of the saints, so far as their minds and hearts are apprehensive of this or that failing, lust, defect, and spiritual ail or evil, put that into as good expression as they can, in secret before the Lord, and though at first their tongue can but stammer out their souls' cases, yet in a short time that tongue of the stammerer shall be able to speak plainly. At first you may be timorous, but within a while you shall attain that *παρρησια*, liberty of speech, and spirit in prayer. As young scholars at first are timorous to speak without book, and apt to stumble and stammer in it, but in a little time by exercising themselves to it, wax more able and bold, exact and large therein. So it is here in the matter of praying, as it were, without book. As walking with wise men increases wisdom, so walking with the wise God, in secret calling upon him, increases our holy skill, and abilities of talking with him in prayer.

Some will object (especially in this country) want of convenience of a place to be retired in solitary prayer.

1. God required the Jews of old to build their houses with battlements, which, as they were places of safety, so secrecy fit for retiredness in prayer; whence it was that Peter in that house at Joppa, gets him in thither to pray alone. Such as are able, are supposed by Christ to have a convenient closet, with a door to shut it for secrecy in prayer. It would be a shame for Christians to have private places for their very swine to sleep, or their cattle to feed in, free from annoyances of wind or weather; that they should not make some shift to get some retired place to seek the face of God therein.

2. If it were supposable, which hardly is, that Christians cannot have such a place, within doors, at home or abroad, yet Isaac can get him into the field to pray. Christ can go apart into a mountain to pray; any solitary place in a wilderness, will serve Christ's turn to be alone praying. The Lord can, and sometimes does, make any solitary place when his saints are praying, to be to them a very corner of heaven, as Jesus Christ when praying in the mountain was transfigured. Many a precious meeting does the Lord give his poor suppliants, when alone praying under some solitary rock, or by some swampside, or thicket, or the like.

Let us now apply what hath been said touching this duty of secret prayer.

1. Let this serve for reproof to such professors who are shamefully to blame in the neglect of closet prayer. How many are so surcharged with worldly cares and employments, that they will scarce

afford themselves time to attend upon either church or family prayer! but if they sometimes be praying there, yet seldom or never take time solemnly to seek the Lord alone. How do many here in New England, though able to do otherwise if but willing, build their houses as if they intended to shut closet prayer out of doors! How do many look at closet prayer, at the best but a freewill-offering, as they term it, which they offer if they will, but look not at it as a duty which they must attend upon all occasions! Surely such are little sensible of their heart-plagues, for then would they alone one by one make prayers and supplications. How little do such love the Lord, that they are afraid to talk too much, or too secretly with him! Surely such have at most but some few drops of the promised spirit of supplication, for if they had plenty of that spirit poured out upon them, they would be exercising the same apart. No wonder if such are not led in a way of supplication in secret, as well as otherwise, that they are ever and anon stumbling in matters of judgment or practice. Nor is it wonder that we have so many lukewarm professors amongst us, if so few that make conscience of calling upon God, even in secret. Such as make not conscience of calling upon God publicly, privately, and secretly, either are, or will soon prove as a cake half baked. Such are not led by rivers of water into a fruitful way, who are not led in a way of weeping and supplications. Such have little love to others, who are little with God in prayer. If we had more of Cornelius' spirit, to be earnestly exercised in praying alone, we should have more love to professors. Full of prayers and alms (fruits of charity) was his commendation. And it is well if the spiritual Chaldees, the soul's enemies, are not gotten into such men's hearts, as of old they did into the temple; yea, and that God himself be not departed from such, as of old from the temple, when this daily sacrifice and offering of holy prayer unto God ceases with them. Surely Daniel was not of these men's temper, who though he had such vast employments, as to take the accounts of the other princes of the several jurisdictions, and many other State affairs to despatch, yet would not, no not for one day, no, nor one time in the day, omit this his constant exercise of secret prayer; yea, when it comes to the hazard of his life, and all his worldly honors, or to forbear this his course of daily seeking of God in secret prayer, he had not such a thought, need not thus hazard myself, he might have said, I may forbear praying thus to God in my chamber for a while. It is but a matter of my own liberty; I am not bound to pray thus by any command of God. Nay, he saw more in God's command than so, which was of more sovereignty with him than any earthly monarch's command. He will not only deny to pray to the king as a God, which had been a sin of commission, but he will not forbear for the month's space, praying to the God of heaven in his chamber, which had been a sin of omission. Isaac, who had such weighty matters, as the change of his condition, to have occasioned some omission of his retired converses with God, yet then also will not leave his usual work of going out into the field to pray. Nor will Jesus Christ, whose example is a forcible argument to urge our imitation of his holy practice, he will not omit this holy business of secret prayer, though he had many others of great moment to attend in their seasons; he will rather borrow time from his natural rest in the night, if so fully employed in the day; he will get up the earlier in the morning before day, rather than want an opportunity for this holy exercise, yea, when the multitude came together to hear him, and be healed of him, he will not omit this work, but withdraws for that cud, and they must stay the while, yea, his chiefest followers must be dismissed whilst he attends this holy practice. And to conclude this use, it would be a shame that blind papists and superstitious votaries should be more zealous in their way of secret devotions, than we in our secret addresses in prayer to the Lord in the name of Christ.

Let it, then, in the second place, serve for exhortation to the earnest practice of this duty of secret prayer. If such an one as Cornelius, who had so many martial occasions to withdraw him, who also knew so little of Jesus Christ as that Messiah promised, yet was so constant this way; we that enjoy far more spiritual advantages, may much rather do it. Though too many now apostatize, as did such like in David's time, yet let us be the more resolute this way, as he was. Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray; and truly, if ever it were a time to be much with God in prayer together, and asunder, now is a time for it. All the saints' hands in a manner are up in all places, and doing exploits for God; and it were a shame if ours only should be down, especially when the saints of God in other places think that we in specially find it hard in prayer together and asunder. Let civil rulers ply it thus, as that president Daniel did, as king David himself did. Constantine the Great, as Eusebius tells us, would have this as his portraiture, a man on his knees praying, to show that was his usual practice and posture. How oft was Moses the magistrate with God alone in prayer? Let ministers, whose special calling lies in this also, to give themselves to prayer. Be much in it. How often is Paul described as thus employed. Epaphras the Colossian minister is commended for this also. Eusebius tells us of James called Justus, that his knees were grown hard and brawny with being so much in this way employed. And do not ministers' closet sins, as vanity of mind, vainglorious reasonings of spirit, listlessness sometimes to their holy work, call upon them for closet, study-prayers? Does not their weighty closet work call for this? Is not prayer, as once Luther said, the best book in our study? Does not Satan oftentimes come into our studies to assault us in our work, as sometimes he did Joshua the priest in his? and had we not then more need than others to be found oft praying there? The Lord vouchsafes oftentimes to be talking in friendly sort with us in our studies, and it were pity and shame if hereby we should not maintain holy conference with him. Who are more potent with God in public prayer, than such ministers as wrestle it out most with God in secret prayer? The gracious language which there they learn from the Spirit of God, and the choice, lively, and spiritual expressions and pleas wherein the Lord breathes upon their hearts, when alone, are those wherein he is wont to breathe upon the people's hearts in public prayer. Who more prevalent with God than Paul and Peter, this way exercised? We, as the friends of the bridegroom, as Eliezer was of old, speed the better in our work of gaining some spouse for Christ that day, for which we have been most earnest in secret prayer beforehand. The defect hereof, too oft makes our ministerial work so unsuccessful; as it did that of the disciples, assaying to cast out a devil, without praying beforehand for it. A minister need not fear but lie shall preach well afterwards, if the Lord help him to pray well beforehand; as ministers have more advantage of privacy, so their people make account they improve it this way; witness their frequent commending their cases to them, to spread them before the Lord in their prayers, and therefore let them be much with God in secret. And let all our brethren and sisters make conscience also of this duty of secret prayer; the Lord Jesus brings us, my brethren, into his chambers, where he delights most to rest, and show himself and commune with his saints, and shall not we hereby bring him into our chambers also? The Lord hideth us in the secret place of his presence; the secret chambers of his providence and protection are our chambers for our safety and honor, and shall not our chambers be his, for his use, that we there meet and talk with him in secret prayer, and he with us by his gracious presence and answers?

Each particular saint of God has his chamber, his mansion-place of glory, in which to Praise. God forever. Why shall not each saint of God, of what condition soever, have here his oratory, and place for secret praying unto God? each of them are by their calling, God's hidden ones whilst

here, and let them be so in this respect also, by their secret repairs to the Lord in prayer. Each godly mail in particular is set apart unto God, and why then not more apart to pray to him; we are his friends, and let us then be his friends in the closet, tell him our minds, be oft doing him this service of love in secret. We are his spouses. The church would have Christ go aside, as it were in private, and there she will give him her loves; so let us in secret give him this spouselike love, fruits of our lips in secret, and there tell him all our hearts. The spirit which is in the saints, is a free spirit, and truly there is the most free employment of that spirit in prayer, when sequestered from all occasions, and from all other company. Friends are most free and bold, when alone; so we with the Lord, when alone. A gracious person is never more gracious than when praying. But I pray, says he; and truly never more seen to be such an one, than when praying, or given to prayer in secret. Hypocrites may, and will pray, and haply in private too, but we must pray as most desiring privacy. When the Lord would demonstrate to Ananias, that Paul was converted; he doth it by this argument, For behold he prayeth; it was alone, in secret that he did thus, he must inquire him out, for he was got into some corner of the house. Let not wicked ones be more forward to set up an idol in secret, or to set up a false Christ in the chambers, than we to honor the true God and Jesus Christ thus in secret. And that we may yet a little further press this so weighty a duty; consider that it is indeed our privilege, in many respects, ordered, by the Lord in much wisdom and faithfulness, for our good as well as his glory; that he will have us thus to seek him by ourselves alone in prayer. For 1. He therein tenders the very credit of his people. They need not uncover their spiritual nakedness before any man whatsoever, nor all their personal plagues need be unbared before man, it suffices that they have this privileged precept to pray to their Father, who seeth in secret, and tell him all their hearts. In some cases of personal sins against brethren, personal confession of such sins is requisite; and sometimes in case of some oppressing burden upon our hearts, we are to go to some faithful minister, or experienced saint of God, and tell them our secret ails; but in ordinary course it suffices that we tell the Lord in secret, all our personal and particular failings and wants.

2. If solitary prayer were not God's ordinance, what should God's solitary ones do in sundry cases incident to them? But now Jeremiah in a solitary lonesome prison is encouraged, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee." Sometimes the saints are like pelicans and owls in the desert. Well may they make their moans to the Lord, but are of all other respect destitute. Sometimes the Lord works upon some one of the family, a son, or daughter, or servant, or the like; the rest remain opposite to all good, saying, "What profit should we have by praying unto God?" Such will say of the other person, we shall have him a precise fool, a mopish sot; father now is against child. Now it is well that prayer in a corner, where none sees or hears but the Lord, is an acceptable service and ordinance. The poor slave in the infidel's family, is now the Lord's freeman for this business. So the poor Christian wife with whom her infidel husband liked to dwell, though he yet like not her religion, she may pray alone with acceptance. Banished John in Patmos, may thus be in the spirit by himself alone. Manasseh in his fetters, yet has liberty all alone to make his prayer to his God. If this had been no ordinance of God, to what purpose had David's couch-prayers been? which yet prevailed, or how else had his cave-prayers ever come to be available?

3. If this had not been an acceptable ordinance, there had not been such honorable records thereof kept by and with the Lord; this is singled out amongst all that Manasseh did in his loathsome state in captivity, as most notable and honorable, and therefore is twice repeated, And

his prayer, and his prayer. So Cornelius' prayers are as memorials before the Lord.

4. It is well for the saints that this is an ordinance in point of honor; that God hereby is wont to put upon them severally, as that hereby they come to have testimonials from the Lord himself of the grace which is in them, and of their prevailing with him for desired mercies. Thus when Jacob is all alone praying, he has a new name given him; he is told, he has prevailed with God. Then is Daniel told that he is greatly beloved, and his prayers heard. Again, they have this honor put upon them to have choicest secrets revealed to them, as to God's friends in a corner; those three worthies severally praying, have this secret given unto them; Daniel and Jeremiah calling upon God all alone in prison, have great and wonderful things showed them that they knew not of. Peter when alone praying, has the mystery of the bringing in of the Gentiles revealed to him, yea, such in special shall have this honor of detaining of the Lord, when he would be gone. Let me go, says Christ to Jacob, "I will not let thee go until thou bless me;" nor did he. Let me alone, says God to Moses; but he suffers himself then, and afterwards, to be stayed from going on his course of displeasure against the people, by Moses' wrestling with him, as it were, hand to hand: "I held him (Song of Solomon 3:4) by the exercise of faith in prayer." The Lord knows not how to leave a suppliant, or to proceed in a way of displeasure against him, and is it not well for the saints that each prayer in secret is an ordinance of God, and a very acceptable service unto him?

Let us wind up all with a caution or two.

1. Look that it be not alone secret prayer, in respect of the place apart from others; but in respect of our desires, and endeavor as much as may be of privacy. That as Christ says of secret fasting and prayer in an extraordinary way, "Wash thy face, and anoint thee with oil, that thou appear not to men to fast;" so avoid loudness of voice when alone, or if melted in secret, let it not be perceived, if you can, that you have been weeping; yea, if you cannot go aside, unobserved of some in the house, let us even wish that we might so pray alone, that none might know how oft, or how long we are therein; if any secret motion arise, to think of what others will think of us, let us abhor the thought of it, else, if in secret, our hearts desire others to take notice of us, that desire makes it, before God, as if we prayed in the street corner.

2. That we vanish not into mere habit in praying in our closets, going aside thither to pray for fashion's sake, living in good families, and seeing others go aside for that end, we do it too, or we have been trained up to it, and so we will hold it on as a custom. Yea, lest we go about it as a mere formal task, which if we but perform, let it be well or ill, we mind it not, so we do it, we are satisfied; if we do it not, indeed, we are troubled; but in all, not moved from any principle of love, and longing after communion with the Lord, or prevailing with God through grace for pardon of this or that sin we groan under, or supply of this or that spiritual want, over which we mourn. Verily such formality will produce other evils, as listlessness to pray even when got into our closets; such will have so little of God in their customary seeking of him, that they will have little encouragement to set about seeking him. It will also cause slowness in prayer. The formalist's prayer is called vanity. And if slight in praying, usually as slighty in praising. None says, seriously, "Where is he that gives us songs in the night?" Such as are slighty in the work of thorough repentance. Such as slightly complain of their pining away in their sins, and are therefore so roused up to turn unto the Lord, as even to well content to die in their sins: "Turn you, turn you, why will you die," etc.? yea, they are as slighty in hearing the word of God, as though but hearing only some musical song,

which as we say goes in at one ear, and out at the other, nay, commonly such are very serious in some way of sin against God. "Wilt thou not from this time cry (namely, in this slighty fashion), my Father? Behold, thou hast done evil as thou couldst." Such are wont to be serious in discontented complaints of God in his dispensations of providence; as that his way was not equal, when it is their own ways rather which are unequal; as slighty complainers of their sins are bold to charge God as if his ways were not equal.

09. Part 1, Chapter 6. Intercession and Imprecation

CHAPTER VI. OF PRAYER OF INTERCESSION, AND IMPRECATION.

Having spoken of the sorts of prayer in general, we come to speak especially of solemn and continued prayer, and letting pass those which respect ourselves, we shall only single out those two respecting others, namely, Prayer of Intercession and Imprecation.

Concerning prayer of intercession, whereby upon all occasions we are bound to pray for others' good, we shall not mention the persons especially concerned in it; as magistrates, ministers, parents, masters, husbands, and all other superiors, for their inferiors, as also their inferiors respectively for their superiors; or any other special relations, as of friends, kindred for their friends, and the like; of which Scripture instances are plentiful; but we shall consider it generally, as that which respects all sorts of godly persons; nor shall we spend time in urging reasons and motives from the honorableness of this holy service of love in itself; its advantage to the persons themselves who so plead for others' welfare every way, the suitableness of this to that matchless pattern thereof in the Lord Jesus, and the mighty things which have been done for others thereby. But shortly come to lay down, first, some rules to guide us in it. Secondly, some means to help us in it. Thirdly, some marks to discover our gracious speeding in it.

Touching the first thing propounded, we observe these rules in it.

1. Attend the times, and observe them, when the Lord is in any more special manner with us by his Spirit, and when our hearts are near to him, by special stirrings of faith and love. They are as iii Christ's lap, upon their spouse's knee, in their beloved's bosom, and they would yet be. nearer to him. The church is leaning upon her beloved, yet says, set me as a seal upon thine arm, and upon thy breast, and then makes that gracious motion to her beloved. We have a little sister, what shall we do for her? As she is ready to do her part, so she would have him do his part for the other's good; when the daughters of Jerusalem find Christ, when he meets them, then they must in their prayers tell him of the church's sad case, that she is sick of love. Moses will take the advantage of God's being so near him, and speaking to his heart, to speaking for his presence with the rest of God's people: "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not hence. And Moses made haste and bowed himself to the earth, and worshipped, and said, O Lord, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, that the Lord would now go with us, and pardon our iniquity, and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance." It were pity that the saints would not improve their waiting months upon the king of saints, to move him as well for others, as for their own good. The king at Esther's banquet expects request for her people; so does the Lord at such time especially look that some should make inter. cession. He expects that some should ask him of things to come, concerning his Sons and his daughters. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

2. When others are under any special desertion or temptation, or in any helpless, desolate, disconsolate conditions, as when the Lord is withdrawn from them: "My beloved had withdrawn himself. Tell him that I am sick of love." When under reproaches and indignities from others, who

by their profession and place should do better offices for them, as when the church is smitten and wounded by the watchmen, and her veil taken away by the keepers of the walls, then tell" my beloved I am sick of love." When others are deeply sensible of their need of Christ, and nothing else will content them but Christ, then they are sick of love, then tell Christ of it. When the displeasure of God himself is breaking out against His own people, then if Moses have interest in God, he must be down on his knees for Israel, then Aaron must haste to offer incense. Then Job must offer for his friends. When enemies are ready to swallow up the Lord's heritage, then Isaiah must lift up his prayer for the remnant of God. When persons of choicest use are in greatest hazards through the rage of persecutors, then prayer is made without ceasing for Peter by the godly. When people want a fruitful ministry, pray for them especially. Pray, then, that the Lord would thrust forth laborers into his harvest, and in other sad cases of the saints.

3. Be serious and not flighty in pleading for others, "Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." "Wrestle together in prayer for me, if we should seem therein to get a defeat, yet again try more with God for them, especially in difficult cases. Abraham follows Christ with prayer upon prayer, even for Sodom: "Give the Lord no rest until he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

4. We take advantage of the least possibility of speeding, to set us upon this service of love for others, in any case whatsoever, though not always desired thereto by others; but especially when thereto moved by them. It may be the Lord hath heard Rabsbakeh's word; and, "Wherefore lift prayer for the remnant that is left." "Moses said unto the people, ye have committed a grievous sin, but now I will go up to the Lord, peradventure I may pacify him."

Touching the second, even helps to further us in this duty.

1. Cherish brotherly love, and kindness, and charity. Love the church and people of God, his Jerusalem, and you will pray for them. Love your enemies, and you will pray for them. The centurion will be suing to Christ for his servant, who is very dear to him. If we love others, we will every way seek not our own things so much as theirs. Jonathan, who loves David, will be a petitioner to his father for him. And Esther, who loved her people, will not be content to ask her own life, but theirs also of the king. So in our requests to the Lord for others, if we love them. Moses will have no greatness of his, founded in his people's ruin; nay, he refuses an offer thereof, so he may bespeak mercy for his people. True suppliants can sometimes be earnest for others, when more sparing in suing for themselves.

2. Be as much acquainted with, and well informed in other's estates as you can, especially inquire out all the good which is in them. The knowledge of others' miseries, as the eye affects the heart, opens those sluices then whereby it comes to be poured out for them; this brought good Nehemiah upon his knees, when he had certain information of Jerusalem's calamities: "He sat down, and wept, and fasted, and prayed." Hence the direction, confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. The best are much led by sense; others' cases, of which we have but some general information, do not so affect, as those of whose particular case we have better knowledge; knowledge, also, or hope at least of the grace which is in others, does much quicken us to pray for them. From the day that Paul heard of the faith of the Colossians and Ephesians, how importunate is he in prayer for them? The report of Philemon's faith and love, makes Paul echo forth the sound thereof in the ears of God by praying for him. And it would be good to keep a fresh memorial of others' graces, as Paul did of those in the Thessalonians, whence it was that he

was so earnest for them in his prayers.

3. Prize grace in others, as well as in ourselves. And by their prayer for you, which long after you, for the exceeding grace of God in you.

4. Put ourselves in others' stead. So Jesus Christ teaches us in the Lord's prayer, to be ourselves needing daily bread, and remission of sins, and rescue from the evil of temptation if others be so. So Moses, "Let the Lord go with us and pardon vs." So Daniel puts himself in the number and case of such and such suffering ones.

5. Maintain an holy life in prayer respecting ourselves. When the root of a spirit of prayer is kept fresh and springing, it will be sprouting forth into all the variety of the branches thereof, respecting others, as well as ourselves. If that pipe be kept open, it will be conveying waters of grace to others' houses and hearts as well as our own. If the spring tide be up, our neighbors' creeks, as well as ours, will be supplied with water. The supplies of the oil of grace from the Lord of the whole earth, will be beneficial to the whole candlestick, the church, and the several bowls and lamps of it, Zechariah 4:2-3; Zechariah 4:11-13. We cannot as members of this body sensibly think or speak for ourselves, but more or less we shall be mindful of other parts and members of the body of Christ in special sort.

6. Put one another upon praying one for another. Pray for us, says the apostle. Lay open your cases one to another, begging each other's prayers. "Tell my beloved," says the church, "that I am sick of love." Many hands contribute this way, even to a poor decayed Christian, and will help him into a way of spiritual trading with God as formerly. As many simples put together will make sovereign physic to recover a sick man; so I may say of particular men's prayers, meeting in one, further other- soul's welfare and health. Some favorite's prayers may help others who may be under some displeasure of the Lord to come into renewed terms of favor with him. Therefore as Mordecai will set Esther to intercede for him with the king, and for his people, so should we crave the prayers of such as are upon better terms, possibly, with the Lord than we ourselves. Even the injurious Gibeonites must bless Israel, or else they are not to speed so well from the Lord. God will have all the members of Christ to see the need and se of other members, even the meanest, as the church of Jerusalem's daughters tell Christ in their prayers of her condition.

Touching the third thing, the marks of our prayers speeding for others, and that the favors showed to others are fruits of our prayers, are,—

1. When God stirs up their hearts for whom we pray, to be by faith persuaded that God will hear us for them, "For I know that it shall turn to my salvation, through your prayers." "For I trust that through your prayers I shall be given to you." When God does thus send word beforehand, and give notice to his saints what he means to do for them, at the request of such or such of their brethren, it is a pledge that the ensuing success was that way brought about.

2. When God in conferring such and such mercies upon others, does secretly and strongly persuade them, that they are the fruit of the prayers of his servants for them, it is verily so indeed. As when Paul is persuaded that his liberty and life restored, and the gracious fruits thereof, that they were the fruits of the Corinthians', and others' prayers; a gift bestowed by the means of many, and you also helping by your prayers. As when a king shall send word to some subjects of his that he has done thus for them, because of the request of such or such of his courtiers. Or as a

school-master shall tell his scholars who begged their play-days. So here in such holy motions in others' hearts, the Lord signifies to them, that such or such a refreshment, enlargement, and succor in such or such temptations, are issues of the requests of such or such of his servants for them.

3. When God stirs up injured persons to pray feelingly and fervently for such as have wronged them, as Job for his friends. The prayer .of Christ for many of his persecutors, "Father forgive them," etc. It took well; witness that blessed change wrought in many of them so soon after, Acts 2:1-47 :This fruit of divine love in the saints, argues a root of it in the Lord himself toward such persons, for whom they make such requests, and such strong living currents and rivers of kindness and compassion, argue an ocean in God towards them; such love- speeches being dictated by the special motions of God's Spirit, are wont to be owned by the Lord.

4. When some are stirred up to earnest prayer for some one or more, for whom many other saints, unspoken to, haply unthought of, do in like sort intercede with God. When many help this way, toward the bestowing of one and the same gift, it seldom fails. You also helping by your prayers, namely, together with others in other places to pray for the same gift. There is ever most of God in such unanimity. When the Spirit of the Lord does thus tune many hearts, as several instruments to answer one another, when the same lesson of the Spirit is played by divers spiritual harpers; this holy harmony of spirits, seeking to the Lord that he would loose in heaven some poor sinning persons, formerly bound, but now repenting, this argues the presence and acceptance of the Lord: "What ye loose on earth is loosed in heaven;" that is, "If you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing you shall ask, it shall be done."

6. When God carries out some of his servants in prayers for others, very earnestly, resolutely, and constantly, as those who will have no nay. God assuredly, as a fruit of such holy importunity makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Paul always in every prayer of his, is stirred up to mention the Philippians, confident that God will go on with his work in them, and he thinks it meet to be confident of it, because the Lord has put them thus oft into his heart in prayer for them. Such earnest incessant prayers of the church for an imprisoned Peter are not denied, there being most of the Spirit in such prayers.

6. When God stirs up the faith of such as pray and plead for others to wait and expect; yea, to be persuaded of their answers, as the Psalmist who expects peace as an answer of those prayers for others of the saints, "I will hearken what God the Lord will say, for he will speak peace to his people," his prayers for them are mentioned in the former verses. When the church in praying for the king is persuaded that they shall have the joy thereof, she concludes the same from her faith, "That God will show mercy to the king according to her desire." Faith ever speeds in its suits, and in this our holy trading with God, it is the Lord's earnest penny, that he will give us suitable and reasonable returns.

7. When mercies begged for others, are suddenly and strangely brought about upon our prayers, and as suddenly brought to our knowledge. Peter is sent in unto them, as set at liberty from his chains, whilst they are praying for him; wherein the providence of God would as it were speak to them thus, there is the mercy, here is the man for whom you make so much ado; since you will needs have it so, and will have no nay, and the ears of the Lord are so filled with your cries, take it, and be thankful.

8. When we are in especial manner enlarged and quickened in thanksgiving for God's mercies upon others. The many which gave thanks to God for his gift bestowed, were surely of the many by means of whose joint prayers it was bestowed.

Let us now speak a little more largely to the other branch, being somewhat more intricate, and not so often spoken to.

Prayer in way of imprecation is that part of prayer wherein the saints do not barely complain of the indignities done by God's and his people's enemies, against him and them, but crave divine justice against them.

Let us first clear this to be a duty of the saints, to pray even against such as hate God and his people.

"Curse ye Meros," etc. The Levites were to pray against divers kinds of sinners, and the people to join in those imprecations by saying, Amen. The Scripture holds forth many examples of such imprecations, as Lamentations 3:64-66; Psalms 144:1-15; Psalms 145:1-21; Psalms 146:1-10; Psalms 147:1-20, and many other Scriptures.

Reasons enforcing the saints to it, are, —

1. Their love to God, out of love to whom they may, and must say as he did: "Do not I hate them that hate thee?" etc. The converted princes shall hate the anti-christian harlot, and if the saints may, and must hate the enemies of God, they may pray against them.

2. Their respect to Christ and his kingdom. We are taught to pray that it may come as well in the confusion of some, as the conversion of other of his enemies: "Let thine arrows be sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby people fall under thee." "O thou to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself, lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth, render a reward to the proud.

3. Their respect to the church and people of God, and their peace and good, whence those imprecations: "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom." "Let them all be confounded that hate Zion." But because our natures, as carnal, are rather disposed to curse than to bless; a "carnal man's mouth is full of cursing." So that herein we need not spurs, so much as bit and bridle to curb and guide us. And because even the dearest of the saints have miscarried this way, yea even when they least suspected the same, as James and John would have been requiring fire to come down from heaven upon those Samaritans, as Elias sometimes did, but were rebuked for it, though they seem to ask Christ's counsel in it. Wilt thou that we command fire from heaven? To exalt Christ's sovereign power in it, if he willed it, they in his name might command it, and to be zealous of his honor injured by those Samaritans, yet checked as persons who knew not of what spirit they were of. Now considering such like things, we had need to have aim given us, and to have the mark described, at which we must shoot.

Let us then consider, 1. In what way we may not imprecate and pray against others. 2. In what way we must pray against God's enemies. 3. Against what enemies

1. We may not curse nor pray against the righteous upon any pretence whatsoever, no, not of sharp, harsh, high, or continued opposition against us. There was a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabus, but they prayed not against each other. Abraham and Lot engaged in their

herdmen's contention, yet Abraham prays for Lot. I heartily wish that all God's servants of either Congregational, or Presbyterian way, take heed of the breaking out of any such fire as this, which will be found to be wildfire one day. As for cursing ranters, who curse those whom God has blessed, yea, it may be, the blessed God himself also, our God will one day accomplish that dreadful word upon them, if they repent them not thoroughly of their blasphemies, "I will curse them that curse thee;" and let none of them think that in cursing they bless them, for they are contraries, as the Lord there shows," I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee." He would not curse men for blessing his people, but bless them rather; they may as well imagine that God in cursing such, does but bless them; and if they dare undergo God's curse, and yet dream of his blessing, "Let the blind lead the blind."

2. Look that our curse against others be not causeless. The curse that is causeless shall never come; as when Jeremy in a distemper cursed him that told his father first that a "man-child was born unto him." It is extreme injustice, and taking the name of God in vain, (nor will he hold such as do thus guiltless,) to call for vengeance against the guiltless, and make divine justice subservient to the unjust desires of the flesh. If a reviling Raca be under the head of murder of another, what is this? It is foulest impiety under a cover of piety, of prayer, to seek to devour others.

3. Let us be careful, that though there be some seeming cause, yet that we be not rash in imprecating, but very deliberate, consider thoroughly of our own spirit therein, the want whereof was rebuked in James and John, though seeming to consult with Christ about it, "Wilt thou that we command fire from heaven, but Jesus rebuked them, saying, You know not of what Spirit ye are." We are easily mistaken in our spirit at such a time, in such a work. In other cases not so intricate, we understand not too often what is that which chiefly moves us therein; much more in this, we may soon miscarry here both in the persons against whom, and the things which, and the end for which we imprecate. If in other cases we should not be hasty with our mouths, or rash to utter a thing before God, much less should we be rash in our imprecations.

4. Look that we imprecate not in our own persons barely. As when servants provoked will be cursing their masters, our hearts and consciences will smite us for it, if thine heart knows that thou thyself hast cursed others, this were to imitate heathen in a way of revenge.

Look that we do not therein cut in sunder the bonds of special relations which the Lord has laid upon us, as for children under any pretence whatsoever to curse their parents, "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." Such wild and strange fire never came down from heaven, such a cursing tongue is set on fire of hell.

6. Look that we do not secretly imprecate against such as we pretend to bless. Some there are who bless with their mouth, but curse inwardly. Such persons are rotten-hearted, and like a tottering wall. It is as monstrous that out of the "same mouth should proceed blessing and cursing, as for a fountain to scud forth bitter, and yet sweet, or salt, and yet fresh waters." It is gross hypocrisy, and that wisdom which contrives it, is carnal, sensual, and devilish. The devil himself will sometimes carry towards men, as if he wished them well, and in heart curse them.

7. Look that we do not abound in imprecations, as that cursing generation of ranters, sprung up of late, little else to be heard, but, Lord confound such and such, Lord cut them off; etc. Prayers so continually besprinkled with gall, argue a root bearing gall and wormwood: "Their grapes are

grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter, and so their vine is a vine of Sodom." "Guile is under their tongue, which is full of cursing." They are Jews, professors of religion in show, but really carnal Gentiles, not sincerely righteous, whose mouths are full of cursing, constantly, and only cursing, such do not experimentally know the grace of Christ, and the blessing of grace ; nor are they sincere seekers of the Lord; but rather wander as persons dangerously deluded and misled, in by-ways leading to destruction; and are at best unprofitable, and such as do nothing formally good.

Lastly, look that we do not delight and glory in imprecations. The prophet speaks of one delighting in cursing. Judas is pointed at therein, who it may seem thereby, was a man much given to cursing, and delighting much in imprecations, and himself in the mean time a cursed hypocrite and traitor to Jesus Christ..

Caution 1. Now let us consider affirmatively in what way we may pray against others.

We must be more ready to bless and pray for others, than to curse, or pray against others: "Bless, or pray for them that persecute you." "Yea, bless," says the Lord, "and curse not." The charge of blessing or praying for others, is reiterated, and a prohibition given to the other, showing how ready and forward we should be to bless others, but be very rare and cautious in imprecating and praying against them; for the prohibition there is not taken absolutely and indefinitely in no case, and at no time, the saints may, or ought to curse, or pray against others; the Scripture elsewhere, as we have seen, allowing of it, in this case, and enjoining of it.

2. We must bless long, before we may dare to imprecate, in case they be professed friends to the Lord. As Jeremiah did, who prayed long for those revolters of his time, until forbidden of God to pray any more for them: "Pray not for this people," yet he is at it again, "beseeching of God for his name's sake not to abhor them." God tells him there is no good that way to be done for them, though as mighty men in prayer, as Moses and Samuel stood before him; afterwards, indeed, Jeremy once or twice prayed against them, "Remember that I stood before thee for them, to turn away this wrath from them, yet Lord thou knowest all their counsel against me, to slay me; forgive not their iniquity." God is long before he inflicts his curse: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man... yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." We may then be long before we wish the curse of God upon the ungodly. Jesus Christ was by and heard his persecutors imprecating so against themselves and children, saying, "His blood be upon us, and our children." And one would think he might well say amen thereto; nay, but he would not, he did not, for as in that, he prays rather that God would take off that curse: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Imprecations had certainly miscarried, if they had been made, by any of the saints against Manasseh or Paul, who yet went very far in rebellion and enmity against God.

3. Look that we imprecate and pray that such or such calamities may light upon others, so as in reference to blessing of them. If the Lord please, "So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm: fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord." The church anathematizes a wicked person; but it is not for their destruction, but of their flesh in them, and that their souls might, if possible, be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. So here.

4. Look that we imprecate and pray rather against their sin and wickedness, than their persons against whom we pray. "Turn this counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." "Lord, behold their threatenings." "Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end." It is the wickedness and the

enmity of God's enemies which most properly strikes at God, which is most mischievous to the church, and most hurtful to themselves and others, wherefore spare no arrows against that; and as far as worldly greatness is an occasion and instrument of their wickedness, we may pray against that: "Break out the great teeth of the young lions."

5. Pray against the enemies of God conditionally, namely, if they persist in their enmity against God, that they be implacable; that they be reprobates, persons devoted to ruin, and ripe for it. David prays against the enraged enemy, that God would judge them, but if he turn not God will whet his sword; and the Lord himself declaratively curses the wicked by his ministers, but yet with a tacit condition, if they repent not. And so are the saints to wish that curse of God against them with the like tacit condition, if they repent not.

6. Pray against the enemies of God indefinitely, and not this or that person in particular: "Smite through the loins of those that rise up against him, that they rise not again." Moses did not eye one enemy of Levi more than another: "So let them that hate thee, fly before thee." "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha." There is ever most of God, and least of self in such indefinite imprecations. And the saints may in that way of imprecating be both more free, and have more help to their faith in God's promises wherein he engages himself in an indefinite way, to plague such desperate and ripened enemies, without reference to this or that person in particular.

7. Look that we propound for our end in such imprecations, the glory of God, and the church's good. Paul's respect to the glory of God in his word, makes him wish them accursed that preach another gospel. And his respect to the church's good and peace, makes him wish them cut off who trouble them. So for the manner of imprecating, we do it in faith:

"Let not the foot of pride come against me." There are they fallen, and he by faith sees them fallen against whom he prayed: "Break thou the arm of the wicked. The heathen are perished out of his land." Let it be with holy grief of heart, that we have any cause to imprecate against any enemies of God: "As when the fellow-servants saw what was done, (by that cruel and merciless wretch against one of their fellows,) they were sorry, and came and told the Lord." As Christ the judge pronounces that sentence against those his enemies, with expressions of much compassion — "he beheld Jerusalem, and wept over it, and said, they shall not leave thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the day of thy visitation." So should the saints, which as witnesses, or assessors, either give in evidence or verdict upon the testimonies of their acts of enmity against God and his church; they should do it with grief.

1. Touching the third thing propounded; we may and must pray against treacherous enemies, which should have been friends, as those of "Meros, which should have helped the Lord against the mighty, were cursed." "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none." "Let their table become a snare."

2. Against sly, undermining enemies, such as pretending to pity and help, will hurt the people of God:

"Let death seize upon them; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." Such as can use all fraudulent expressions to insinuate to murder souls. "They lurk and lie in wait to take all advantages to murder the innocent;" yea their very souls, if it were possible, as well as their

bodies, by wily tricks to draw them to sin against their consciences, "They would be drawing them into their net." Yea, "He croucheth and humbleth himself that the poor may fall." And, "Arise, O Lord, O God, lift up thy hand." "Break thou the arm of the wicked." Such enemies, who professing the true religion, yet against their own light, will be plotting all the ways they can against the saints, and to reproach, and to disgrace the ways of God, are very like the devil, transforming himself into an angel of light, but against his light, using all his wiles to ensnare souls, and bring them to like perdition with himself. These do the more mischief to the church and people of God, and possibly cause many truly godly ones, through their wiles, to go halting and bleeding to their graves.

3. Against mocking, scoffing, and insulting enemies, who like Tobiah and Sanballat, deride and jeer at the gracious practices of the saints, as they did at that good work of theirs, in building Jerusalem's walls. But "hear O God, for we are despised, and turn their reproach upon their own heads." "When I wept and fasted, that was to me a reproach." "I became a proverb to them." "They talk to the grief of them whom thou hast wounded." "Add iniquity to their iniquity," etc. Such as are ready to gnash their very teeth at the righteous, and to make themselves merry at any evil befalling them. "Hypocritical mockers in feasts, who gnash their teeth upon me, open their mouth wide against me, and said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it." "Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together, that rejoice at my hurt." Such are old standers in the ways of sin, and have long walked in the counsels of the ungodly, and now taking up their rest, as it were, in the way of scorning at God and good. These have most venom that can laughingly smile on the saints, when yet they had rather be gnashing their teeth at them, and so are riper for God's curse, as even ready to glory in any wicked pranks which are played against the saints.

4. Against apostatized enemies, as an Ahithophel, a Judas, an Alexander: "Alexander hath done me much hurt, the Lord reward him according to his deeds." Such do much hurt indeed; they know the ways of the saints; they are most embittered against them. Like Christians turning Turks, proselyted pharisaical persons; more hellish in their malice and fury against the godly, than Turks or Pharisees themselves, the nicest wine turning the sharpest vinegarlike spirits against the saints.

5. Against such as apparently oppose rather God in their persons, than the persons themselves; opposing persons every way amiable in their eyes, for parts, parentage, good behavior and repute, and only because godly, and so hating them without any personal cause, only for God's sake they reproach them. "Because they pray and fast, that is to their reproach." "Let the table of such become a snare." "Without cause, on my part, they have hid for me their net. Therefore let their way be death." "They devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land." Persons that meddle not with others, or others' matters, but have their conversation in heaven, they themselves cannot charge them to be turbulent, but they are pious, they are conscientious, that is enough against them in such men's eyes, and in whomsoever such persons see the image of God, they do, like their father the devil, malign it. Yea, though they gain neither credit nor profit by maligning such persons, as the devil himself does not, but are rather losers by it, yet they are well pleased if they can but wreak their malice upon the saints; let the ways of such be slippery, and the angel of the Lord persecute them.

6. Against such enemies as are so great, that they are even past the reach of human justice; none other left to break their teeth, but God only. Such as say, we will speak, and do thus and thus with them, and let us see the proudest of them all, which dare contradict or oppose us, "Our tongues

are our own, who is Lord over us?" And some vilest persons, haply, being exalted to the highest place of rule, such wicked enemies walk on every side, without curb or control. Now it is high time for the poor and needy to cry against them, and God will arise at their cry. In this case Christ makes it the saints' duty to cry night and day for vengeance against such enemies. And God at length will hear them. Bloodyminded Joab being too mighty to be reached by king David's justice, is prayed against. "Let this blood rest on the head of Joab." "I am this day weak, though anointed king, and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me; the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

7. Against the enemies of God, which divine justice has already found put, and begun to seize upon. If the fire of God has begun to kindle on them, and in them, we may blow it up by this holy breath. If God shows that it is his will to cut down such ripened stalks, we may help onward to their cutting down; if he has begun to wound such mad dogs, wolves, and serpents, we may help to kill them outright. If he has routed such Midianites, our prayers must help for the chase of them. When persecuting Babylon is once begun to be battered and closely besieged through God's sin-revenging hand, "Then the inhabitants of Zion shall say, the violence done to me, and to my flesh, be upon Babylon; and my blood upon the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say."

Lastly, against general enemies, such as antichrist, the saints must muster up all their spiritual forces against such an enemy. To conclude: —

It may be asked, when the saints' prayers against the enemies of God may be said to be heard? or how it may be known, that such judgments as the Lord inflicts upon his enemies, are fruits and issues of the saints' prayers?

I answer, 1. When God brings strange judgments upon persons prayed against. As Hezekiah, with no extraordinary inspired prayer, prays against blaspheming Sennacherib. "God heard his prayer, which appeared by the strange hand of God against him, and his army of 185,000, who are cut off by an unusual stroke or plague of the angel, and he himself (in an unheard of manner) is killed by his own sons, whilst he is worshipping in the house of his God."

2. When God brings upon such enemies speedy and untimely deaths, and not long after imprecations of the saints made against them; as that night after Hezekiah had so prayed, the angel wrought that unheard of slaughter of the Assyrians, and soon after that parricide is committed upon Sennacherib himself. Doubtless the saints which made such earnest request for Peter, did not forget Herod, that bloody man, to entreat God to convert him, or else to cut him off, if ripe for it; and you see it is not long after that in that unwonted way, he comes to his end by the stroke of an angel, when the very next day Ananias dies a dreadful death, it is a sure token that the prayer of that godly bishop of Alexandria which he made against him the night before was answered. Within five or six days after that fasting and prayer of the Jews, wicked Haman is unexpectedly brought to his end; surely God has respect to his people's requests in their mournings, and this their enemy came to fall before them, according as the very night after Esther's feast, that unexpected way was made by God in the king's heart for Haman's fall, when Ahithophel within a day or two after David had prayed — "Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness, cometh to his end;" it evidences the same to be an issue of David's imprecation. It is a sign that God heard the cry of Moses against the Egyptians, when that very day the Lord in a wonderful manner overthrows them. So when Jehoshaphat and his people solemnly and humbly

request the Lord to judge those inhuman, ungrateful enemies of theirs, and the very morrow after, God does in an unwonted manner bring ruin upon those enemies, all may safely conclude that those prayers prevailed.

3. When the manner of the ends which God brings upon such enemies against which his people pray, is reproachful and shameful; as when a wicked Haman, which, a little before, was the greatest in the kingdom, comes to be hanged upon a gallows. When the great oracle of the people, and counselor of State, Ahithophel, comes to so shameful an end, as to die by a halter, yea, to hang himself; when that deputy king, or governor Herod, comes to so base an end, as to be eaten by basest vermin; so when wretched Ananias comes to so base an end, it argues that some godly Alexander has told his errand to the Lord.

4. When the judgments God brings upon his enemies, are the very same which his people desired against them in their prayers, God does not, indeed, always hear his people in the very particular, yet when he does so, it argues the same to be an answer of prayer. As when not alone, a prophet, extraordinarily inspired, prays against Judas, in another enemy like him, and the things desired are inflicted, as Psalms 109:1-31 and Acts 12:18-20 compared. Jotham, an ordinary man, prays that fire may come from Abimelech, and devour the men of Sechem; and that fire may come from the men of Sechem, and devour Abimelech, and the issue presently afterwards answered the same, for both were instruments of each other's ruin; it is a sign that Jotham's prayer prevailed in both.

5. If when persons prayed against are swept away, without any desiring even of their associates to the contrary, even they pity them not, and all blessing from any hand, almost, is far from them. The very wicked which counseled them to such treacherous acts of enmity against God and Christ, cast them off without pity; as the priests and scribes did cursed Judas, in his saddest outcries and troubles. What is that to us? (they will not own him, nor his acknowledgment.) look thou to it. Nay, such enemies prayed against, if the prayers be effectual, will help forward one another's ruin. Such bloody Shechemites, so prayed against, will help forward murderous Abimelech's death and misery, as he did theirs.

10. Part 2, Chapter 1. Modifications: Importunity in Prayer

PART II PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.— 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

CHAPTER I. THE MODIFICATIONS OF PRAYER — IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYER.

HAVING despatched the discourse about the nature, sorts, and parts of prayer, we come to consider modifications of prayer, enjoined and implied in the word *αδιαλειπτος* which implies praying importunately, opportunely, and indefinitely. Some interpreters make account, that Paul has reference herein unto that speech of Christ, “that men ought to pray always, and not to faint.” So here, pray, *αδιαλειπτος*, without giving out, leaving off, or intermitting any space of time, which implies importunate praying, as that of the widow’s plying the unjust judge with earnest suit for justice, notwithstanding any seeming discouragements or denials. And, indeed, such as pray importunately, earnestly, and fervently, in God’s intent and account, pray continually, or without ceasing.

Now for our better handling this duty of praying importunately, let us consider, 1. Wherein importunity of prayer consists. 2. The qualifications of it.

3. The reasons enforcing it. 4. Some helps furthering it. 5. Some marks discovering that importunity of prayer which the Lord means.

1st. Wherein importunity of prayer consists? It consists

1. In the extensiveness and intensiveness of the mind and heart, and of each praying grace of a godly suppliant in his prayer. Our new translation renders that in Acts 12:5, by a like phrase as this in the text, “Prayer was made without ceasing,” but the word in the Greek is *εκτενης*; then was prayer made *υλlich* was stretched out upon the tenters; not so much, namely, in the length and largeness of the intercessions of such as put up the same, as in respect of the thoughts, holy affections, and exercise of the graces of the spirits of those godly suppliants in their prayer. So in Acts 26:7, prayer was one special piece of that service intended in that there mentioned, “Our twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night.” The words are *εν εκτενια* in a “stretched out manner, serving God, I cried with my whole heart.” David’s whole heart acted in that prayer with all earnestness; his prayer was the common cry of all that was within him; his desire, love, hope, and all the graces of his spirit in his heart put forth themselves in his prayer. So “continuing instant in prayer; *προσκαρτερουντες*, continuing with all your might in prayer.” The acceptable prayer is *δηεις ενεργουμενη*, an inwrought prayer. A prayer wherein all the active hands within the suppliant are set on work, according as there it is said of him: “Always laboring fervently in prayer for you, *αγωνιζομενος*, wrestling for you in prayers. A fervent suppliant does wrestlerlike, bend and writhe, and strain every joint of the new man in their souls; yea, of their whole mind and heart, so far as sanctified, that they may take all helps and advantages of the Lord to prevail with him in prayer. All our lines must meet in this center of prayer; our whole man must wait upon this as the creature of the Holy Ghost; as it will share in this blessing, so it must act in begging it; and then it will put on the garment of praises also for it. As before, the whole man went in mourning weeds in

the want of that blessing; so the mercy will be sweetest to the whole man when it is in this holy manner employed in begging it; or if the mercjr be delayed, yet it can the more quietly sit down in the want of it, when it has used God's means for it. A Christian that prays much, can want much, he has that inward peace that guards his heart and mind from discontent: "Make your request known to God, and the peace of God shall keep your hearts."

2. Importunity in prayer, consists in a frequent renewing of our suits, when we are at this holy work, early and late; the Psalmist was at it early, when he said, "My prayer shall prevent thee." "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried." He was earnest in this holy work, who was at it so early; a lively Christian will be up in his spirit, and hard at this work, when drowsy professors are not stirring this way. And verily he must be up be- times, who prevents the Lord with his prayer, who is wont before we call to answer us. The importunate suppliant also will be late at it, come for bread at midnight, when he might have it inwardly suggested to him, that he comes unseasonably, as the parable holds forth. He will pray with the first and with the last too, he will pray again and again:

"For this I besought the Lord thrice." His fresh suits freshen up the suppliant's praying graces; put a new luster upon his faith, love, fear, zeal, holy desires, and the like. Sometimes the heart is more ripe for prayer than at other times; importunity tries conclusions, sees how our heart's prayer-pulses beat at all times; the heart is sometimes more full of holy motions and workings, much more resolute, more fixed upon God and good, much more tender and sensible. Importunity takes all advantages of the heart of a Christian; an importunate suppliant is wont to be always taking the scales and balances into his hand, and in his thoughts puts in the mercies he pleads and longs for, in the one scale; arid all his prayers, pleas, and tears for the same in the other. And perceiving the mercies to weigh down all his prayers, he then lays in more prayers and sighs, and yet alas, they are not weight, which makes him stifi to be laying weight after weight, prayer upon prayer, all his days. Prayer is the soul's messenger, which it speeds to heaven, there to relate in the ears of its God and king, the various cases which do concern it; and as good speeding messengers are the most serious, and the most serious messengers speed best, so it is in the case of prayer; yea, as messengers are sent again and again, till their errand be fully told, and their business despatched, or sufficient order taken for it, so it is here. Prayer after prayer is sent up to heaven, until either the Lord do what is desired, or that which is equivalent to it; as in Paul's case, he said unto me: "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." An importunate suppliant has the art of praying, and so has his divers spiritual topics, whence he frames variety of holy arguments and pleas in prayer, in which holy reasoning with God he has great spiritual eloquence, so that he is seldom nonplussed in prayer, but with sweet and apt variety, is again and again pressing upon the Lord for mercy; and when ordinary prayer seems not to prevail, importunity in prayer will be expressing itself in an extraordinary way, fasting shall be joined to crying mightily, and if our prayers alone prevail not, it vill make us go another way to work with God, even to set others on work to seek God with us and for us: "I sought him, but found him not." "If you find my beloved, tell him I am sick of love."

3. It consists in a holy impatience of delay; it makes a gracious suppliant to stand upon thorns; "the captive exile hasteth to be delivered." The church is even sick of love for want of the desired presence of Jesus Christ: "Hear me speedily," says David, "my spirits fail, lest I be like to one of those that go down to the pit," it is even death to such to be delayed, much more to be denied,

hence those frequent repetitions: "How long, Lord, how long? every day, week, or month, is as seven to importunity; love in the soul to the Lord, his favors and fellowship, keeps account how long he has held us off, and therefore calls upon the soul, Go again to him, renew thy suits; speak, why dost not thou speak for a speedy answer? and faith whispers the soul in the ear, Be not put off; the Lord hath that by him for which thou comest; it is not for his honor to bid thee go and come again to-morrow, when he hath that pardon, and peace, and grace by him for which thou comestt: yea, Satan and unbelief will be charging such present pay of spiritual debts, or else to prison; and therefore fears and jealousies are raised by them both in the saints, and many times will excite desires of speedy resolutions and answers from the Lord, what he means to do for them at these times.

4. It consists in a strong resisting of discouraging suggestions, tending to beat the soul off from prayer; if the answer from within be, Trouble me not, I am in bed, yet the suit is continued, and for importunity's sake the friend arises, and supplies with bread. If the angel say to importunate, wrestling Jacob, "Let me go," he says, "Nay, I will not let thee go till thou bless me." He will hold fast whosoever says no. Let me alone, saith he to Moses, (or leave off thy prayer, as the Chaldee paraphrase reads it,) but the event showed he would not let him alone. Though God carry it towards his people sometimes as if angry, yet they pray; why art thou angry at the prayer of thy people? when his prayer is shut out, yet he knocks. "From the ends of the earth will I cry to thee; when my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Let his distances be never so great, he is resolved to cry after the Lord, and if he get but his head never so little above water, the Lord shall hear of him. One would think his discouragements such, that he were past crying any more, the waters entered into his soul; in deep waters the streams running over him; he sticketh fast in the mire where is no standing, (be is at the very bottom, and there fast in the mire,) he is weary of crying; yet he says, "But Lord, I make my prayer to thee;" and as he recovers breath, so breathes out fresh supplications to the Lord; if men or devils would be forbidding to pray, as the multitude sometimes did the poor blind man, to cry after Jesus, yet an importunate suppliant will cry so much the more, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." When distrust and distempers would be pulling such a suppliant by the sleeve, as he is going to the throne of grace, and say, What, thou go thither? alas, poor tattered creature, wilt thou go thus in thy rags? Hath the Lord nothing else to do but to wait upon such as thou art? Dost thou, poor prodigal, think that he will be spoken with, by such an one as thou art? Go pay thy debts first to divine justice, thou knowest what an one thou art, and hast been. it is for such as are fruitful, faithful, zealous, mortified, self-denying, sincere, serviceable to God and others; such as have kept close to God, that have not run into such and such sins against light, such as can confidently stay upon God; and not for thee who hast failed in all these, to draw near to him. Yea, but strength and importunity in prayer will gather strength by these oppositions, these gusts will but kindle the fire of holy desires, and make them flame out the more in prayer; and conclude, that it concerns the soul the more to beg and seek for mercy. Sometimes the guilt of some, special sin would stop the soul's mouth this way; but that also makes it complain the more, and press the harder for pardon. Sometimes the world in the occasions of it in your prayers, "that I am sick of love." Such beggars wince not much for the barking, or for some snaps of doglike enemies to prayer, nor care such beggars what they are secretly termed, the worst name is welcome, so that they may have but the alms of mercy for which they come. They meet with many a wrench and many a crush, in pressing through crowds of discontentments, with their petitions to their King's gracious throne; but

earnestness of their desires, makes them quietly bear all. In those soul wooings of Christ, such like discouragements are all nothing, if at last they may but win Christ, and gain true spiritual fellowship with him; if they find such a pearl, they weigh not any cost they are at in seeking it. If they may but gain the passage of the strait gate to life, they can very well bear the dry blows they meet with, in fighting to enter in, as the force of that phrase, αγωνιζεσθε, holds forth fighting; as those of old in the Grecian exercises, some whereof were with fists and bats. Brave spirits are up in the soul, when a spirit of importunity in prayer is stirring, and they will make suppliants bear any thing; so much also the force of the word προσκαρτερεω, for continuing instant in prayer, holds forth; continuing therein with much patient bearing of incumbrances or molestations.

6. It consists lastly in being in a holy way, unsatisfied with smaller measures of blessings, pressing still on for more. Importunate Abraham has his additional requests to the former, when they are granted. So Moses, when heard for Israel's pardon, so far forth, wants, and must have, the Lord's gracious presence along with him; and then when that is granted, he wants a further light of God's glory. And when he has got that, he has a further request for Israel again. Gideon has scarce ever done asking one sign of God's gracious presence with him, after another granted him. Those earnestnesses make them press harder for the receipt of further and larger sums of grace; those gracious recoveries make them to renew their suits and pleas; those tastes do but whet their appetites after more of such spiritual cheer; such first-fruits make them long the more for gathering in more of that blessed harvest; now and then a view and kiss of their beloved at their request, makes them more enamoured with love-desires after more.

Now of the second thing propounded. What manner of importunity is required? To which I answer, 1. Negatively. 2. Affirmatively. Negatively in two ways. 1. Look that it be not unseasonable importunity, but a seeking of Christ early, in the daytime of grace, but not in the evening, the close and ending of that day. "Thou shalt seek me early and not find me;" when the door of grace is shut, to cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," it is in vain; when men have wearied out the Lord with knocking at their hearts, and with calls, and they answer not him, "They shall cry, saith the Lord, but I will not hear."

2. Look that it be not an inordinate importunity, an importunity of some lusts, like Rachel wrestling, in prayer also, with great wrestling for a son.

How may inordinancy of affection or lust, be discerned to be the spring, and give rise to importunity in prayer?

1. When importunity in prayer for mercies which we want, is uttered with undervaluing of blessings we already have, or with discontentment at them. You fell a lusting, and wept: saying, who will give us flesh? We can see nothing but this manna. Like children, that whilst crying for an apple from their father's hand, will fling away the cake that is in their own, and so get a whipping rather than an apple. This argues an inordinancy in such children.

2. When such importunity in seeking such or such things from God, is accompanied with a prizing of a very bad estate, in the enjoyment of the things we ask: as, we remember, say they, the flesh we did eat in Egypt. They are so eager for flesh, that Egypt itself, where they had such flesh, has now an honorable memorial with them, and they could even be glad of Egypt again upon condition they had but flesh enough as formerly. A place of bondage, a place where sacrificing to the Lord

was an abomination to the Egyptians, would be a welcome place, with that desired flesh they crave. "The younger said, Father, give me the portion of goods which falleth to me." He will have it though he should want his father's presence, and the communion of his family, and be left to himself to shift for a living. The Israelites will have a king, though they are told from God that they will be in a far worse condition under their tyrannous usages, than ever they were under the government he appointed over them, even under their judges. "And you shall cry out in that day, because of your king which you shall have chosen you, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel, and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us." Like some young men, that against all their fathers' wholesome admonitions will needs have such an one for their wife, and night and day solicit their father to let them have her; though told that they will undo themselves by it.

3. When we ask things of God, that are unsuitable for our condition: as for the younger son to ask his father to have all at his own disposal, when no way fit to manage it. So for Israel in a wilderness to desire quails, a meat altogether unsuitable for their place and estate; so for James and John, to desire that one might sit at his right hand, and the other at his left hand in the kingdom of heaven, before they are fitted to suffer with Christ, or for him; to be riding on horseback ere they are able to go on foot.

4. When we are rashly importunate, as James and John were, "You ask ye know not what: " they understood not what they asked; or as in that request for fire to come down from heaven, to consume those Samaritans, Christ told them, You know not what spirits you are of: they considered not from what spirit they were moved in that request. When we wait not for God's counsel about what we are to ask; or not seasonably, before our hearts are grown inordinate with their desires: "They waited not for his counsel; they lusted in the wilderness." When desires prevent, or outrun deliberate judgment, they are not right; or when Judgment, the mistress, must wait upon these her maids, there is disorder. When your princely mind must go on foot, whilst servantly affections ride on horseback, there is confusion; when understanding must only dance after affection's pipes, there must needs be great miscarrying.

5. When we are not willing to wait the Lord's leisure for the effecting of what we ask of him; but will be asking of him in ways full of hazard, or with means of our own devising to attain our desires. As Rachel, who wrestled in prayer for a child, but whilst delayed gave her maid to Jacob to attain her desire of a child; or like David, desiring the waters of Bethlehem which could not be had, without the lifeblood of such as fetched it. Like feverish persons, flying out of their beds for the drink they ask. The Israelites' desire to go up to Canaan when God had said nay, was a lust. There were lusts in that king's extraordinary seeking of God for supplies of bread, by fasting and prayer, 2 Kings 6:30, which in delays of supply, lets drive at the Lord himself. "Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer." Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge: those breathings that are so short-winded, they are not divine inspirings.

6. When we keep not due proportions in our desires, being more importunate in corporal matters, and those of less consequence than in those spiritual matters of greatest concernment: like those who can howl upon their beds for corn and wine; and yet without heart to seek reconciliation with God. Lukewarm at the best in spiritual matters; a cake half baked. Like foolish children, hardly ever speaking of choice matters, and yet ever and anon filling the house with cries for rattles and

baubles.

7. When we fly in the face of this or that creature, lay causeless blame upon such or such persons or things, if not answered of God, in things that we crave of him. Thus Rachel wrestled with God for a child, but whilst delayed, quarrels with Jacob:

“Give me children, or else I die.” Like distempered patients, angry with their attendants, because they may not have such or such things, though forbidden by their physician. Or like children falling out with the executors of their father’s will, because they do not at their times, in their ways and proportions, pay them in what they desire.

8. When our desires in prayer tend to the service of a lust, they spring from it. And if lust be last in execution of our desire, it is the end of it, and so the rest in intention. Our prayers are in their Genesis, as they are in their analysis. When their resolution and dissolution is into inordinacies, their beginnings were assuredly some inordinacy. Such prayers and desires as have earth and flesh for their center, were assuredly earthly and carnal in their principles: such as their Omega is, such was their Alpha. The prodigal who spent what he asked of his father upon harlots, surely had some inordinate lust, which set him on work to ask the same of his father. For this the Apostle James condemns these professors: “Ye ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.”

9. When the fruition of the things so earnestly desired, proves afterwards burdensome to us. How earnest is Lot for Zoar: “Is it not a little one? and my soul shall live.” But he is weary of Zoar: Lot went up from Zoar. Thus, to the Israelites, quails overearnestly asked, become loathsome. So did they at length cry out as much upon a king, as ever they did cry out for one. This passing from one extreme to another, argueth inordinacy in the heart. Now we come more briefly to answer affirmatively.

1. Let your importunity in prayer be caused and guided by faith: so it was with the Syrophenician woman. He says not, O woman, great is thy importunity, and yet it was such; but, great is thy faith; faith doth ballast the heart aright in prayer, and keeps the swift-sailing desires thereof in their due course.

2. Let it be with filial meekness and submission. Christ offered up prayers with strong cries and tears, but annexes, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”

3. Let it be done with suitable earnestness, and seriousness in holy endeavors, in the use of lawful means to attain our spiritual desires.

Third. The reasons -calling for importunity in prayer. We might name many; as the Lord’s importunity in calling upon us; the fiery, fervent nature of the Spirit of God in us; the importunity of the wicked in their desires; the prevailing force of such holy importunity with the Lord. But we shall insist upon this one reason, taken from the evil of carelessness, or remissness in prayer, which is cross to importunity in the same, which may suffice to awaken us all to the contrary duty of importunity. Let us only hint some particulars of the evils both of sin and sorrow which attend remissness in prayer Let us consider first the evils of sin in such careless prayer.

1. A careless prayer is a blind sacrifice: the mind of such an one that so prays, is not wont to consider what he does therein. He that is careless of the manner of his approach to God, looks not to his feet, considers not that he does evil.

2. It is a lame sacrifice; it is not a complete prayer. Like the sacrifices of those careless, slightly Jewish priests of old, such an one's affections to God and good are corrupted. Their expressions in prayer are very unfit and unsuitable oftentimes unto what he is speaking of. Prayer in their mouth is as a parable in a fool's mouth, which in expression is very unequal. The prayer expressions of a drowsy professor are like the speeches of one half asleep, half awake, full of impertinences. The mind also of such an one is crippled, halteth; witness the many distractions which constantly accompany such prayer. The mind of such being not serious in prayer, and taken up in talking with God, will easily admit speech with other objects, which will be calling the mind forth to mental discourses about theta whilst praying. As it is in seeking of something which we have lost, if we mind it not seriously, we shall have trifles enough in view to draw our eyes to them; so is it in careless seeking to God in prayer.

3. Carelessness in prayer, breeds inconstancy and instability in prayer. Any occasion, yea, sometimes no occasion, shall cause a careless professor to neglect his praying. Any pretence that will serve to silence conscience, or any discouragement that will put by prying, is verified in such an one. "Will he always call upon God?" that is, he will not do it constantly. Their goodness in seeking God in prayer also, "is but as the early dew which goeth away." Nor will it be only an occasional omission, but an habitual instableness in prayer, now off, now on; now having a mind, and now no mind, to pray; until at length such a one waxes weary of prayer, which did not call upon God, namely, seriously. "Thou hast not called upon me," namely, importunately, "but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel." As it is with the sluggard, "Yet a little slumber, and yet a little sleep;" and as one sleep and slumber steals upon another, so one careless prayer begets another, at least a disposition thereunto; and one omission of prayer occasions another, though it may be an awakened conscience would fain have it otherwise; or as it is with a slightly workman, if he do but now and then forbear working, labor grows tedious to him, or at least he cannot hold out to any constancy in working. The like befalls him that is careless in praying; he cannot be constant. Such an one will rather run any hazards, to shift for comfort otherwise, than be constant in laboring in prayer for it.

4. Careless prayer rather strengthens than weakens the sins we pray against. When professors grow remiss in prayer, then corruptions presently gather head, and get the better. If Moses' hands grow heavy and remiss in prayer, flying, wounded Amalekites will rally, and give a fiercer and more victorious charge. While a Christian soldier handles this weapon of prayer carelessly, he leaves an open mark for an enemy and lust to foil and wound him, if not mortally and irrecoverably. Should a Christian traveler, though like another traveler, with his pistols in his holsters, and his sword by his side, be well weaponed, yet if careless, and as good as asleep by the way-side, he is a fit prey to any lust to rob him of his treasure; or if suddenly awakened in conscience, to see his danger; yet he is but as one suddenly awakened in a kind of amazement, and hardly in case to fight against any such robber. Yea, careless prayer lays a Christian open to all manner of temptations. It even tempts that arch robber and murderer of souls, the devil, to be making a booty of such professors. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." The disciples' carelessness of prayer, made the more ready way to Satan to tempt them to forsake their master. And it was an ominous presage to Peter in special, of his sad fall soon after. "Simon, sleepest thou? Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation."

6. Supineness in prayer is an inlet to delusive fancies and conceits. The slightest Christians in holy performances are most haunted with groundless and vanishing joys and hopes, as is evident in hypocrites who are habituated in such a careless way of prayer, and other religious exercises. As it is with other persons who are between sleeping and waking, they are subject to dreams; so it is with such like Christians.

6. Careless prayer is an inlet and sad forerunner of apostasy, if not seasonably redressed. The professors in Josias' time, that so soon turned back from God, were such as did not seek God, namely to any purpose, but at most formally and carelessly. The foolish virgins, for fashion and form's sake, go out to meet Christ in his ordinances, making it their great care to get so much oil of grace as would make them shine in religious exercises. Their oil at length failed them, and their profession and religious performances ended in a snuff, and in smoke.

Christians come not from one extreme of rash and hypocritical zeal arid fervency, to the other of utter contempt, and neglect of God arid good, but by this middling temper of slowness, from hot they come to be quite cold by this lukewarmness. When professors are once beginning to step from the height of fervency, they then haste downward apace, and if the Lord prevent not, they stay not till they fall into the bottomless pit. When Christians grow indifferent in their desires of grace, they grow as indifferent in their endeavors after it; and when once indifferent, whether they work for God or no, they are fittest to be hired to do some worse work. When Christians, through carelessness, in driving this holy trade of prayer, do not thrive but go down the wind amain, it is twenty to one but they will be taking up some other trade; it may be of covetous persons, or of time-servers, or of drunkards, or of adulterers, or of heretics, or opinionists, or the like.

Let us consider now of some evils of punishments and sorrow attending this; for this being in God's account the guise of deceivers, "That when we have a male in our own flock," as sometimes the Lord spake, we have serious spirits in other matters of the world, or the like; yet offer such an accursed thing as careless prayers, a curse of God is wont to attend it. God is wont to blast such in their spirits and gifts; so that their very gift of prayer is by degrees taken away from them; there is a secret moth that eats out the strength and beauty of it; and it is too often found, that while such are trifling about the greater matters of their souls, the Lord withholds his rich mercies from them, and while they are making some complimentary suits to Christ, he at length will be wooed no more by them, and that sad curse of God threatened against them, "And the Lord will be no more named by any mouth of the men of Judah," comes to be fulfilled in such loose-hearted professors. Prayer is cast out of their families and closets, as some refuse service, as is seen in these later days in too many; or if by some awakening afflictions sent upon them, they are roused; yet it is too often their just doom to be earnest indeed, but without any regard thereunto by the Lord: "They shall cry, but I will not hear." But at best any degree of such a careless spirit in prayer, will become very grievous to us, if truly gracious. Whence that way of complaint, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." It is as grievous to such souls to have their spiritual joints either bound or benumbed, as it is to men when their body has the palsy; when in prayer a gracious heart is ever reaching out to take an approaching mercy, and then through a little remissness the mercy is let slip, and the advantage at that time lost, it must needs be grievous to the godly.

Fourth, what means we should use to be importunate in prayer.

I answer, get the more abundant knowledge of God, and of ourselves, but especially acquaint ourselves with God's friendly and merciful disposition towards us. He who was importunate for bread, knew he was at a friend's door. Like the Syrians, hearing that the kings of Israel were merciful kings, quickened them to the earnest seeking of their favor. It will make a beggar earnest for an alms, when he knows where a bountiful person lives, who is not wont to send any beggar away empty.

2. Cherish the hope of the Lord's mercy to us:

"Let them cry mightily to the Lord." "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" The possibility that the Lord was within hearing, and might open to the Ninevites, made them knock so hard at his door of grace.

3. Be sensible of our utter destitution of what we are to ask of God, and our inability to get it any other way: "Lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine is come, and I have nothing to set before him." "I perish for hunger; I will arise, and go to my father, and say, Make me as one of thy hired servants." "My heart is desolate within me." "My soul thirsteth after thee." When all other means fail such spiritual beggars, and that only door of grace is left for their relief, or else they must famish, how earnestly will it cause them to knock there: "A voice of weeping and supplication was heard." "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

4. Account highly of the mercies we ask in prayer: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice after understanding." "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hidden treasure." The church was sick of love, and used all means to find him; and no wonder, her beloved was the chiefest of ten thousand to her.

5. Take holy advantages of movings of the spirit in prayer, and of Christ's approaches to us; opportunity helps importunity: "And behold two blind men sitting by the way-side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David." "And Jesus stood still and called them, and said, What will you that I do unto you?" "They say to him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened." When Christ by his spirit calls us to him, puts us upon asking, and when he stands still waiting to be gracious to us, let him not go till he bless us. When beggars come whilst a bountiful person is giving to the poor, or in dinner time, when food is stirring, they will not go away without something. So if we perceive the Lord ready to give, put in hard for a blessing.

6. Improve former advantages gotten of God by prayer. "I will cry to God Most High, unto God who performs all things for me." When we see crying will do, it will put us on not to spare for crying. Now in this holy search after experimental knowledge of God's grace, we now and then light upon a smaller vein of such treasure, we will not spare any pains in digging; when in our daily wooing of Christ in prayer, we meet now and then with a smile and kiss, and love-token, it will make us follow our suit close.

7. Go about prayer as our only business, which then we have to do, engaging ourselves to attend it. Saints are spiritual solicitors by their calling as saints. That which made Abram so urgent in his request is this, "Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord."

8. Chide ourselves sadly, and be seriously abased for any carelessness at any time in prayer, as the prophet complaining thereof: "We have not called upon thy name, nor stirred up ourselves to take hold of thee." "Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?" As Elisha was wroth with Joash for smiting but thrice, and then staying, saying, "Thou shouldst now have smitten five or six times." Or as they did chide sleeping Jonah, when he should have been praying: "Awake thou sleeper, and call upon thy God." So should we chide our careless spirits to awaken unto prayer.

9. Set the examples of the most importunate suppliants of God before our eyes: "Elias prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not." A very dullard will pluck up his feet when he sees how nimble his leaders are.

Lastly, take heed of all such things as are enemies and impediments to importunity. Such as are inordinate desires after other things; we cannot to any purpose follow several suits at once, in several courts; we cannot ply the world's court and God's too. The messengers are sent out another way which should importune heaven, and they cannot be here and there too; whilst our winged desires are hastening after other things, we are slowest in moving heavenward with wings as angels.

2. Immoderate intentness, even upon our lawful occasions; when our spirits are even riveted to our occasions, they will not be easily got free for prayer, they must be even filed off again, no ordinary pulling at them will do: when we are too busy all the day long in speech with such occasions, they will be calling even in prayer for a word with us.

3. Inconsiderate roving of mind in the interims between our praying seasons; when we let our fleet thoughts fly hither and thither without restraint, they will not be so easily lured by us, and come at our call, to become fixed in prayer.

4. Admission of wandering thoughts in prayer, and too easy yielding to carelessness therein; they grow unmannerly bold, when in the least entertained.

5. Resting in graces and comforts received by prayer; we are sure to become remiss in praying the next time, if we feed our thoughts too much upon what we got the last time we prayed, or if careless once in prayer, because secretly thinking to make amends the next time, we shall be then also the more careless.

6. Misgiving apprehensions touching God and his grace. That thought, "What profit should we have, if we pray to him?" makes them careless of coming near the Lord. A petitioner must needs be heartless in his suit, if he think that the king is wroth with him. And a beggar has no mind to stand begging at a known churl's door. To the last query, touching the marks of right and acceptable importunity in prayer.

I answer, we may discern our importunity in prayer to be acceptable; when our importunity is the importunity of a suppliant, of a beggar in spirit; when it is attended with much self-abasement, as the importunate Canaanite, who looked upon herself as a dog: "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs under the table." Importunate Abraham looketh at himself as dust and ashes.

2. When our hearts in prayer are well warmed, then the end of fervent prayer is attained; when our hearts wax warm by it, and the means is acceptably used, then God's ends in the use thereof are attained.

3. When we are in special manner attent to the work we have in hand, so to the success thereof; as the woman that besought Christ in an acceptable way of importunity she was awake, for she picks out something for her holy advantage, even out of that word which Christ let fall in way of answer: "It is not meet to take children's bread, and give it to dogs:

Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." That prayer was full of holy pleas, and so are importunate prayers. And the prophet believes it was acceptable: "He will speak peace unto his people." But withal, he was in a lilting posture after his answer, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

4. When we are as earnest and serious in returning praises for mercies received and begged, as we were in begging for them. The Samaritan among the other lepers, also lifted up his voice with them, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us; and he is as earnest and loud in his praises: "And one of them, when he saw he was healed, turned back and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down at Jesus' feet giving him thanks, and he was a Samaritan." And Christ himself justifies his importunity as a fruit of his faith: "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole."

11. Part 2, Chapter 2. Opportunity of Prayer

CHAPTER II.

OPPORTUNITY OF PRAYER.

We come now to the second thing included in the modification of this duty of prayer; that it be without ceasing. Namely, that we pray opportunely. When Paul says that without ceasing, he had remembrance of Timothy in his prayers night and day, he means, that upon all occasions, and as he had an opportunity, he did remember him in his prayers. He takes all opportunities offered by the Lord to pray, and omits them not; he prays without ceasing. It is then the duty of all the Lord's people to pray opportunely, or to take all holy opportunities to pray unto the Lord. For the better handling of this duty, consider these particulars :—

First, that it is seldom that any time is unseasonable for prayer.

Secondly, that yet there is a time when the Lord will not listen to prayer, no, not of his own people.

Thirdly, that in mercy the Lord gives unto his people opportunities and seasons for prayer.

Fourthly, that the Lord's people are bound to improve all such opportunities of prayer.

First, very briefly. It is very rare that any time is unseasonable for prayer; it appears that the saints are enjoined to pray always. And this that the title of God is to be a God hearing prayer: "O thou that art bearing prayers." He is always hearing the prayers of some of his people, and ready to hear the rest.

Second, more largely; there is a time when the Lord will not listen to prayer, no, not of his people. Praying at such times, they pray out of due season. It is not then so fit a time for them to pray. As,

1. When they are under offences unrepented of: "First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." It is not seasonable for Job's friends to offer to God, until reconciled to injured Job. If we are out with the favorites of the king of saints, it is not seasonable to come to the king with petitions. It is not a season to seek peace with Christ the head, when peace with his members is not sought. If our heavenly Father should not hold off his respects to children's requests, who offend their brethren, they would never seek to be reconciled.

2. When any of them too willingly and contentedly remain under the guilt of some known sin against the Lord: "When you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood." "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings," etc. "Come now, and let us reason together." And then only it is seasonable to pray, when we lift up our hands and hearts: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned." "If thou preparest thy heart, and stretchest out thy hand toward heaven, if iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away," else all that is to no purpose. God heareth not sinners, that is, impenitent ones. It is no fit season for us to go a wooing to Christ, if not clear of privy leagues with any of our lusts; nor is it seasonable to trade with the Lord in prayer, if we have any kind of traffic

with his proclaimed enemies.

3. When we are under any special power of passion, and (as the not seeing the sin of it) to lift up wrathful hands is unacceptable, and so unseasonable: "Lifting up holy hands without wrath." It is not seasonable to offer up our sacrifice with such common, yea, wild-fire. Such leaven of wrath and malice is apt to sour our very Mincha, or offering, and makes it come as out of due season. Such was the petition of James and John to Christ: "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven to consume them?" Such were Job's petitions, Job 3:1-26. Such was that of Jonah: "Take away my life from me." As in a strong blustering time, knocks at the door are scarce heard, if at all; so the noise of our distempers outsounds the voice of our knockings in prayer. It were better to pause awhile till the noise be abated. And as Revelation 9:1-21, silence was made awhile before that the holy incense was offered so should it be here.

4. When our heads and hearts are full, and even sore charged with carnal occasions and inordinate thoughts about them; it is not so seasonable to go abruptly from such a crowd, and throng into the holy presence of the Lord without some pause. Such rashness is irregular, and therefore unseasonable; such a prayer will be no better than a dream arising from multitude of business, filled with multiplicity of unseasonable, impertinent, and independent expressions.

5. When we come to pray in remediless cases, of for persons past recovery: "Pray not for this people, for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble." How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?"

6. When we will be praying at such times wherein other ordinances do call for our attendance. As when we will be praying at home, when we should rather be in the public assembly, or praying in our closets, when religious family exercise requires our presence.

Now let us consider of prayer seasons offered by the Lord, which he requires us to take. These opportunities are either general or special. The general opportunity of prayer is that general season of grace held forth in the offers of the dispensations of the gospel: "Seek him whilst he may be found." While God may be found, it is a season to seek him:

"If you will inquire, return, come." While the prophets encourage to come, it is a season to inquire. Our cry is but the echo of the Lord's call: "When thou saidst, Seek my face; my heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." The echo waits upon the voice; a demand of grace upon a former offer of it; it is very seasonable. This blessed day-work is most suitable to the daytime of the gospel and grace of God. But besides this general opportunity, there are some more special praying seasons: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a finding time," (as it is in the Hebrew). As bountiful princes have their seasons for petitioners, so the Lord has his for petitioners to come in with their suits, and have each their days of audience. Our blessed Father has his set days of paying to each child his portion of mercy and blessing upon demand and suit for it. Now these special seasons of prayer are of three sorts.

1. When God in special sort is near to us. Or secondly, we in special sort near to him. Or thirdly, in case of emergencies, or special necessities calling for speedy help.

First, when God in special is near to us, then call upon him while he is near. The Lord as our gracious king goeth his holy progress, and now he is nearer this people and such and such

subjects; and now again he is nearer to others: let each accordingly take and observe their particular seasons of holy approaches to him with their suits. If the loadstone be near, the very iron moves; the approaches of the Lord to us have, or should have this holy, attractive virtue to draw us near to him in prayer.

1. Now the Lord is thus in special sort near to us, by some special mercy vouchsafed to us, as when answering to former prayer: "The Lord is nigh to them that are of a broken heart." Wherein does he show that he is nigh to them? It follows, "He sayeth such as be of a contrite spirit." God's ordering some special favor to his people by his providence is called his visiting of his people. The saint's repairing to the Lord with fervent, earnest prayer, is called their visiting of the Lord: "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee;" how? "they have poured out a prayer to thee," etc. When God first begins to give us a gracious visit, it is seasonable and suitable for us to give him prayer visits: "And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also which thou hast spoken." "And Moses said, I beseech thee show me thy glory." Moses made God's time of giving, to be his opportunity of begging mercy. If ever the saints' hearts are filled with love, it is when they partake of manifest tokens of the Lord's love to them; and if ever it be a season of praying, it is then, when in such a friendly frame: "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice." Therefore will I call upon him, or speak lovingly to him. Words spoken to God in love, to him come the most seasonably, for they are taken in love by the Lord. When the Lord in his providence bestows upon his people something whereon the image of his special favor is stamped, it is a time in special to acknowledge the Lord by prayer, as praying is called: "In all thy ways acknowledge him," even by prayer of faith.

Secondly, the Lord is thus near to us by any special motions of the spirit, especially such as put us upon prayer; when the Lord does inwardly speak to our hearts such like words as, "Ask of me touching my sons and daughters; and concerning the work of my hands command ye me;" or when Christ by his Spirit says to our hearts, as sometimes he did to them by word of mouth: "Hitherto ye have asked nothing; ask, that your joy may be full." Or as he said to his people, "Let me hear thy voice, for it is sweet." It is now a time to speak to the Lord, that we seem not to slight him. When thou saidst, namely, by the spirit inwardly, as well as by the word outwardly, "Seek my face; my heart answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." If that holy motion to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give to thee," etc., made even a sleeping time a supplicating time, much more may holy motions of God this way, make our waking times wrestling seasons. Such drops of a spirit of prayer are pledges of large outpouring of that spirit upon us, if thankfully received and improved. Such soliciting directions given us from the Lord, argue that assuredly it is both a praying and speeding time. If the Lord prepare the heart, and put it upon prayer, teach it how to pray:

"He surely boweth the ear to hear." It is Esther's time to ask, when king Ahasuerus himself puts her upon it: "What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee; and thy request? it shall be performed." So is it here. And let none abuse this to strengthen any fond conceit, that we must never pray till we find the spirit first moving us to it. It is our opportunity indeed of prayer when the spirit moves thereto, but not the only season of prayer, as we have in part showed, and must further mention other seasons thereof as well as that. We must sometimes pray, that we may pray, and when as we are apt to judge ourselves, that we are most unfit to pray, then to pray that we may become fit to pray; as by speaking, men are fitted to speak, by running to run, by wrestling to wrestle, by laboring to labor.

Thirdly, he is thus near us by some special word of his mouth, especially by some gracious promise spoken and manifested to us; and that also is a special season for prayer: "For thou, O Lord God, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house, therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." It is a season of holy talking with God, when he first enters speech with us by some such words of his grace. it is seasonable to open our mouths wide, and receive grace and peace, when the Lord sets open any such golden pipe as is the promise; the gospel is in every part of it, the ministration of the spirit, and of life, and of faith, and of peace. The words of God's grace pacify and still the tumults in the soul, and enlarge and quicken the heart. Now if ever it be a season to speak to the Lord in prayer, it is when unmannerly distempers which too often silence us are put to silence, and when our hearts are set at an holy liberty to pour out themselves before the Lord.

Fourthly, the Lord is near his people, when he visits or afflicts them. "What shall I answer him when he visits?" or afflicts. "What is man that thou shouldest visit him?" The Lord is then near to us to try us; to take an account of our misdoings, to observe how we carry it under affliction, to comfort and support us, to sanctify affliction to us, and to save and deliver us out of the same, and therefore in special sort it is seasonable to cry unto him, and to ask a correcting father's forgiveness: "If any be afflicted, let him pray." "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me." God does then speak to us by his rod. It is therefore seasonable then to answer him in our prayers. If ever a gracious heart be humble, sensible, serious, and lively, it is then when in affliction, when in the fire. A time of pangs is a time of crying out to the Lord; when God visits saints by affliction, it is seasonable for them to visit him with prayers: "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer to thee when thy chastening was upon them."

5. The Lord is near to us by some special deliverance out of affliction: this is likewise the Lord's visiting time when he comes to see us: "For the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." If God will thus visit his vine, the people of God look at themselves as engaged to call upon him: "Behold, visit this thy vine, quicken us; so will we call upon thee." When the winter of the church's afflictions and captivity is over, Christ expects to hear his church's voice in prayer: "I will bring the third part through fire, and they shall call upon me." A person newly delivered out of this pit:

"He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him." Little do Christians, sharing in a time of the Lord's clemency and pity, in their deliverance from sick-bed and other notable hazards of life, know what a fair opportunity they have to speak for further mercy; and how much they lose, if they grow negligent in improving such an opportunity of prayer, when if ever, praying dispositions stir afresh in them.

6. God is thus near us when his time of special promises draws near. Then God's faithfulness, immutability, almightiness, come into view. And it is a season then in our prayers to go out and meet the Lord. "Then shall ye call on me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you." When? "When the seventy years shall be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, then shall you call upon me." "I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem; and I set my face unto the Lord to seek

by prayer and supplications.” Such a time is a speeding time; for at the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth;” and therefore the fittest season for prayer. A fair day may well be expected to ensue, when the saints are so early at this work of prayer, even as soon as any morning beam of divine righteousness begins to break forth. And surely such is this very present time, when if ever, it is a season of frequent and fervent praying. When the Lord is coming out in view, to accomplish his great designs of grace to his churches, and vengeance to antichrist and his abettors. When his wondrous works in our native land and the neighbor nations do declare that his name is near. A second special season of prayer is, when we are near to the Lord. True it is that all the saints are always near unto the Lord, in respect of their reconciliation wrought by Christ, and their union with Christ, God-man, and the like. Yet are there differences of their actual nearness to the Lord in many other respects, as might be shown in sundry particulars. Let us instance only in two or three branches of this holy nearness of ours to God. Which are several opportunities of prayer.

We are near to God by some solemn engagement, whether more publicly or more secretly plighted before the Lord. Thus Israel was a people near to the Lord. “And what nation is there so great,” said Moses, “who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for.” “I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord.”

Secondly, we are near to God when upon any work of reformation of special enormities in ourselves or others, which alienates them or us from the Lord. Zealous reforming rulers, whose hearts stand bent, as much as in them lies, to reduce the church to its primitive purity and perfection, they are said in that respect also, as well as others, to engage themselves to approach to the Lord. So zealous reforming Asa, and others joining with him in that work, are said to be with God. So those zealous friends of Christ, that set themselves against the Babylonish whore and her abominations, are said to be with Christ. And surely as they are with him, so he is that while with them, as he said: “The Lord is with you, whilst you are with him.” And there being such nearness betwixt them and God, then surely is it a choice season of speaking with God in prayer. For indeed it is a choice speeding time, as the prophet there adds: “And if you seek him, he will be found of you.” “Wash you, make you clean,” etc. “Come now, and let us reason together.” It is the fittest time to offer up this holy incense of prayer in these fiery, zealous times; and to plead with the Lord when alienating sins are removed. Thus godly Nehemiah takes such an opportunity for prayer:

“Remember me, O my God, for good.” When the graces of the spirit have been stirring in one good work, they are the fittest to be employed in another. And when we have been doing for God, if we take the advantage of time and of our hearts to speak to him, he will be doing for us; if we give any thing to him, he will assuredly give us something that is better if we ask it.

3. A third special season of prayer is, when any special extremities and urgencies are upon us. Prayer being one of our last means to be used for attaining succor from God; and our very extremities having their cry in the ears of the Lord, it will be most seasonable that we join our lips with theirs, that they make together the louder and more prevailing outcry. It is meetest for us then to go a begging to the door of grace, when in such extreme necessities. God accounts the time of our extremities in asking, to be his opportunities of hearing and helping. Let us instance in these four cases.

First, in case of intricacies of providence, which merely concern ourselves or others. Now in such cases of providence prayer is most seasonable, for it is a recourse to the Lord for inquiry, or for his sentence in a case of controversy. Rebecca found by experience that he going thus to God to inquire in that difficulty was very opportune. The Lord interprets to her the meaning of that unwonted struggling of twins in her womb. David, when about to remove his habitation, and yet not knowing whither, finds this inquiry seasonable, by his answer, "Go unto Hebron." When that sad affliction was on David and his people, and the particular cause unknown, this inquiry came in season, and made discovery wherefore the famine had been so long upon them. Asaph doth but go into the sanctuary, and then all his hard questions about the reasons of the wicked's prosperity are answered, and all that cloud on his mind is scattered: "Until I went into the sanctuary, and then I understood their end."

Secondly, in case of some masterly distempers gaining upon us, and we know not how to redress the same, though we sadly mourn under it. Such a time of need is a time of speeding in seeking for answerable help at the throne of grace. When any lust begins to grow more seditious against the Lord Jesus, when it becomes more headstrong against his sacred majesty, and will not be curbed by all our expressions of shame and sorrow, and detestation and defiance of it, it is high time to draw a solemn petition to our gracious king, to take some effectual order to suppress it.

3. In case of some weighty service of God, which we look at as above our strength. Now must young Solomon, that thinks himself but a child for such employment, ask of God.

4. In case of greatest danger impending, as when, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed." Now, if ever, poor Ninevites must call mightily to the Lord; and "God saw their works, and repented him of the evil." God's hand is up against Israel with his slaughtering weapon. Now pray, Moses, or never; and he did so, and God repented of that evil also.

Lastly, that we are bound to take these opportunities of prayer is undeniable; we are bound to pray without ceasing, and therefore to be taking all opportunities. And wherefore else does the Lord put such a talent of opportunity of prayer into our hands, but that he expects the faithful improvement thereof to be made by us? or else he will assuredly take his time to express his displeasure against us for so gross a neglect of his grace, and of our own soul's advantage. But that we may be quickened to pray opportunely, or to take all opportunities of prayer, consider

1. That opportunity is the best, yea, the very all of time. Hence this, Pray continually, that is opportunely; he that prays as oft as he has opportunity, prays always.

2. That opportunity of asking offered by the Lord, does engage the Lord to answer. Why should the Lord set out such alms-days, and audience-days, and some way signify it to his people, if he meant not to hear and help them? Friends in such a case stand upon their credit, if they appoint times to meet, and to entertain a friendly discourse with their friends, they are not wont to fail them; so here opportunity of asking given us by the Lord, it emboldens us to ask, and to expect a seasonable answer.

3. That opportunity of prayer does grace and beautify our prayers. As every thing else is beautiful in its season, so is prayer in its season. Opportunity is a wheel to the chariot of prayer, which safely, strongly, and swiftly carries it in before the Lord. A word spoken in season to men, is, in the Hebrew phrase, a word spoken upon the wheels. So is it in these words spoken to the Lord in their

season; yea, opportunity helps to carry our prayer also in an holy state before the Lord, as upon a royal chariot wheel. Opportunity of prayer greatly furthers their acceptance in Christ. These fruits of our lips also are then best, and most welcome to the Lord, when brought forth in their season.

4. That seasonable prayer is ever speeding prayer: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning," namely, praying in the season of prayer.

5. That opportunity of seeking and getting grace by prayer and other means, is begged for us by Christ: "In an acceptable time have I heard thee," as saith the blessed Father to the mediator. And thence it is that the members of this head of the church have any such time of acceptance. For he says, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee. Now is the acceptable time."

6. That great will be our disadvantage by letting such holy opportunities of prayer slip; for besides the loss of such jewels, and of what we might have gained by trading with the same, our spirits will come to be very much straitened, and hardened, as sad experience in the saints themselves witnesses.

12. Part 2, Chapter 3. Constancy in Prayer

CHAPTER III.

CONSTANCY IN PRAYER.

We come now to the third and last thing held forth in the modification of the practice of this duty of prayer, that it be without ceasing, that is, constantly. Now for this, consider,

1. What it is to pray constantly, or what is implied in it; and why we must so pray; and then we will make one brief use of it.

First, to pray constantly is, not to give out from praying; not to let God alone until he does bless us; to pray and not to faint; not to give God rest. To look to him in prayer, until that lie have mercy on us. May any true child of God give off prayer for a season?

Yea, verily: God's own dear saints may be weary in praying, though not so weary of prayer. The duty itself is to them very desirable in itself: but the discouragements may be such in times of temptation, that they may be even afraid to go to God to seek his face: "I am weary with my groaning; I am weary of my crying;" yet he gave not off wholly, or not long. "But as for me, my prayer is unto thee." If they give up for a short time solemn prayer, they cease not to be darting up ejaculatory prayers: "I said I am cast out of thy sight, yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." When God in times of desertion seems to turn his back upon his saints, or they, through distrust, are as if turning their back upon him, yet they give many of these love casts of the eyes of their soul towards God; desires will be ever and anon stepping out of such a gracious heart to look after the Lord. That holy fire within the heart, though it blazes not out, yet will be ever and anon sending out these sparks. There are times wherein the saints are so spiritually sick of sin and of temptation, that their very speech fails them; even they have their spiritual wounds, and may lay awhile speechless; yet either they are making these holy signs in their fainting, or some of this holy breath is stirring. If Hezekiah cannot speak out in solemn prayer, yet can he chatter, and make these shorter holy mutterings of his heart, and these dovelike moans of his spirit: "I. am oppressed, O Lord, undertake for me."

How comes it to pass that any such sad silence in respect of solemn prayer does at any time, befall God's own people?

Sometimes through some dangerous fall into some heinous sin; as other speech is sometimes lost by bodily falls, so is this by such spiritual falls. So David, after his great fall into the sins of murder and adultery, lay speechless in this respect for a while:

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old." So dangerous declinings and backslidings in religion, occasion some temporary cessations of solemn prayer. Hence it is said, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but hast been weary of me, O Israel." "There is none that calleth upon thy name; that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." Great guilt breeds great horror and despondency of mind and heart; which with unbelief blending itself, causes poor Christians even

to give off prayer in their desperate fits. As heathen Tully said to his brother, I would pray to the gods for those things, but that they have given over to hear my prayers; or as desperate Saul, perceiving God answered him no more, will go to him no more to inquire. It is thus with the saints; so far as desperate despondencies grow upon them, and represent the Lord to their souls as all justice, they dare not come to him in these fits. Sometimes they pore, too much upon discouragements which they meet with in prayer within themselves as that they pray with so many distempers and distractions intermixed, and with so little life, or liberty of spirit, or comfort, or quiet, or faith, or good success, and the like; that as good never a whit, as never the better; and they are even loth sometimes to go apart to pray. And sometimes Christians fall into some such errors touching prayer, as for a time do take them off from it, imagining that God being a spirit, must be worshipped only in spirit and in truth; and so not by any bodily worship. That bodily exercise even in prayer profits not; that all outward forms of worship are abolished. That Christians must have some immediate light of the Spirit, and unwonted suggestions putting them upon prayer, if at any time they do set upon prayer. These and sundry like delusive principles, too rife in these latter days, make too great and too long interruptions with too many hopeful professors in this holy exercise of solemn prayer. To pray constantly is also to maintain praying dispositions; that though we actually pray not without intermission, or do nothing else but pray, as those fanatical Euthites of old, yet in the inward frame and bent of our heart, we cease not prayer. There is still a spirit in us, crying, Abba Father, Galatians 4:6, a disposing us upon all occasions to go to God as a Father in prayer. Christians of all sorts, both ministers and others, must have their vials full of prayers, ready still to pour them out, albeit they actually do not without intermission. They are to be ready evermore to offer up those holy odors, and that holy incense, though not always actually offering the same. The church in its members, must have honeycomb lips, ready to drop this sweet, wholesome honey of prayer, though they be not dropping the same every moment. And good reason is it why each gracious person should maintain always a praying frame in his heart; for a praying frame is a most childlike frame. If ever the love of sons and daughters of God be stirring in them, it is then; if ever their hearts are filled with holy awe of God, and faith in him, it is then; if ever they are ready to do any thing for God, it is then. The same spirit which is to them a spirit of adoption, acts in them as a spirit of prayer; and where there is a spirit moving to prayer, or to cry Abba Father, there is a spirit of adoption. Again, a frame of prayer is most sweet, calm, and comfortable: and thence opposed to the spirit of bondage, working fear; amazing, discouraging, sinking fear. But a breeding and feeding filial boldness and freeness with God, as a child with his father.

Again, it is a most free, and best privileged frame of spirit; and hence also opposed to that servile frame. Is any free to pray, and free in praying? surely those cords of slavish distempers are broken in sunder. A praying frame is likewise a most evangelical frame: being redeemed from the laws, rigor, and confinement, we are most at liberty to address ourselves thus, as children to our heavenly Father: "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons: and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father." A praying frame is also a most heavenly and gracious frame. A spirit of grace and spirit of supplication, or a spirit disposing to pour out holy supplications, are inseparable companions: "I will pour out upon them a spirit of grace and of supplication." No grace is wanting, where a spirit of prayer is not wanting. All and every grace is stirring, where that spirit of prayer is working. A praying frame is an humble frame of heart: the saints never mourn more savingly over

their sins, even as crucifying the Lord Jesus, than when in such a frame. A praying frame is a believing frame, and a believing frame is a praying frame; then have they the most clear and effectual views of him whom they have pierced. To conclude this, a praying frame both furthers our delight in prayer, and makes it every way more easy and pleasant to us; that we are not so apt to give out through emergent difficulties or discouragements therein; yea, and it furthers the good success of our prayer with the Lord himself.

How may a believer maintain in himself a praying frame?

1. Let such as would hold up such a blessed frame in their hearts, be daily drawing from the flowers of God's providences and promises, some spiritual sweetness; and then our spiritual combs will be dropping ripe. Drone-like professors, whilst they neglect this, and live upon an old stock of grace or comfort received, grow altogether listless to prayer; they have enough already, what need they ask more? But this beelike diligence in the saints will make their lips like the dropping honey-comb. And this is done mostly by daily meditation, whereby we do in a holy manner, sit and dwell upon, and draw out the sweet and sap which is in God's words and works: "Consider my meditation," that is, prayer. What David brought into the retired corners of his soul by holy contemplation, be dropped out in prayer. Meditation fills the vessel of a gracious heart, and prayer opens the heart and pours out the things therein. By meditation we beat the spices, and cut the offering to pieces, and lay them in order, fit to be offered, and then we are the fitter to offer the same up in prayer. Meditation digs and searches, and finds out the precious metals and materials, which being ready at hand, are the sooner and the better coined in prayer.

2. Let such be improving all praying motions and stirrings. We shall never hold on in prayer without ceasing, and in continual praising, unless we attend that counsel. Quench not the Spirit, even in any strong, warm, and lively motions also, which he may make that way in our hearts. David, who says that he gave himself to prayer, or as it is in the Hebrew, "I prayer," as if made up of prayer, and doing little else but praying: he says also, "When thou saidst, Seek my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." He did not slight or put off any strong motions of the Spirit in his heart to seek the Lord, but made faithful and fruitful improvement thereof. Christ puts the church upon it, to let him hear her voice, and she hath a request ready for him. And so, "Cause me to hear thy voice," saith Christ to the church. She speaks in prayer: "Make haste, my beloved."

3. Let such be oft and much in ejaculatory prayer: we may be sure to find our hearts in elevated frames, when we have been oft heaving and lifting at them. When we have been dealing with God just before, and have made so many short essays, we are the fitter to deal with him more solemnly. Moses was tampering and catching at the Lord thus, before he spake out so solemnly: "Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people?" etc. For God saith to Moses, "Let me alone." When we have so oft whispered thus with God beforehand, we are the fitter to talk and speak out before him: "Hear my cry, attend to my prayer;" yet nothing expressed what he said; he was at it in ejaculatory crying and praying, and thence is so bent for more solemn prayer, expressed in the verses following: "From the end of the earth will I cry to thee," etc. These running grasps and trips do much help our holy wrestling, praying art, and skill and courage; when we do in ejaculatory prayers oft sally out upon our spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world, we are the fitter to maintain a solemn fight against them in our more solemn prayers.

4. Let such maintain in their souls that precious frame, poverty of spirit. That will teach us praying eloquence, help us much with praying arguments, and quicken up in us all praying desires, as we see persons pinched with extreme wants and penury: of all others, the poor oppressed ones, as the Hebrew is, have their hearts set and fitted by God for prayer:

“Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the poor, thou wilt prepare their hearts,” namely, to pray, “thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.”

3. To pray without ceasing, is to be very frequent in prayer; so we say, you are always doing thus or thus; we mean you are very often doing so. “Ye have asked nothing,” that is, but very seldom. Ask; that is, more frequently; frequent prayer keeps every grace active; frequent uttering our wants and ails keeps us humble; the often opening of our spiritual wounds keeps us tender; the more we trade with God about heaven’s commodities, the more it keeps up the price of them in our hearts; we then vend and utter them readily, in other parts of our holy conversation; and making quicker sale that way, we make the quicker return again to God for more.

How oft must we pray? As oft as opportunity is offered, as was said before. yet twice a day at the least, must be to us a time of praying. Hence the morning and evening sacrifice of old, unto which the prophet alludes, and calls it a seeking of God evermore, as held out in his tabernacle. The very birds, morning and evening, and some also, as the nightingale, in the night also, are in their manner lifting up their notes unto their maker and maintainer. “Give us this day our daily bread,” must needs imply a daily prayer for it; and as twice a day, at least, our bodies need supply of bread, so is it fit, that both body and soul be employed twice a day in solemn seeking of the Lord about that, and all other things which we need, or the blessing of the Lord thereupon.

Suppose a Christian take the seasons of morning and evening for family prayer; must he take the same seasons for closet prayer also?

We should, as much as in us lies, and the providence of God ministers opportunities of it, endeavor the same; one duty may not willingly be omitted because of the other. It has been proved that both are duties, and the saints will have respect to all God’s commandments. As a Christian is considered singly and absolutely, so secret prayer lies upon him; but as in relation to others, so also prayer with others is his duty: as his estate is, so is his bond of duty doubled. The carnal heart of man will more cavil, and startle at prayer by ourselves alone, than at that with others: our natures will less easily be strangers to services to which others are privy, as we see in hypocrites and familists, than to such as the Lord only beholds; but no wiles of our heart or Satan, should draw us from a commanded duty in Scripture. And indeed, we under the gospel should not be less in holy serving of God with our spirits, than those under the law, but rather more. Hence it is that the wooden or incense altars for the incense of prayer, is in Ezekiel typically represented to be much larger, under the times of the gospel than ever under the law. That under the law was a cubit in length, a cubit in breadth, and two cubits in height. That which Ezekiel sees in vision, is three cubits high, and two cubits long: the breadth is indefinite and unlimited, showing that the saints under the gospel would make much more improvement of the Lord Jesus, their holy altar, in prayer, and make use of his mediation and intercession by faith, in their heavenly supplications, for height more sublime, for continuance more stable and lasting than the saints of old were ordinarily wont to do. Hence a spirit of supplication promised in those days, not to be barely dropped, but abundantly to be poured out upon the saints.

4. To be constant in prayer, is to be in a course of prayer daily; implied also in daily prayer to be made for daily bread. Hence Paul enjoining praying always, joins persevering, or holding on our course in prayer: "Continue instant in prayer." As for reasons why we ought to pray thus constantly, they are briefly these.

1. The Lord is very constant in calling upon us. He daily spreads out his hands to us; we may well be daily lifting up our hearts and hands to him.

2. Jesus Christ intercedes for us without ceasing; he ever lives to make intercession for us, coming unto God by him. It is all his work in a manner; therefore we may well be so much taken up with this business of prayer.

3. The main matters of our prayers are everlasting matters, and everlasting mercies call for incessant prayers: yea, the praises one day to be returned for answers of prayers, will be everlasting; and there would be some proportion of perpetuity in our holy prayers.

4. The Lord ceases not to bless us till we cease begging: but if we give up praying, he will forbear his wonted giving; so long as Abraham held on asking, the Lord held on answering. When Abraham left off communing with the Lord, he goes up from Abraham. If Joash be scanty in smiting with his darts, his victories over the Syrians are the less. Fewer spiritual wrestlings will issue in fewer spiritual conquests. The oil of grace still runs, as long as there are empty vessels to receive the same. As sometimes Sir Walter Raleigh answered Queen Elizabeth's demand, when he would leave begging of her: "Not till your majesty," said he, "cease giving." So should we, perceiving that whilst we seek the Lord, he is found of us. We should resolve to hold on seeking, and pray as long as we prosper in it.

5. Holy constancy in prayer, will be an argument of most integrity in it. The hypocrite will not pray always. They are elect ones which are so incessant in prayer; cry night and day. They are natural fruits to trees, which they bring forth constantly. So constancy in holy prayer argues prayer to be in a holy wise natural to us as saints, and that there is in us some praying nature. It is a beam of divine immutability, amidst variety of changes in other things, yet to be unchangeable in our way of holiness, and therefore of prayer. The saints, whatever their changes otherwise, yet are suppliants:

"From beyond the river of Ethiopia shall my suppliants come." That is, my saints, my effectual called ones, which will be continually, even naturally, making holy supplications to me. If abroad, they are conscientious in prayer, and so likewise if at home. If free, then free to pray; if bond, yet the Lord's free men to pray. In privileged and peaceable times they continue praying, and so they do in troublesome times; whilst the light of God shines in their tabernacles, and on their spirits, they labor in prayer; and so in darkness of temptations, afflictions, etc., they hold on praying.

6. Special and desirable benefits come by constancy in prayer. It is a special help against all worldly temptations. If we would not be charged with cares of this life, pray always. Men much in prayer with God, are ever the most weaned from the world. They have so many sweet discourses with God, that other talks with the world are more harsh and burdensome to them; they are so oft in speech with the spouse of their souls, that they cannot affect to speak familiarly with that harlot. They are so much in heaven that their spirits cannot be much in earth. They drive so gainful a trade in that celestial city, that they have little delight to be peddling elsewhere about trifles. They

fare so well at their father's house, that they care not for the devil's husks, or the world's scraps. It is likewise a means to escape the displeasure of God, which lights upon others; to escape that which comes as a snare, which takes and holds fast, and bruises, crushes, and kills others. Besides, it is a means to fit us for Christ's second coming. Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of man. Persons much in prayer do so oft set up tribunals in their own hearts, so frequently make up just accounts with God in Christ, and so many times in their prayers make references of matters unto that day, that they familiarize with their judge, and in a manner facilitate the business of that day, so far as it concerns them. But here we might justly reprove such in our days, who have formerly been more constant in family, and possibly in closet prayer, but now leave it off, seldom or never pray in their closets, and will not join with others in prayer. This is charged upon hypocrites as their guise and garb: "Will he always call upon God?"

Whence comes it to pass that any faint, or grow weary, or cease from praying?

1. Many bring with them to prayer too many incumbrances, and they tire them; they cannot travel on to hold out in a course of prayer, when they carry so much luggage with them.
2. Many do but waste their time in prayer to no purpose, and so getting nothing by this their trade, they grow weary of it, and men shut up shop, as I may say. It is bootless, they perceive, and in vain for them to pray any longer.
3. Many have some secret wounds yet unhealed; they are annoyed with some malignant distempers of heart, with some predominant lusts, and so faint and give out. They began this holy course, and set out with others in this spiritual way, but cannot hold on with them; their hearts not being sound and right within them, they draw back, and that to perdition; their heart is lifted up, and not upright within them, and so cannot make any spiritual living of it. Their hearts not being sound in God's statutes, they sustain the shame of apostasy.
4. Many do not sincerely receive and retain the holy food of their souls, the word of God, which would keep us in this path of a Christian's course and race. Careless and unprofitable hearers will not, cannot hold on long, or with any life, a course of prayer. Whilst Christians are lively and fruitful in hearing the word, they are lively, fruitful, and constant in prayer; but they that give the bare hearing to the prophet's words, minding other matters whilst they are hearing, are heartless and listless altogether in seeking unto God that they might live. "If our iniquities be upon us, and we pine away in our sins, how should we then live?" They think it loathsome to look, or speak to God about it.

13. Part 2, Chapter 4. Conditions: Faith

CHAPTER IV. THE CONDITIONS OF PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING. — FIRST, FAITH.

Having spoken of the nature of the duty of prayer here enjoined, and of what is implied in praying without ceasing, we now come to the third thing propounded, namely, the conditions which are required in praying importunately, opportunely, or constantly. Now these conditions of incessant prayer are four. 1. Faith. 2. Humility. 3. Sincerity. 4. Watchfulness.

First, faith in prayer. This is a principle requisite to prayer; it is even all in all in it. 'Without this, prayer is in effect no prayer unto the Lord: hence acceptable prayer is called the prayer of faith: "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." It is not so much a Christian's prayer, as his faith in prayer which prevails with God for a gracious answer: "Whatsoever ye ask believing, ye shall receive." It is faith which makes a man's person first acceptable, and no wonder then if such an one's prayer prevails. Cain and Abel both sacrifice; "God had respect unto Abel, and unto his offering, yet not to Cain." But it was by faith that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Faith is the instrument whereby the stains which else might blast us and our prayers are removed, both from our persons and prayers: "God purifies our hearts by faith;" "We are sanctified by faith." Faith is a means to make the holiness of Christ's person and prayers ours; and that must needs be acceptable to the Lord. My beloved is mine, all his holiness and righteousness is mine, saith the believing church. Faith interested the saints in all the succoring attributes and titles of God, or offices and titles of Christ in the covenant of grace, and all the particular Promises which we need to improve in prayer; and what then more needful or useful in prayer than faith? Faith shows a godly soul, where all its strength and life is to be had; and makes the utmost improvement of all in prayer. Faith makes the saints keep their due distance in prayer; gives God and Christ their due, grace and mercy their due; ourselves and our spiritual enemies which we complain of, their due. It sets God and Christ in his proper place and throne; puts us into an holy athletic plight, orders the bounds, proportions, and motions of prayer, and then takes its best season, and holy advantages, both of God and of ourselves, to effect and bring about the desires which spring from our faith. Faith is a lively spark indeed, and puts life, both into the suppliants, and into their supplications. Be we ever so dead, dumb, and listless in spirituals; if faith begin once to be stirring, it puts life into the business. Now for the better handling of this principal requisite to incessant prayer, consider 1. What faith in prayer is required, and why so?

2. What is the work of faith in prayer?

3. What helpful means and encouragements are useful to further faith in prayer?

4. What are the marks of faith in prayer?

First, the faith requisite in prayer, either respects God more generally, both in his absolute and relative nature, or Jesus Christ more specially, or the promises or providences of God more particularly.

1. Faith in God's nature, and in God absolutely considered, is required, as in all other approaches to God. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is," and so must believe in God absolutely considered, "and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him;" and so believe in him, relatively considered. But let us instance in some particulars.

1. Faith in the immensity and omnipresence of God is required in prayer. Faith in prayer must look at God as in heaven, in respect to his more glorious manifestation and communication of himself:

"Our Father which art in heaven." "Art not thou God in heaven?" And "Hear in heaven thy dwelling-place." It is a great help to an heavenly spirit in prayer, and to high and holy aims. It is a notable curb to restrain carnal desires and thoughts in prayer, to eye God as in heaven. But though faith with its eager eye pierce the clouds, and behold the Lord as above all, yet also it beholds him as in all and through all. It conceives of God as comprehending heaven itself, and not comprehended either of heaven or earth. So did Solomon by faith eye God as one whom the heaven of heavens could not contain. Wheresoever the saints are praying, they are praying as before God: "Daniel prayeth and giveth thanks before God." So did Nehemiah. Neither is any frame more suitable to prayer, than that lawful working of heart which proceeds from faith in God's immensity. And nothing more quickening to serious attentions to the duty, and to comfortable expectation of the issue, than a lively apprehension, that we speak not to an absent, but to a present deity, not to a friend out of hearing, but to one that is with us when we are praying.

2. Faith in God's omniscience is also required in prayer. Thus David, and Jeremiah, and Solomon, in prayer look at God as one that tries the heart and the reins. Faith in prayer comes not to bring light to God, but rather to borrow light from him in all the business of prayer. It knows his all-seeing eye as well as his all-hearing ear. Faith makes a sincere heart the more free and bold with God, because it eyes him as one who is privy to all it has to think or speak in prayer. Nothing is more terrible to the sinner's thoughts than that God sees them. But nothing is more comfortable to the godly than this persuasion, that now they are before an all-seeing one; they are glad that they serve such a master, and speak to such a father, who does thoroughly know them, and watchfully eyes them. The suppliants of God have secret things in secret, to commit to the ears of God. And oh, how well is it for them in their esteem, that they may pray to God which seeth in secret: "Pray to thy Father which is in secret," says Christ. Suppliants are to seek God's face about matters carried on by God's and their own enemies, secretly and slyly, and had need eye the Lord as one who sees what is contrived and done in the dark; yea, sometimes they are so sorely assailed and charged by the wily enemies of their souls, that they have no way left them but to appeal in prayer to the Lord's all seeing eye, to judge of the false charges of men and devils; and sometimes of their corrupted, tempted consciences, accusing them when they should excuse, disquieted when they should rest in God. Hence, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God." "Deep calleth unto deep." "My prayer shall be to the God of my life." That appeal in prayer unto the Lord as one that hears, where the right lies, helped much. Sometimes we know not what to ask as we ought, "but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered;" and "he that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." So said Paul's faith, so says the faith of each gracious suppliant.

3. Faith in God's all-sufficiency is requisite; wherefore Christ teaches us to pray, teaches us to look at God, as one whose is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Hence, the lowest room, and

one day's residence in God's house of prayer is desirable to David. He believed that God is a sun and a shield, and would withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. Moses prays to the Lord for mercy, as one whose mercy would fill all the desires of his soul: "O satisfy me early with thy mercy." None are more self-empty and needy than true suppliants; and therefore faith in God's all-sufficiency is most needful to them. None are more sensible of their utter inability to withstand the force and guile of their souls' enemies, and so need such a faith the more; yea, the truth is, true suppliants seek not of God this or that so much, as God and Christ in that which they seek of him; God in a spouse, in a friend, in liberty, in health, in ordinances, in comforts, and the like, and therefore they must needs eye the Lord as all in all, and all without him to be nothing; yea, in a barren land where no desirable comforts are; and can then in seeking him by faith be satisfied with him, as with marrow and fatness.

4. Faith in God's almightiness is requisite in prayer. Paul, who bowed his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, looks on him as one who was "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." So Jehosaphat, in his prayer, argues by faith in God thus: "And in thy hand is not there power and might?" So Jeremy in his prayer: "I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Ah, Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." Sometimes God's suppliants are put hard to it in the course of their prayers; the last grain of their faith and patience seems to be put into the scale; their pressures are to the last drop of their faith and patience; there appears but some small spark thereof under the ashes; they seem to cease in some fainting fits, to be even departing, only some symptoms left of life therein, namely, some workings of faith in God's almightiness, that he is yet able to succor them. It may be, a possibility in respect of God's almightiness is eyed by faith, and that carries them out in prayer. Sometimes the very faith of God's suppliants is at a stand in regard of God's will; it is an "if" to them whether he will help; yet they believe he can help, and therefore pray, as he did: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" and such a faith in the Lord's almightiness does great things by prayer. For hence that "I will; be thou clean," says Christ, "and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." He who prays in faith of God's power, shall have beyond his faith the benefit of his gracious and energetic will. So the centurion in his prayer to Christ believes that if he but will his servant's cure, he can word it; he can even command it by its sovereign word: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." He is not sure that he will give out that energetic word, but if he would but speak the word, he concludes that he has power over all desirable blessings, "as servants at his command, even as his soldiers were at his beck." And Christ approves of his faith in his sovereign power, saying, "Verily I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." So the man mentioned Mark 9:1-50 makes a request to Christ for his child, but at first questioned Christ's power, saying, "If thou canst do any thing, help us;" and so long his request took not; but being quickened by Christ's word to faith in his power, that he could do any thing for them, and to expect any thing from him in such a way of believing, "if thou canst believe," namely, that I can do any thing for you, "all things are possible to him that so believeth;" then the man cries out with tears, "Lord, I believe," namely, that thou canst do any thing for us, and so gets the blessing he prayed for; where prayers are put up in faith, believing all things are possible to the Lord, and attainable upon believing. All things are possible and attainable to such a faith's request. Sometimes suppliants deal with God in prayer about intricacies, where the determinations of the will of God seem, or are hid and obscure; yea, for such good things as come within the reach of his power; and herein it were sad with them, if faith in

God's power did not relieve them. Sometimes they deal with God about cases wherein the Lord comes to express his mind to the contrary, and yet faith in God's almightiness puts words into their mouth, and encourages them to pray to him, even in such cases. When God tells Moses that he will smite the people, and disinherit them, yet, because Moses believed the greatness of God's power, which might else be dishonored, he pleads that the nations will say, that because the Lord was not able to bring them into the promised land, therefore he slew them, and then be- takes him to this hold: "Let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity," etc. He looked at him as now able to fulfill the other part of his revealed will, even to be a God pardoning his people's sins. This set the Ninevites a praying, when God had said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." Yet for aught any knew to the contrary, God might show them mercy: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not." And their prayers took effect: "God repented of the evil that he had said." Besides, true seekers of God are continually sensible of mighty, adverse powers of darkness against them, so that if they had not faith in God's almightiness overmatching those powers, they would not pray without ceasing.

5. Faith in the gracious nature and disposition of God, as in his love, mercy, bounty, compassion, longsuffering, goodness, is required. Nothing is more usual with the saints in their prayers mentioned throughout the Scripture, than to set their faith on work in prayer upon the gracious nature of God. I need not mention the Scriptures. In this ocean faith can freely swim, and bear up all the suppliant's burdens. In this holy chancery court of grace, it can have right in any cases which concern the soul. Nothing more suitable to the hungering and thirsting desires of suppliants, and nothing more sweet and satisfying than the marrow and fatness of God's loving-kindness: "The upright remember the love of the Lord more than wine." A poor suppliant sees here by an eye of faith the true riches which his soul needs, and that it is here ready for him; God is rich in mercy to all that call upon him. So did David. This is a spiritual heal-all to the diseased and wounded soul crying to God for cure. When the people of God are tossed with tempests of troubles and temptations, they eye this as a sweet and safe harbor; if they can but put in here, they are sheltered in all weathers; if they can but cast the anchor of faith and hope here, they can ride securely, and without hurt or loss from any winds which blow.

6. Faith in God's simplicity is required. Solomon in his prayer looks at God as always acting, one whose eyes were open night and day. So the psalmist, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." The like faith in the eternity and immutability of God, and his faithfulness in what he is to his redeemed, and in what he says to them, and does for them in a way of grace and favor, is needful. Habakkuk in his prayer makes use of the eternity of God: "Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, my holy one? we shall not die." Nehemiah in his prayer improves God's faithfulness: "O God, that keepest covenant and mercy for them that love thee." Those afflicted souls mentioned Psalms 102:1-28, in their prayer improve by faith God's unchangeableness: "Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." The suppliants themselves, and their cases vary much, and suffer many changes; but faith in these encourages them to incessant prayer to the Lord. We might have instanced in the particulars of faith's improvement of the relative nature of God in prayer; as that of a Father, of a Savior, and the like, as is often mentioned in Scripture; but I shall forbear. The second branch of faith required in prayer, namely, faith in the Lord Jesus. Christ is able to save such to the uttermost as come unto

God by him. Out of Christ God is a consuming fire and if we eye him as such only, we are driven from him rather than drawn to him. Daniel craves all things for the Lord's sake. David requests mercies of the Lord for his word's sake, or for his servant's sake; the saints of old looked in their prayers towards the temple. Now the temple was a type of Christ; Christ spake of the temple of his body. It was not enough for the Israelites to cry out of wounds, nor for Moses to pray with them, or for them; but they must look to the brazen serpent, which is made a type of Christ; Christ is the altar whereon we offer all our spiritual sacrifice if acceptable. And if we do in offering them but touch this blessed altar by faith, that sanctifies them. The best incense of our prayers needs sprinkling with Christ's blood. As was typed in that Exodus 30:10. No intercourse betwixt God and us but by the means of this blessed ladder, whose foot is on earth, and top reacheth unto heaven. A third branch of faith required in prayer, is faith in God's promises; especially in such promises as do respect our personal and particular cases. Jehosaphat in his prayer makes use of a suitable promise, respecting the case about which he then besought the Lord, saying, "If when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, etc., we stand before this house, and in thy presence, and cry unto thee in our afflictions, then thou wilt hear and help." When David also is to seek the Lord for mercy upon his house, he improves a promise of God made to that end: "For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." The Lord is so abundant as in goodness so in truth, that at every path's end, in the way of grace and race of godliness, he has placed some well of salvation, some spring of consolation, quickening and encouragement in Christ, to go therein without fainting. All his ordinances and precepts have their promises annexed to the faithful observance thereof, and no one ordinance has more gracious promises than this of prayer.

Prayer, as it puts much honor upon God, so the Lord has honored it with many goodly, glorious, encouraging promises. Faith makes use of this blessed treasury, bequeathed in the Lord's testament to the prayer of his suppliants. Faith wisely lays out and bestows this holy stock, here and there, as need requires. Hardly any case of prayer, but there are promises here and there scattered in the Word of God, which speak to that very case, if not directly, yet by necessary consequences. Now by faith the godly make suitable improvement thereof; and such as put them upon pleading such holy maxims before the Lord. The Lord sees it meet to bound the people's desires, within these holy limits of his promises, and it is faith that helps us to keep within them in our prayers. And surely there is no language more sweet and acceptable to God, than to speak to him in our prayers in this holy language of his Spirit and word. If we speak in our prayers no otherwise than the Lord himself speaks in his promises, there shall be a sweet concert of voice begun by the Spirit in the promises, seconded by the spirit of faith in the saint's prayers, and answered by God in his providences.

4. The last branch of faith required in prayer, is faith in God's providences. The saints mentioned in Scripture, in their prayers have thus by faith improved the providence of God: "Our fathers cried unto thee, and were delivered." The real respects which the Lord bears to his people's prayers, are practically demonstrated in his providence. Providences of mercy respecting prayer, are but the promises of God made thereto, executed. Every such providence is an oracle of God instructing or encouraging us. Faith is a spiritual recorder in the soul and conscience sanctified, it writes by the finger of the Spirit on the table of the heart, such observable and useful passages; and faith calls for conscience to read them over as need requires. There are no cases now, but what in

substance have been heretofore; there is nothing new under the sun. And the Lord in like cases cannot vary, but ever carries it like himself, so that faith makes great advantage hereof in prayer; the Spirit of God leads suppliants in the same track of holy requests for the substance of them, and what wonder if the same answers and issues are, by faith, expected? Precedents in prayer are rules to us, and arguments with God in our holy pleadings with him for his mercy. As with men in their courts and pleas, precedents in such and such a king's reign, in such a suit, thus and thus issued, according to such or such a statute, not repealed, are casting matters in lawsuits; so verily in our suits in heaven's court, for this or that relief which we crave, precedents of providence improved by faith, are a current gospel plea.

Second, what is the work of faith in prayer? Prayer is called the prayer of faith; as if faith were, and indeed is, the chief instrument of the Holy Ghost in the soul to do all in prayer. Let us instance in some particular good offices which faith performs for the souls of God's poor suppliants in prayer.

1. Faith is a monitor to instruct the soul truly and thoroughly in such things as are most suitable and helpful to this holy work. Hence we read of the Psalmist, in his secret lifting up his heart to the Lord in the night season; he says, "My reins instruct me." This knowing grace of faith in his heart, was the Spirit's instrument to teach him. Faith is called the wisdom of the just; the wisdom of justified persons by Christ, to which they were to be converted, there spoken of: and as other wisdom, so this in special is profitable to direct our minds and mouths. It is faith which gives the soul the truest survey of its emptiness and neediness. It is faith which most fully and convincingly informs the soul of the fullness and freeness of the riches of grace in God and Christ, and of his suitableness to us, considering our case and condition. Faith tells the soul of its interest and encouragement in the mercies of God, and merits of Christ, and in the covenant of grace, so far as the same does concern that about which the soul comes to God in prayer.

Faith in prayer acts as a queen, and a mother grace, to order and excite each praying grace unto its proper work therein. When faith is stirring, it does in a manner charge desire to do its office; reach out thy hand, open thy mouth wide, enlarge thyself, O desire, to crave the mercies which the soul needs, which the Lord is ready to give. And Love, do thou the like; never a more lovely object presented to thee from one who so dearly loves the soul wherein thou art. Zeal, be thou fervent, put an edge upon desire and love; the case so requires, the mercies are near, it is a pity they should be lost for want of putting to a little more strength to wrestle for them. Humility, stoop thou the heart, be low and vile before one that is so glorious. Fear, awe thou the heart, let it tremble in the presence of the holy one of Israel. Joy, do thou enlarge the heart in the sense of mercies already gotten by prayer, and more mercies are at hand. Hope, stand thou on tiptoe, and look up, for verily mercy is not far off; the Lord is near such secret motives and whispers of faith as are in the souls of God's suppliants; their spirits are encouraged in prayer by that faith which they have in the Lord when it is exercised. David's faith in the love of God towards him, occasioned that speech in his soul, when to Praise God; so that David from the strength of his faith therein speaks to his soul:

"And all that is within me bless his holy name." The like speech doth faith occasion in a gracious heart, when to pray, requiring all within to be employed in furthering the work. So when David is to make his prayer to the God of his life, in faith that God will command loving-kindness to him, a charge is given his heart to attend it patiently and hopefully; and distempers are commanded to

stand by.

3. Faith in prayer regulates and recifies the soul's pleas. It dictates arguments to back those holy pleas. Prayers of faith are pleading prayers, filled and carried on in lively reasonings with the Lord. And because oftentimes the spirit of a suppliant may be even nonplussed almost, and not know how to carry it on, by reason of secret cavils raised in the heart, whether from Satan, or distrust, or otherwise; faith then whispering some spiritual and suitable answers, clears up the mist upon the spirit, and exposes the mistake and sophism, and so the soul is afresh carried on in his pleading with God: "Will the Lord cast off?" etc." This was secretly whispered by distrust, as if God would cast him off: "But will he do it for ever?" David's spirit was pinched in these reasonings and cavils; at present he could not positively answer that God would not do so; the cavil of distrust became a real question to his tempted, deserted spirit, by reasoning so much with that whilst he was crying to the Lord. But faith gave light to the case, and he perceived that these were but cavils of an infirm spirit of his own. The case is resolved and determined, through the help of faith exercised, which before sat silent; and he concluded this was his infirmity. Faith is a second to the soul in its holy wrestlings and pleadings with God to succor it in its suits, both in persuading the heart that the Lord will prepare the heart to seek him, and to prevail. It is the speech of faith, "We have what we ask of God." It is as sure as if it were already granted. And so in point of acceptance: "We know he heareth." Now when at any time the spirit of a suppliant begins to give out and faint, then faith renews the charge; it takes up the holy weapons which the spirit of the saints began to lay by, the arguments which it was ready to forego; and the soul gathers up itself afresh, and plies the Lord with renewed strength of holy requests. At this pass was Jonah; he said, "I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again towards thy holy temple." When fainting, and when faith minding him afresh of something in the Lord, he is revived, and sends up many supplications to him. What, give out? will faith say; nay, for shame! It claps the soul on the back, and bids it cheer up; wrestle one bout more, pursue once again; it may be, nay, it is likely thou wilt prevail, nay, thou shalt indeed prevail.

4. Faith in prayer is an agent for the soul to improve and plead all the foregoing principles and spiritual arguments mentioned. God's gracious disposition is a large field, and very fruitful in prevailing arguments, when improved by faith; so is that of Gods all-sufficiency, almightiness, eternity, immutability; and so is that of Christ considered in his offices, merit, mediation, and intercession; the promises of God likewise are several heads of holy' pleas. Faith improves them wisely, and seasonably, as the case requires. It would be improving them all, in and through the Lord Jesus, for the soul's succor and support in this ordinance of prayer; verifying Isaiah 12:3, "Drawing water out of the wells of salvation."

5. Finally, faith in prayer becomes the common pledge between the Lord and the suppliant, that each shall do right in all that has been pleaded. Faith undertakes to become bound, and to be a pledge to the soul that the Lord for his part will do what is meet and what becomes the soul. And again it engages itself to the Lord, that by his help the soul shall attend to its duty. David's faith pawns its credit that the Lord will not, shall not say him nay: "My voice shalt thou hear, O Lord;" and then faithfully promises on David's behalf, that he will and shall rightly order his prayer, and so leave it with the Lord: "And unto thee will I direct my prayer, and look up."

3. In the third place we consider some useful helps unto faith in prayer. The helps and encouragements to faith in prayer may be such as these.

1. Let us take and make all holy advantage of the least possibility of mercy, whereon we may ground an expectation of a gracious answer of our prayers. We may, yea must do thus. Meek ones must seek the Lord, hoping for his mercy when there is but a possibility of being hid from the Lord's anger. Thus did the Ninevites; nobody could tell they should be delivered, nor assure them of mercy if they did sue for it; yet none could tell the contrary, none could say peremptorily they should perish without remedy. If it be but a "Who can tell?" it is a ground of mighty prayer, and may cherish a spark of hope therein of success. Isaiah must lift up his prayer, though it be but a possibility that God would hear the blasphemous speeches of Rabshakeh, against which he was to bend his prayers on Israel's behalf. A very peradventure of prevailing in prayer will set Moses praying. No Scripture tells thee that thou art a castaway, many Scriptures give thee grounds of a possibility at least of salvation. Let that therefore raise thee, though troubled sore, to look and wait for a gracious answer of thy prayer.

2. Labor to be stored with suitable promises to your case; it will be our wisdom to lay up knowledge of such words of grace. Jehosaphat had not to seek a promise suitable to that he was to pray for. Nehemiah had a like promise ready written on the table of his heart. And let us be well acquainted with the attributes of God, which are virtually promises and props to our faith in prayer. Moses in his prayer makes use of them for that end. And the saints oft elsewhere, as recorded in the Scripture.

3. Let us improve former experiences, both of our own and others of the gracious dealings of God with us in way of prayer, for they work hope. "The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer." David's experience of God's merciful and faithful performance of all the desires of his soul for him, will make him cry to him with much confidence. We may not rest in mercies and blessings received, but we may and must be encouraged from them to wait for more; if we never had tasted of his goodness to us, when we sought him, yet were we to expect and wait for his gracious answer; but tasting and seeing how good the Lord is by experience, it is then a blessed thing to trust in him. We may well trust him as a God hearing prayer, when we have tried him to be such: or else it will be a shame, if speaking it in his word that he is such, and then speaking it over sensibly in his works that he is such, yet he cannot be believed. If any, surely such as by experience know the name of God, have proof of that or any other title, or attribute, or word of his, wherein he makes himself known to us, they will trust in him. Gracious answers of prayer given to the saints, are precious pledges of our interest in the covenant of grace, and in God as our God; and so we are to look at them, and be encouraged by them. For indeed the Lord in giving answers of grace to any of his children, has regard to the good and encouragement of them all; that which the Lord did for, and spake to supplicating, wrestling Jacob, he did with a view to others that were to come after him. The regard which the Lord has to the prayers of the destitute, is written and recorded for the generation to come, to make a comfortable use thereof.

4. Let us carefully improve the intercession of the Lord Jesus for us. When he was on earth he prayed for us, as you may see in John 17:1-26, To be sanctified by his truth, to be kept from the evil of apostasy, we pray for union and communion with the Lord Jesus, such as is very strong, comfortable, and constant whilst we are here, and the eternal enjoyment of the Lord Jesus in another world, but fear lest our sins might intercept and frustrate our prayers; but Christ tells us (and for our comfort, that our joy may be full) what is the sum of what he intercedes with the Father for on the behalf of his apostles, also of all believers.

We must needs confess that Christ's prayers were without exception, and that the Father always heard him. How well is it then for us that the Lord Jesus has with acceptance gone before us, and these mercies are already begged by Christ, and granted of God to our hands. Solomon's request for the grant of their prayers, in their several cases which are mentioned and which are granted, were types of what the Lord will condescend to in all his suppliants' cases, at the request of this our blessed Solomon, but especially improve his present intercession and appearing before God for us now in heaven. Whilst the people were "praying without, the priest was offering incense within the temple." So is Christ in that glorious temple above appearing before God for us, whilst we are praying. That was a shadow of this; the saints' prayers are committed to him there, as his charge, according to his office to which the Lord has appointed him, to offer them up with the incense of his own meritorious sufferings; they cannot, then, but succeed well. The time when the Lord should be absent from his disciples, was a special speeding time in their prayers.

5. Contemplate, and let your spirits dwell much upon these considerations.

1. What a suitable name the Lord assumes, and by his own writing and seal allows to be challenged, namely, "A God hearing prayer." Hearing prayer, showing it is his constant exercise, his inseparable property; nor says he whose prayers, as excluding thine, or the prayers of any other poor soul, which in truth desire to seek him. It is recorded of Augustus, that he never sent away any petitioner sad from him; and dost thou think that the Lord of compassion, that "is rich in mercy to all that call upon him," can or will?

2. To whose requests the Lord has given, at least, some audience; even to the rude moans of beasts and other dumb creatures. And as Christ reasons thence: "God feedeth the ravens, and are not you much better than they?" So may I say here, God hears the ravens' cries; will he not hear the righteous' cries? It is but righteous, as well as an act of grace in him so to do. "He satisfieth the desire of every living thing;" "Is righteous in all his ways." No wonder then if "he be nigh unto all them that call upon him, to fulfill the desires of them that fear him." The cries of mere natural men, as they are his creatures, and in helpless condition, look out to him for succor, as many rude mariners are so heard; he will give some audience even to hypocrites' prayers, and surely he that out of his overflowing bounty will hear (as far as he may) such persons' prayers, they shall have that benefit of his common audience and providence, though not of his peculiar and saving respects of grace. He is not unwilling to hear his people's requests, when not so rightly principled as that noble Jew, who would scarce believe without signs shown, yet who was so heard in his request for his son; if rightly, yet not so thoroughly principled as Cornelius, who yet was not so cleared in that great article of faith then in question, that "that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah;" or if so principled, yet at present under much distemper of corruption; yet even then God overlooked all that, and judged of them by their better part, and taken their prayers then made kindly. Such was David's secret prayer at that instant, when changing his behavior or favor, as if he had not been the man he was, yet accepted. Those that in their affliction are so distempered with infirmities of distrust or discontent, it may be that they cannot speak freely to God in prayer, but sigh, yet are heard. Moses when in such a pet, yet the Lord picks out what he would have craved, and grants it. Their cry was with much distemper, as appears by their words to Moses, yet it was heard and granted; and God the rather showed all those after-signs and wonders on the Egyptians, in answer even to that distempered cry to him by the Israelites, many whereof were truly godly. Halting Jacob, yet wrestling in his prayer, though lamely, is heard; yea when too

curious in his inquiry, yet blessed in regard of his prayer before. Sparks of grace amongst an heap of ashes are acceptable.

3. Consider what kind of prayers have found special acceptance with God; such as have been rather sighs and groans, than express prayers; he hears the prisoner's groans, the needy's sighs. Such as have been but ejaculatory liftings up of the soul unto God in mental desires. Such as have been but a poor chattering and muttering of something in the ears of God. Such as have been but an abrupt. and broken expression or two from a truly broken spirit, as the contrite publican's: "God be merciful to me a sinner;" the converted thief's, "Lord, remember me in thy kingdom;" but a long look of the body and soul towards God: "They looked to thee, and were not ashamed." And Jonah's look towards God in Christ, typified by the temple, took well with God; yea, prayers of the saints in a dream, as was that of Solomon's, have found good acceptance:

"After that Solomon awoke." Not that any should think it enough to sigh or groan, and not utter their souls in words to the Lord; but if, like the Shunamite, the soul of any be troubled within them, that they cannot utter their hearts, or like David, so troubled in spirit that they cannot speak, then it is comfortable to consider that even in such cases sighs are successful. Neither may any abuse what we said of the publican and the converted thief, and content themselves to speak some few words constantly, and there rest as if all were well: no, but if we are young in Christianity, babes in Christ, our heavenly Father, (as other fathers do in theirs,) delights as much, and sometimes more, in the broken language and lispings of his little ones, and of his sick ones, than he does in the more fluent expressions of sundry others; not but that he does in his own season enable such stammerers also to speak more plainly.

4. Consider what account God does make of his people: they are his choice allowed suppliants; his royal priests; persons separated for such holy ends; his beloved ones. Hence that strong expression of Christ, encouraging us to expect the hearing of our prayers: "I say not that I will pray to the Father for you," (namely, as now whilst on earth,) "for the Father himself loveth you;" as if that were that strong motive which will further his gracious audience of his servant's prayers. What will not love grant?

6. Consider what account the Lord makes of his people's prayers. They are his delight, "as sweet music in his ears." They are memorials before him, ever in his eye, minding him of what is meet to be done for his people. They are as a recompense to him, he likes to be paid in his dues in prayer also; he thinks we never pray enough: "Hitherto you have asked nothing," (namely, in comparison,) "open thy mouth wide." Mercy accompanies prayer; if the Lord would turn away the one's, yet not the other's plea.

6. Consider what measures the Lord keeps in his respect to prayer. He hears sometimes before we call: "Preventeth his people with goodness." Sometimes even whilst praying they have answers of grace. Sometimes when his people seek him for pardoning grace, he "showeth mercy even above their thoughts," gives them as above what they ask, so beyond their thoughts and expectations. Wherefore raise up our expectation in this way of seeking the face of God, by thoughts of his gracious disposition to hear and help us; and when we have got up our thoughts therein to the highest, yet believe it, he has mercy and answers of grace for us above our thoughts.

7. Consider what method God continually and infallibly uses in his respects to prayer; namely, first to incline hearts to be cordial and serious in prayer, and then to give his promised mercies. The nearer and surer mercies are, the more praying motions there are then in our hearts. Both are to the same mercy, as one works to help to pray, and to hear prayer. Mercy would not be at work with us in the one, if the other part of God's work were not to be effected.

Lastly, that we may clear up our fainting hearts, in expectation of faith, that our prayers shall not fail of good success from God, consider that parable of our Lord Jesus, which he for this purpose propounds. An unjust judge hears a poor suppliant's request; and will not God, a Father, do much more for his? An unjust judge hears, and will not a just and righteous God hear the cry of his poor ones? One that was a hater and disregarder of men, and of his own name, yet hears; and will not God and Christ hear, whose delight is to be with men? One that was utterly averse from hearing: "He would not hear;" one to whom asking was a trouble: "This widow troubleth me;" yet at length grants the request of her which sought to him. How much more will the Lord, to whom prayer is a delight, and whose property it is to be hearing (even ready to hear) prayers; surely he will hearken to his suppliants' requests much more. One that while he denied and delayed his petitioner, considered it not till afterwards, (then he considered with himself,) and he relents. How much rather will the Lord, who wisely weighs all circumstances and inconveniences in case of too long delay to hear? He will surely fulfill his people's desires. One that in granting his petitioner's desire, merely to avoid disquiet, (lest she should weary him out with her cries,) hearkens; and will not God, who delights in mercy, do much more for his precious ones? One that is solicited by a certain widow, one no way allied to him, coming to him without any other intercessor to plead her cause, yet he cannot deny her petition: and can or will the Lord deny his own dear children, who come to him in the name of him in whom he is well pleased; who have the Lord himself to intercede for them.

Lastly, very briefly. The marks of one praying in faith are these:—

1. When a soul is borne up, and carried on in praying, amidst discouragements to pray. If he pray without ceasing, when yet there are so many things sometimes which may seem to occasion ceasing to pray, save that he prays in faith. When we are hindered and opposed in it by Satan and others, yet a Joshua stands before the angel, notwithstanding Satan's resistance. We continue crying, "Jesus, have mercy on us," even when others would forbid us; when we are delayed and held off from our desired answers, and left in some deeps of affliction in the interim, and yet trusting in the Lord in prayer:

"We will wait." When the Lord is long silent, yet we will not be silent, but plead, "How long, Lord?" When denied of God, as the woman of Canaan, as if we had no part in the mercy we ask, yet we continue asking. Surely there is faith emboldening thereunto. When we seem to be curbed and silently rebuked, as the friend wished not to trouble his friend, yet will not give over his suit, surely he thinks he speaks to a friend within, or else he could not, would not then continue asking.

2. When we pray with some more than usual boldness and liberty of speech, as sometimes in an awful and spiritual manner, we are wondrous free to plead with God, more than at other times, now is faith stirring in such a prayer.

3. When we pray with a kind of delightful calmness and stillness of spirit, not tossed like waves in prayer, through the power of unbelief.

4. When in setting ourselves sometimes to pray to the Lord, and petition him, we are even ready to make a holy digression and diversion, and turning our intended petition into melting, admiring praises of God; as oftentimes spiritual Christians have experiences thereof; surely then faith is stirring. So Christ turning himself to approach to God, says: "I thank thee, Father, that thou always hearest me."

14. Part 2, Chapter 4. Conditions: Humility

CHAPTER IV.

HUMILITY REQUIRED IN PRAYER. In considering the conditions required for the incessant performance of the duty of prayer, we have dispatched the first, namely, faith. And now we are to speak of the second condition required, namely, humility. It is the desire of the humble which the Lord hears; and his people that pray are to humble themselves, and then the Lord promises them hearing. Let us consider 1. Wherein humility required in prayer does consist.

2. When humility expressed in prayer may be discerned to be saving.
3. Why this humility is required in prayer.
4. What are useful helps to such humility in prayer.

First, humility required in prayer consists in these six or seven things.

1 In low thoughts of ourselves to attempt such a duty. When we are going about it, we judge ourselves most unworthy in ourselves to speak to the Lord; and as we are employed in praying, still the serious thoughts of our own worthlessness dwell with us. The justified suppliant stands afar off, and would scarce lift up his eyes to heaven, he thinks he is not worthy to come nearer; let others go as nigh as they please, as for himself, he will take the lowest room in God's house. It is more than he is worthy of to be admitted there at all, and heaven is too glorious a place for him, a wretch as he has been to be so bold; he has sinned against heaven, it is better for him to look on the dust, yea, to kiss the dust. In the words which the wise man speaks in prayer unto Christ, (that Itheil, he that was his God, and that Ucall, that mighty one,) you see how humbly he prefaces in his speech, so far as directed to him in way of prayer; he professes he is more brutish than any man, and has not the understanding of a man; so unworthy to speak either of Christ in an instructive way, or to Christ in a supplicating way. The disciples having been at prayer with Christ, they see so much weight in the duty, and so much excellency in the due exercise of the gift and grace of Christ in prayer, that they look at themselves as most unfit to pray as they ought, and therefore entreat his help: "Lord, teach us to pray." The psalmist begins his prayer in a kind of expostulation, and pressing of God with examples of his mercy to others in like cases. But if thou think he is too bold with God, and keeps not his due distance, he will profess that for his own part, "he is a worm, and no man;" he judges himself, as infinitely unworthy to stand upon terms with God, so even unfit to make comparison with others: "But I am a worm, and no man;" whatever our fathers were, yet I look at myself as fitter to creep on the earth, and feed only upon the dust, in respect of the guilt of sin laid upon me, (for if you apply it to Christ the antitype, God "laid upon him the iniquity of us all," but we intend it of the Psalmist rather himself,) than as a man to lift up myself to heaven; and therefore justly made the reproach of men. No sooner do the saints essay to draw near unto God, than the beams of the glory of God reflect upon their souls, which do thus awe and abase them; they see in the glass of that excellency their own vileness.

2. In abased thoughts of ourselves when we do get any thing of the Lord by prayer. True it is, bumble ones do speed best of all others in prayer; but yet, as mercies of prayer found them, so they leave them humble. When Abraham has gained upon the Lord by prayer, then, especially, is Abraham lowest and vilest in his own esteem; then he says “he is dust and ashes.” He knows no cause which should move the Lord to give any answer of mercy to so mean an one as himself, but his rich grace, and he frequently presents it as a plea to continue such undeserved mercy to such an one, from that which moved the Lord to begin to respect his prayer. Thus David, when he had gained by his prayer, and God was found of him, yet puts an humble emphasis upon the matter, “this poor man cried.” That they, even better men than he, such as walked worthy of God and of his grace, looked unto the Lord in prayer, and were encouraged by answers of favor, was no wonder; but for this poor man to cry unto the Lord, and be heard, is a wonder of grace to him. After Ephraim has prayed for turning grace from God, and is answered, then is he more abased in his own sight than before. When the church at her request is drawn unto her beloved, then she cries out of her blackness. Humblest Christians are the soundest and healthiest in spirit; and as blasts of affliction and temptation do not much annoy them, so neither do warming gleams of mercy distemper them, for they are humble; they are square men, nothing comes amiss to them, they will fall right which way ever they are cast, if lowly. As vessels whose sails are filled, if well ballasted, they run a more steady course; so with the saints, when they pray with full sailed joy of faith; when this holy ballast of humility is in the hold of the heart, and not merely aloft in show above decks, they are not soon lifted up with the success they meet with, but keep low, as humbly, if not more humbly than before. The saints know well they are but beggars, and stand in need of much; they praise not their good prayers, but their good master for the alms of grace which they get: “Not unto us,” and because once was too little to set forth their own unworthiness of any mercy, they repeat it again: “Not unto us, but to thy name give glory.” Little cause to be proud of a trade or art of such holy begging, though through the bounty of God it proves gainful.

3. In affectionate amplifications of our own vileness, and God’s mercy and excellency. As beggars who make very lamentable relations of their own miseries, but giving their benefactors all their titles to the full, so those repeat the expression of their own utter unworthiness: “Not unto us, not unto us.” And the publican in his prayer speaks of himself as a sinner, none else such an one as he. So the prodigal in his request to his father, acknowledges his extreme and unparalleled sin and unworthiness. So those converts, Jeremiah 31:1-40, do the like; such like amplifications being so many forcible arguments in their prayer with themselves, to further compunction and contrition in them; and with God, to further their participation of the benefit of his compassions. Out of the abundant heart-abasement the mouth speaks. As pride is large in speaking for itself, so is humility in dec1aring against itself.

4. In framing all our pleas in our petitions in the manner of poor undone persons; and pleading for mercy in regard of our extreme misery. That we are under woeful captivity and oppression, even of spiritual enemies of our souls, corruptions of nature, temptations of Satan, etc. That we have sustained losses in soul that are almost irreparable, lost the goodly patrimony in our first parents of God’s favor and image, which never can be sufficiently bewailed; yea, haply have lost that little light, and life, and comfort of grace, through some ill course we took since the Lord set us up again, and trusted us with a new stock of grace; yea, we are extremely in debt by our sin to divine justice; we are afflicted with many spiritual diseases, and sorely wounded in our spirits by the

enemies of our souls, and in all we are utterly insufficient to recover ourselves, yea, and helpless in the very use of such means as might tend thereunto. We see, indeed, that if we could believe, that would succor us, but yet are not able; if we could so earnestly wrestle for, and breathe after help of God in Christ, we might have relief; but see also that of ourselves we cannot do so much, but as we are able through the might of God. We tell him of our grievances, and plead our miseries, and spread them before him, and his people, if they may move to mercy, and so wait his gracious leisure for the same. Jeremiah pleads for mercy to him and his people, because their backslidings were many. David pleads for pardon because his sin is great, and craves mercy because a poor stranger, and sadly gone to decay, and entreats the Lord to forbear to afflict him, because his "arrows stick fast in him;" he is sorely wounded already, sick in body and spirit; he is already fallen under a burden that is too heavy for him; and so on with such like sad pleas taken from his forlorn condition, he presses God for mercy.

5. In much inward brokenness and relentings of spirit, hence that smiting upon the breast in the publican's prayer. There lay his sin and misery, there was his wound and burden; little did men think what he felt and saw. Ah, that breast of his, how it had harbored rebellion against God! his heart within was smitten for it, whereof his breast smiting was but a shadow. "A broken and contrite spirit" is the all of his sacrifice and prayer. Surely that heart is low in prayer, and brought down, which is broken as it were to dust. Whatever speech humble ones have in prayer, it is sure they have sighs attending. If the dovelike Spirit of Christ breathes in them, they will be breathing out dovelike moans in the ears of God. The psalmist speaks not so much of God's hearing of the words of the humble, as the desires: "He heareth the desire of the humble." If they do fall short at any time, through some occasional impediments of expression, yet brokenhearted desires, expressed in groans, are present and stirring, and they are to God as prayers: "The groanings of the prisoners are the prayers of the afflicted and destitute," in God's account.

6. In a meek and quiet submission, and bearing all discouragements without quarrelling against God, nay, awfully clearing the Lord therein. If rated like beggars, if rebuked, if delayed, if denied, yet putting up all contentedly. The reproachful name of a dog moves not the humble suppliant; she takes it very well, and makes good use of it, and does not mutiny against the Lord Jesus for it. They in Judges 10:1-18 hear and bear, and take all that well, which the Lord in a holy upbraiding way speaks. They yield to all as just, if worse with them from the hands of God than it is; yet with the leave of his mercy, they crave his favorable acceptance of their request. If humble ones come to Christ in prayer or otherwise, surely they come with holy dispositions to stoop to any yoke and burden of Christ which he will lay upon them, as well as desire to have their own burdens taken off by him. They may indeed plead with God why he carries it so towards them; but they are clear in it that be cannot but do well, though the particular cause they know not. "Thou art holy," and however it comes about that such divine forsakings are occasioned, yet still thou art holy and pure in all thy dispensations.

7. In a real -preferring others' prayers before our own. Thus the humble centurion in his request he had to make to the Lord Jesus, he thought better of the Jews' prayers than of his own, as being in his own sight a most unworthy Gentile. Not that under this pretence men should in a way of voluntary humility repair to deceased saints, which is idolatrous humility; yea, even the madness of persons then living. So Hezekiah prefers Isaiah's prayer before his own, and therefore sends solemnly to him to lift up his prayer in the case of Judah. So the church prefers the prayers even of

her young daughters, not so well instructed as herself, before her own. And the Psalmist reckons the prayers of his fathers as far more excellent than his. And the like did he in comparing his own prayers with others. True it is, pride and hypocrisy will counterfeit this, as they that preferred Jeremiah's prayer before their own, and therefore so earnestly seem to desire it; and the proud, falsehearted Simon Magus does the like in regard of Peter's prayers. But this was but an extorted act from horror of heart; and others in a complimentary way, for fashion's sake or that they might seem to be humble persons, may carry it thus too; but it is not inwrought in their spirits.

Secondly, when humility in prayer may be called saving.

I answer, first, negatively, and then affirmatively. Negatively. 1. That expression of humility is not always saving, when a person questioning the worth and validity of his own prayers, does desire the benefit of others' prayers; for then that act of Pharaoh in desiring Moses' prayers, and Jeroboam the prophet's prayers had been saving.

2. Nor is that always saving when one carries it so iii prayer, as ascribing all to the Lord in what good he partakes of. The unjustified pharisee will in words attribute all to God, that "he is not as other men are, extortioner," etc., yet with a proud spirit disdaining others, which in his esteem are not so good as himself.

3. Nor is that always saving, when one is fearful to come to God in prayer, out of sense of great distance betwixt God and him; as the slothful servant which durst not trade thus with God in prayer, as well as otherwise. Or like him whom the fear of the majesty, word, presence, and justice of God, as a king, strikes speechless; he cannot, dare not open his mouth to plead for his mercy.

4. Nor is that always saving when any prayer does express several semblances of humility; as when any is large in confession of their sin; as many of those that are brought in as confessing their sin in such a sort, yet few or none of them savingly interceding and pleading with God in prayer; hence that wonder that he found no intercessor. Or when any utter before the Lord many complaints of themselves, and their misery, and that in a mournful manner; in their prayers in appearance they will roar like bears, and mourn sore as doves; and such like were many of them that did not savingly bewail their sins. Nor when persons set apart solemn days, and that frequently, for a more seemingly humble seeking of God in prayer; as that proud pharisee and unjustified person did fast twice a week. Nor when dejected looks are adjoined in such solemn times of prayer. There is an hypocritical, affected sadness of countenance charged upon those false- hearted professors in their days of fasting and prayer, forbidden to sincere ones. No, nor when tears and weeping are joined to such prayers, are they always expressions of saving humility therein required; though some of those were sincere, yet surely some of that people which wept so sore, upon confession of sins made, Ezra 10:1-44, and in that solemn time wherein all Israel were gathered to Mizpeh to pray, and there even poured out waters, so abundantly did they weep on that fast-day, but were not sincere therein, but many of them did it from sympathy, and not saving principle.

Affirmatively. Humility expressed in prayer is saving,

1. When a Christian abases himself in prayer, and is not merely abased by compulsion; when he is a voluntary agent, by the lively power of the graces of God in him to abase himself; he lays many arguments together for that purpose, and is not barely a patient therein. Thus did the publican in

his prayer; he smote on his breast, and that not to seem to be humbled, but as one outward help to himself to be abased. Hence the conclusion of Christ in reference to the humble manner of seeking of God's face: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Pharisee lays all such materials together in his prayer as did rather tend to lift up his spirit, which was high enough in itself, and needed not such exciting. When humility is wrought in prayer, as out of the fire, yea, gained out of much contrary opposition, a Christian finding his heart unaffected and unbroken, takes such pains with his heart in prayer, and wrestles so with God and his own spirit, that it relents, and melts, and falls before God. Thus did those of Ephraim, they cease not bemoaning themselves, and charging their stiffneckedness and unbrokenness so deeply upon themselves, and pressing the Lord for a more serious and thorough bringing of their hearts to a relenting, repenting frame, whilst that they prevail with God, and their own souls, and are more thoroughly abased, ashamed, and confounded in their own sight before the Lord.

2. When a Christian is in a holy sense ashamed before God in prayer, even so much as not to look him in the face. That humble publican that was so ashamed in his prayer, in the sense of his extreme vileness and unworthiness in himself is justified; he thought earth and hell below were more suitable to his case and deserts, and the judgment of God there (and thence looks down thitherwards) than heaven's glory and grace. Thus Ezra, in his prayer, professes "he was ashamed, and blushed to lift up his face to heaven." Thus the converted prodigal is ashamed to own the name of a son; to be called, or be as an hired servant is too good for him, he thinks, and speaks so in his prayer. The woman that came to Christ is ashamed to come before him, to behold his blessed countenance, but "standeth behind him." And she sped well in the desire of her soul, for the comfortable manifestation of her pardon. Says Christ, "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

3. When a man in prayer is affected and awed with much holy trembling; thus that suppliant in Luke 26, "He is even afraid to lift up his eyes to heaven." Such awful rays in the glorious purity, majesty, and excellency of the Lord did be behold by an eye of faith, and he is justified therein. The prophet Habakkuk, in his prayer, and in the mention of divers things touching God's providence and proceedings, "his belly," he says, "trembled, and rottenness entered into his bones." Thence the believing centurion, after he had sent to Christ to entreat his gracious presence, and coming for the help of his servant, as in a holy jealousy of himself, and what he had done, whether he, so unworthy, had not made too bold with the Lord Jesus, to desire him to come under his roof; he sends a second message, therein professing his unworthiness that Christ should condescend so far to the desire of so unworthy an one as he judged himself to be.

4. When a man in prayer is much in begging pardon of sin, and the reconciliation of his soul to God in Jesus Christ. Thus the publican, justified in that way of prayer; the main matter of his desires was, that God would be propitious to him a sinner; for so the Greek word signifies, or be reconciled to him, and have mercy on him, in covering all his sins in Christ: the favor and mercy of God in Christ Jesus as a propitiation for sins, is all in all with him. When a child of God is in great afflictions of outward as well as inward man, yet the favorable remembrances, and merciful respects of Christ to a poor converted sinner, even in tortures, it is all in all. The converted thief desires not to be saved or exempted from any justly deserved censures of God or man, but only favor with Jesus Christ. The other wretch was all for his own ease, and for to continue in the world; he cares not for the favor of Christ, as sometimes the Psalmist did: "The loving-kindness of God in any condition is better than life;" to live in the love and favor of Christ is more than ten thousand

lives to him; yea, so the Lord will be merciful to his soul, he cares not what becomes of his bodily life, when called to sacrifice the same. An humble child that cries out when he is whipped, yet cares more for his father's favor than about his whipping.

5. When a suppliant of God does not propound to him in his prayer matters too high for him, things that are above his reach, or his measure, or his condition, or his calling, or the present necessity whereof he is sensible; but he will be glad of smallest mercy, hitherto's crumbs; yea, such as are to others refuse, despicable blessings, are in high esteem with him in his desires. Beggars ask but a piece of dry bread, a cup of small beer, or water; and the like mercies and blessings in God's house, which others, it may be, account too slightly of, these humble suppliants will highly prize, and earnestly crave of the Lord.

6. When a Christian amidst all vilifyings of himself in prayer, is ready to exalt the Lord, and to acknowledge much love and mercy of God, even in the smallest benefits thereof; whatsoever stout vagrants do, which will disdainfully cast scraps at their feet, yet poor hungerbitten beggars will not do so, but be very thankful for smallest courtesies. So it is here; the guiding of a faithful Eleazar in his way, will make him bow his head in way of thankfulness to the Lord, that so graciously answered his prayer. O how will God's humble suppliants exalt and magnify the Lord for blessings of a meaner nature, even temporal as well as spiritual blessings! as David for promised blessings to his house, cries out, "Who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" He exceedingly amplifies the kindness of God to him and his people, even in regard of temporal blessings; he wonders at the greatness of God's mercy to him and them therein. And when such of God's suppliants do not fare so well at the door of mercy as they could desire, and as sometimes they have done, yet they will not go away muttering, but even then will speak well of God, and his grace, and mercy, and covenant. The Psalmist cries out, "Lord, where are thy former loving-kindnesses?" yet concludes thankfully, notwithstanding all the sad passages of providence before mentioned: "Blessed be the Lord forever more; amen, and amen."

7. When a suppliant having prayed with much fervency and brokenness of heart, yet sees the emptiness of his prayer, even at the best, rests not therein, but runs to the name of the Lord, and looks for the rich and free grace of God in the Lord Jesus, as Daniel. He presents to God in humble prostrating, his soul's desires, but in the close professes the supplications which were presented, (though with much brokenness of heart doubtless,) were not for any righteousness of his own, whether of person, or performances, or prayers, but for his mercy's sake, and desires audience for the Lord's sake, for Christ's sake, and for his name's sake. So Ezra, "though he had been weeping and casting himself down before God in prayer," yet at last he concludes that "he and the people in respect of themselves, are before God in their trespasses, and cannot stand before him by reason of the breach of covenant with God, which he had then bewailed."

Third, why humility in prayer is required. I answer briefly,

1. Because prayers put up in humility, do ever speed best: "For this saying, go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter." For what saying? namely, that wherein she takes the name of a dog so meekly, and craves the very portion of dogs, the mercies slighted by the children. The Lord will not look at what the proud bring to him, but has respect to the lowly, to strengthen them with grace and peace in their souls, to perfect all that concerns them. The lowly strangers see how the Lord welcomes them in prayer. The penitent prodigal, that speaks in such a vilifying way of himself to

God his father, sees how royally and richly he is entertained by the Lord. The costliest robes of grace in Christ are readily brought forth to such; greatest mercies are granted, as pardon of sin and the like. Yea, in such a lively and convincing manner exhibited, as that they shall carry it home with them, the sight and light thereof shall abide by them: "He went home justified." They shall in a holy, triumphant way carry home the garland of grace and peace for which they wrestled with God in prayer; whereas in defect of humility, no prayers nor tears of a proud Esau shall avail. The Pharisee's repair so diligently to pray at the temple is to little purpose, whilst he does not humble, but rather exalt himself therein. God will not approve of any such men's persons or prayers, and such a non-justified estate is a sad abasing of such, as the gracious acceptance of the persons and prayers of humble ones in Christ Jesus, is a high degree of honor to them.

2. Because the servants of God are never more such, than when humbly seeking the face of God. When the converted prodigal comes to himself, then in that frame he betakes himself to this work. Assuredly, penitent dispositions work then strongly; zeal and holy indignation against sin, and ourselves for it, are then stirring; then faith and love are doubtless active, and putting forth themselves in our souls.

3. Because an humble frame of heart in prayer puts most honor upon God, and Christ, and mercy, and grace, as all in all. Agar in that frame thinks that it will put the largest heads, and ripest wits in the world to it, to conceive or express the glory of God in Christ, and he will magnify the purity, perfection, and stability of his word. Asaph, when in that frame of heart shown in Psalms 73:1-28, then there is none but the Lord of heaven and earth with him, and in his desire; and if such a poor soul get any mercy by prayer, of all others he will use it best, and give God the most glory of it, and for it, as might be shown in divers instances.

4. Because such a kind of spirit in prayer does fit us most for the mercies of prayer. Hence it is compared to hunger, which does fit the soul for its desired food of grace and mercy. Hence is that opposition betwixt the hungry and the rich, and yet rich is rather opposed to poor, because indeed the poorest in spirit, the beggars in spirit are the most hungry. As the emptying of a vessel fits it for being filled with precious liquor; so humility by emptying the heart of all self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, self-will, fits the soul in prayer, for what it does pray for. The heart of the humble is a prepared heart to pray to God, likewise to receive and improve the mercies which it seeks in prayer; such an one is most flexible and ready both to use the best means to obtain the mercies desired, and to walk worthy of them when obtained. So Job says, "I have sinned, what shall I do to thee, O thou preserver of men?"

Lastly, what helps and means should we use to further the humility required in prayer? I answer,

1. Set faith at work, as we showed at large in the last lecture. Faith in God's promise and providence made David pray humbly, as one not worthy to speak more to God, or receive more from him. That made the prodigal to throw down himself in such sort, and humbly to seek his father's favor, considering in him a father's compassion, which possibly might move towards him; he is sure likewise that he has all he needs, and that he moves and furthers him therein. The publican's faith in propitiatory merit and mercy, causes him so to speak. It was faith that set the woman begging in that humble and lowly, as well as earnest manner, Matthew 15:1-39. The faith of that woman was the instrumental means of her salvation, which was the means of her silent, humble approach to the Lord. It is faith which takes a true measure, both of God and of ourselves,

and thereby furthers such humility.

2. Get our hearts filled with love to the Lord. Love is a stooping grace; it will make a Christian think meanly of all he says or does in behalf of Christ, whom he loves, that he never speaks nor does enough for him. Love will make a man amplify his worth and excellency and glory, and ever be speaking well, even the best of him; and that will surely make him carry it submissively to him, as very loth to displease or dishonor him; and when at any time a Christian wrongs or offends the Lord, O how will love occasion self-loathing and displeasure and distaste and trouble for it. The Lord Jesus in giving that answer in that poor woman's hearing: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her; for she loved much," shows that love also set her on work in such humble and melting sort, to express the secret desires of her soul unto him, touching the clearing of her justification.

3. We must be sincere in heart in our prayers which we make. The sincere-hearted publican will humble himself in seeking of God's favor by prayer, when the leaven of hypocrisy will puff up the Pharisee whilst he is praying. Sincerity will make us in prayer speak freely and ingenuously on the part of God and Christ, in way of good; and on our own part, in way of our evil and emptiness; it will make men of yielding and flexible tempers, and cause them to be open and plain-hearted with the Lord; and that they shall not refuse or be unwilling to take any shame before God.

4. Let us improve serious considerations of our needy condition, as likewise of the greatness of God. The saints are styled such as poor in spirit, hungry, destitute ones, whose best habiliments are rags. When we look at this ragged condition of ours, it will make us remember ourselves, and keep us humble in our supplications.

5. Let us spread much our own and ancestors' sins before the Lord when we are to pray. Thus did Daniel and Ezra. The very serious mention and meditation of an offence of a child of God against his Father, will make a regenerate nature begin to work, and then will issue holy blushes in the face of an ingenuous Christian. If through the wiles of Satan and our deceitful hearts, we should begin to gaze on our goodly features, and have some risings of spirit in way of pride, yet at the sight of this black foot of ours, we should then assuredly fall in our spirits.

6. Let us take all holy advantages of such melting, weeping plights, in which we are sometimes above others. David's heart being in that humble plight upon occasion of a good word of the prophet, sent to him from God, then David goes in and prays, and then he carries it so humbly. When Ezra upon the hearing of the evils among them, was put into that abased frame, then he falls into that humble sort to pray before the Lord. So whilst Nehemiah's heart was even broken at the present hearing of the sad news, he forthwith fetches himself in solemn way to pray and weep before the Lord. Though such melting desires and inclinations should haply be raised from other causes, or spiritual miseries, yet being stirring already, they may the better be spiritualized. There are times when we are so strangely stupefied, that scarce any thing will affect us; but when affected seriously with any thing, it is an advantage to turn such waters (the sluices being now opened) into the right channel.

7. In our secret approaches to the Lord, spend some time in serious premeditation. It will help to put us into a more serious frame of spirit, and that is the next neighbor to an humble and sensible plight. It will add plummets to fleety, lofty spirits, especially if we seriously consider his majesty and

sovereignty before whom we come, surely that will help to bring us on our knees. The sight of the king's colors will doubtless make all, but some presumptuous, careless, stout spirits, to lower their sails, even when they are going on full sailed in prayer.

15. Part 2, Chapter 6. Conditions: Sincerity

CHAPTER VI.

SINCERITY REQUIRED IN PRAYER.

Having spoken in part of the third general thing propounded, namely, the conditions required to the incessant practice of this duty of prayer, and therein handled two of those conditions required, namely, faith and humility, we come now to a third, namely, sincerity, or purity, or integrity. The approved suppliants are such as call upon God out of a pure heart, such as call upon him in truth: "The prayer of the upright is a delight to the Lord." For our better handling of this requisite to prayer, consider we, 1. Wherein this purity, integrity, and sincerity required in prayer does consist.

2. Why the Lord requires it.

3. What are the marks of it.

4. 'What means and helps there are to it.

5. And lastly, what motives may stir us up to endeavor it. To the first we answer, that such sincerity consists in these six or seven things :—

1. In carrying on the whole business of prayer as to God. Whether we confess our sins and miseries, or crave redress of them; whether we ask such or such blessings or favors for ourselves or others; or whether we bless the Lord for grace already vouchsafed us: for what else we do in prayer, we are to carry it with such awe and reverence as those who are speaking to God; and with such intention and observance as those that are now to deal with God; to keep our true distance, neither heartlessly distrustful and dismayed, and yet not heedlessly and presumptuously bold with God; afraid of him, yet not terrified by him; solaced in him therein, yet trembling before him; satisfied in him, yet unsatisfied in continued desires of mercy from him; resting on him, yet restless; and though restless, as pressing upon him for mercies we need, yet resting on him quietly for the same. Having such apprehensions of God in the duty as befits him, and as are suitable to us, to the duty, to the present work and workings therein. If we confess our sins, we are sensibly apprehensive of his purity and majesty offended thereby; of his goodness and patience abused thereby; of his privity to them all, in their circumstances; of his sin-revenging justice due thereto, of his sole prerogative to pardon the same; of his readiness in Christ to do it. We are seriously apprehensive of the vileness of such sins, of our own loathsome nature, whence they did arise; and our hearts rise up in holy indignation and detestation of them, and ourselves for them; whilst we mention the same, we bleed over them in our spirits, could even tread upon ourselves, and take a holy revenge on ourselves for the same; and all the meltings and breathings of our spirits in the mention of our sins, they are still as to God. When we mention our want of such and such mercies, all is carried as to God. We have suitable workings in our minds; we eye him as full of all grace and mercy, as treasuring up all that fullness in the Lord Jesus, as willing and free to communicate the same, as real in his promises of the same; and the like might be said in the rest.

David says, "he will direct his prayer to the Lord." And Christ would have such as pray, to "pray to their Father which seeth in secret." "Job would order his cause before the Lord."

2. In carrying on the whole business of prayer as from God; as, "praying in the Spirit." "Praying in or by the dictate and direction of the Holy Ghost." Christians are to drive this holy trade with God, but yet as with his own talents and commodities: "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds," says the good servant. We should wrestle in and by prayer with God, but as by his strength. By the Lord will his people make mention of his name in prayer, or any other ordinance of his.

3. In carrying on the whole work of prayer, as for God alone. The suppliants of God bring their prayer, not as their offering so much as God's offering; they do indeed lift up their prayer, as did the prophet, and their heart in prayer; yet so as withal exalting God in both. "He is extolled with their tongue, in their crying to God with their voice." The saints confess their sins, that God may be cleared in his proceedings; express his mercies in prayer, not to set forth their own praise and commendation, as did the Pharisee, but that the Lord rather may be glorified, and that the heart in the mention thereof may be awakened to give him glory; and therefore they use in the mention thereof sensibly to confess their own vileness and wretchedness. If they request of God such and such mercie, yet it is that the Lord may be the more honored in granting the same to them, whether the mercies be of a spiritual or temporal nature. Though the mercies they crave, and immunity from the miseries which they complain of to the Lord be the matter of their prayers, yet not the sole motive. Self is not the great wheel which sets all the wheels of their hearts going, nor is self the center in which those many lines of their spirits and prayers do end and meet, but rather the respect to the Lord, and his name, favor, and presence; these are all in all. They are a generation not of false seekers in their prayers, but of "seekers of the face of the God of Jacob;" "and having pure hearts therein, they do not lift up their souls to vanity." The main of their desires is, that the Lord Jesus, the Man of God's right hand, may be glorified, and that the mighty hand of God may be with him in his government; and if he be exalted, that shall and will engage them the rather to be thankful to God for it: "The making of the refused stone, the headstone of the corner, is that wonder of grace in which they thankfully rejoice." David wishes that guilt removed, not merely because it lay as so sore and heavy a burden upon his conscience, or that he would have ease of the terrors thereof, but that in being eased and freed thereof, he might be the freer to sound forth the praises of God. He would have his former joy again, not because he made any idol of his comforts, and was all for comfort in his spirit, for he is as earnest for a clear and sound heart, but that he may be more active for God in giving some honor to him in other sinners' conversion, whom he had haply hardened by his sin. He would have his mouth opened, not to be more free and cheerful of speech, but that his lips might set forth God's praise. The sons and daughters of God pray for preservation from, or deliverance out of temptations, and afflictions inward and outward, as in the petition of the Lord's prayer, but with a first and main respect and desire that the name of God may be hallowed, sanctified, honored therein; they pray for the remission of their sins, and the comfortable manifestation thereof, not merely because they are damning, but because detestable to them; not because terrors to them simply, but that God in his gracious and free pardon of them may have his name hallowed; and for that cause do they pray for all temporal blessings for them in their callings and conditions, under the notion of daily bread. The godly pour out prayers, not so much as expressions of their desires of observance thereof from God, as of obedience therein unto God; not merely as means of future, but also as an homage of love for past

mercy. David will call upon God, because he loves not himself, but him.

4. In being as ready pressed to a serious use of all other means to obtain mercies prayed for, and avoid miseries bewailed; as to pray for the one and against the other. Abel brings himself with his offering; both are equally at the service of God: so did not Cain. They offer themselves in with their prayers, and such like service, as the main sacrifice, willing “to prove what is the holy and acceptable and perfect will of God.” And therefore no wonder they are pressed to use any holy means to further what they ask of God. Their heart and hand are joined with their tongue. If they cry for wisdom, they bring their instruments to dig and search for the precious mines thereof. Their prayers are called seeking, because they are ever attended with searching in all corners, in every means, if they may find the mercies they pray for. And they are comprehended under the notion of that hungering that will break through even stone walls to come by the food it craves. Many instances hereof might be given; but more hereof, when we come to speak of that case about use of means.

5. In not hiding any thing from God, as unwilling or not desiring his privacy thereto, but at least endeavoring to open all to him, declaring our ways to him; pouring out our hearts to him; and where we fall short, craving a further discovery of ourselves by and to the Lord. When Job would clear his integrity, and prove his sincerity, he does it professing that he covered not his transgressions as Adam. Sincere ones are uptve, such as would be, and have all in them seen of God; as persons held to the sunlight, perspicuous, transparent, yea, in all their spots. Suppliants being much in commerce with God, they have experience of his all-searching and all-seeing eye, and cannot but will and desire his search. They are acquainted with his admirable faithfulness and cordialness to them, and therefore are not loth to have it thus, but glad of that opportunity. They find they pay dearly for any contrary acts of guile; and beholding withal the happiness of plaindealing with God in their words and walks, they cannot but desire and endeavor the same.

6. In harboring nothing willingly and knowingly in themselves, tending to hinder audience and acceptance of their persons and prayers by the Lord, or free access to the Lord and to his gracious throne. The Psalmist declares that his prayer is unfeigned in that he dare make that appeal to the Lord, and is purposed not to offend so much as in a word. The sincerity of his heart in prayer appeared, in that though he had evil in his heart dwelling there, yet was not the same had in respect by him. Hence that putting away of iniquity required in persons who intend to pray; hence the holy clearing of the saints when entering upon prayer, by premising and prefacing their self-condemning confessions, as in Ezra, Daniel, and others; hence that casting up accounts when persons are then to offer up their gifts; then is the remembering time of what was not taken such notice of before: “When thou offerest thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest.” When to lift up our hands and our hearts unto God in the heavens, then if ever, there ought to be searching and trying of our ways. We are to draw near with our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and privy to any known sin approved in us or by us. Sincerity will heartily complain of any lets to the free passage of prayer, and account the same its great burden and misery. It will never connive or wink at them, or give free way to them.

7. In avoiding all affectation in prayer. In hypocrisy there is affectation. Hypocrites are stage-players, who though illiterate, many of them, yet will be high-flown in their expressions. Their mouth speaks great swelling words when they speak to men or God, or else they fail of their use

and aim. In all affectation there is some hypocrisy. Sincerity will avoid flourishes of rhetoric and vain repetitions, not expecting that the Lord should be moved by any such like vanity. Sincerity loathes and fears to compliment with the all-seeing and faithful God. The lips of the saints in their prayer are as a thread of scarlet, not stuffed out with the rhetoric of man, but with the pure eloquence of God: "Thy lips are a thread of scarlet."

Secondly, the reasons why God requires sincerity in our prayer may be such as these:—

1. Because purity and simplicity are most suitable to his nature with whom we have to do in prayer; as a simple, pure Spirit, "he will be worshipped in Spirit and in truth." He seeks most that part of his image of truth and purity in any person or performance: "Such doth the Father seek to worship him." Truth in the inward parts is that which he desires. The more of that therein, the more approved, the more delightful to him: "The words of the pure are" (to God also) "pleasant words." His image in his children is lovely. The child that is most like his father is most made of. The purity and sincerity of the people of God are reckoned their perfection, though they have many imperfections. Thence are the godly called the perfect. Besides, purity and sincerity are most suitable to Christ our high-priest, who was holy and undefiled. And God would have his priests, his saints, an holy priesthood, and so conformable to him. Besides, there are truth, reality, seriousness, and solidity in all we improve in prayer; and therefore no wonder if God will have us carried with an answerable frame of Spirit therein; the priest of our profession is truth itself. The meritorious sacrifice was real and true; it was the sacrifice of himself. The covenant of Christ's blood a real, ratified, forcible testament; the way made for us a true and living way, and therefore we may well draw near to God with true hearts.

2. Because sincerity ever puts to all its strength in prayer, which the Lord likes best. Hypocrisy divideth, and doubling and dividing makes weak work. Potsherd strength is but brittle, and will not abide any knocks. Burning lips in zealous expressions, joined with a wretched, false heart, are but like a potsherd, covered with silver dross; but sincerity is single and unanimous in all its actions, and so its united force must needs be more available.

3. Because sincerity puts a holy grace upon, and force into our words in prayer. Hence that strength ordained in the mouths of babes, entire and sincere ones. Grace of the lips is joined with pureness of heart; and as earthly kings befriend that in their petitioners, so does the Lord in his. Hence is it that David pleads his unfeigned speaking to God in prayer as an argument with God to hear him.

4. Because prayers of sincere ones are ever of most public use and good, and that is a thing the Lord greatly likes. A pure handed and hearted Job praying to the Lord, shall deliver the island where he is thereby: "By the blessing of the upright, the city where they are is exalted."

Third, the marks and characters of sincerity in prayer are such as these.

1. When the chief materials of our prayers are right and holy things. When our hungering desires expressed. in prayer are after righteousness, they are surely such as are accounted of God sincere; when in prayer also we first and chiefly seek the kingdom of God, the light of God's countenance, not as the most do, some worldly good; when we mind not baser, common metal, brass or tin, but gold and silver, precious materials, requests of weight and worth with God; it argues we have some spiritual measure of sincerity and purity within; when we trade with God, not

about trifles, but pearls of great price; it argues we are not hypocrites, but solid and substantial merchants and citizens of heaven.

2 When our whole man does act in prayer, understanding, judgment, and conscience, will and affections, they do their parts in it, and are joint petitioners. David was all prayer, or all of David, or in David, was herein employed: "With my whole heart have I entreated thy favor." The soul and spirit, sublimest parts of the church, are employed therein. If this little world in man, this little commonwealth in a Christian become a joint solicitor unto our heavenly sovereign, surely the king of saints will account the requests serious, and the solicitor entire therein; as earthly kings do the joint petitions of whole bodies and counties. When every string in the instrument sounds its part, and keeps due proportion, both the instrument is right tuned, and the music played is fullest of true harmony. So the saints, when wholly exercised in the prayers they make, are sincerely employed therein. When all within the soul, as bound by oath and covenant unto the Lord, to deal truly in matters touching him and us, do agree in what they present before him, surely then it will pass for a true verdict, as in other cases it does with men.

3. When in praying still we endeavor to do it to purpose, or else we are to ourselves as if we had not prayed. Righteous ones will pray effectually; if they pray, they lift up a prayer unto the Lord. When a factor or servant will not leave trading or working until he make something of it, you will say then he is honest and just in his calling. Like Abraham's servant, he prefers his master's occasions which he was to despatch, before his very food. He was serious in his errand, and in pressing for his answer, and when he has done, hastes to make return thereof to his master; so it is here in serving God with our spirits in prayer. They are true and trusty soldiers to their commander and country, which will not out of the field without some trophies of victory; like those which when thereto enjoined and adjured, though the honey would even drop into their mouths as they were in the pursuit of the enemy, yet they mind the completing of the victory, though with some denials of themselves in their present refreshments. So when we sincerely seek and wrestle for mercy, we will not away without a blessing. Or as a pleader is honest in soliciting a client's case, when he will not cease pleading until he has brought the same to some comfortable issue; so is it with the spirit of a Christian, which is mainly employed by us in this holy pleading work; the more serious and unmovable it is therein, without some good success, the more sincere.

4. When we strain not much to speak more than is in the general bent of our souls, or than is in the present desires of our spirits, or is in the sense or workings of our hearts, but speak as things are to us and with us. It is not so much the strength of judgment or memory that prompts the mouth to speak, to fill up time with airy expressions, as the strength of holy desires and griefs, which put the people of God upon uttering what they do in prayer. They had rather cease, after some serious strivings to the contrary, against distempered, senseless spending of time in mere words without spiritual life, than go in such sort, though they may seem to themselves or others but in an ill pass at present by reason thereof: "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for thy commandments." Strength of holy desires after grace, to understand, believe, and practise the Word of God more, made him be so large and zealous in his prayers, that out of the abundance not of his head, but of his heart, his mouth speaks. Hence the saints' prayers are called their desires.

5. When we are most frequent and fervent in secret prayers of all other prayers. What is said of grief, is true of prayer. He prays most truly and sincerely, that prays most secretly. Hence our Savior does oppose secret prayer to hypocritical praying. Sly, false dealers will be careful and very exact in what they speak when witnesses are by; but honest men will be as exact in what they speak to another all alone. So is it here; many, it may be, who carry it with much zeal and circumspection before others, in their closets, if they do pray at all, it is so briefly and carelessly, that it is as good as no prayer at all. Let such look to their spirits, whether all be right within. False-hearted spouses may seem to speak lovingly and loyally to their spouses before others, so that such as are by take them to be very chaste and faithful and kind; yet if in secret they carry it otherwise, their honesty may well be suspected. So if Christians should carry it in expressions in prayer with others as if very loyal to the Lord Jesus, but in secret it is quite otherwise, their hearts are not so honest as becomes their profession. Verily, sincerity is plain and open-hearted, and surely never more than when alone with God its friend. Sincerity in prayer, is simplicity and singleness in prayer; and therefore will be the same everywhere. If praying with others, we strive still to speak with such life and power and holiness as is meet; so if alone praying, it will put us upon the like seriousness in the duty.

6. When we can in prayer be as earnest for others as for ourselves; yea, we can be very serious in wrestling with God for such as have injured us; not so much that we may be less molested by them as that the Lord Jesus might be magnified in them. The very thoughts what a mighty conquest the Lord would work in their conversion, what a glorious name he might get thereby, what a foil it would be to the devil's kingdom, put spirits into their prayers for them. •David, though he had many things lay heavy upon himself, as appears in the whole 51st Psalm, prays for, and is mindful of Zion and of the church's good. Self has less groundwork in prayers for others than those which are for ourselves. The Lord Jesus makes account that they had need be perfect as their heavenly Father is (in their measure and proportion of perfection) that love and wish so well to their very enemies.

Lastly, when we are as ready to praise God for mercies received, as to pray to him for what we want. Godly Esther and Mordecai are as solicitous that they and others with them may have their solemn thanksgiving days for the gracious deliverance for which they had prayed and fasted, as ever they were of the days of prayer and fasting. Self will be sometimes prayerful, and so will hypocrisy, because it is good and suitable to both; satisfying the desires of both, and furthering the ends of both may come in thereby. But sincerity will be praiseful and thankful. An honest poor man will scarce ever forget a special kindness showed to him by another at his request in a time of his necessity; whenever he meets his friend he will be thanking him a long time after; and when he is with others, he will be thankfully acknowledging the same, to the great commendation of that his friend. But a counterfeit, a vagabond, a rogue, for whom you do any office of love, you shall hardly ever see or hear of him more; when he has gotten his pennyworths of you he is gone, unless he need you again; he returns not to acknowledge it, though at the present he give you good language. So a Christian's grace and sincerity thereof are more tried when he gets blessings than when he wants the same. Self being empty, prays; but self when full looks but to his own satiety: but self-denial, the daughter and handmaid of sincerity, will not be so circled within the compass of self in his prayers. As i is in a prospective glass, when you turn the wrong end foremost, great things will seem very small, and things that are nearest will appear as afar off, and small things will

hardly be discerned. So when self and hypocrisy are to look upon mercies of prayer; great ones are but little, and small mercies none at all; but sincerity takes the truest survey of them all in their dimensions and colors, and therefore no wonder if it be thankful; sincerity will bear such true and full witness to our extreme misery in ourselves, that the light of mercy, compared with this darkness, will prove very amiable and praiseworthy. Sincerity will truly and faithfully compare our worthiness and utter unworthiness at our best with Christ's glorious worthiness, that the eye of the soul cannot but discern praiseworthy glory therein. Greatness, and absolute sovereignty, and independency in the Lord, and unutterable nearness and dependency in us, shall truly be presented and compared in a sincere suppliant; and can he be other than very thankful? Self, which prompts a falsehearted Christian to speak for blessings, will be judge, too, of the same. And there is little likelihood of right judgment to proceed from so ungrateful an umpire; and if not rightly judged of, what thanks to be expected? But sincerity judges of divine blessings by the rules of the Spirit and Word of God. The spring of sincerity in prayer rises from God; and therefore it will assuredly return to God in praises which are suitable. The sincere Samaritan suppliant is as loud in his praises of God as ever he was in his prayers; but so were not the others.

Let us now briefly speak to the two last things propounded; first of the means and helps to further sincerity in prayer, and then of the motives to stir us up to the same.

Helps to sincerity and purity in prayer may be such as these :—

1. Labor to be sincere in all our life towards God and man. When sincerity is interwoven in this whole piece of our lives and conversations, it will show itself in this part of it Sincerity and right things should be our constant and daily study: "The thoughts of the righteous are right," and therefore no wonder that the words of the pure are pleasant words. When men love pureness of heart in all their courses, there will be a grace and favor thereof in all their discourses with God or men; when persons use duplicity in some things with God and their own souls, they will do so in other things likewise: "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways; hypocrisy is leaven." If you hide it in one part of the lump of your conversation, it will spread and sour all the rest soon. The Apostle James instances the double minds that such have, and they must purge themselves of their double mind in all other things, if ever they would approach and draw nigh to God in prayer rightly, and not ask amiss; and for this purpose we must free our hearts and hands of sinful defilements which foment that doubling with God, and hinders this integrity in prayer. If men in any kind attain the same, they will ask amiss, ask things with a false, adulterous heart. We shall never make straight steps in this part of our Christian race, "if that which is lame be not healed." If the feet of our affections be diseased, we can never wrestle with God so stably, but shall halt therein, as well as in other of the ways of God.

2. When at any time we espy any flaws or doublings with God in prayer, as the best sometimes may, we be greatly abased for the same, as James wishes such as ask amiss, and such false spirits therein, to be afflicted and mourn, namely, for that doubling with God and their own souls. When Christians pay dear for such slowness, they will surely take heed thereof; the more bitter it becomes, and grievous to their palate, the more will they loathe it. It is to be feared that many Christians who see such guile in prayer, are content sometimes that they have prayed, though the same were a shell and shadow of the duty, and the pith and substance thereof were wanting; or if they be troubled slightly with it, all is not well with them, that they deal not so faithfully with God

and their own souls, yet they are not thoroughly stirred up with serious grief and holy indignation by reason thereof, and therefore go on in such a way. If guile of spirit were thoroughly examined, and holy revenge taken upon it, such a cheater would not so much haunt the hearts of Christians in this and other ordinances of God as it does. And to this let me add, that we carefully and resolutely resist Satan, when at any time, then or afterwards, he does tempt us to this falseheartedness in our talking with God in prayer. Give not the least way to it, but when at first you perceive the tempter busy to put us upon sinister ends in our requests, or any sly dealing with God and our souls in prayer, away with it, strongly and seasonably bend all our strength against it, discover to God by humble and solemn confession that treacherous motion; cry out upon it, pursue it, and never leave till we have sent it away with shame and loathing of heart. Hence is it that James wishes such as were so guilty in their prayers, to make use of that remedy: "Resist the devil," namely, "in his temptation thereunto, and he will flee from you," and espying such like wiliness of spirit in our prayers, let us be willing to be crossed in any such requests as we make with such a spirit, for verily God will not grant such desires to us if he love us; and if we do or should do it, it would be worse for us. Many of the saints see cause to bless God afterwards, that the Lord did not grant such or such requests of theirs, perceiving that indeed their heads were not right therein; and it is well for them that God will cross them in any sinful much unbelief in our asking, too much doubling with God. Unbelief is never cordial, but slavish and selfish. Faith will cause a thorough opening of the heart to God. We shall then draw near to God with the truest hearts, when with most assurance. There is secret atheism or infidelity of heart, and much unbelief, in that any at any time dare to double with God in speaking to him, making God like to man, which might be mocked and deluded with goodly words and pretences, and not to be a searcher of their heart and reins; else men durst not make so bold with him, to baffle with him to his face. David, one that had made too bold to affirm that of his integrity, of his hatred of God's enemies, qualifies it with a plainhearted motion to him, whom he knew was privy to his spirit, to search it, and" see whether there were any way of wickedness in him, and to steer his course for him in the right way." Where faith is, love will attend and show itself; love uses still to be candid and cordial, and entire in all its speeches to him whom the soul loves, the more that abounds, the more sincere. When the apostle prays that the Philippians may be sincere (in all their words and walks respecting God, themselves, or others,) he prays that their love may abound; then will they approve the most excellent things, the best way of praying to God, serving God, and walking with God.

Motives to sincerity in prayer may be such as these. In that it will be an argument of a saving and sound fruit of God's speaking unto us, and of our effectual speaking to him. The former is evident when our language is sincere; surely God has turned unto us some pure lip, some soul-saving ministry. Such of the cities of Egypt as should be converted savingly, the prophet says, they should (as a fruit thereof) speak the language of Canaan. Especially in worshipping God in prayer, there they should not speak half the language of Ashdod, as it were, and half the Jews' language, half carnal language, nature, sins, the world's language; but at the least in the desire and endeavor of their souls they speak the language of the Holy Ghost, pray in the Holy Ghost. And the latter is as evident; truth in our seeking of God, and mercy in God's answers will surely meet together, as in other cases they do. The Lord himself makes it an argument of his respect to his people's desires, in that they are children that will not lie, and gives it as a pledge when they may expect infallibly that he will answer their prayers, namely, when they are cordial and sincere in

seeking of him, when they seek him with all their heart. And the Psalmist makes his cordial seeking of God, to which his very conscience was privy, and the Lord much rather, as an argument with God, to pray for respect to his desires. Sincerity and integrity in our speeches is amiable to men, to all sorts of men; and the God of truth is not less, but more delighted in the words of truth. Hence it is that upright-hearted supplicants are (and well they may be) freest and boldest of all others with the Lord. Such as come with true hearts, come with much confidence. They walk at liberty when conscious of their integrity, that they seek the statutes of God. Consciousness of secret guile will appall a man when dealing with an all-seeing God. Hypocrites are afraid, but are persuaded that such as speak uprightly may come near to God boldly, and converse with him safely, though in respect of his justice a consuming fire. But amongst them, who may or dare come near him with such stubble? and if they durst be foolhardy, as senseless ones are, yet it would be to no purpose; salvation which they might desire would be far from such persons, as seeking not God but themselves.

2. In that God will cover a great deal of weakness in their persons and in their prayers, where there is sincerity in their desires. Their sincerity in prayer is a special preservation against any ruling evils in them. When they seek God with their whole heart, and do no iniquity, God is engaged to protect and preserve them from such swervings. When Christians do not deal cordially and plainly with God and their own souls in the request they put up against their sins, and for God's grace, they do but strengthen then the part of sin; pretending to speak against it, and not doing it cordially, it provokes God to leave them to such lusts, and to receive a due recompense of such spiritual treachery from such secret traitors: but as for the saints that are cordial with God in prayer, though they escape that mischief of ruling evils; yet are they perplexed and molested with indwelling distempers, which haunt them at the very door of grace, to which they repair in prayer; and herein is the kindness and compassion of God to them, that he overlooks these their distempers in prayer, and owns the meaning of his spirit in theirs therein. God looks at the bent of such a heart, and by that measures out to them mercy: "Do according to his ways whose heart thou knowest." God searches the heart both of sincere and false Christians, in all their doings, to give to every one according to his ways, to the false heart indignation and wrath, but to them that are sincere, and seek for glory, he gives honor and immortality. For of all others, upright ones have the successful influences of all others' prayers with their own prayers; each sincere one prays that God would do good to them. As for others, they are left to be discovered, and left to such courses at the length, as shall declare them to be evil-doers. The continuance of God's faithfulness to sincere ones is the joint request of all that are godly, and the several petitions of each of them.

3. Consider the evils of hypocrisy in prayer. God esteems such prayers as but dross of some silver. It is as but as an offensive odor rising from a dead person. He eyes us then as speaking lies rather than uttering prayers, because we pretend to pray, and worship and serve God, but do indeed therein but serve our own base lusts, become petitioners for them, and speak against God rather than for God. "They lied against me," says God, yet in pretence cried to him; but in truth they did not cry to him when they howled on their beds; their ends were carnal, and they make God as carnal as they; a God that would further the desires of lusts; else why do they petition him thereto? and this is to belie the Lord. The Lord answers such according to their heart's desire, according to their heart idols, and not their lip hypocrisy; he gives them up to their lusts; they secretly choose delusions, notwithstanding other pretences of sacrificing, and the Lord lets them have their choice,

and at length takes away that good that they seem to have, and to prayer they become as speechless, deprived of all ability to pray.

16. Part 2, Chapter 7. Conditions; Watchfulness

CHAPTER VII.

WATCHFULNESS REQUIRED IN PRAYER.

Having handled three of the conditions required to the incessant practice of this duty of prayer, we now speak of the fourth and last requisite, namely, watchfulness; which is threefold. 1. Watching unto prayer. 2. Watching in prayer. 3. Watching after prayer. In which let us consider severally three things.

1. The nature of the duty in the three forementioned branches thereof.
2. The reasons and motives urging to the practice thereof.
3. Some helps furthering the performance of the same.

Watchfulness unto prayer consists in these four particulars :—

1. Being of a wakeful spirit, ready and fit to take the due seasons of prayer, as the Lord requires:

“Call upon him while he is near,” as the saints’ usual practice is; and that is a part of their special privilege so to do: “They call upon God in a time wherein he may be found.” There is a morning of opportunity which David will take for prayer. True it is, that God is up before us, he is stirring early for his people’s help; as soon as the face of the morning or season of showing mercy to them appears, he helps them. Yet we may not be up in our spirits; we had need rouse up our hearts, as being too oft drowsy and not watching for the first daybreak of a season of mercy. So that as David did, when he would praise God, that are we to do when we would pray to him: “Awake early.” There is much spiritual sluggishness cleaving to the spirits of the best in spiritual services; as sometimes the eyes of their bodies were covered with sleep when they should have prayed; so is it too oft in our spirits when they are not in wakeful plight. In Deborah’s song of praise to God, see how she doubles and redoubles the word awake: “Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a Song of Solomon” It is not a little calling that will awake our slumbering, heavy-eyed spirits. Sometimes they call up a sleeping Jonah to arise and call upon his God. Zachariah must be roused out of his sleepiness to observe the vision, by the angel. When the Lord Jesus would hear his dove’s voice in prayer, see how oft he calls to her to arise and come away. Sometimes the Spirit of God in their consciences and spirits calls them up to attend this holy employment, if any morning light of approaching grace peeps forth, or season of doing the Lord service in prayer is observed, as in Deborah and David, and others of the saints. If ever our spirits had need be up and ready, they had need be so when we are to pray. A sleepy spirit will scarce speak sense to God in prayer. It is burdensome to a friend to stand listening to a sleepy, broken discourse, consisting of half words and sentences indistinctly placed and uttered in his ears, though it be by his friend. So is it in a like spiritual, disorderly, drowsy praying and speaking to the Lord; as men in a sleepy fit, rather than lose something they got in their hand, than get more unto the same, by craving it in such a drowsy sort. So we are losers and not gainers by prayer whereunto our spirits

are not awakened to be fit to speak to the Lord as becomes him and us.

2. In heeding to make use of all holy and special advantages unto prayer that Divine Providence offers. When Christians wait for providence, such speaking invitations to prayer, then they watch unto prayer indeed. As at the posts of the doors of Christ, so are the saints to watch and wait. Though the Lord in respect of his own disposition to mercy, be always ready to hear and help his people, yet he is not always to be spoken withal for that end; neither are we so fit to speak to him. Sometimes again it is in our hearts to pray to the Lord, as David said, "He found in his heart to pray that prayer to God." At other times, that advantage was to seek. It requires much holy skill and care to discern advantages to prayer. A watchless, sluggish eye discerns not the same.

3. In observing narrowly and distinctly what necessary and weighty occasions of prayer we have, searching our ways for that purpose, and then lifting up heart and hand in prayer. Like pleaders, saints ought to be good students, that they may be the fitter to plead; we are to study our hearts and lives, and the cases of both, before we plead them. Or as tradesmen look over and set their marks upon their parcels ere they retail them; so in this case ought the saints to look over the particulars of their hearts and lives, before they approach God in prayer about the same.

4. In observing wisely the frame of spirit in which we are, when we address ourselves to prayer; how fit or unfit for prayer; how far lively, or dead hearted; how far serious, or slighty; what faith is stirring, or what distrusts, doubts, or temptations, and like musicians, when they are to play, as they are about to tune their instruments, make use of their musical ear, attending how far each string is in tune, too high or too low, too sharp or too flat; so the suppliants of God, who are harpers, as we have showed, have a musical ear, an attentive, discerning spirit, and can tell when their spirits are prepared or unprepared, and how far forth prepared or not prepared to seek the Lord. David had not only a forelook to that, that his heart might be prepared to praise God; but he had a reflex look upon the same, and gives his censure upon it, that as far as he could judge, his heart was in tune to praise God. And the like observation did the Church make of her heart when seeking the Lord; strong and lively desires of God and his favor were stirring in her, and she is resolved to improve them that way to the utmost. How many people pretend to be seekers of God, who are utterly careless in making these observations, and being thus heart-awaked for this duty! which I leave to their own consciences seriously to consider. That the people of God ought thus to watch unto prayer, appears,

1. In that it will be a special help to pray pertinently, and reverently. If we would pray in the spirit, with the life and power of the Holy Ghost in a spiritual and heavenly manner; we had need "watch unto prayer, praying in the spirit, watching thereunto."

2. In that it will much help spiritual enlargements, and continuance in the act of prayer; and prevent straitenings and inconstancy; praying alway with all manner of prayer, and watching thereunto, are joined; yea it will help our skill in prayer, we shall pray in the spirit in that sense, even in and with the skill thereof. The best students will be the best pleaders in this way of prayer.

3. In that it will be a special means to make our prayers more availing and successful, both in the exercise of our faith and hope and patience; such watching unto prayer, helps to further Christian progress, as might be evinced in many particulars, if need were.

4. Watching in prayer consists, in the general, in a wakeful spirit throughout the duty. When the eyes not dim in this ordinance, as not in others, but are increased in a right carrying on of the duty, and making holy observations thereupon. So far as any sluggishness steals upon us, we are ready to shake it off, and to rouse up our spirits in this holy work. As the good prophet, even whilst the angel talked with him, was as one in a sleep, and stood in need to be waked to attention. So may our spirits need quickening, whilst we talk with the Lord in prayer. We should indeed be of wakeful spirits therein, but oft-times we are watchless, and spiritually sluggish.

1. In a careful heeding and ordering our expressions in prayer. As in vowing, so in praying, we are not to be rash with our mouth, careless what expressions we use unto the Lord. As men that speak to kings and princes, weigh all their words heedfully, lest while seeking to request his favor, they provoke him to displeasure by any unseemly and disorderly expressions; so ought men to heed what they speak to the great God of heaven. It is an argument of a stupid, and in a manner atheistical spirit, not to heed what we utter before God in prayer, so we fill up time with words. It is a high provocation and contempt of the Holy One, when men will make so bold with his pure ear and eye, as to use such expressions in speaking unto God, which they would be loth, yea would blush to speak in the hearing of mortal men. If of every idle, or frothy, impertinent, unprofitable, unnecessary word spoken at other times, and that unto men, "We must give account at the day of judgment, and that we must be justified or condemned according to our words," what may we think will be the censure of idle, unsavory, impertinent expressions used in prayers, if not repented of, if we judge not ourselves for them; if we reform not the same, by a more watchful regard, what and how we speak unto the Lord? When David is to pray, he desires the Lord himself "to set a watch before his mouth, and to keep the door of his lips." The saints are very solicitous of what they speak in prayer to the Lord; they are sensible of such weight in this duty of watching in prayer, that they think it is a work which requires the skill and wisdom of God to help therein. David is very sensible that he runs many hazards, if rash and heedless therein, and yet sees that he has no sufficiency to set or keep this holy watch at the door of his lips, to take due care what expressions come out, and how many, or how few; to restrain and keep in any unseasonable and unsuitable words, which with the first would be coming forth even then, when he should be most spiritual. The saints in prayer are darting upwards, and had need to keep their eye on the work as well as on the mark; they had need observe what darts they direct thither, and how they levy them.

2. In attending carefully to the working of our hearts and spirits in prayer. David observed his whole heart to be stirring in his prayer, and what strength of desires he had therein. He observed how entire and sincere his heart was in his prayer; a watchful Christian will observe whose hands are to the soul's petition, whether the several affections, the mind, etc., do join therein. And as musicians improve their musical ear in tuning to play; so whilst playing, they listen what strings sound harmoniously, and which are not touched, and sound not at all; so it is in praying.

3. In observing carefully and seasonably what want there is of meet stirring of heart in prayer, and what impediments, and unmeet thoughts, and suggestions, or affections, are therein. The church and people of God observed, that their spirits were hardened, straitened, and wandering, and complain thereof, "Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?" Hezekiah observed, what distrustful thoughts were working with him in his sickness, though he prayed then for recovery. Asaph observed carefully all the workings of his distempered spirits, and the distempered reasonings which he had while he sought the Lord. Though he prayed for deliverance, yet then he

perceived the distempered speeches of his distrustful heart. A watchful Christian observes what jarrings are in the harp-strings, the heartstrings (as I may call them) while he is harping, while he is praying, or praising God. He observes who would be fingering the instrument of his spirit, while he is playing, or rather praying; he marks who comes in to interrupt his spirit while it is speaking to God in prayer. Some intruder will assuredly be crowding in upon the people of God, in their retired discourses with the Lord; but a wakeful spirit espies and rebukes them.

4. In a heedful observing such spiritual hints, items, and motions of God which he gives unto us in prayer, or any divine beams of grace, which even in a transient way, we meet withal therein. Though the Lord, the Savior of his people, be but as a wayfaring man, who makes very short stages with them, yet a watchful Jeremiah observes and improves such travelling calls of the Lord. Sometimes while the people of God are asking, the Lord speaks to them to ask on; and a watchful David will hear. He was crying, and the Lord bids him seek his face; he hears, and does it. If but a harbinger of heaven do but call upon such watchful Christians, they espy them, and inquire more of them. While that generation are seeking the face of the God of Jacob, a motion is made for preparation to entertain the king of glory in his ordinance. "Lift up your heads ye gates, and the King of Glory shall enter in." They hear what was spoken, and inquire further about the same. "Who is the King of Glory?" Now how many drowsy formalists neglect this holy watch in prayer, in all the several particulars, we may easily guess; but I shall leave them to be awakened by the Lord.

Reasons moving the people of God to watching in prayer, may be these :—

1. The Lord has gifted his people with eyes, fitting them to observe themselves, as in all other actions, so most of all in the acts of his worship. Hence those living creatures in the church are represented with eyes within, when about the worship of God. They are fools, which when religiously exercised, consider not what evil they do therein, how vain, or slight, or stupid their spirits are therein. But the saints are the wise ones, which have their eyes in their heads, fit to improve them in discerning of what passes. The watchman in the soul of a natural man and hypocrite is blind, or at best sleeping, and therefore observes not who passes through the soul; but the conscience of a regenerate man sits upon the watchtower, the candle of the spirit is lighted up, his eye is single, he has a seeing eye from the Lord.

2. The Lord is a glorious, heavenly, and all-seeing God, and well may we mind what we speak and think in prayer before him. If that we ourselves do not observe our hearts in prayer, yet he does, and he will discover us to our shame, how our spirits were exercised in our prayers.

3. God answers, or smiles when he pleases. Sometimes when we are addressing ourselves to pray, "he will hear before we call. He will meet him that gladly worketh righteousness;" even in the half-way will he meet such a one. A suppliant had need, then, be a man which minds and remembers the Lord in his ways. The prodigal himself when about to sue for his father's favor, shall perceive his father coming to meet him. Sometimes while we are speaking in prayer, the Lord gives gracious answers, and motions, and persuasions of his Spirit in ours. We need, then, in this part of our course, observe the gale of the Spirit of God, and how it turns or returns in the breathing of it; that we may be ready to catch this prosperous wind in the sails of our spirits, and keep still our sails full.

4. The enemies of our souls and supplications, do then watch their opportunities to disturb us in prayer, to distract us with troublous perplexing thoughts, or to delude us with groundless comforts. The fowls will be lighting on Abraham's sacrifice, but a watchful Abraham soon espies them, and drives them away.

5. Our hearts are naturally false in the performance of this, as in the practice of other holy duties; they are apt to step aside from such a strait path in the way of grace. David knew it, and therefore desires the Lord to order his steps in the word. Sometimes the heart seems to be brought to some inclination to God and good, and yet then is apt to start aside; David says, "he found in his heart that he might pray to God." He had found such a heart, or upon serious and long seeking of such a heart, for the Hebrew word will bear both. It is one of the holy chances that any of us overtake a heart filled with holy praying dispositions. It is so slippery, that if we look not strictly to it, when we think we have got hold of our wandering spirits, yet they will steal away, and leave us; arid when they are but a little while gone aside, it is very difficult to recover hold of them again for such holy employment; though we should seem to lay a lock and chain upon them, by our holy resolutions and vows; yet verily our hearts have their pick-locks, and the devil for a shift will lend them a file; there is no keeping of them from their natural wanderings, without a very strict hand and vigilant eye. That slippery flitting disposition of heart, which rules in hypocrites, does at least dwell sometimes in the dear children of God. Their goodness, good thoughts and workings in the ways and ordinances of God, are sometimes too much like unto morning clouds, which mount heavenward in appearance, but forthwith vanish out of sight.

6. God and Christ watch then to give us aid in prayer, that our spirits may be more and more elevated, and to be then whispering items of grace to us, to rescue us from oppositions of the wily enemies of our souls, and the like. He waits to be gracious to us, in hearing and helping us at the voice of our cries. He observes carefully the resistances made by Satan against his Joshuas. As he says of vowing, we may say of praying: Say not before the angel, it was an error, a careless, rash expression of our minds. We should so carry it before Christ the angel of the covenant, in such religious acts, as those that have been conscientiously heedful, the rather therein; yea in that when we are religiously exercised in prayer, and such like worship of God, some of the blessed angels are then observing what we do, and how we carry it; and they are waiting on the Lord, ready to be employed in any service for our good. As when Joshua is so employed, as Christ was ready for his succor; so there stood before him some blessed spirits, ready to be commanded in any service for him. An angel of God is ready at hand while Daniel is praying, to minister encouragement to him. May not we well then watch in prayer, when the Lord himself thus waits upon us, and the blessed angels are watching the grant of a commission from God for our good.

7. Watching in prayer much helps both our comfort and confidence, in and after prayer, when hereby we become more assured of our sincerity in our praying unto God. Paul had observed how in prayer, his spirit was duly employed, and therefore dares to appeal boldly unto the Lord, and call him to witness, in what sort he had mentioned the Romans in his prayer. Our waitings in this way of calling upon God, is a pledge and fruit of God's waiting to be gracious unto us. We may best know the estate of our soul, by observing what we are usually in our prayers. David gathers by this, that he was one of those godly ones set apart for God. As skilful persons may gather the estate of the body by the pulse, so may a wise and vigilant Christian, by observing his spirit in prayer.

Watchfulness after prayer does likewise consist in these four particulars.

1. In diligent attention to keep up such praying dispositions fresh and lively, which were operative in us, in our prayers. It is a great part of a Christian's wisdom, when he has got an advantage against a slight or formal spirit, or any enemies to prayer, now to stand his ground, and manage his holy victory; and when his heart is upon wings, so to keep it; but neither will be effected without a watchful heed thereto. When David was in that praying and praising frame, as one suspecting the fidelity of his own spirit, and his own sufficiency to maintain the same, he entreats the Lord to keep the same in his servant's heart for ever. A praying frame is so sweet, that gracious hearts would ever be in such a plight, if it might be, and they take all the care they can, that they may be so; they therefore crave and improve the faithfulness and wisdom of God for that end. Great is the insufficiency of the best to keep up their own spirits therein. Even praying Moses, though he held up long and strongly in prayer, yet his hands wax heavy; such is the infirmity of the best, that they are not able to hold it out long with strength of elevation of spirit in any holy exercises. Care must be taken both to keep such a sublimity of spirit. A stone is brought to bear up Moses' hands, the strength and stability of that tried stone, is to be improved by those who as a holy priesthood, would hold on offering acceptable sacrifice of prayer or praise. And as this care is to be taken, that while we are actually praying, it may be thus; so even afterwards, we are to look well to it, that our praying spirit be not weakened and grow weary, that it flag not, fail not. When a motion is made by the Lord to David, to hold on yet seeking of God as he had already done, he was awake to hear, and improve, and followed the motion.

2. In looking heedfully and hopefully after our prayers, and listening still when God will answer us by his Word and Spirit, and accordingly observing how far forth he does not answer us. David he is careful to order his prayer rightly, so when he has done, to wait and see what becomes thereof. The Psalmist will hearken after he has prayed, what God the Lord will speak. Watching after our prayers and the success thereof, is as the watching of the night-watchmen watching for morning. O how eagerly do such of the saints desire the day-spring of the least outbreking of the light of the Lord Jesus! How earnestly do they attend the scattering of the night mists and clouds of their troubled, tempted spirits? How oft do they look out to espy the least peep of the dawning, of the daybreak and morning light? When they have knocked at the door of grace, they listen after the least moving of the door, and the least sign, or pledge of the gracious approaches of the Lord to them. Hence is it that on the one hand, when the Lord is silent, or when the prayers of the saints take not according to the desires of the saints, they observe it, and acknowledge it; as the prophet perceives that the Lord gives not such gracious entrance and entertainment to his and the church's prayers. They observe the frowns of the Lord, notwithstanding their prayers. And they observe that no such desired deliverances were wrought by their prayers. On the other hand, Paul observes how long the Lord was silent; he kept true account how oft he sought God without answer given, and then he minds the answer which at length was given. They that love the Lord Jesus, will look after the love letters which they have sent, and carefully attend and await the answer returned. If our Heavenly Father should by his Spirit put the question in our hearts, what we have done with our petitions, where we have left them? we may upon observation and knowledge answer, that we have left them in the hand of the Lord Jesus our elder brother. And if we be questioned how we have disposed of our sacrifices, we may confidently answer, we have delivered them, and left them in the hand of our blessed high-priest, and do wait the success.

3. In a judicious eyeing, examining, and owning of after-items, or occurrences, wherein an answer of our prayers is involved. As in secret pacifying of the heart amidst his sad stormy grief of spirit, the Psalmist thence gathered that the Lord had heard the voice of his weeping. He observed, that after he had prayed against his enemies' plots and whispers, they did not triumph in the attaining of their intended mischievous desires, and gathers that the Lord did therefore hear his prayer. David observes the sweet quiet of spirit which he had after his prayer against the rage of his enemies, and gathers thereby that the Lord has heard him. Paul has experience of strength in and from the Lord against his temptations, and gathers therefore that God had heard his prayer against the same, though the temptations were not removed. David being in a pit of fear, and rescued and freed of his horrors, and his spirit more established in the ways of God, sees that he waited not for his answer of prayer in vain, but that he got it at last. He observes how he is quickened and strengthened with the might of God in his spirit, and by that perceives God had heard his cry. When before prayer he was in outward distress, and inward stress and perplexity; and after he had prayed, he perceived how he is every way outwardly and inwardly enlarged, he concludes, that the Lord hath heard him. As lovers will be opening the boxes wherein are their letters, and reading, as the superscription and direction on the outside, so that which is written within; so will the saints be looking into the providences of God, and see and hearken what they speak, and what of God's mind and grace in answer to their prayers they may perceive. Or as petitioners to earthly Lords, will be inquiring of every one of his attendants and servants who come from his presence after their petitions have been carried unto them, what the Lord says touching their requests, whether he has read it, how he accepts it, whether they bring not the answer thereof from him, and the like? So heaven's petitioners will be examining and inquiring into, and of all, after providences occurrent without them, and motions made within, What news from heaven?

4. In a vigilant care to keep with us what answers and trophies of prayer we have gained, in safe custody, and lively and fresh vigor, sweetness, and efficacy. The lovers of the Lord Jesus, will keep such love letters and answers by them, and will ever and anon be reading them over with as much delight and content as at the first, and haply at a second perusal and review, they take notice of some precious, pithy passages, that at the first more cursory looking over, they observed not; and it may be at a third time still they perceive, it breathes more love, and more in this or that pathetical expression, than at a first or second view they were aware of. Answers of prayer are like to friendly tokens of the Lord's special love to them. Every vigilant, friendly seeker of Jesus Christ, will be owning and looking over and over these pieces of his coin, which at this or that time he has sent them by such or such a good hand, in such or such an ordinance, or providence, or work of his grace. How will they make conscience of keeping the love of the Lord Jesus engraven upon their hearts, if he was lately with them, and spake kindly to them in prayer? O, bow they will familiarize with him, by reviewing and reviving, and speaking over in their hearts his last expressions which he used; a word spoken to them in mercy, is carefully kept by them, and incorporated into their very hearts. Hence also the church who had so wished for Christ's company: "O that thou wert as my brother," professes her care to keep Christ with her, and that nothing provoke him to be gone from her. "I charge you O daughter of Jerusalem that you stir not up nor awake my Love till he please." Paul long after that answer mentioned before, kept the joy of it, witness that joy of his in his trials: "Therefore I take pleasure in reproaches."

Reasons to move the godly thus to watch after prayer, may be these:—

1. Our condition is that of children, subjects, servants, beggars, and therefore we may well attend the good pleasure of our heavenly Father, Lord, and Master, to give answer to our requests; the poor are expectants. David praying to the Lord as his King, will look up: "As the eyes of servants look unto their master's hand, so our eyes wait upon the Lord."

2. It is certain God will give an answer of grace to his saint's prayers, though it may be long first; yea, in that the Lord oftentimes defers his answers, it rather calls for our waiting. Habakkuk having prayed against the church's enemies, "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?" says, "I will stand upon my watchtower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." He will use all pains, patience, and vigilance to observe the issue of his requests; and he has some answers: "The Lord said unto me, Write the vision." "The vision is yet for an appointed time, though it tarry, wait for it;" and verily sooner or later faithful prayers will speed. "I said not to the seed of Jacob, Seek my face in vain." "I will hearken what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his saints." "I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me." God has wisely appointed hearing times, when answers are most suitable and grateful to his saints, and honorable to him and to his grace; therefore we may well attend the same: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning," (that is, seasonably,) "and in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." None are losers by being the Lord's waiting-men or women: "The expectation of the poor shall not perish forever."

3. Such watching and waiting after our prayers, is a comfortable pledge of mercy to us, and grace in us. Answers of prayer are assuredly near us, when we have hearts to wait for them earnestly and attentively. Habakkuk stands, and sits not long upon his watchtower, is not long in that waiting posture, without his answer, as before shown. The speaking vision will come, if we wait for it; and they only whose faith tells them that God will hear, and will speak peace to his saints, they hearken, they wait for him. It is a sign that we do truly and sensibly feel the pinching wants of mercy, and that the desires of grace have some strength as well as truth in them, when we are so industriously heedful and attentive in listening for answers of prayers; they come not idling to mercy's doors, or as men who have no weighty soul business to dispatch: for them, well they might stay there, as men do in a formal course of prayer, but they would not wait. Waiting Christians make not light of their prayers, but look at them as precious, in that they in such sort look after their returns, and the answers of such messengers.

4. Answers of prayer, which by this holy watch are met withal, and observed; are of all others most precious and useful to us. They greatly enlarge, praise God, and incite to walk worthy of him. "Continue in prayer, watching therein with thanksgiving." Who more thankful than such watching suppliants, who observe how and wherein God has heard them? "When the afflicted cried to him, he heard." "My praise shall be of thee; I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice." Answers of prayer heeded and observed, greatly strengthens and arms a gracious person against Satan's wily cavils and rebukes: "I will watch to see what he will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." It is a pity to see how many precious souls, which out of ignorance or carelessness of this duty of watching, or out of improvidence and negligence of oft reading over these lines of God's love, written and sent in, are foiled in temptations. Answers of prayer attentively observed, strengthen our faith for the future, and much encourage us to pray in greatest straits and saddest hours. "The Lord hath heard my supplication, the Lord will hear my prayer." "I called upon the Lord in distress, and he answered me; the Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me."

When we look not after our prayers, both we and others also lose much of the benefit thereof. Answers of prayer are in God's intent of public use. God spake with us, (say they,) when yet he spoke with wrestling Jacob. God's hearing the prayer of the destitute, concerns all others in like case. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute." "This shall be written for the generation to come." Much sadder would the case of many an afflicted soul have been, if godly David and others had not been watchful, and by the spirit's guidance had not recorded the varieties of their conflicts, comforts, and answers.

5. It is the part of the more wise and judicious of the saints so to do, and by doing whereof, they grow most in experimental knowledge of the Lord's giving. As the wisest men are those that take most heedful observations of the carriages and issues of human transactions, so are they the wisest Christians, who most attentively mind these holy transactions betwixt them and God. Hence the Psalmist, speaking of manifold answers of prayer, says: "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivers them." "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." To conclude, we would have God to mind our prayers and desires of answers, wherefore look that we heed our answer of prayers, if worth the waiting for. "When the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." Harvest-answers of seed prayers, will fully recompense our pains and patience; and therefore, like other seeds-men, we may well wait for the precious fruit thereof.

Third. The helps of such holy watching, are,

1. Sobriety, which is joined to prayer watchfulness: "Be sober, and watch unto prayer." Spiritual drunkards, distempered persons with lusts, regard not what they say, even to God himself. Such as are most moderate and mortified in their thoughts about common matters here below, have little else to mind than how their souls prosper in their holy converse and commerce with the Lord.

2. Bodily watchfulness: both are aimed at under that exhortation. "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." The eyes of the mind are hardly watching when the eyes of the body are scarce waking. Now for this end, use seasonable hours for prayer, neither too early nor too late.

3. An heavenly frame of spirit. Angels are very vigilant. "Their angels are always beholding the face of my heavenly Father." A godly man's watch-tower is a sublimer station and condition than is usual; earthly, sensual, worldly spirits, are not fit to keep this holy watch.

4. A wise and awful frame of heart, apprehensive of the weight and worth of prayer, of the glory and greatness of God; an holy ability and skill to discern, and judge of things that differ, whether workings or motions; the wiser Christians (as I said) are most observing of such things.

5. Composedness of mind and thought, together with earnestness of desires and deep sensibleness of our present pressing necessities. David praying in deeps, brings in a night-watcher's case, often exposed to extremities; is in a night-watcher's posture, watches for morning break of gracious answers from God.

6. An holy keeping ourselves in a constant and general watch of spirit in other things and passages of our Christian work and way. Watch unto, in and after hearing the word and reading of it, conference about it, meditation upon it, and practicing of it. "We must observe all the commandments of the Lord."

17. Part 3, Chapter 1. Unregenerate Persons' Prayer

PART III.

CASES OF CONSCIENCE RESPECTING PRAYER

CHAPTER I.

UNREGENERATE PERSONS' PRAYER.

Having handled the two former parts respecting the duty of prayer, and the modification and qualifications thereof, we now come to the last part of this discourse about prayer, namely, to speak of some cases of conscience, in respect to the incessant practise of this duty of prayer. The first case respects the persons who are to obey this indefinite injunction; whether only regenerate persons are bound thus to pray; or that it be not also a duty which lies, even upon unregenerate persons to endeavor obedience to this injunction; "Pray without ceasing;" or if such persons should endeavor the practice of this duty, how far forth they may come up to it, and be carried out in the obedience thereof; and likewise what success may come thereof, whether their prayers may not be heard and answered of God, or how far God may hear and answer even their prayers. The case itself doubtless may lie sad upon some spirits, which either suspecting, or concluding, out of some dismal horrors of heart, their estate to be but the estate of mere natural persons, they question whether the injunction does lay a bond upon them to obey it, though they may desire to come up to the obedience of it; especially, considering that the Scripture requires that such as pray, should pray in faith, and believe that they shall receive what they ask: "Whatsoever ye ask, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." And this they cannot do, finding no assurance of any interest in God, nor being able to persuade themselves that Christ died for them in particular; and through this mistaken fancy, that there can be no true faith without such a firm persuasion and assurance that Christ is theirs, they are kept off, and scarce dare pray, conceiting that they are not qualified and fitted yet for it; they cannot lift up pure hands without doubting. Besides, God says, that "the sacrifice (prayer) of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." And they think that they are such wicked ones in themselves, and can or will God take a prayer in good part from such as they are? Surely no. Neither will Satan, the enemy of prayer, neglect the opportunity to present to them the strictest of the qualifications required of such as seek God by prayer, and that unless they could come up to that strictness of the rule, (which is laid straight, that the people of God may by little and little come as near to it as they can) and that forthwith; at first, setting about the work, it is not for such as they are to attempt the same; and better were it for them to sit still and be silent; and so would (if possible) take them off from using means to be better, and make them resolve never to seek after a better estate than what they are in already; the devil knowing right well, that God who orders such or such an end of good to his people, orders such and such good means to be used, for attaining that end. But such suspicions of tender hearts, being mostly groundless surmises, need not, must not discourage any from prayer, iii whom the Lord hath wrought a pliability of heart to the mind of God therein, and a desire to obey his injunction thereof; this is to them an inward call and invitation of God to call upon him.

The more tremblingly they set about this duty, with sense both of their own unworthiness and unfitness to perform it, the fitter they are for it. And suppose the worst, that their surmises have real ground, yet verily, the more sad they see or suspect their estate to be, the more need have they to seek God by prayer. When wicked Simon Magus did discover the falseness of his heart, Simon Peter does not now forbid him to pray, but he enjoins him to pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart may be forgiven him. If there be any possibility of a man's salvation, if there be but a perhaps left of pardon, and that of one at present in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity; as such a one is bound to repent, so also to pray. Some will be ready to put off these injunctions of prayer, as such as concern puritans; but as for such as they are, what boot is it for them to pray? It was reckoned among the profane speeches of them of old: "What profit should we have if we pray to him?" Yea, but some now hold it as their judgment, that it is to no purpose for unregenerate persons to pray; because indeed they are not bound to pray. They may as well join in the rest of the speeches there condemned and branded for profaneness, and maintain that they ought not to desire the knowledge of God's ways, they ought not to serve him, they ought not to pray to him, and therefore may say to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; and what is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit is it if we pray to him?" An unregenerate heart of itself, averse from any way of God, and not subject to the law of God, would gladly have such a tenet to hold up against God and his servants, to excuse them from seeking unto God by prayer, as not bound to do it.

Let us therefore give answer to the several branches of the case propounded, and show, 1. That an unregenerate person is bound to pray. 2. That such a one may be strangely carried out in prayer. 3. That God may hear and answer his prayer.

1. Then, that an unregenerate man is bound to pray, is evident from this indefinite injunction, "Pray without ceasing;" whether regenerate or unregenerate. The wicked man, who is charged to forsake his evil ways and thoughts, is first charged "to seek the Lord whilst he may be found, to call upon him whilst he is near." All flesh shall come to God, whether they are good or bad persons. For first, it is a duty which lies upon all men, as created and made by God. It is a natural worship. It is that which the law of nature, as well as that of the word of God, doth put men upon. Hence, even the most Pagan people all do call upon some God: "The mariners cried every man to his God." "They pray to a God that cannot save." Among other "things contained in the Law, they do this also by nature." If they omit calling upon God, their natural conscience will accuse them for it; or if they do call upon God, it will so far excuse them and encourage them in it; other natural men who live under the light of the word, if they neglect it, sin both against the light of nature, and the light of the word of God. Heathens and other natural men will be damned for this sin of not calling upon God. Hence are they twice imprecated against, as under that consideration of not honoring God, so of not calling upon him; as highly sinning in the one as well as in the other: "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that know thee not, and the families that call not on thy name." Unregenerate persons, as well as others, are bound by the first commandment, to have no other gods but God, and therefore bound to worship the Lord only, and no other God but him alone; and therefore to love him and no other God; to fear him and no other God; to trust in him and no other God; to pray to him and no other God, as they are bound to make no graven images of God; to worship the true God only with his own instituted worship, and not any other of men's inventing; and as they are likewise bound not to take God's name in vain.

2. Prayer is a means ordered by the Lord, even for the obtaining of regenerating grace: "A new heart will I give you," etc., compared with "Thus saith the Lord, I will yet for this be sought (or inquired of) by the house of Israel to do it for them."

God will give even first grace, in the use of his own appointed means, and that is in a way of seeking for it. Hence also God owneth this as his own appointed means for obtaining other blessings of his, as deliverance from dangers, supplies of wants, and the like, though the persons which pray are unregenerate. So when seamen of all sorts, whether ungodly or godly, are in storms and dangers, they cry "unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distress." If it were simply sinful in them, being unregenerate, to cry and pray to God, he would never thus encourage them, or others in their case, to cry then unto him. Uzziah sought God in the days of Zechariah, and when he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper; if he had been downright godly, he had sought God all his days: yet though an hypocrite (so unregenerate) as long as he does that which is for the matter of it right in God's sight: "He sought God— God prospereth him. Uzziah did what was right in God's sight, as Amaziah his father did," which was not with a perfect heart for the manner of doing it, yet the seeking of God even by such a one, whose heart is not perfect with God, is in itself considered, that which is right in God's sight, and a due and direct means to prosper, in what such a one takes in hand. "When he crieth unto me (namely, as one oppressed, as one in necessity, be he who he will, regenerate or unregenerate) I will hear him, for I am merciful." That scoffing lad Ishmael was an unregenerate person, yet when in distress, and crying to God, the angel said to Hagar, "Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is ;"if it had been simply sinful, and that which Ishmael ought not to have done, the angel would never have encouraged Hagar from such an argument, as God's hearing Ishmael's cry.

3. God may and does bestow praying abilities upon unregenerate persons. He gives to some the gift of prayer, to whom he never vouchsafes the spirit of prayer. The gift of prayer is as common to hypocrites, as the gift of prophecy. "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, (is large and earnest in prayer to me,) shall enter into heaven." Unregenerate ministers, magistrates, parents, masters, tutors, may have such a gift of prayer, by the use whereof others may be instructed, helped, and encouraged in a way of prayer, yea, in a right way of prayer; and if he give such a gift, surely he rebukes the use of it. That slothful servant, though a reprobate, yet having gift and talent, he is damned for not improving it.

4 That practice or religious performance must needs be a duty, even of unregenerate persons, the omission or neglect whereof is charged by the Lord upon them for their sin, (for if it were not an anomia or transgression of some rule of God, it could not be sin,) but the omission or neglect of prayer, or calling upon God, even by unregenerate persons, is charged upon them by God as their sin; therefore the performance of that service of calling upon God was their duty. The assumption is evident: when the apostle would prove the unregenerate Jew and Gentile to be under sin, he proves it by this, that "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." The workers of iniquity have it charred upon their very consciences, as that which they cannot bear know to be their sin. "that they call not upon God: do not the workers of iniquity know that they eat up my people as bread? They call not upon God." It is charged as the pride of the wicked: "The wicked is so proud, that he seeketh not God." The hypocrite that is blamed for ceasing to call upon God (will he always call upon God?) should rather have been blamed for calling upon God at all, if

it had not been any duty of his to pray. To like purpose we might argue, that the neglect of it by the unregenerate, as well as regenerate Jews, is bewailed by Daniel, as their sin: therefore the contrary was their duty. "All this is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer to God." Besides, also, if it had not been in itself good, and a duty even for an unregenerate person to pray, but had been in itself sinful; the Psalmist never need to have made that imprecation against him: "Let his prayer be turned into sin." Besides, the Psalmist would never have urged God so to affright and persecute his enemies by his judgments, that they might at length be forced to seek his name, if it had been in itself sinful. But "the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." So is the "plowing of the wicked sin." Not simply in themselves, for then an unregenerate man should not plow, nor labor in his calling; yea, he should not eat his meat, nor sleep, etc. "For to the impure and unbelieving is nothing pure." But it is so in-respect of the defects of other qualifications required to the holy use and exercise of such things; namely, want of faith, love to God, repentance for sin, etc. "Their sacrifices were an abomination to the Lord;" yet in themselves commanded duties, and enjoined to every Jew, whether he were unregenerate or regenerate. God once enabled Adam, and in him all his posterity, to call upon him; and though he, and we in him are become bankrupts, and disabled to do that service and homage, yet our Lord and Master may, and does require it of us, and accounts it our sin to neglect it. It is every one's duty to understand, and so to believe in God, as well as to seek him; but the omission of that duty of understanding and believing God, hinders not, but that the omission of that other duty of seeking God becomes a sin to every one.

2. An unregenerate man may be strongly and largely carried out in prayer, as it is said of them, who did but flatter God with their mouth, for their heart was not right with him; they sought God early, namely, when he slew them, when they were in fear of their lives. So may profane mariners be very earnest in prayer then. "Cry unto the Lord." "When your fear cometh," etc., "then shall you seek me early, but shall not find me." Those spoken of in Isaiah lviii., joined long and large prayers with their fasts. An hypocritical Pharisee could not spend his time in his fasting days, unless enlarged in prayer. Those hypocrites that devoured widows' houses had such a gift in prayer, that they could be very large and long in prayers: "And for a pretence make long prayers."

3. Unregenerate persons may be full of praising and thankful expressions in their prayers. The unjustified Pharisee's prayer was rather a thanksgiving. He prayed thus: "God, I thank thee, I am not as other men." Those unregenerate ones among the Jews also, who cried so earnestly, did sing as loud as Moses and Aaron. "Then believed they his words, and sang praises to him;" but not rightly, for "they forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel." "They lusted in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert." Only lost what is now said, may raise some doubt in the hearts of any truly regenerate, the example of the Pharisee's thankful prayer, will yield matter of distinction and differencing of the unregenerate persons in his praises from the regenerate.

1. The unregenerate person, in his thanksgiving before God, pretending to lift up God in his praises, does intend to lift up or exalt himself. Hence Christ, who knew the spirit of this Pharisee in his praises of God, renders him thus: "Whosoever exalteth himself."

2. The main in their eyes, and so in their thanks, is some inherent excellency, not those imputed mercies, not Christ and his righteousness, and propitiation and the pardon of sin, God's favor, acceptance, etc. No word of these in the Pharisee's thanks, but that "I am not as others, unjust; I fast, I pay tithes," etc. They are the saints, whose hearts, being most affected with those mercies,

do break out into cordial prayers for them.

3. Such men rest in some common eminences and excellences, above others. The Pharisee passes others, he is not as other men, and that sufficeth him: no word of a serious petition for the supply of such or such wants, of this or that grace, or for the increase thereof, or for the subduing of such or such corruptions. He grounds his rejoicing upon another's falling short of him, and into sins from which he is restrained. He "shall have rejoicing in himself, and not in another."

4. Such men respect more the gift, than the giver; and trust more in that, than in him. They trust in themselves that they are righteous, when they say, God, we thank thee. They make the gifts their God, and they adore and admire the giver only for the gifts' sake, and do not admire the gifts for the giver's sake, as true converts, and spouse-like spirits do.

5. Such men are very ambitious in their thankful acknowledgments. They make God's praises but as a stirrup to get up into men's esteem, and as a bridge by which to convey to themselves human praises. Hence this temple-acknowledgment, in the most conspicuous place.

6. Such men will in the midst of their thanksgivings be with heart and mouth too (sometimes) censuring, and putting contempt upon others, falling short (as they conceive) of their excellences; though those other be better men than themselves, as this gracious publican was, than the Pharisee—so says this seemingly thankful Pharisee: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as this publican;" not such a wretch.

3. Unregenerate men may be carried out with some faith, as well as fervency in their prayers. The nine, as well as the tenth, who was truly gracious, cry as loud as he, and believe as strongly upon the word of Christ as he, that the Lord Jesus had granted their request of healing, and go a great way to Jerusalem as men already cured, to show themselves to the priest when yet they were not then actually cured; they set forward in the journey upon that errand, upon confidence of Christ's word, as if they had been cured at the very instant wherein lie spake, and yet not at that very instant, but afterwards, even as they journeyed towards Jerusalem from that part of Samaria, were they actually cured. As an unregenerate man, who has not love, may have the gift of the faith of miracles, so as to remove mountains, so may they exercise that faith in such a way, expecting answers of prayer in cases of wonder. They that cast out devils, did it by invocation upon the name of the Lord, accompanied with such a faith for hearing them, and helping them: "And in thy name cast out devils." And as an unregenerate man may have that common temporary faith; may believe for a time, so may he for a time act such a faith in prayer, or the like, in matters only of a common nature, and not such as are properly saving; as for clearing up pardon of sins, subduing secret corruptions, sanctifying afflictions, an holy rescue or issue from temptations.

Third. God may in some sort, and in some cases, hear unregenerate men's prayers; both such prayers as they put up to the Lord with others, or by themselves alone. Prayers put up by them with others, may be heard in a saving way and manner by the Lord; though not in a saving manner to themselves, yet in a saving way to the saints which join with them in the prayers which they put up. Matthew says, the centurion came unto Christ beseeching him to heal his servant; but Luke expounds it, that he sent to the elders of the Jews to beseech Christ to do it; he joined with them in the request; it was his, but it was presented by those proud hypocritical and unregenerate elders, who breathed none of the centurion's faith, or humility, as appears by their plea with Christ from the

centurion's worthiness, saying, "that he was worthy that he should do this for him," yet the Lord Jesus heard, and graciously answered the good centurion's hearty desire, and consented to the substance of the prayer. They that presented the poor palsied man to Christ with a tacit desire of cure, had (some of them at least) a faith of miracles for his cure; but the man himself no doubt had a further desire, even of his soul's cure, with the pardon of his sins: "And when Jesus saw their faith, he saith to the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven;" the man's grievous disease might trouble his friends; but this was his greatest trouble, in the want of pardon of sins; and his desire and faith was accordingly carried out, and this soul-mercy of his pardon and peace is given in as an answer in common to them all. "When he saw their faith, he saith to the palsied man, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Abiathar, who proved a treacherous and bad man, yet if he made inquiry of God for his counsel about distressed David, or about David in a strait, God gives a gracious answer for David, who by him seeks unto the Lord for his counsel; and surely the desires of faith are acceptable to God, and successful, whether expressed in others' prayers, wherein believers joined, or in their own alone: "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him." The fruit of no one ordinance of God does depend merely and only upon the worthiness and goodness of such as chiefly act in it. Christ authorized the twelve disciples, and Judas among the rest, to preach the Gospel. And so, as that if they came to worthy ones, humble souls, ready to receive their doctrine, their peace was to come upon them: "If the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it," even all kind of bliss to their souls also, which you petition for in your prayers, and hold forth in your preaching, that shall come upon it. Let the preacher be unworthy himself, yet if the hearers be worthy, their peace comes on them. The Gospel, and Gospel ordinances are the power of God to salvation to the believing hearer and partaker, be the minister regenerate or unregenerate. The cup in the Lord's Supper, "is the Communion of the blood of Christ" to the worthy receiver, be the minister, whom the people called to dispense the same to them, regenerate or unregenerate; and so in prayer God's compassions are to his people's miseries; for redress whereof, the prayer is made, be the man that is the mouth of the people therein, godly or ungodly. Notable is that example of wicked Jehoihaz. "Jehoihaz besought the Lord, and the Lord heard him: for he saw the trouble of Israel wherewith the king of Syria troubled them." Nor would God ever show such respect to prayers put up by unregenerate persons in behalf of his people or any of them, if it were (as some say) a sin to join with an unregenerate minister, parent, master, husband, etc., in their prayer. And since every hypocrite, how godly soever he is taken to be by the most judicious Christians, yet is an unregenerate person, if an hypocrite; and since he that we judge to be truly godly, yet it is very possible he may be an hypocrite, we cannot be infallibly sure in any ordinary way, of another's saving estate, but only in the judgment of charity we may esteem such or such a one truly godly; so that if we sin if we join in prayer with an unregenerate person, we cannot assure ourselves but that we sin in joining with any other at all, because we cannot ordinarily be so assured, that another with whom we would pray, is regenerate; and so a man must now turn an absolute separatist indeed. As for other prayers, which do more personally respect themselves, and are uttered by themselves, although the parties be unregenerate, yet the Lord may hear the same; the Lord as a master, grants the request of that hypocritical servant, though not as a Father. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee the debt, because thou prayedst me." So those rude mariners, crying in distress, are heard of the Lord. So was mocking Ishmael heard in his cry. God may, and does put forth wonderful works for persons who cry to him as they are the children of men, though not as the children of God, many of them.

“O that men would praise him for his wonderful works which he doth for the children of men! Though those that sought him when he slew them, had not hearts right with God, yet he being full of compassion forgave their iniquity,” (i.e. as to the punishment deserved by it, even utter ruin, he passed over that,) he destroyed them not utterly. God likes also to own the righteous causes even of unrighteous persons, and to set himself against their affliction. “They have caused the cry of the poor to come to him, and he hath heard their cry.” Though many of the children of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob in Egypt’s bondage, were themselves unregenerate, yet they crying also, were heard, out of respect to their godly ancestors, and the covenant of God made with them: “I have heard the groanings of the children of Israel, and have remembered my covenant.” Sometimes God hears such persons’ prayers the rather, that they may afterwards be instruments of his people’s good; and sometimes that he might the rather encourage all sorts to pray to him: “O thou that hearest prayer, to thee shall all flesh come.” Sometimes the persons at present unregenerate, are elect, and God in hearing them, will look to his own thoughts of prayer which he has towards them, and so will be found of those which sought him not aright. But in case the parties be reprobates, what hearing does God afford to any prayers of theirs?

It is first in common things, and such which, at least, are not properly saving mercies unto them, for so God hears not sinners. If any object that evil servant’s pardon granted upon his request, I answer, the master forgave him the debt, not simply, but in respect of the consequent vassalage and imprisonment presently deserved by it. Some interpret the place to be spoken in reference only to the main intent of Christ, that if a man forgive not his neighbor offending, and begging his mercy, God will never communicate to him any saving benefit of his mercy in Christ. An implacable spirited Christian is at present in a state of damnation.

2. The hearing which the Lord does lend to such, is from his general providence and pity, and rather as a sovereign and master, than from any particular grace, and as a father; for so he hears not sinners; yea he hears them, rather to leave them without excuse, and to take a fuller blow at them afterwards, as in the case of that evil servant.

3. The Lord uses not to give any suitable grace as the success of their prayers; so he hears oniy saints, and not sinners, especially reprobates; he changed not the servant’s heart with his condition.

4. God sometimes hears them in displeasure and anger: “I gave them a king in mine anger.” He gave them their desire, but sent leanness into their soul; their soul is blasted, they were hardened in pride and security thereby, and the thing itself given is blasted to them in the use of it, becoming a snare, and vanity, and in the deprivation of it vexation of spirit.

18. Part 3, Chapter 2. Distractions

CHAPTER II.

DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER.

We are now to proceed to other cases of conscience, arising in the incessant carrying on of the weighty duty of prayer. The second case now to be handled is, touching distractions, or impertinent thoughts, which disturb and molest us in prayer; wherein, demand will be made of three things.

1. The causes. 2. The cure or remedy thereof.
3. The success of such prayers, wherein such distractions are found.

First. The causes of such distractions are either such as are more general or more particular. The more general causes are two.

1. Satan, that enemy to prayer, the author of all confusion, and so of this confusion of the spirit in prayer; that fowl who steals away what is spoken to the heart by God in the word, is busy to steal away the good motions of the Spirit, stirring us up to speak to God in prayer. Satan is at hand to tempt, when we are in hand with prayer. If we will draw near to God in prayer, we may expect the tempter to approach some way or other to disturb us, by sinister, subtle suggestions. We must resist the devil in such like distracting motion, when we are drawing nigh to God: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." "Draw near to God," etc. If we will pray with all manner of prayer, we had need be armed against such wily assaults of Satan, as tend to annoy us therein. When the Apostle and his company were to go to prayer, the devil in his instrument, the maid possessed, makes a disturbance with her impertinent speeches; so is there, if the devil can help it, something or other shall be set on work to breed distraction, or occasion disturbance to us in prayer, or he himself will be suggesting something to molest us.

2. The unregenerate part of man. When at any time we should do any good, whether it be to pray, or the like, evil will be present with us: "When I would do good, evil is present with me." That sink of natural corruption will then especially cast out its unsavory smells, when so raked into by holy, humble acknowledgments and deprecations; this dunghill will then be sending out its vapors, even when the heart is heated and warmed in prayer by the spirit. When a commanding power of grace is stirring the heart, the unregenerate part will be raising mutinies: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." Paul found it so, and who does not find it so in continual experience? If the Spirit does break any long silence in the heart, and will be speaking, corruption will talk as loud as the Spirit, and if it can, drown the voice of the Spirit, that the heart may not distinctly hear what the Spirit does teach the heart to speak to the Lord. The flesh will be lusting against the Spirit, so that we cannot speak to God, or do any service for him, in so free and spiritual a manner as we (as regenerate) do desire. All evil thoughts rise out of that inward spring, and disturb us in prayer: "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts," etc. The unregenerate part, in

the best, savors not such a spiritual way of God, as is the earnest exercise of ourselves in prayer, that begets that natural slipperiness in spiritual things; whence it is that good motions are not so rooted, and dwell not so long with us. This would be breeding and feeding a disposition in the best, to be soon satisfied with spiritual things, and so to abate the earnest pursuit after the same. The strength of this natural bias will too often show itself in the saints, that whilst their spirits are carried out with some might of the hand of the Spirit of God towards the mark in prayer, this draws the mind away, and the deceitful heart of many will be slyly flinging something or other in the way to cause a rub, and to slack or divert the straight course of a regenerate man's prayer.

More particular causes of such distractions in prayer, are these:—

1. Natural hypocrisy of heart; want of soundness in the feet of our affections, will make us go crippling and stumbling, even in this plain, even way of prayer; and a small push will turn us aside, and cause the mind and heart to divert from the holy way, in which they were going: "Lest that which is lame, be turned out of the way." "As the legs of the lame, so is a parable in a fool's mouth." A fool's mouth cannot, will not utter spiritual things so closely and concisely, but will be intermingling impertinences; so this sinful guile, (which indeed is but folly,) does take place. Where ruling hypocrisy does possess a man, he is very fickle and unstable, he is in and out, off and on, in every thing he says or does: now he will be as one speaking or doing well, and now again the contrary. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. So is it in part, where tyrannizing hypocrisy domineers over any poor soul, it will cause many diversions, and much unsteadiness in the mind in the best services. Where the spirit is hypocritical, there will the heart and mind be constantly gadding, and far off, when the lips are near God in seeking him: "Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins." And "They draw near me with their lips, but their hearts are removed far from me." When the heart is divided, surely the mind will be so too. That part of man which is not for God, will never be long with him, but ever starting from him in any ordinance, and so in this. Though the heart, as sincere in part, put the mind upon thinking of suitable things to the prayer in hand, yet the heart, as wily and guileful also in part, will be employing the mind in other thoughts also; and so far as there is division of mind, there is a distracted mind, or a mind drawn diverse ways.

2. Distrustful care for outward things. Thence is the mind as a meteor, pendulous and wavering; now up, now down; now turning this way, now that, keeping no certain course in this, or in any other way of God. As that care of his about his inheritance, distracted his mind in hearing God speak to him, (whence that interruption of Christ in his preaching): "Master, (said one then,) bid my brother divide the inheritance." So does the like cause work a like effect in our speaking to God in prayer. It is a sad and dangerous character of a thorny professor, when constantly as any seed of the Word is shooting up in any ordinance, such thorny distempers and distractions spring up with it. Yea, when they commonly overtop the same, and good things in prayer, hearing, meditation, etc., come thereby to be choked and stifled in our minds or hearts; when the mind is in a manner drunk with cares of this life, it will go on reeling and staggering in the choicest paths of God; or if from such a worldly spirit, we make rash and sudden irruptions unto prayer from heat of worldly business, when the mind but then was reeking hot, and sweating in them, the steam and savor thereof will surely annoy us in prayer so soon after. Our business, which we talked with so earnestly but then, will be calling after us again, as having somewhat more to say to us. The vessels of our minds will taste too much of that strong liquor, which can hardly be emptied out so

soon. As it is with a man not thoroughly waked from sleep, his head is most apt to be filled with fumes, and his tongue to speak impertinently; so is it here, when we are not thoroughly roused from carnal occasions and thoughts about them; our minds will be full of impertinent thoughts. And as other dreams come from the multitude of business, so from such like busyings of the mind, we shall pray but dreamingly and distemperedly. When we have been so intently studying such a point respecting the world, we shall not so soon be drawn to think so intently and fixedly on better subjects.

3. Discontent with our present condition. As discontented Jonah, how is his prayer stuffed with distempered expressions springing from distempered thoughts. Grace and discontent pulled Rachel's spirit divers ways; now tumultuous thoughts against her husband, now envious thoughts against her sister, and now better motions of the spirit to counter-work the same; so that she in that case might be said to be in great wrestlings in prayer also. Discontent is a mutinous distemper, and will be casting tumults, even in our best times of praying: "All the days of such afflicted ones are evil." Discontent, as a mighty vapor in the heart that is long pent in, will at length be breaking out, and will cause earthquakes in the heart of long continuance, which will strangely vary the motions of the heart this way and that way, and oftentimes rend it. It will make a man mentally, ever wandering, and so liable to all sorts of temptations, at all times, and in the best ordinances: "As a bird wandering from her nest, so is a man wandering from his place." Discontent taking off the mind from its basis and center of quiet submission to God's mind and will, the mind knows not where to fix. A discontented Christian is neither pleased with himself, nor any thing he has or does, no, not with his very praying; and no wonder then if so distempered in it. The ground of discontent is distrust; and what is of a more wavering nature than that? It makes a man like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest so long as such blasts are upon his mind. It makes the workings of his mind like the waves of the sea, very independent, and sometimes thwarting each other: "Nothing wavering;" that is, nothing doubting or distrusting, which is indeed the wavering of a troubled sea wave.

4. Inordinacy of affection, whether of desire, or fear, or love, or joy, or grief, or anger, etc. The Lord Christ when about to raise Tabitha, would put out the minstrels and the mourners, which made a confused noise; for no good could be done unless these be stilled. There is no raising up of a dead spirit in prayer, unless all such inordinacies be excluded. Such inordinacies in the heart will hurry the mind with them, and make that inordinate too. If they give respite to the mind to be busied a little in any ordinance, yet they cannot spare or forbear its service long. They carve out so much work for the mind, that it can scarce have leisure for more spiritual employment. Yea, the very mouth and tongue, which should be in any ordinance as the pen of a ready writer, shall be ever and anon jogged by them; yea, they will be inditing, suggesting, and inserting ever and anon their matters, whilst the spirit of a sanctified Christian is inditing the more weighty messages of the soul to be despatched to heaven by this sure and speedy messenger, prayer; and it is well, if through the tumultuous noise of these distempers, the mind be not so disturbed, that men sometimes in prayer speak nonsense. And as in feverish distempers, the patients' thoughts are slippery and incoherent, and their discourses accordingly as full of impertinencies: so amidst those feverish distempers of the soul. Inordinacies of affection are the soul's diseases, and a Christian sick of such diseases, will be followed ever and anon with impertinencies of thoughts in best services.

5. Any spirit of lust. This makes Christians of good hopes, as clouds which are driven hither and thither of contrary winds. Jude calls those lascivious professors, clouds carried about of winds, also wandering stars; their minds cannot be fixed and intent in any duty of piety. They do not, cannot keep in the right ecliptic line, but wander from that constant course which Jesus Christ the Sun of Righteousness constantly kept. That wildfire will be burning, whilst the incense of prayer is offering and burning. As with the boiling pot, the scum will be rising up, together with the meat therein; so, even when a Christian's heart is or should be boiling up good matter in prayer. Such a filthy scum as this will be rising up in the spirit together with it. Or as it is said of the harlot, "She watcheth her times to call and entice passengers to her, which were going right So these panders in the soul, will be inveigling and enticing the mind and heart, to withdraw the same from their intent going on in prayers, or any other good way of God, to the end that they may be nought with them. As it is said of that old hag and harlot, concupiscence; a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed; so is it here, in this daughter of that mother of fornications; it will be enticing the soul, and drawing it from any way of God, and then tempt it.

6. A spirit of error. This makes Christians also like clouds, as Jude speaks of erring persons. Unclean opinionists, they are or will be dreamers, as Jude's phrase is, "These are filthy dreamers," dreaming continually in every thing they say or do. Their thoughts will be incongruous in their best employments. As persons benighted, are aptest to wander from any right path wherein they were going; so is it with a mind benighted with darkness of error; that mind will hardly keep on its way in prayer or any other ordinance long, but will have its sinful vagaries. Or as a man whose head is filled with wine or strong drink, his head being giddy, goes reeling along. So with Christians besotted with error, their giddy brains will not suffer them to be solid, exact, and intent in their thoughts in the good ways of God; they will be stumbling with their feet, and stammering with their tongue, making at best but rude and broken work of it in their prayers and performances. Such persons are ever unstable souls:

"They beguile unstable souls." Their very minds are unstable in any thing that is good. They are vain in their imaginations. Belial, the spirit of confusion of mind, heart, and way, is where a spirit of error dwells.

7. Family contention. It is a continual dropping. It will make breaches into the very spirit also of the other yoke-fellow; yea, divide and distract in prayer as well as other services. To orderly dwelling together of Christian yoke-fellows, this is joined, "That your prayers be not hindered," neither by distempering your spirits who are to join in prayer, nor by distasting the Lord, so as he will not give a ready answer thereto. It is hard for him who is in the family to mind the cases of each one therein, but in minding the contentions therein, some distempered thoughts will be arising in him. If the very repetition of an offensive matter passing betwixt two friends, is so apt to breed a fresh distance, by renewing the former apprehensions of the offensiveness thereof; as "He that repeateth a matter separateth chief friends," then in the best men, and in the best duties, it is a wonder if reminding and rementioning family contentions, there be not found some distempered moving and musings.

8. Spiritual sluggishness, and slowness of heart. When heart and mind are of a drowsy temper, it is of a dreaming temper, full of impertinent fancies, even when to be employed in prayer, or the like; yea, if both body and soul be not in a waking and watching plight, the soul will be apt to be

hurried with impertinencies and temptations. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

Secondly. The remedies of such distractions in prayer. Let but diligent heed be taken, and proper endeavor used against each of the former occasions and causes thereof, and it will help to redress the same. Espy out and bewail the secret guile of the heart, rid your heart of distrustful cares, of discontent and inordinacy of affection; banish the spirit of lust and of error from your souls, beware of family contention, and spiritual or corporal supineness, and you will in a good measure get rid of distractions in prayer. But yet for our better help herein,—

1. Make conscience of holy and due preparation of ourselves unto prayer. Moses must come alone to God, and leave the flocks. Jacob ferries over all belonging to him on the other side of the river, before he wrestles with the angel. Abraham leaves the servants and the asses at the foot of the hill, when about to go to sacrifice to the Lord. David had got his heart into a very serious and fixed frame, for that praising part of his prayer; and yet as thinking that. all too little, says, he will yet rouse himself up to that work: "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise; I myself will awake early." So good Deborah rouses up herself again to pour out praises to the Lord: "Awake, awake Deborah, awake, utter a canticle." A gracious heart should think itself never enough awaked to such holy work, experience of saints will prove it; and when they can by grace get their minds and hearts a little sequestered to consider seriously of the work they are going about, and of God and Christ before whom they come, and of themselves who are to come before the Lord, and the like, before they actually address themselves to solemn prayer; how intently, and spiritually, and strongly they are wont then to be carried through the duty, and all other times, when they more suddenly and inconsiderately set upon prayer, how unprofitably they are wont to spend such a time; and how many hurries of spirit, this way and that way, they are cumbered with, and much ado to make any thing of it at. such times.

2. Spiritual wisdom is another help. Godly wisdom will choose places for prayer, which are freest from any distracting occasion. Hence Christ so often repairs to the mountain to pray. Wisdom will seasonably discern a deluding, cheating thought, yea, though it come with its painted face, wearing in view the very livery of our heavenly Father; and much readier will it express other thoughts, which would slyly withdraw our minds by little and little from the present business of our souls. "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding, whilst the fool's eyes are wandering in the corners of the world." The wise Christian keeps his eye from gadding after vain objects, and keeps it rather intent upon wisdom's works and ways. "The heart of the wise is at his right hand," the instrument of action. He has his heart and spirit at an holy beck, to be employed as wisdom shall direct; as there is need of the exercise of thoughts, or desires, or grief, or joy, or fear, or anger, in an holy war or work, a truly wise Christian has them at hand to do their several homage to the Lord, being thereto commanded by his spirit. "The wise man's eyes are in his head." The truly wise Christian has the ready and seasonable use of the eyes of his mind and understanding; holy thoughts and apprehensions are not to seek when the Lord calls for the use thereof, as in prayer or the like; but they are then active, and so ready to keep out worse or unjust thoughts. A wise Christian being also privy to his own inability to keep his heart close to God, betakes himself to the Lord, as did the Psalmist: "Unite my heart to fear thy name." He would have the Lord to keep his heart close to any part of his fear or worship, that it wander not therefrom. Intruders cannot get in unseen, and unnoticed, whilst this watchful grace is employed, as they will in darker places. This skilful pilot at the helm, by keeping its eye upon God's compass, avoids many wrong courses, and

much leeway in a gracious Christian's prayer; which other unwise Christians make.

3. Watchfulness, which is the seasonable and practical use of that holy wisdom upon every occasion. This will be examining such a knock at the door of the heart, while the spirit is talking with God in prayer. Those godly church officers described, with their eyes before and behind, and within also, to observe all without, and as well also within themselves, go on uninterrupted in the worship of God, as though their cry was but one and the same, continued night and day: "They rest not night nor day, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which is, and was, and is to come." This pondering the path of our feet, is a help to going right in the way of God without diversions from it, or stumbling in it. "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left;" the former is the means to the latter. A good watch at the city gates, the outlets and inlets of suggestions to the mind, or motions from it, will keep us from these distractions, and help rid them of such vagrants as they are. Such holy careful oversights of the banks, will prevent the dividing of the streams and issues of our minds (even our thoughts) that they run in no other channel and way than is meet for them. When we go to prayer, we are assaying by the ladder Jesus Christ to climb up to heaven, and this holy care of our feet keeps them from slipping, and us from falls: "Look to thy foot when thou goest into the house of God," namely, to worship God in prayer or otherwise. When we go to pray, we go spiritually to plow, and this holy minding of our work, and our hand helps to keep us in our right furrow.

4. Holiness and heavenliness of heart. The nature of prayer is a lifting up of the heart; the more elevated that is, therefore, the more fitted to pray aright. Who is more free from distractions in prayer than Christ, the holy one of God? Who go on more straight in their holy course without any digressions, than those heavenly spirits described in Ezekiel 1:9? A heavenly heart is so much in heaven at other times, and on other occasions, that it will be very loathsome to it to be then in earth, when solemnly exercised in heavenly discourse with God. Holy things and thoughts are made so natural to such a soul, and so familiar to it, that they will more easily be spoken with, and more readily be speaking with us in prayer. God has such a one's heart, and therefore his eyes will be fixed and intent upon this, or any other way of his: "My son, give me thy heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." Such a heart is filled with spiritual materials, and when well warmed in this, or other like holy exercises, it will boil up little else but good matter, as he said: "My heart boileth up (so it is in the Hebrew,) good matter;" and such a one's tongue will be also as the "pen of a ready writer," not often making so much as a wry dash, in presenting the soul's occasions before the Lord. As a well-built ship, deeply and richly laden, keels not so much, nor makes not so many lurches, and is not put to so many tacks, to recover and keep its course, but will ho nearer the wind, even when it is scant, and keep a straighter course than other vessels. So with a well-composed, well-principled heart; it will steer a straighter course, freer from digressions and distractions in prayer. Or as a person that has his pocket filled with pieces of silver, and here and there a brass farthing possibly amongst it; if he be to trade for wares, will mostly pluck out silver; whereas another, that has most brass money in his purse, and very little silver, will hardly pull out any other than brass. So when spiritual and heavenly-minded Christians are to trade with God in prayer, they present little else to the Lord than what is spiritual and suitable to their work in hand: "Out of the good treasure of their hearts, they bring forth good things;" good thoughts as well as words; whereas a more worldly-minded Christian, in prayer, presents little else but what savors of the world, especially in his thoughts. It is said of the spiritual person: "The law of God is in his

heart, none of his steps shall slide.” No, not so oft or much slip, in this or any other path of God. God himself is more engaged to keep such a heart from wandering from any of his commandments which is devoted to him. Hence that plea of his: “With my whole heart have I sought thee, O let me not wander from thy commandments.”

5. Holy zeal. When there is an holy ardency of indignation against the least evil and impenitency arising in prayer, it is a means to redress the same. When Christians do not barely fall out with any such evil, but abhor it, hate evil as hell, then will they more immovably cleave to this or any other good, for they are joined there: “Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good,” or be glued to that which is good, so as not to be stirred from it. A zealous suppliant espying any such impertinency in prayer, presently falls foul of it, cries out upon it, pursues it with exclamations, censures it in all its aggravations, and so gains more intentness of spirit, and seriousness of lively affections in the duty than before. Zeal is bold and courageous, and will not basely yield to any such intruder, but thrust them out of doors, looking at them as attended with a whole crowd of other like disturbers, ready to press in at their heels, if once permitted entrance into the soul of a Christian exercised in prayer. As cutting, cropping off unprofitable sprouts, putting forth here or there, upon their first appearance, causes the tree to grow the straighter, and to bring forth more seasonable fruit; so when by zeal, we cut off impertinences at their first appearing, we bring forth more seasonably the fruits of every praying grace and disposition. And when they were sitting in that weighty discourse, there was charge given to handle that turbulent messenger roughly at the door, to prevent his Master’s coming in at his heels. So when at this pious conference with God, any such unseasonable motions are zealously repulsed, it prevents more sad disturbance in the duty. Though Abraham’s zeal could not hinder the fowls from lighting upon his sacrifice, yet it will not suffer them to rest there, but drives them away. Zeal also will make a godly Christian remove all causes and occasions of disturbance. As Paul, out of his zeal, uses means to cast the devil out of the possessed maid, which occasioned that disturbance daily to them when they went to prayer: “As we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed, cried, and Paul being grieved in spirit, said to the spirit, Come out of her.”

6. Peace of conscience and calmness of spirit. If noise without, disturb and distract us in prayer, much more will clamorous noise within. The heart in hurries of conscience unpacified in the blood of Christ, in a horrible pit, hath not its goings established: “He brought me out of the horrible pit, and established my goings.” When God brought David out of the pit, then, and not till then, were his goings established; then did his mind and heart take more fixed and straight steps in the ways of God. If the blood of Christ does not speak such good things as further us in prayer, the blood of Abel, or the guilt of sin, will speak that which will startle us and stumble us whilst at prayer; and the poor soul will be more taken up with listening to these cries, and with perplexed thoughts, what answer to make to such pinching objections thence, than be able to hold out its attentions to what he was to speak further unto the Lord. When Asaph was so beset with fears about his main estate, his prayers were rather reasonings with inward cavils raised from his own infirmity of unbelief, than distinct requests. When the heart is shackled with such binding griefs and fears, it cannot go, much less run so sturdily in this, or any other way of God, but will be blundering and staggering in mind and heart; whereas peace and joy in God free us for a steady and speedy motion in this or any other way of God: “I will run the way of thy Commandments, when thou hast enlarged my heart.”

7. Faith is a help against distractions in prayer. That preserves from wavering in mind or heart in prayer: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," especially if a Christian stir up himself to act and exercise his faith in such promises wherein the Lord undertakes for his poor servants to help them against such distractions: "With supplications will I lead them in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble." "Thou shalt hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk in it, when thou turnest to the right hand or to the left;" and so be speedily set to rights in mind or heart in God's ways, when at any time starting aside: "They shall mount up with wings as eagles;" soar aloft with winged thoughts and affections in God's holy ways: "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments and do them;" his spirit shall keep his people's minds and hearts intent and attent in his ways.

8. The fear and awe of God. Which as it helps to make thorough work in the things of God: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." It makes us full of holy jealousy lest we should come short of what God requires of us in it; or instead of pleasing him therein, carry it so as to displease him. And as other fears call in, and confine all the thoughts to be exercised about the objects which are in their view as matters of dread; so in this holy fear, lest we should sin against the Lord in our approaches to him, it fastens the mind to attend to that end. This is a jealous grace, and therefore will be suspecting every impertinent thought, and examine it, and awaken the soul to take speedy order with it. Hence is it, that by the fear of God, men come to depart from all manner of evil of sin.

9. Lastly, the love of God, of Christ, and of the duty itself. Love itself is glue, and a bond, a very strong, engaging, and endearing tie; it is an overcoming, delightful affection, so that the mind will not so soon wander from its pleasing objects and actings. Love of God and good is so unsatisfied an affection, that the exercise of all the thoughts in their utmost intentness, at such praying times, seems unto love too slender, short, and narrow for its employments. Hence that speech of love: "Thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." "My soul followeth hard after thee." David professes, "I love the Lord." "Truly, Lord, I am thy servant, thy servant." "I will call upon the name of the Lord." Love makes him wholly for God, and that in a way of prayer also; so in love to the duty of prayer itself; if David can say, "I have chosen the way of truth," he can also say, "I have stuck to thy testimonies." If the soul make choice of prayer as a lovely ordinance, it will not be loose in it or from it, but cleave close to that holy exercise when called to it. As love of Christ will constrain Paul to speak of Christ, so others also may have soul-benefit: "The love of Christ (says he) constraineth me." This works the like holy attention to the work of holy speaking to God in the name of Christ. As it is with the burning-glass, by it the scattered beams of the sun being more united, come to kindle upon combustible matter; so it conies to pass, through this grace of love, that the scattered thoughts, like beams of the mind, are so gathered and kept in one, and so set and fixed upon the heart's desires expressed in prayer, that our hearts come to be even fired and inflamed spiritually. It is an active means to compose and compact the good thoughts and stirrings of the mind and heart, which are suitable to the expressions in prayer, but to scatter and remove impertinent and unsuitable moons and workings of our spirits therein.

Thirdly: The success of prayers, which are pestered with distractions. I answer:—

1. Some kind of distractions in prayer, do sorely undermine, if not wholly overturn its saving issue. These are of four sorts.

1. Such as are constant and commanding distempers, usually and in a manner constantly carrying all gainsaying motions before them, yea, such distractions as are universally overspreading, as the duty of prayer, so all other duties. These argue ruling hypocrisy, and an unregenerate estate. When the eyes of the mind of any person, which is to have to do with any of the ways of wisdom, are so constantly and prevailingly wandering in the corners of the earth, that person is a fool, a natural man: "The eyes of the fool are in the ends of the earth;" namely, when he should have to do with wisdom, as the opposition shows: "But wisdom is before him that hath understanding." "They are sheep for the slaughter of judgment," whose trade and way that is, there mentioned, "Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins." When their mouth makes the godliest mention of God in prayer, (or the like,) of God's nearness to them, yet even then he is far from their hearts and thoughts.

2. Such distractions as are despised in the person's eyes in whom they abound, he is careless of them. This verifies that "he that despiseth his ways shall die;" be they the ways of his mind, or heart, or lip, or life, if he never regard whether they be regular or irregular, he is a child of death. When such words get up, grow fast, yea, and overgrow his better things, and he regards it not, surely, such a professor's end will be miserable: "The sluggard's vineyard is covered over with nettles, and yet a little sleep," etc.

3. Such as notwithstanding which, yet the heart is quiet. It breaks not his sleep, it molests not his ease, nor is he so much as willing that such spiritual mischiefs and evils should disquiet him; he is all for ease, and will not have that disturbed: "Yet a little sleep," etc. Such one's case is sad. God regards not him nor any thing he says, but eyes him as a loathsome sluggard fit for ruin.

4. Such as overcome the soul, and by degrees eat out the very motions and dispositions to prayer, or any other good work. The sluggard had his desires, but even his desires, too, are overcome with such distempers: "The desire of the sluggard killeth him, for his hands refuse to labor."

2. There are some other distractions in prayer, which may stand with hopeful successes of the prayers annoyed by them: as,

1. Such distractions in prayer as are strongly resisted, prayed against, and bewailed. Though sometimes by their violence they captivate us, so that as he said, "The good we would do we cannot, because of that present evil." "And this part of the law of our members rebelleth against the Jaw of our minds;" is quite cross to the bent of our spirits, as spiritual, whence with Paul, we are ready to cry out, "Wretched men that we are, who shall deliver us from the body of this death?"

2. Such as are frequently overcome, so that notwithstanding that opposition of the Spirit in us by the flesh, yet the flesh has not its will of us: "The Spirit lusteth against the flesh;" namely, so as to put it to the worst.

3. Such as at the first rising of them do amaze and appall the heart; and so satanical, and not ours.

4. Such as are mainly occasioned from bodily distempers, melancholy, unwonted drowsiness, sickness, pains, etc., in which case he pities us as a father his children, remembering our fçme, that "we are but dust," as in sick Hezekiah's chatterings, etc.

5. Such as are occasioned by some outward occurrence, as the disturbance occasioned at that prayer and fasting, so by sudden outcries, accidents, etc.

19. Part 3, Chapter 3. Good Things Suggested in Prayer

CHAPTER III.

GOOD THINGS SUGGESTED IN PRAYER. A third case of conscience about prayer, now to be considered of, is touching things materially good, which are suggested in prayer, how they should be discerned to be, or not to be delusions.

Before we lay down the marks of differencing these motions materially good, from those which are so formally, we must premise that such good things for the matter of the motions may be suggested and raised up in the spirit of a Christian, when praying to God, and yet not spring from the Spirit of God. Even such like motions may be raised from our own natural spirits, as far as they are carnal, and likewise they may be cunningly propounded by Satan. And because this to some may seem strange, that good motions should be suggested to God's people, or to others, whilst exercised in so good a work, and yet the same not to come from a good spirit, let us evince it a little from Scripture examples and grounds. That such motions may come from our own hearts, as they are carnal, will appear by the character of man's heart in itself considered, .and as far as natural: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Surely, if the heart could not play such a cheat as this, that speech would be too hyperbolic. When David sought God in and about his soul, he had experience of such seemingly friendly counsels to do this or that, to take this course for his succor and that, whereby the Lord's displeasure might be removed; but by his complaint of them, it appears he found them deceitful counsels; he is weary of such heart-counsels, saying, "How long shall I take counsel in myself?" When David was in so sad a case, one might think sad musings and thoughts being so suitable to his case, need not be suspected to be sinful; yet David perceived that those he had were tainted, and therefore chides his soul for them: "Why art thou so sad, O my soul?" When Asaph was crying to God in prayer in that sad condition, he had motions in his mind then, propounding grounds of comfort whilst he sought God; for he says, "I sought God, my soul refused to be comforted." Again, at the same time, he had other motions crossing the former, and persuading that it was not for such a wretch as he, who had lost God's favor, to take hold of comfort; and these motions prevailed against the other; for he says, "I sought the Lord, my soul refused to be comforted." Both motions had their probable grounds of equity and truth, but could not be both from a good principle. He had also in his prayer many thoughts of God's past mercies to him, yet other motions and inquisitions are made in and by his spirit, which make him but the more troubled and overwhelmed amidst his complaints: "I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." True it is, that the thoughts of God's mercies, together with the serious musings of our vileness and unworthy walking, they work kindly, when they humble us, and break our hearts; but it is never of God that they should overwhelm us, as these did this good man. The like might be said of such motions demanding, "will the Lord cast off forever?" "Is his mercy clean gone forever?" Though he does cast off, and his mercy be gone to sense at present, yet is it so forever? Was there any hurt in these? Yea, verily, Asaph's own conscience being judge afterwards: "And I said, this is mine infirmity." David has motions in his heart which put him upon

that: "Lord, make me to know my end," and it was materially a good thought which he expresses:

"Man at his best estate is vanity." Yea, but David's heart was too hot within him; it was distempered heat against the prosperity of the wicked at which he was troubled, and these were but the sparklings of that wildfire; he does as good as pray to hasten his own end; but he corrects himself presently: "But now, O Lord, what wait I for?" etc. He thinks it more needful to exercise faith and patience, than to be so hasty and discontented. Job uttered many things (out of the abundance of his troubled heart) before the Lord, which were materially good, but his heart did but carry him away in sundry of them. A heart transported by a distemper, may make religious motions, and put upon religious expressions. The spirit of good Moses, that man of God, suggested things considerable, and put him upon uttering the same before the Lord in prayer: "Have I conceived this people?" etc. "Whence should I have flesh to give them?" etc. "I am not able to bear this people alone;" yet verily, it appears that his spirit was not regular and spiritual therein, but carnal: "If thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee." The spirit of the disciples moved them to pray as is mentioned: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven upon them, as Elijah did?" The ground and warrant seemed weighty and rational. The Samaritans did not receive him; yet they were deluded and mistaken, in listening to these motions of their own distempered spirits: "Jesus rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what spirit ye are of." Whilst Jacob was praying so well: "As a Prince, saith the angel, hast thou prevailed with God." Yet an unsuitable and unwarrantable motion, materially good, arises in his heart, whence that further request uttered by his lips: "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." A desire to know more of so glorious and gracious a one, as the Lord was, who would suspect that, or any thing which it moves? Yet verily, curiosity blended and mingled itself therewith; hence so checked: "Wherefore askest thou after my name?" Jeremy, whilst he is praying humbly, "Remember and visit me, take me not away in thy longsuffering;" yet behold a tincture of a distemper, though fair faced, arises therewith, and moves him to speak thus:

"Wilt thou be altogether to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" The disciples seem to themselves to have good ground for that desire and motion:

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" but were transported with curiosity, and thence that secret check of Christ: "It is not for you to know the times." And as man's heart can thus sophisticate, so Satan can inject and suggest things materially good to our minds. Thus when Christ had been fasting in the wilderness, he suggests a piece of Scripture to his mind: "It is written He shall give his angels charge over thee," etc. Thus whilst Joshua is before God, Satan can present to him his sins, and charge his heart and thoughts with them, and that groundedly, for Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and the Lord also adds, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." And what humble soul but would be ready to judge it meet to think of its sins? When to come before the Lord with that holy zeal of the church of Corinth, against the incestuous Corinthians' sin. Satan by his wiles would be transporting the same beyond bounds of compassion and charity: "Sufficient is such an one's punishment inflicted of many." "So that contrariwise, ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." "Lest Satan should get an advantage, for we are not ignorant of his devices." The poor penitent Corinthian's sin was very great, and his sorrow needed to be exceeding great, and he was moved to sorrow exceedingly, and is there any evil in this? Yes, a device of Satan to carry him out in his very sorrow for his sins, beyond all bounds: "The man Gabriel, an angel of light, brings a gracious

message to Daniel in prayer.” Satan can imitate the like message at the like time, for “he can transform himself into an angel of light,” as his ministers can, like those of Jesus Christ, speak things materially good to the outward ear, which are formally satanical. The like legerdemain can that old deceiver play, in reference to our inward senses, verifying that “He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness, but a false witness deceit;” namely, when in pretence he holds forth righteous things. The saints are most endangered by such a white devil, being more aware of him when he speaks like himself. it was the devil in the poor possessed man, who had that motion in him, to do homage to Christ:

“When he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him.” He also moved another such a like person to go to the synagogue, as outwardly to observe the Sabbath exercises: “Christ entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and taught;” and “There was there in the synagogue, a man of an unclean spirit.” The devil also could strongly move such a one to make for substance a goodly confession: “For the man cried out, saying, I know thee who thou art, the holy One of God.” But this was whilst the auditors should have been hearkening to Christ’s doctrine, and joining in his prayers, sanctifying the action. Whilst the Apostle and his company were at prayer, Satan moved the possessed damsel present to expressions in substance good, saying, “These men bring unto us the message of salvation, and are the servants of the most high God,” when praying dispositions in those there present had been more suitable. So that it concerns us the more to endeavor to a clear discerning of any such delusive motions, materially good, from such as are truly good and heavenly. A mistaken devil entertained for an angel of light, is most mischievous, and not easily excluded when once admitted. Such comfort or counsel slyly suggested, will not so soon be rejected; but being admitted for good, is apt to be maintained. The good witches (as they call them) which will tell men news of lost things, and how to right injuries done, are most mischievous, as bewitching and besotting the spirits of such as listen to their counsel; they are poisoners. Hence the devil’s instruments, heretics and schismatics, which propound Scripture grounds for what they hold forth, beguile and hurt more souls than other wretches; they bewitch people: “Who hath bewitched you?” These “flatterers spread a net for men’s feet.” Seven abominations are in the heart of Satan and his subtile instruments, “when they make their voice gracious;” as the Hebrew has it. If Satan could not, or did not set a good face upon his treacheries to men’s souls, and cover all with the mantle of good and pious motions, he would not so properly be said to “deceive the whole world.” But to come to the marks of distinction and of discerning of this highest strain of the sophistication of our spiritual enemies, through suggestions materially good.

1. Such motions, materially good, which steal away the heart from the duty of prayer in hand, though possibly the duty be carried on but in an overly manner, by reason of those motions, such are satanical; on the contrary, motions which tend to farther intentness thereon, they are of God. The Spirit of God is a faithful and wise guide, and uses not to lead the saints about, or in by-ways, but in straight paths, right on by all his motions. The Spirit of God leads the sons of God in a direct way of crying, “Abba, Father.” “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father.” “Thou shalt hear a voice behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when thou turnest to the right hand or to the left.” The Spirit moves nothing to draw us out of the way of God, but to put us into it; and being in it, to move us to keep on. When a man in prayer has his imagination working and exercised

about good notions for godly discourse, for expatiating on some good subject, or meditation, or preaching; and that in such sort, as he cannot, and does not mind scarcely what he is saying or doing before God in prayer, these thoughts and motions are delusive.

2. Such motions as come into the heart with such violence, that they occasion inward hurries of spirit by them, and thereby breaking off the very duty sometimes, though materially good, yet are delusive and satanical. As when in prayer strong motions are suggested, pretending to put us upon being affected with sorrow for some past evil, or fear about some evil impending, yet so, as the same are pressed and followed with such violence that they bend and tend to amazement and swallowing up of the spirits; these are delusive. Such were those motions of Asaph's heart whilst seeking God, which so troubled him that he was overwhelmed: "In the day of my trouble I sought God;" and "I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." Such were the motions to the humbled Corinthian, when so violent, that he was like to be swallowed up with overmuch heaviness about his sinful and sad estate. Satan's devices were in it for his own advantage: "Lest Satan get advantage, for we are not ignorant of his devices." The Lord never uses to maintain contention to cause the spirits of his people to fail: "I will not contend forever, lest the spirit should fail before me."

Nay, rather the Spirit of God uses, when such troublous motions grow strong and very heavy, to put under his hand to revive the saints' spirits when ready to give out through such hurries of sad pressures of heart: "To revive the spirit of the humble, for I will not contend forever, lest the spirit should fail before me." Hence that Psalms 94:1-23 : "In the multitude of my wretched thoughts, thy comforts delight my soul." The Spirit of the Lord will indeed suggest motions of fear, but not such as tend to make us break off through their violence, but sweetly rather to draw us to hold on in the way of God: "I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." He gently leads "his flock as a shepherd." Yea, if the motions were to confidence in God, or joy in God, but with such violence as to drive men into strange ecstasies, they are to be suspected. So in motions putting upon just anger for the ground of it; but with so much violence, as not to be kept within bounds of godly moderation, and temperature of compassion. So in motions putting upon desires of something in its time, way, and proportion very desirable; but so all upon the spur, and with so much imperiousness upon the spirit, as though all present service of God, and all other thoughts, must forthwith give room and place to this motion; which is enough to prove the same to be delusive; the Spirit of God using to work regularly and calmly, even when he works most strongly. Sure it is, that it is not one and the same Spirit, that speaks to a man's spirit, which, whilst it was but then called upon to speak to the Lord about such a business of weight, it is now in such haste and hurry called off to run a long tract of mental discourse, so hotly and so closely, with some other matter.

3. Such motions as are empty notions, carrying a show of Scripture language, but are not Scripture: haply some piece of Scripture joined with something else, whereof the main is left out. So the devil at the first sight seemed to suggest that Scripture: "He shall give his angels charge over thee;" but look it over again, and you shall see the main limitation of promise, "to keep thee in all thy ways," is left out; as something is added of the devil's own, in bringing this to back the temptation of Christ: "Cast thyself down, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee," etc. Thus here is chaff mingled with God's wheat. Yea, here is a pretence of a Scripture, when in the terms of it there was no such Scripture. Scripture in the devil's or his instrument's mouth, is as

the “parable in the fool’s mouth.” Like to the legs of the lame, which are not equal, but halting. It is pretended, “Thus saith the Lord,” by the false prophets. They say, “the Lord hath said,” but God counts it all but chaff, a mere empty husk: “What is the chaff to the wheat?” They did but pretend the word and counsel of God, “thus saith the Lord;” it was not really so. “God sends (in a judicial way,) strong delusions, that they should believe a lie.” It were not a delusion, if better things were not held forth; yea, but in truth, it is nothing else but a very lie, though backed possibly with Scripture of truth wrested and abused. The devil’s imps, to seduce the better, pretend the liberty of Jesus Christ, but in truth, it is “servitude to the flesh.” So Satan himself would be beguiling Christians with his delusive shadows of God’s grace, counsels, comforts; but they who “hearken to such lying vanities, forsake their own mercy.” But things which the Holy Ghost suggests, are realities, regularities, solidities. The Spirit’s suggestions carry a real port of divine majesty and sovereignty, and many times in the very mentioning of them does he effect what he represented to the mind: “The Lord will command his loving-kindness in the daytime,” (and not barely hint it;) yea, so effectually, that a song of praise for it follows: “And his song shall be with me,” etc.

4. Such motions apparently Scriptural, yet really suggested to cross other Scripture counsels, reproofs, comforts, commands, or threats; or coming cross to principles of faith, or light, or peace, and experience received from God, are delusive and satanical. Such were those suggested to Christ, whilst spiritually exercised in the wilderness. Crossing that Scripture:

“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” It is a deluding spirit, it sets the blessed harmonious Scripture against itself. When Scriptures are set on the devil’s rack, by himself immediately, or by his instruments mediately, it is still devilish. They put them on the rack, as they do other Scriptures, though to the perdition of such hucksters. Thus the devil by the false prophet pretends divine authority, for that which was directly contrary to divine authority. Hananiah says, “Babel’s yoke shall be broken in two years,” and that the Lord says it; but God by Jeremiah says, No; and as Satan does thus mediately by his instruments, so he uses to do more immediately by himself. But the Spirit of God, being a spirit of truth, can suggest nothing but what is consonant unto truth: “What he heareth, that he shall speak.” And being a spirit of wisdom, he cannot speak contradictions to what himself indited and inspired, as he did the Scriptures:

“He is a witness.” “A faithful witness speaking the truth,” the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and the same constantly. As it is said of the true witness:

“He that heareth speaketh constantly.” I deny not but that in some extraordinary cases God may say to Abraham, “That in Isaac shall thy seed be called,” etc., and yet bid Abraham kill that his Isaac, before Isaac had any child, and so seemingly crossing his promise, yea, and his precept, too: “Thou shalt not kill.” But this was for trial’s sake: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.” Nor do such extraordinary cases cross the tenure of ordinary rules, which we are to attend, and by which we are to judge of the regularity or irregularity of suggestions or actions.

5. Such motions as leave no impression upon the mind, but are forthwith forgotten, they are delusive. Satan is sometimes compared to lightning. What lightsome motions he makes! They are but flashes soon gone. But the Spirit’s motions are abiding reflections of sun-like beams. Satan as a fowl will be present at religious exercises. (The fowls attending the sower, are interpreted the wicked one attending the ministers in their preaching, and hearers in their hearing the word.) But whatsoever flatterings he makes in men’s minds, they are but vagrant and transient movings; but it

is otherwise with suggestions truly divine. When such a motion and word is spoken from heaven to Christ, "Thou art my son," etc., and "the Spirit abideth upon him" too, that argued that it was indeed a divine attestation. When in keeping the commandments of Christ from love to him, (as that command of Christ for prayer,) the Lord so shows himself and his gracious counsels to us, that he abides with us, the suggestions of such comfortable things to our hearts in prayer, are of God indeed: "I will manifest myself to him, we will come and make our abode with him." When a word is so spoken once to us inwardly or outwardly, that it is heard twice by us, verily God spake that word to us indeed: "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard it, that power belongeth to God." When Solomon is praying in his dream, and the while precious and sweet motions are suggested to him to ask 'what God shall give him; and when he asks wisdom, it is said to him that he has that granted, and more. This does not vanish as a dream, but leaves such an impression upon him, that when he awoke, the light, heat, and life thereof abides; so that he must go to Jerusalem, and offer sacrifice there, in regard thereof; this was indeed of God. So in that item of God to Paul whilst he was praying: "He said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness." This so stuck with Paul, and so warmed him, that he breaks out thus: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities," and he rightly therefore concluded, that the Lord said thus unto him. "Whilst Jacob is wrestling with the Lord, it is told him, that he should prevail with men," and the motion clave to him; and in confidence of the truth of it, he now dares to meet his brother, of whom before he was so afraid.

6. Such motions as leave the heart barren, when yet they swim aloft in the brain plentifully, are delusive; as those lying items suggested to the ear from Satan's instruments, they please, but profit not: "Therefore they shall not profit this people at all." So these of Satan leave the heart fruitless. Satan's sweet bits nourish no more the soul, than those of that dissembling churl do the bodies of his guests. Like his sorcery of bringing a fair woman to another's bed, which in the morning proved a carcass. Satan's flattering motions, whenever suggested, are but as other flatteries, a pleasing song, and cheering blaze, but ending soon after in sadness and smoke:

"The song of fools is like the crackling thorns under a pot." Like those that in seeking God, ("in their affliction they will seek me early,") they had such motions of returning to God: "Come let us return to God;" and of following on to know him: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord;" but "their goodness was like the early dew and clouds vanishing away." So "in seeking God when he slew them," they had motions materially good, stirring: "For they considered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. But their heart was not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." It was then without force upon their hearts, which indeed were never sincere and serious, but deceitful. But when the Spirit moves upon the face of our souls in any ordinance, whether it be in and by motions of conviction, or consolation, it makes the spices flow out, it causes the various graces of God in the soul to give their fragrant smell: "Awake, O north wind, and blow o south upon my garden, that the spices may flow out." When Christ comes to us in prayer, or in any other of his holy ordinances by the motions of his Spirit, he comes "as showers that water the earth," the force thereof mollifies our souls, and makes them fruitful.

7. Such motions as are various, confused, and independent one upon the other, or upon the present business which then we are in hand with in our prayers. Such, though they may be for the matter of them good, yet being not distinct, methodical, or seasonable, they are not from God's Spirit, but from some other delusive spirit. Such items are not words upon the wheels, in due

order, according to our particular suits, which are then in motion and agitation. Christ's lips, when he speaks to us more immediately by his Spirit, or otherwise, "are as lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh." His words and motions come not in heaps but orderly, drop after drop, and pertinently; as of the same myrrhlike nature all of them, as he guides his truly wise servants, so that their tongue uses knowledge aright, so the fruit of his lips by his spirit flows forth aptly, dependently, in a right order, season, and manner; but those of a delusive spirit, they are like sea waves, tumultuous, depending, in no certain course or channel.

8. Such motions materially good, as put us upon high thoughts of ourselves, and of our good estate, which heave up our spirits, are delusive, like those in Zedekiah, who was confident that the Lord moved him to speak: "Thus saith the Lord, saith he, and that his spirit had been with him," yet see how proud he was, and how he despised Micaiah, who indeed was moved by God's Spirit to speak: "He smote him on the cheek, saying, Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me, to speak unto thee?" The Spirit's motions in prayer tend to humble rather. As iii Abraham's praying, and saying, "which am but dust." Those lily-like drops from Christ's lips, of which we spake, are as myrrh; of abasing, and mourning use, as myrrh used about dead bodies to keep them from putrefaction.

9. Such motions materially good, suggested in prayer, as put us upon any breach of special relations, or duties of our callings, are delusive. As when Jonah thinks how merciful is God, and thence is put upon it to turn aside from his calling to pray at Nineveh: "O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." Or if a private man should be followed in prayer with Scriptures, urging him (as he thinks) to cast off civil subjection to higher powers: "Be not the servants of men;" or, "Then are the children free;" or if some private man should be moved in prayer very strongly, to kill such or such a wicked ruler, from Ehud's example. Such like motions would be found to be delusive. The apostle, to prevent such abuses, says: "As free, but not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness."

10. Such things materially good as are moved in prayer, either to justify some former evil thing in us, as Jonah in his prayer now mentioned. He revives in his mind those former thoughts of God's gracious nature, as a plea whereby to have justified him in that refusal to obey his call to Nineveh: "O Lord, was not this my saying," etc. Or when they are moved to ground some present distempered request in prayer, as that pretended humble motion of Job in prayer: "What is man, that thou visitest him?" brought in (as it may seem) to back his distempered desire not to live any longer in such misery: I loathe to live, my days are vanity;" and "what is man?" etc. So distempered Elias says: "He is no better than his fathers;" good, yea, but it is brought in to plead that God would dispatch his life: "O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers;" and this was delusive.

Lastly, when God in judgment orders it to some false and perverse seekers of him, that some things which they conclude to be good shall be suggested to them, whilst seeking him; but in judgment for some inordinacy, or hypocrisy in their requests, and so in wrath not in mercy. God had once told Balaam inquiring of him, that he should not go with Balak's messengers, and yet out of his covetous mind, and desire of the wages of unrighteousness, he will go again to move him for his counsel about going: "Tarry ye here (says he to Balak's second messengers) this night, that I

may know what the Lord will say more to me;" and "God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them." Balaam was inordinately set to go, and God, when he again inquires about going, does in judgment bid him go. For "The angel telleth him, Behold, I went to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me." "Every one that putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet to inquire of him concerning me, I the Lord will answer him that cometh by myself, according to the multitude of his idols." And as God deals judicially with such rotten-hearted ones inquiring after his counsel in the word, he in like sort deals with like persons inquiring after his counsel in prayer.

20. Part 3, Chapter 4. The Use of Means

CHAPTER IV. THE USE OF MEANS WITH PRAYER.

We are now to proceed to some other cases of conscience about prayer. A fourth case is, how far forth means are to be used together with our prayers? In answer whereunto, let us show,—

1. That means are to be used with prayer, and 2. How they are to be used. That means are to be used with our prayers, is clear in all instances of the suppliants of God in their prayers, and in Christ's example also, using the means with his prayers. Nehemiah, as he prayed that he might be improved as an instrument of good to his distressed countrymen; so also did he use his interest in his Lord and Master the King, to further him therein, and when he was in hazard by reason of his enemies' powers and policies, as he prays with the people, so he sets a watch: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them night and day, because of them. Ezra and the rest had confessed the sins of the people," but must use the means to reform the same: "Now when Ezra had prayed, Shechaniah answered, Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away the strange wives." "Arise, for this matter belongeth to thee." Abraham's servant with his prayers for success in the business of procuring a wife for Isaac, uses the means to speed therein, he bestows bracelets upon her, when he began to perceive her to be the woman. Paul with his prayers that the "Philippians' love may abound," will use exhortations too for that end. Christ when to raise Lazarus, as he will pray, so commanded that the "stone be removed from the grave." And with his prayers for the not failing of Peter's faith, he uses that means of recovering words also.

Let us add three or four reasons why means must be used with prayer.

1. Because ordinarily God gives us the blessings which we seek of him in the use of means. If David pray for a victory over the Philistines, God will give it him, but he must listen to the noise in the tops of the mulberry trees, to know when he must fall on, and he must first fetch a compass, the better to lie in ambush. So he shall recover all, upon his prayer and inquiry, that the Amalekites took from Ziklag. But he will use means to come upon them where they are secure, by making use of the information of that Egyptian soldier of theirs whom they left behind: "Jacob shall prevail over Esau, having prevailed over God," but will use the means by a large gift to pacify his brother's wrath. Paul has a promise of the lives of all in the ship. Yet some means, as that of the boat must not be used, and other means more unlikely must be used for the safety of all, they that can swim must do it, and the rest get upon boards, and pieces of the wreck to the shore. "Not a bone of Christ shall be broken," yet God ordained it that he should be dead, before they came to hasten his death by breaking his bones, as they did the others. "Of those that the Father gave me, have I lost none," according as it is written. Yet will he use the means, that his weakly disciples may at that present escape that temptation of suffering. God delights to bless the use of means as his own ordinance, he will be seen to be all in means, and over means, and will have his people discern the sweet accord between the first and the second causes.

2. Because the more costly and difficult mercies are to us, the more they are prized by us, and they abide the longer with us. Hezekiah has means pre-scribed for his recovery, which God could have wrought without them; but his recovery is thereby the more memorable. Abraham's servant with prayer using sundry means, had made many more affecting observations of speaking providences for accomplishing his business, and did the more thankfully admire God therein, and repeat the same the more feelingly for others' benefit. There are more conspicuous varieties of God's wisdom, grace, power, and truth, in such a way. Both the means and the mercies which we obtain by prayer, with use of means, are more suitable to our condition here; when means are used by us, we are often minded of the mercies received thereby, by like cases and means occurring, and are fitter to remind others thereof occasionally.

3. Because the saints using means with their prayers, are quietest and most at peace in the issues thereof, whatsoever they prove, and are strongly armed against objections impugning their fidelity to God, themselves, or others; being thereby also fenced against temptations to discontent. Hannah having prayed by herself, and having set good Eli also on work with God for her, is quiet. David, after he had with his prayers to defeat Ahithophel's counsel, —“Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness,”— used means to escape Absalom's bloody army, marshalling his own army for that end, how quiet lie is. In a psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom, he said, “I laid me down and slept,” he can then sleep as sweetly in his tent, as in his palace.

4. Because the saints using means with their prayers, are sure either of the good things they seek, or as good, and the Lord's blessing upon them. Abraham's servant Nehemiah and others had the very mercies they sought. Paul and Moses had the good of that which they sought. God gave not Paul the desired deliverance from the evil he complained of, but yet gives him grace sufficient to guard and support him against his temptations. Moses shall have all in a view at a distance, which they had who went into Canaan. David earnestly desired to have built God a temple; “It was in his heart so to do, and accordingly be made ready;” yet he must not build it; but God honored him in selecting his son Solomon to do it; and he further honored David with a glorious testimony of his gracious acceptance of such desires and endeavors of his to have done it, even as if he had actually done it; yea, he honored him with that divine discovery of all the platform of that goodly fabric; that, though Solomon shall erect it, yet David shall have the honor above him in all matters concerning the framing of it. Abraham is denied his desire in Ishmael, but is fully made up in the blessing upon Isaac, and Ishmael some way also fared the better for it.

What rules are to be attended unto, in our using means with our prayers?

1. Sanctify even the very means which you use, with prayer for a blessing upon them. So did Nehemiah, his petition to the king was sanctified by his petition to the King of heaven, “So I prayed unto the God of heaven, and then I said unto the king.” And those godly Jews sought God by fasting and prayer, for a right way of proceeding in their return into Judea. Asa will set the battle in array, as the means, but yet sanctify it by prayer, and yet then also profess, it is all nothing without the Lord: “We have no power, help us O Lord our God.” And, indeed, when Christians sanctify the means by prayer, they acknowledge God as all in all, even in the means as well as the end; this will prevent using unlawful means. If Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, and Jacob had done so, they had not used those poor shifts mentioned, which are no better than lying. Besides, it will prevent a blast upon that which means may bring about without such prayer, to sanctify the same; when we

use means with success in our desires, without prayer, we either want the comfort of the thing attained, or it is unexpectedly snatched from us; or it is some way perverted to some unwarrantable use, or rather abuse thereof.

2. We must needs be choice, prudent, and pious in making use of the means we pitch upon, and as pious and prudent in the manner of using the same. Neither choose nor use any unlawful means, as Rachel and Sarah did, to give their maids to their husbands, to attain their desire of children by them. Or as David in danger at Gath, supplicating for deliverance, but scribbling too, as the means. Nor are we to use any unsuitable or unseasonable means, or lawful pertinent means unlawfully or unseasonably, but use lawfulest and likeliest means. As Mordecai with prayer used queen Esther's interest with her husband, king Ahasuerus; and Jacob with his prayer, sends Esau a present, a gift using to prosper whithersoever it goes.

3. Let us see that there lie no fault or sin upon us, in such sort as might blast both our praying and means using also. As in Joshua's crying whilst Achan's sin lay upon the congregation, "Why criest thou? — Israel hath sinned." So the Israelites for avenging that horrid crime of Benjamin, gather an army, and pray too; but for sins among them, and too much trusting to their numbers, twice blasted. Hence, when godly Ezra would use means for their safe return to Judea, he puts his company upon solemn humiliation of themselves before God, lest their sins might waylay them.

4. Use the means in faith. Set faith on work, as well in the use of means as of prayer. Nehemiah prays, sets a strict watch, encourages all sorts to fight, but all in faith: "Our God shall fight for us." "Moses crieth," and withal Moses uses means prescribed of God to pass through the Red Sea, "he stretcheth out his hand over the Red Sea to divide it;" but all this was in faith, looking through all their prayers, and all secondary means, unto the Lord as all in all. By faith they passed through the Red Sea. Asa sets the battle in array, and prays, but rests neither on his warlike power nor on his prayers, but on the Lord alone: "We rest on thee." And, indeed, we have need to use means in faith, looking through means, and resting on the God of them, and on his promise for succeeding the same. Jacob prays, as well after he had pitched upon the means of pacifying Esau as before, and yet rests on the charge of God that he should return, and his promise, "That he will be with him and do him good," and on that promise, "With men thou shalt prevail." Use the means also in faith, respecting the warrantableness thereof, lest in that respect what is not of faith becomes sin to us. And let all be done in faith also, eyeing and owning God in all successes of prayers and means, as the chief, as all. So Exodus 15:1-27, "He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and rider hath he thrown into the sea."

5. Be diligent and patient in using means, waiting upon God for the success, as they do that dig for mines: "Our eyes wait on thee, as the eyes of the handmaid upon her mistress."

6. In using means, be submissive. Bind not God to our praying or means, much less to this or that means, or manner, or season, either of the use, or of the success of the same; but leave all with the Lord, to do, delay, or deny as he please. Even Joab spake nobly herein to his brother: "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." This he spake after he had used all warlike means for a good success. David, though he so earnestly desired, and industriously endeavored to build a temple, and was denied the success as to himself, yet rests satisfied in God's mind touching his son, and his acceptance of him for other service. So Paul denied of that he so earnestly begged and endeavored, rests quiet

in God's answer: "My grace is sufficient for thee;" saying: "Most gladly there' fore will I glory in my infirmities."

7. When means have been thus used with prayer, and yet do not succeed, search out the cause, be humbled for it, and redress it; find out the Achan that troubles Israel and execute holy vengeance upon him, and be not discouraged in using means, as Joshua uses stratagems to take Ai and the men thereof, who had the better of the men of Israel. So did Israel after their twofold defeat by Benjamin, humble themselves greatly before God, inquire his counsel, and use stratagems against Benjamin, and prospered. So Paul hindered oft from going to the Romans to do good among them, though he prayed and endeavored it, yet was ready to it still.

21. Part 3, Chapter 5. Time Spent in Prayer

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT TIME SPENT IN PRAYER.

Having briefly despatched this case, about the use of means with prayer, we shall go on to speak to a fifth case, namely, concerning the time to be spent in prayer, How long, or how short we may be in prayer? To which I answer, more generally, that the space of time is not fixed or limited; but the text plainly shows, that much time is to be spent in prayer: "Pray without ceasing," implies, be much in prayer; spend much time about it. For, 1. The heart is not so suddenly or easily got upon the wing; yet in that doth the nature and life of prayer consist. It is a lifting up the heart, "I lift up my heart to thee;" that is, I pray. We pray indeed, when our hearts are elevated in prayer. Many weights are oftentimes upon our spirits to press them down, not so easily removed: many bonds, yea, knots in these cords, straitening our spirit, not easily unloosed: we need enlargement of our hearts to run any such way of God's commandments. We would, as men sometimes in their sleep, fain cry, but there is such a weight upon our breasts, that we cannot; deadness seizes upon us, and much rubbing is needful ere life is recovered: dulness annoys us, and much whetting is requisite, ere our hearts get a spiritual edge upon them: we may say with the church, "Quicken us, so will we call upon thee." If the iron be blunt, the more pains is taken to sharpen it, so it is here with our blunt spirits in prayer.

2. The necessities of the soul of the best, are so many and weighty, that a little time will not suffice to express them; yea, it being the trade of a gracious soul to be thus merchandising, his business being to be thus pleading, his calling as a saint being to call upon God; surely a little time should not be taken up in this his proper employment.

3. As the time in prayer is improved, all the rest of our time is either blessed or blasted to us. That morning that the soul speeds well, that day all goes the better; and on the contrary. If Jacob see God's face in prayer the night before, he is confident to speed well the next morrow. If the instrument of a Christian's spirit be not well tuned in prayer, truly he will make but bad music all the day after in his calling and employments. If we speed not well at heaven's court, we shall not do so well in earth's country. If at this holy mart and port we get not well stored, and full lading, we shall make but poor markets elsewhere. But to answer more particularly. Sometimes in special sort we are to be long in prayer; other times there are when it is meet to be but short. We are to be long in prayer,

1. When some extraordinary occasion of the church or commonwealth, or of our own or other Christians call for it. Prayer of eight hours long was made on that fast-day. Nehemiah himself spends whole days in prayer and fasting. Prayers stretched out upon the tenters (as the Greek word is) was made by the church for Peter's enlargement.

Upon the calling of Christ's twelve disciples, he spent a whole night in prayer, and so in families, Christians for a time are to be as only sequestered to prayer and fasting: "Abstain with consent for

a time, that you may give yourselves to prayer.”

2. When strong and long temptations are upon us. Jesus Christ in that strong and bloody conflict in his soul, being in an agony, he prayed, *εκτενεστέρον*, in a more extended manner. Then the Psalmist cries himself hoarse with long crying, when in these quagmires, that deep pit, those deep waters: “I sink in the mire, I am weary with crying, my throat is dry.” Lord, in trouble they have poured out a prayer to thee: “They do not only barely drop, but plentifully pour out prayers.” Psalms 102:1-28, title: “A prayer of the afflicted, when in distress he poureth out his complaint,” and that prayer following is longer than others. When Satan, ο Αντιδικος the law adversary does extend his pleas against us, it is meet that we should enlarge our counter pleas for our own souls; as the powers of darkness do lengthen and multiply their wrestlings, so must we our counter wrestlings of prayer: “We wrestle with principalities, and powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world.” Praying with all manner of prayers.

3. When some sad trials and sufferings are approaching, then will Jesus Christ spend night after night in prayer, not long before his bitter sufferings. “For my love they are my adversaries,” (says the Psalmist,) but I pray, or I give myself to prayer, whilst they are treacherously plotting my ruin. We must lay in a magazine of prayers, against such a spiritual siege, and sorest sufferings; wherein, if not then so fit to pray, we may have the benefit of former prayers.

4. When we are in any special spiritual frames, then spread out your sails and hoist them up to receive and improve the wind, as long as any spiritual gales last. When liberty of speech is granted and given us, then speak on. When the cloud fills the temple, now is a time, if ever, for Solomon to make his long prayer: “When we are filled with the Spirit, we may well continue pouring out prayer.”

5. When we are not like to live long. Christ knowing he had but few days to live, spent the more time in prayer: “The end of all things is at hand, therefore be sober, and watch unto prayer.” If heaven’s pleaders have but a little while allotted them, they had not need lose any of that little time to plead in. When such spiritual merchants are shortly to go out of this country of trading so by prayer, they had need bestow themselves to purpose. When these travellers are so shortly to take their long journey home, they had need improve every moment for the despatch of the remaining part of their prayer business here. Sickness allows but little respite and free space for prayer. Other work of the poor soul is so various then, and perplexing, that it takes up the whole man to despatch that. And indeed when sincere ones have not long to live, they are the fitter for prayer. When the saints are near the ocean of eternity, then the rivulets of grace in their souls wax stronger. Weakly persons who are godly, are so often minded of eternity, and perpetuity, as time’s successors, that they bear an image of perpetuity; it is deeply instamped upon them in their spirituals. But some will say, shall not suppliants then wander and vanish into forbidden repetitions, if they are long in prayer?

1. The saints are and may be helped with such holy variety, that unlawful repetitions may be avoided, as might be evinced by many reasons, if need were.

2. We distinguish of repetitions in prayer; some are lawful, and some are unlawful. The Scripture frequently gives us instances of lawful repetitions, as Amos 7:2. It is twice repeated: “By whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small.” And in Solomon’s prayer, he oft repeats this clause: “Then hear

thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive." Of this sort of lawful repetitions in prayer, are these:— First, such which are wrung from the strength of pinching necessities, or temptations; as when Christ was so hard bestead in the garden, be oft, even a third time spake the same words, entreating his Father, that if it were his will, that the cup might pass, and "Eli, Eli, Lama sabachthani, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" So Paul, in a like sort, besought God thrice in the same manner:

"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." Like children in great pain, when they are to tell where it is, they iterate and reiterate this cry, O here, here, here, O here; or like men in a ditch, or among thieves, iterating this outcry, Help, help, help; or as prisoners in straits, crying, Bread, bread, for the Lord's sake, bread, a little bread for Christ's sake; or as it is with men, when their houses are on fire in the night, they cry, Fire, fire, fire.

Secondly, such repetitions wherein the heart is carried out with equal strength of feeling and holy affections, at a third, as at a first time; so was Christ in his iterated cries: "He made supplication with strong crying and tears." So Daniel often iterates:

"O Lord, hear." When there is in a gracious supplicant so much strength of love, desire, and esteem, and suitable reachings after mercies begged, that the soul is not content to speak once, but it must speak it over and over again. As friends when commending some business of greatest weight to their friend's care, they will be often repeating, Be sure you forget me not in such or such a thing. So is it here in making known our requests to God. Or as a cry uttered with greatest strength, causes the iteration of a like echo, so repetitions in prayer are the echoes of strong cries of spirit; as a ball banded with great strength, makes many rebounds, so the heart, carried out with great strength of holy affections, is apt to make these holy rebounds of such repetitions; or as a bell, which having been but then ringing, doubles and redoubles its knells, from the strength put forth in its ringing, so will the gracious heart be giving many reiterated lifts, and those sounding out in like expressions of the lips in prayer. Hence that reiterated desire of the saints, "Amen and amen."

3. Such repetitions in prayer are lawful, as spring from some strong workings of faith, in the expectation of mercies: such was that iterated cry and prayer, "Amen, even so" (which is the sense of the same) "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," as believing Christ's word then mentioned, "Lo, I come quickly." So the Psalmist concluding that God had heard his prayer, says, "Blessed be the Lord, Amen and amen:" such was that frequent repetition of David in his prayer to God to bless his house, as building upon the truth of his promise for that end. Thus is faith letting down the same bucket into the well, which is presented to it: when the believing soul hears assuredly that its friend, the Lord, is within hearing, it knocks thus again and again, in the same sort as before.

4. Such repetitions in prayer as spring from love, or are accompanied with special delight and spiritual stirring of heart in the very mention thereof. Such was their reiterated cry in solemn worship of God: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty;" such strains of love and holy delight may often be reiterated in holy musical divisions, (as I may call them,) though there be little variation. As where a speech is pleasing, a motion is wont to be made to hear that over again; so the spirit of Christ liking to hear us speak so very savorly and sincerely in this or that passage in prayer, may bid us speak that again. In sundry passages of the saints' prayers, the Holy Ghost in special manner spake in them and with them, and such like double speeches of God's saints and Spirit

speaking together, may well be repeated. But yet. there are repetitions in prayer which are unlawful, as,

1. Such which are affected: as strains of eloquence, uttered in a rhetorical way. Such were those of the Gentiles: "Use not vain repetitions as the heathen." These may please men's ears; but in prayer, whereas suppliants should be most humble and self-denying, they are loathsome to the Lord.
2. Such repetitions which are vain, "Use not vain repetitions:" vain, that is, empty, frothy, impertinent, unprofitable repetitions, wherein is no spiritual life, heat, vigor, nor yet solidity nor integrity.
3. Such repetitions which are idolized, "They think they shall be heard for their much speaking: " to think that God would not, or could not take notice of our wants, unless we should word it in that sort with him, is a great dishonor to his free and rich grace, and to his faithful and watchful care and respect to his suppliants: or to rest and trust in our repetitions, that God will the rather regard us, is to make God like a mortal man.
4. Such repetitions as spring from hypocrisy, namely, from secret desire to seem to be fervent in prayer, or to be thought of others to spend much time in prayer, or to stop the mouth of an accusing conscience, which would else be quarrelling at per. Sons if too brief in prayer, and therefore to fill up time, men will be making such repetitions of the same things and phrases, in their prayers; such like repetitions as these are sinful and heathenish: men thereby take God's name in vain, abuse his holy ear, willing to draw him to listen to babblings, they derogate from the glory of God's wisdom, as one that is dull of hearing or conceiving, as childish as the sons of men; like Baal, needing long and loud crying to awaken him by a vain reiteration, O, Baal, hear us. Such cast dishonor upon the renowned ordinance of prayer, making it to be but as empty expense of time in airy, vain expressions. So much for the answer to the former part respecting length of prayer. Now consider in what cases, and with what cautions we may be short in prayer.

We may be short in prayer, 1. In case of bodily sickness, pain, faintness, and death approaching: "How can thy servant talk with this my Lord, there remaining no strength in me?" Sick Hezekiah and Jacob were short in prayer: "Jacob worshippeth God leaning on his staff."

2. In case of pressing occasions, unavoidable by ordinary prudence or providence: when the Philistines came suddenly upon Samuel and upon Saul in prayer, they soon despatch.
3. In case of prevailing indisposedness of heart to pray; after much strivings to pray, yet distempers and hurries of spirit abate not: better then be short, than multiply words in any senseless and tumultuous manner, and take God's name in vain.
4. In case a Christian be personally persecuted, and may not stay long in one place.
5. In case the prayer to be made be only occasional, above that of our ordinary course. In such a case Hezekiah is short.

Only in spending so little time in prayer, take we these cautions.

1. That it be not usual with us so to do, but rather occasional: to be ordinarily so brief in prayer, would argue unacquaintedness with the Lord, men not using to hold any long discourse with strangers. It would manifest suspicion and distrust, and slighting of God; as men that use to speak either seldom or but little at once, with persons they suspect or dare not trust, or who are not regarded. Besides, it would evidence a self-sufficient spirit; they have little business with the Lord, and therefore will not exchange many words before him: however, it will be an argument at best, of slender abilities and weakness of mind, that they cannot hold any long discourse with God.
2. That it be not out of a worldly spirit, so intent upon the world, as affording scarce time for God. Family and closet services of God, must therefore be despatched usually in a hurry: there are so many that call upon such persons without, that they have not leisure to be with God in prayer, within: they are so familiarly and fully employed with these new friends, that they speak but by snatches with God. They are so much abroad, that they can be but little at home: when these choking weeds of the world spread so fast, and so far, that they crowd and thrust the good grain, herbs, and fruits into a very narrow compass.
3. That it be not from negligence or slightness, or profaneness of spirit, supposing that such a short good-morrow, or good-evening will serve the Lord's turn well enough.
4. That it be not out of improvidence, when by the use of godly foresight, and prudence, such straits of time for prayer might have been prevented: for that will sadly afflict and abase a Christian, if he be indeed gracious and tender-hearted.

22. Part 3, Chapter 6. Pleading in Prayer

CHAPTER VI.

PLEADING IN PRAYER

We have already spoken to some cases of conscience in the incessant practice of prayer. A sixth case comes now to be spoken to: namely, holy pleading with God in prayer. Wherein let us consider, 1. That we must use holy pleas in prayer. 2. What we may use therein. 3. What rules we are to attend unto in our pleading.

First. We must plead with God in prayer. God says to penitent ones, “Come, let us reason together.” God reasons with us by his word and providences, outwardly; and by the motions of his spirit, inward but we reason with him, by framing certain holy arguments, grounded upon allowed principles, drawn from his nature, name, word, or works. It is condemned as a very sinful defect in professors, that they did not plead the church’s case with God: “There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up.” if you pursue the examples of the most famous, and prevailing suppliants of God, recorded in Scripture, you shall find them using holy pleas in their prayers for themselves or others. Thus did Abraham: “Shall not the judge of the whole earth do right?” So Jacob, “Which saidst, Return to thy father’s house. And saidst, Surely I will do thee good.” Which is, as if he had said, Lord, I undertook not the journey upon my own head, but thou badest me go, and I have thy word for a good success; and therefore I look thou shouldest bear me harmless, and bless me in this undertaking. So Moses, David, Daniel, and others, in prayer are full of holy pleas. And that we may strengthen this by two or three reasons, consider:—

1. It is an argument of holy friendship thus to plead with God in prayer, and therefore most suitable to this holy talking with God. As men use to plead with such as they are most intimate with, so the saints, who have been men inward with the Lord, to whom he has made himself most known, ever use the most pleas with God in their prayers. What, mere men more intimate with God, than Abraham, Moses, and David? and who pleaded it more stoutly and freely with him than they did? And it being so dear a bought privilege, we may well improve it to the utmost: “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence.” “By the blood of Jesus we have access with boldness unto the holy place.”

2. It will be an argument of fervency and holy seriousness in our spirits in prayer, to back the same with prevailing pleas. As it is in all petitioners amongst men, suing for things they most strongly desire.

3. It will be an argument of our careful and serious minding, and recording of what the Lord holds forth in his word or works for our encouragement in prayer. Hence when the ministers of the church are wished to be pleaders in the church’s case, they are called remembrancers, recorders, and therefore men fitted to plead, yea, called to plead with the Lord for his people: “Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, give him no rest.” But three or four things may be objected against the necessity of such pleading.

Objection 1. Jesus Christ is the advocate for his people: "If we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." What need they more than barely present their requests unto God in his name?

Answer True, Christ's office is to present our requests to God. which we bring before him, also to perfume those holy pleas with the odor of his merit and mediation. The Lord Christ meant to pray the Father for them, but yet will have the disciples in his name to ask more to purpose than ever they had done: Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask (that is, more freely, fully, and strongly,) that your joy may be full." Yea, he is an advocate to solicit and plead in our behalf, when we pray.

Obj. 2. God is not as man, hard, but rather easy to be entreated, as being much more merciful, and wise, than any of the sons of men; whose wisdom from above, is to be easy to be entreated. Besides, as men, the more sincere they are, the more candid they are, in ready answers to others' desires, which they may grant. They will not assent to carry it otherwise than as they intend; no more will the Lord; but as he is, so will he show himself ready to show mercy, and to forgive, and therefore what need of such pleading

Ans. True, the Lord is thus ready to help and hear; yet who more full of pleas for his mercy than David, the penman of the Holy Ghost, in ascribing this to God, that he is ready to forgive, and plenteous in his mercy to all that call upon him? He pleads: "Incline thine ear and hear." Why so? "for I am poor and needy." "And preserve thou my soul." Why so? "For I am thy servant, and trust in thee." "Be merciful to me, O Lord." Why so? "For I cry to thee continually." "And rejoice the soul of thy servant." Why so? "For unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." Which is backed with another argument from this very gracious disposition of God: "For thou Lord art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee." This readiness to mercy must not hinder, but further the saints' pleading, and help to more argument, whereby to plead with God therein. Jesus Christ knew that his Father always heard him, yet in solemn prayer how many arguments does he use, to strengthen his petitions, to glorify him: "Father, glorify thy Son." Why so? The "hour (or the time) is come." And "I have glorified thee on earth; and I have finished the work thou hast given me; and now glorify me." "Let them be one in us." Why so? "That the world may know thou hast sent me." "Let them be with me to behold my glory." Why so? "For thou lovedst me before the world was." Surely God himself must needs be ready to do what himself wills; yet as one stirring up himself to act, he argues with himself: "Awake, awake, O arm of the Lord." Why so? "Art not thou it that hast wounded the dragon?" "Art not thou it that hast dried up the sea?" For he said, "Surely they are my people, children that will not lie. So he was their Savior." "For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise, saith the Lord, and I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." God glorifies his readiness to mercy, in that we no sooner plead for it in our prayers but he shows mercy: "Whilst they yet speak, I will hear." "O thou that art hearing prayer." It is the Lord who prepares our hearts in prayer and furnishes them with holy pleas; and it is the rather a pledge that he is ready to hear the pleas of his own spirit. The Lord may, and sometimes does anticipate the prayer of his people with mercy: "Before they call I will hear." Yet ordinarily he will have us pray and plead first, ere he will answer you Christ prevented Zaccheus, and bade himself to his house: "Zaccheus, come down quickly, for I must abide at thine house to-day;" yet usually he went to no house, but he was first invited; which makes way to answer another objection.

Obj. 3. God may and does bestow upon his people many desirable blessings, without so much ado, in pleading for them. The penitent thief did but say, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and Christ presently answered him, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise;" and the publican did but cry, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," and he went away justified. And David did but in a short ejaculatory way seek the Lord, and be delivered him from all his fears.

Ans. 1. Some extraordinary examples do not take away from the force of an ordinary rule, in prayer.

2. The cases of the saints may be such, that a few broken expressions may be as much, yea, more than many pleas in other cases, and at other times. As in the poor thief, encompassed with so much sense of guilt of his former courses, with bodily tortures, and fear of death. So in David, in that instant when he changed his behavior before Abimelech. So poor tempted saints, under bonds, bolts, and keepers, and with heavy weights upon their spirits, "make short cries in depths."

3. God will sometimes order passages for peculiar examples of his royal bounty, that none may glory in man, nor in prayers, nor in pleas, although acted therein by the spirit of grace; and that none may be dismayed, though they cannot sometimes plead the cases of their souls.

4. The Scripture, in recording the saints' prayers, does not always express all, but rather sets down the substance of what was uttered by them.

5. In short prayers there may be couched many pleas, as in that of the publican's prayer, wherein almost every word includes a secret plea.

Obj. 4. God is not as man to be moved by our pleas, but abides unchangeable in his purposes of what he will do: So that as he said to Samuel touching Saul: "Why mournest thou for Saul, seeing I have rejected him? God is not as man to repent;" what pleas soever are made to the contrary: "God answereth me not, (says Saul,) neither by Urim, nor by Prophets." The hypocrites plead: "Lord, Lord, have we not eaten and drunken in thy presence? Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils?" but both in vain: "I know you not, (says the Lord,) depart from me."

Ans. 1. It is true, amidst God's divers expressings of himself to us, sometimes as frowning, sometimes as smiling, there is no change with God; God is the same when he carries it to us as willing, or when as unwilling to hearken to us: because by an immutable act of his counsel, he ordered it so diversely towards us in his dispensations.

2. It is true, also, that there is nothing done in time, but the Lord decreed it immutably before all time; as that he would confer upon his people such and such a mercy, but in such a way of moving them to pray and plead for it.

3. It is true also, that there is a time when pleas avail not: as,

1. For a time: and so the Lord may express distaste and carry it as one that is angry with his own, yea, when pleading in prayer. The Church pleads, "Hear:" why so? "O, thou shepherd of Israel," etc., yet expostulates: "Why art thou so long angry with the prayers of thy people?" yet were their pleas, and prayers, and tears treasured up for a fit season of help.

2. Forever: namely, in case of expiration of the day and season of grace with any: "They shall seek me early, and not find me."

3. Though the Lord be not moved by our pleas; yet are our pleas his ordinance, and therefore we are to attend thereto: and they are an ordinary means, in the use whereof God will give promised mercies; yea, they are a means which the Spirit of God makes use of to move and quicken our sense of such and such wants, our desire of such and such mercies, and our faith in such and such promises or attributes of God, to put us upon the serious urging of such and such holy pleas in our prayers.

Secondly, What pleas we are to use in our prayers to the Lord. There are in arguing the cases and intricacies of our souls, certain radical notions in God and Christ, and the word, which yield fruitful and forcible arguments, in this our holy discourse and reasoning with God: true it is, that it is not every one that can raise so aptly, seasonably, strongly, plentifully, and graciously, such prevailing pleas: some are but juniors and freshmen in the school of Christ; others are senior students in this holy logic; there is much skill required to become one of Heaven's barristers. But for the better help and direction in this art, and fruitful practice thereof, let us reduce these pleas to three heads. Some respect God, some ourselves, some others. Briefly then of some pleas respecting God, we find the Scripture recording some approved, and (as I may say) unanswerable pleas. As first, the engagement of his own name in the cases before him. When a petitioner has such skill in pleading his suit, that he can prudently involve the petitioned party in his case, and so make it as well the ease of the petitioned, as of the petitioner: this with men is undeniable pleading; so with God, thus: "Why doth thy wrath wax hot," etc. "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did the Lord bring them out to slay them in the mountain." As if he had said, Lord, I say not how the name of thy grace, wisdom, faithfulness, and longsuffering, may suffer in the eyes and hearts of thy professed people, if thou shouldst deny my request; but consider what a disparagement it will be to thy glory, in the eyes of thy enemies, to deal so strictly with thy people: men are forbidden to lay a stumbling-block before the blind; and will God lay such an occasion of offence and falling in the way of blind Egyptians? The like plea is used in this: "Help us for the glory of thy name, purge away our sins for thy name's sake: wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God? Render to them the reproach wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord." So in many other places to like purpose. The cases wherein God's name and glory are in any special sort engaged, are of greatest weight, and therefore none need be afraid or ashamed to plead them before the Lord: in such pleas truly, if the Lord should deny his saints, he should deny himself. And the self-denial of the suppliant shines forth the more in such pleas, when he pleads the case, not so much in reference to himself, as to the Lord himself, and to his name.

Secondly, the suitableness of the relation betwixt God and us: "Help us, O God of our salvation; deliver us, for thy name sake." As if they would say, thou stylest thyself the God of our salvation: we by thy grace do own thee as such; wherefore show that thou art such by saving us: let it appear that it is no empty title. And what is more suitable to a God of salvation, than to save his people? or wherein shall that name of thine be more magnified, than in thy delivering thy people? "Doubtless thou art our father, our redeemer." As if they had said, O Lord, we have no other but thee; of whom should children seek relief or from whom should they expect succor, but from their father? Now, we are resolved to own no other for our father but thee, and can a father be cursed to his desolate, disconsolate children, when it is in his power to relieve them? To this we may add the suitableness

of the mercies we ask of God, unto him, and unto us: "Let the power of my Lord be great, as thou hast said, The Lord is long- suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity; pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of thy people." As it is suitable to a sinning people to get a pardon, so it is most suitable to a sin-pardoning God, to give a pardon to them: "But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayst be feared." I need not speak more in this case, or so much as scruple it, that thou shouldst be strict upon a poor, desolate, tempted creature, to mark what is done amiss, and so to proceed to condemn or confound such a one as I am; for there are forgivenesses with thee: the manifold pardons that I need for my manifold and multiplied sins, are in readiness in abundance with thee: thou canst not deny the benefit thereof to me in my case; I will and do conclude it as a granted case, there are forgivenesses with thee: What then? that thou mayest be feared. Thus the faith of Heaven's suppliants will be framing good conceits of God, of his generous nature, that if he deny them, he should disparage himself in their eyes, who had better thoughts of him. As Paul, desiring Agrippa's becoming a Christian, he winds him in by his holy rhetoric, thus: "Believest thou the prophets? yea, I know thou believest:" so that if Agrippa deny this, he must in a manner weaken his own esteem: so when the saints in their pleas hold forth their faith in God, as the Lord who uses not to exercise himself short of their apprehensions; but it is for his honor to make good the utmost of his people's desires and expectations of faith.

Thirdly, the little gain that the Lord would have by denying his people, in the mercies they request. David begs his own life of God, using this plea:

"What profit is there in my blood?" So did the captive church plead: "Thou sellest thy people for naught, and dost not increase thy wealth thereby. So poor saints of God, in their prayers, plead that indeed he may condemn, or confound, or cast them off; he may continue to frown upon them, and to withdraw his Spirit from them; he may deny their requests, for just causes in thin; but what will he gain thereby? he may gain many praises by helping them; but what good will it do him to see them oppressed by the enemies of their souls? or what delight would it be to him to see them sighing, and fainting under sad pressures, this is an allowed, and a very successful kind of pleading. We might instance in many other pleas respecting God, as that: "Where is thy zeal, and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy sayings towards me? are they restrained?" These are prevailing pleas, since the Lord can as soon cease 'to be, as cease to be zealous of his own glory, in his people's welfare; since he neither wants power nor will to help them in any needful case: for he has strength, and therefore is able; and bowels of compassion and tender mercies, and therefore is willing to succor his people. Yea, every attribute and title of God, and every promise is a several plea, which God cannot deny. The second sort of pleas respect the saints themselves, and are of two sorts:—

First, some respect the dependency and neediness of our condition.

Secondly, others the good of grace shining forth in us. Of the former sort let us instance in these:—

1. It may be, and has been pleaded, that we are God's creatures; both considered as men, and as saints by calling: we are the workmanship of his hand, and as such plead for his gracious respects: "Thou hast made me as the clay, and wilt thou bring me to dust again?" As if he should say, thou hast been at such cost and pains to make me, and now wilt thou altogether mar me by afflictions and temptations? so the church pleads: "But now thou art our Father: we are the clay,

thou art the potter: be not wroth very sore.” Which is as much as to say, fathers do not use to be irrevocably displeased with their children, nor will they correct them without measure, or whip them to death. Thus David pleads his fashioning by God: “Thy hands have made and fashioned me, give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.” God himself makes it an argument to himself, why he will bear his people: “I have made, and I will bear: even I will carry, and will deliver you.” And it is a prevailing reason with God, “not to contend forever, lest the soul should fail before me, (says he,) and the spirit which I have made.” So would God have this an argument to help the weakest faith, to raise its desires above all its fears: “But now, thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not. For I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him.” And, therefore, surely the saints may well urge this in prayer.

2. We may plead the imbecility and frailty of our natures. So Job pleads for the speeding of God’s manifesting his pardoning and reconciling grace to him: “Why (lost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust.” As if he had said, Lord, if ever thou intendest, (as I am persuaded thou dost,) to renew the former beams of thy favor, and pardoning mercy, thou hadst not need to defer too long, lest it come too late; for ere long I shall return to my dust. This is David’s plea in the like case: “Keep not silence at my tears, for I am a stranger with thee. Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength, before I go hence, and be no more.” So Job pleads this: “Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt thou pursue dry stubble?” What credit is it to so great a Majesty as thou art, to show thy power against a poor leaf? or to run after a poor leaf, which every puff of wind whisketh hither and thither? or is it any honor to a man, to be hewing a poor leaf, which can make no resistance? Thus Abraham pleads for audience and patience in hearing him: because he is but dust and ashes, of little substance, and short continuance before the Lord: if the Lord please now to hear him whilst he is before him, he is not like to trouble him long; he is but weak, and it is not much discouragement in denial of requests, which he is able to bear. And the Lord has sanctified this plea, as an argument to himself to show his servants mercy: “He pitieth those that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust.” “I will not contend forever, for the spirit should fail before me.” This prevails with the Lord, not to charge too hard upon his poor people.

3. We may plead the extremities of our miseries, our extremities being God’s opportunities of hearing and helping us: “Have mercy upon me, O Lord;” why so? “for I am desolate. Hear me speedily, O Lord,” why so? “my spirit faileth.” I have but a little spirit left, O Lord, to breathe after thee, and speak to thee, let me not spend that in waste: Lord, my soul is dying away; answer, Lord, before I faint quite away. A gracious answer, Lord, would even bring life in me again: and nothing else but that will recover me: and therefore hear me speedily, a poor dying, sinking, fainting spirit, O Lord, I entreat thee: “Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul: I sink in the deep mire, where is no standing.” This plea in effect is thus, Lord, I am ready to drown; if ever thou wouldst save a poor perishing servant of thine, save me: my troubles and temptations are too deep for me, I am ready to sink, and therefore Lord reach hither thy gracious hand, and bear up my head above water, lest otherwise I miscarry. Especially, if such extremities continue, the continuance of them may be pleaded. Such is Heman’s plea: “Lord, why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die: from my youth up, whilst I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted: “and God makes this an allowed plea to himself, of showing his people mercy in such a

case: "I have a long time holden my peace. Now will I destroy and devour at once. And I will bring the blind by a way they know not." Christ the angel uses this plea: "O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt thou not have not have mercy on Jerusalem against which thou hast had i, itrl: i: iou these thrce-s-ore and ten years?"

4. We may lead our helplessness in ourselves, and in any other besides himself: "Be not far from Jne fur trouble is near: for there is none to help. Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles, that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? Art not thou he, O Lord, our God? therefore we whi wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things." We have no might, we know not what to do. hut our eves are unto tbee." Either thou must do O Lord, or else thitie enemies will prevail: " Give us help against trouble, for vain is the help of man." When people are in a perishing condition, it must not keep them from God, but they must take this to bottom their requests upon for mercy; their spiritual oppresors must make them repair to the Lord, and that will prevail for succor, from the Lord Jesus:

"They shall cry unto the Lord, because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a Savior and a great one, and he shall deliver them." It is engaged concerning Christ the true Solomon: "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also and him that hath no helper." God himself urges his people to come to him, with this plea in their mouths:

"Take unto you words and say, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously. For in thee the fatherless find mercy." "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills: truly in the Lord our God is salvation." So is the Lord himself moved hence to help his people: "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation to me." " The Lord shall repent for his servants, when he seeth their power is gone."

6. We may plead the greatness of our sins, not to keep us from mercy, but to prevail for it: "Pardon my sin, for it is great." "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee." "Do thou it for thy name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against thee." This is a strong plea, when sincerely urged, by an humble and contrite spirit. It glorifies God as one that is abundant in goodness, rich in mercy, and one with whom are forgivenesses and plenteous redemption. And it honors Christ as infinite in mercy. Hence also the Lord himself, when he would stir up himself to choice acts of mercy to his poor people, he first aggravates their sin against him to the highest, and then expresses his royal act of grace to them. So God by Isaiah says, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but hast been weary of me, O Israel; thou hast not honored me with thy sacrifices, but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, and wearied me with thine iniquities:

I, even I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for my name's sake." The latter sort of pleas respecting ourselves, or the grace in us, are, —

1. God's own stirring us up to pray for such mercies. When a petitioner can plead with God, Lord, I come not to thy blessed court uninvited; it was thou who hast appointed me to come to thy door of grace, else I had not come; thy Spirit moved me, thy promise encouraged me; and therefore, O Lord, I expect the fruit of my coming. So David pleads. Lord, thou saidst this and that touching my house, and therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer. He pleads, " Thou saidst, Seek my face;" and my heart answered, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." And well he may, in that God is not wont so to stir up and strengthen us to seek him, but when lie intends to be found

of us: "Thou wilt prepare the heart, thou wilt bow thine ear to hear." "Then shall ye seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." And God makes it an argument to himself, that if he say to any inwardly as well as outwardly, "Seek my face," he that speaks righteousness cannot frustrate their prayers, and bid them seek his face in vain: "I said not to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek my face in vain. I the Lord speak right things." If Ahasuerus bid his spouse ask, surely he will not fail to grant her petition. So when Christ called the blind man to him to tell him his grievance, it was truly said to him by them, "Be of good comfort, rise, for he calleth thee."

Secondly, our expectations of faith which the Lord has wrought in us, may be pleaded. That a king should occasion a petitioner's expectation of bounty, and fail him, were not seemly; it were strange. Hence Asa's plea, in his prayer for help: "Help, Lord." Why so? "For we rest on thee." "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I have believed thy commandments." "My God, I trust in thee, let me not be confounded." "Lead me forth in thy truth, for on thee do I wait all the day." "Let me not be confounded, for I trust in thee." "Let uprightness preserve me, for my hope is in thee." "Let me hear thy loving-kindness in the morning, for in thee is my trust." And it is an argument with men; such a one does depend upon me, and I have passed my word to do such or such a thing for him, and he comes to meet me, according to my own appointment, at such a time, in expectation of what I promised; and therefore I cannot, must not fail him. So it is with God: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." "The poor committeth himself to thee. Thou art the helper of the fatherless."

Thirdly, we may (in all humility) plead our heartbreakings and weepings in sense of want of mercies which we crave, and our pantings and faintings after the same. As "Hold not thy peace at my tears." David, who grounds all his pleas only upon the free grace of the Lord, says, "Have mercy upon me, according to thy loving-kindness," etc. Yet he pleads the brokenness of his heart: "The sacrifices of God are a broken heart; a broken and contrite spirit, O Lord, thou wilt not despise." It is a moving argument with a compassionate father, when his child craves this or that with tears, from him, not then to deny him. In such a case, a father will be ready to say, Alas, my dear child, thou shalt not weep any longer; thou shalt have what thou cravest. So doubtless is it with the Lord towards his children. When Ephraim smites upon his thigh, is ashamed, and even confounded, because he bare the iniquity of his youth, how this took with God we may perceive by what himself replies: "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." So Isaiah is bid to go to weeping Hezekiah, and tell him from God, ".I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears." As if he had said to Isaiah, Go run to yonder child of mine, bid him not weep so sore; tell him he shall have his request. "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping." "The Lord hath heard my petition." His prayer itself spake, and his tears also spake aloud in God's ears, and prevailed for audience.

Fourthly, the integrity of our hearts and ways, in former service for God, may by faith in Christ, as all in our justification, be also pleaded: "Remember that I have walked before thee in truth." "O Lord, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto I have declared thy wondrous works. Now, also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not." "With my whole heart have I sought thee, O let me not wander from thy commandments." The Lord himself makes it to himself a motive, to show mercy to his people: "They are children that will not lie; so he was their Savior."

"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth," etc. Only we must use this plea more sparingly, in a self-denying way, in faith in Christ's righteousness, as made ours. The like also may be said of our integrity with men, which in some cases, as of reproach, slander, or injurious dealing from men, may be by way of appeal, pleaded before the Lord: "Know, O Lord, that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke." "Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity."

Fifthly, we may plead our sufferings, especially those that are most directly and properly for God and his cause. Other sufferings also may be pleaded, as, "Let not all the trouble seem little to thee, which bath come upon us. Howbeit thou art just in them." "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us." But especially plead those which are undergone for the Lord's sake: "For thy sake we are killed all the day long. Awake, why sleepest thou?"

Sixthly, our former experiences of mercy in like cases may be pleaded, as Isaiah: "Where is the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained?" Which is as much as to say, Lord, thou hadst wont to be a compassionate God, I have had experience in various conditions and cases of thy bowels; how comes it to pass that they are so shut up now? "Thou hast taught me from my youth up, forsake me not now when I am old." "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I: For thou hast been a shelter to me."

Lastly, the great good which we might both get and do, may be also pleaded. God put that plea in their mouths: "Take away iniquity and receive us graciously." Why so? "So will we render the calves of our lips." "We will no more say to the works of our hands, Ye are our Gods." "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I will keep it to the end." "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law." "Restore to me the joy of thy salvation; then will I teach transgressors thy ways." And as the saints may plead the good which they may do, if answered, so that good of inward quickening, encouragement, and enlargement which they may thereby receive: "O satisfy us early with thy mercy." Why so? "So shall we rejoice and be glad before thee all our days." A third sort of pleas are those respecting others, which are these:—

1. Others' experiences of the like mercy in like cases: "Be merciful to me, as thou usest to do to those that love thy name." Lord, do not change thy wont, do to me as thou hast ever done to others in my case. Let not me be the first anomaly.
2. Others' discouragements or encouragements in ours: "Let not them that wait on thee be ashamed for my sake." "Let thy salvation set me up on high." Why so? "The humble shall see this and be glad." If thou hear me, others will be encouraged; or if not, they will be ashamed.
3. The subtle and malicious desires of ours and God's enemies. Ah, Lord, our miseries, snares, fears, straits, temptations, and falls, are that for which they plot and wait, and are ready to reproach us with; and therefore the rather tender our case. Thus may we plead, as others have done: "Make my way plain, because of my enemies." "I said, hear me, lest otherwise they rejoice over me." "Deliver me from all my transgressions, make me not a reproach to the foolish."

Lastly. The rules which we are to attend to in pleading in prayer, are these:—

1. Plead in faith; yea, with some strength of faith, suitably to our pleas: "Where are thy bowels towards me? Doubtless thou art our father; why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?"

2. Do it with holy skill, improving those promises or attributes of God, which are most suitable to our present case, which are most strongly speaking, most apt to move, at least ourselves to believe, and such as used to prevail that way formerly. So did the church. Isaiah 63:15-17.
3. Be submissive in our pleas, and not inordinate, impatient, or distempered. Moses was somewhat distempered in those pleas: "Wherefore hast thou evil-entreated this people? Why hast thou sent me?" "Whence should I have flesh for so many? I am not able to bear the burden alone. If thou deal thus with me, kill me."
4. Be humble and self-denying therein, and come not to God to stand upon terms with him, or to chop logic (as we say) with the .holy one. Job was to blame herein, and so were they who said, "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou regardest it not?" "Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done wonderful works?"
5. Be sincere, that there be nothing lurking with us, and too well approved by us, which may be counterpleaded against us, and that justly by our own consciences: "Behold, ye fast for strife." "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

23. Part 3, Chapter 7. Straitenings in Prayer

CHAPTER VII.

STRAITENINGS IN PRAYER—THEIR CAUSES, CURES, AND DIFFERENCES.

Having spoken of sundry cases of conscience touching the incessant practice of prayer, we come now to speak of the straitenings, incident to the saints in prayer. We shall inquire of the causes, then of the cures, and then of the differences of these straitenings, incident to the saints, from the judicial speechlessness of hypocrites and reprobates.

We shall premise and prove that the saints may be straitened, and have their mouths in a manner shut up in prayer. This is too evident in ordinary experience; and it were most sad, if such as were sometimes shut up that they cannot pray, yea, and that some continuance of time, should be concluded to be therefore none of God's chosen ones. David's mouth was in this respect shut, and therefore he entreated the Lord to open it for him. And hence also Asaph complains of his being spiritually shut up:

"I am so troubled that I cannot speak." Hence even the saints are described under the notion of prisoners, and whose experience does not at some time or other seal to this? But we consider first, the causes of such straitenings, and they are three: God, Satan, and ourselves.

1. God is a cause. He withdraws his Spirit, the author and efficient of all our liberty of speech, or steps which respect the welfare of our souls. Hence called the free spirit, from the effect, because it frees us to speak or do any thing to or for God, which he calls us unto. David wanted, and in his own sense had lost this spirit, in such like efficacies of it, and in the supporting influence thereof. The Lord sometimes lays spiritual bonds upon some of his professed people. Hence that complaint of the church: "Why hast thou hardened our hearts, from thy fear?" The Lord, who sometimes opens the hearts of men, does at other times shut them up, so as none but himself can again open them: "He shutteth, and none can open." Sometimes some of God's own professed people, which are not bound by any church for sins deserving the same in the nature of them, but being hid from the eyes of men, they cannot sentence the persons guilty thereof; but the Lord orders the matter so, that they go conscience-bound, and excommunicated by God for the same. So was David after his fall, and before his confession of the same, which (as it is probable) was not till a good space after, even after the birth of the child which he had adulterously begotten. O how a Christian's spirit is hampered at such a time by the cords of his own sin! How is he bound up in petition and confession, having no list to pray; and when he is at prayer, no life or delight in it! his thoughts are not at liberty to attend his words; his affections are not stirring, he cannot get his heart to be affected. If he strive, it is but as against the stream; he would fain weep sometimes over his condition in his prayer, but cannot. He is often stressed in spirit, to make his moan to God; but his spirit is shackled, and he can but shake his chains before the Lord. His faith was in a dead sleep in his prayers, he cannot apprehend any thing of God or Christ, but is in his own sight like an atheist. The promises which sometimes have been a great support unto him, now he is not able to

make any thing of them. His mind is full of hurries, but at no liberty to fix upon God or his covenant, yea, he is not free to desire grace and redress, as formerly. his conscience, whilst lie is upon his knees, often upbraids him with his sins, but will scarce afford him any friendly word of direction what course he should now take to mend himself. God sees his servants sometimes play the spendthrifts, and running into arrearages with him, and then he will lay them under restraint for a time, till they do humble themselves; or lie takes notice that they wax wanton, and begin to abuse their inward freedom, or are not so thankful for it; and in such a case he will cut them shorter, and abridge their former liberty: or else he observes much proneness in them to turn such grace of his into wantonness, to grow secure, if not proud and self-conceited, by occasion of that liberty of spirit which sometimes they have in prayer; for the redress and prevention whereof, he shuts them up, and keeps them short, that if they have any liberty that way, it shall be only as they stand in great need of it. It is probable it might be Reman's case, who being a man of rarest abilities, (as appears by 1 Kings 4:31) might happily have run more riot, if not restrained and kept under. God will by such restraints warn them from their own gift of prayer, that they may not rest in it, and he will make them know whence is all their freedom in prayer, and prize it more, when they shall again be enlarged; and cause them the rather to see how God owns them thereby, and so put them upon a freer owning of him, by occasion of his losing even these spirit bonds: "Truly, Lord, I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds." In a word, the Lord will by such straitenings, have them know their dependency upon him, in part likewise upon their fellow brethren and sisters, and to see a need of the help of their praying abilities. Now if there be ever a brother or sister at liberty, when some others of their brethren are under some restraint, their liberty yet is welcome news, and puts some life into these poor prisoners, and now must they be speedily spoken with to remember their poor brethren, and to take the next opportunity to get a grant from God for their speedy release. Like Absalom, when not suffered to come to court, earnestly sending to Joab, a courtier, and one that had the liberty of the presence-chamber, to peak to the king for him, that he may have free access to him as formerly.

2. Satan sometimes surprises the saints, they are in his hands, and then you see in the instance of those disciples, that they are so heart-bound this way, that they could not watch or pray, no not for the least space of time, when in the most danger. Though there were some stirrings in their spiritual part to the contrary; fain they would have prayed, but could not, their spirit was willing: the Lord gave leave to Satan to hamper them a little, and to correct their former pride, and carnalness. Sometimes the saints are just captives under the hands of their spiritual enemy. Sometimes the devil lays a snare for them, and so they are entangled thereby, namely, by raising carnal fears or cares in them, or by increasing or strengthening them being raised, or he does peradventure hurry them into some temptation. The Psalmist was so hampered through temptation, that he had no heart to cry or pray: "I sink in the mire, I am weary of my crying."

3. Ourselves:—

1. From some lust or sin, unto which our hearts are let out; some deceit of sin causes such stupefying of the soul of a Christian, that he cannot bestir himself in any such holy service as prayer: "Lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." As it is said of the wicked, that "he is bound by the cords of his own sin;" so is it true in part in the saints themselves: and as it was with Simon Magus, he being under the bond of iniquity, under the binding power of covetousness and pride, he could not pray himself, but begs Peter's prayers. So is the same in part verified, in

respect of some degree of straitening, occasioned from like sins in them, though not in like power: such sins will bind, both by their hardening power, as before was said, and by their terrifying perplexities, which they may occasion in the soul; for as strong legal terrors are binding to the spirits of men, hence that of “the spirit of bondage to fear.” So any other fears occasioned by sin, which are not so properly legal, yet they are in this sense binding to the saints oftentimes. Hence, Asaph is so troubled with perplexing fears, in the sense of his sin, that he cannot speak to God, namely, with that liberty of spirit which formerly he did.

2. From some carnal distempered griefs which do contract our spirits, as griefs do the natural spirits, as we are naturally such; in sufferings, we cannot utter our minds. When a discouraging fainting frame of spirit seizes on us, it is with us as it was with Daniel, we are not able to speak to the Lord; the disciples under that frame could not pray, although enjoined by Christ. Aaron could neither speak, nor do ought before God that day, when too much Oppressed with grief about his son's death.

3. From our straitening of God, and of his saints or servants. When we straiten the Spirit's motion in meditation, or otherwise, then cannot we hold on either in praying to God or praising him; they cannot pray at length, or in every thing give thanks, which quench the Spirit. Hence, when the Apostle exhorts to these, he dehorts from this, as a bar thereto; when the Spirit is pent up in us, then does he leave us. He is a free Spirit, and will be at liberty where he abides; and when we allow not room to him, he will be gone, and then our spiritual liberty goes away with him: or if we are straitened toward God's afflicted saints, truly God will leave us to straitenings in prayer. Hence if those the prophet spake to, will draw out their souls to the needy, he promises in the name of the Lord, that their spirits shall be free, and ready to pray, and that the Lord will be as free, and as ready to answer, otherwise, no wonder that they set times apart to fast, but are not enabled to pray suitably. They were like tongueless bulrushes in comparison of true suppliants, they could bow down the head, but not sincerely open the mouth in prayer to the Lord.

4. From distrust and strength of unbelief; an unbelieving Zachariah shall be dumb. Men under the power of unbelief are wholly shut up, “he hath shut them up in unbelief;” so is it partly manifest in this business of prayer. None are so free to pour out their hearts upon all occasions in prayer, as they that trust in God: “Trust in the Lord at all times, and pour out your hearts before him;” when faith is not stirring in the soul to take hold of God, a praying spirit is not stirring to call upon God. When a professed people of God through distrust secretly think that God's hand is shortened, it is no wonder, then, that even God by his Spirit's motions does call on them, and invite them to prayer, or the like, that they have no heart to make a suitable answer therein unto the Spirit in their prayers: whence that complaint and expostulation of God: “Wherefore when I called, was there none that answered?” Distrust does limit the power, mercy, and truth of God, the merit and mediation of Christ, the latitude and virtue of the covenant of grace, which should be the foundation of the soul's enlargement in prayer, they “limited the holy One of Israel.” It is by faith only that we comprehend those dimensions in the Lord's love. That he may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye may comprehend with all saints what is the height, and length, and breadth, and depth, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

5. From an unsettled and unstable frame of spirit. whether in respect of the practice of the duty, or in respect of the place of our abode. When a man is journeying, his prayers are suitable to those

travellers whose spirits use not to be enlarged in prayer, through the many occasional hurries of their spirits.

6. From resting in former enlargements or present preparations to prayer, this stops the flowing and spreading of holy desires to grace, yea, the continued course of the Spirit's influences.

7. From carelessness and improvidence, either in putting ourselves upon straits of time, and so the duty is performed in a hurry; and no wonder the Spirit in such a case, as pent up, from so specious pretence at first, there is not now time, therefore what need enlargements? Brevity is more seasonable; and so by frequent inuring ourselves to be thus straitened outwardly for a time, our spirits by little and little are conformable thereunto; or in heedless admiring other vain and impertinent thoughts which take up room in the soul, that they crowd better thoughts.

8. From curious puzzling ourselves about comprehending and conceiving of God, without reference to the present matter in mention in prayer. In this work, after the soul has in vain toiled it gathers discouragement, and has no heart to speak any more in so atheistical a sort as at such a time it will be apt to conclude: whereby it comes to pass that the wheels of the soul wanting the oil of joy, they cannot be readily turned about. Such straining of our strings too high, does but occasion some cracking in them, and thereby our music is marred for that time; when our spirits are once nonplussed, as they will soon be in such transcendent mental discourses of a subject past their comprehension, they then blush, and the shame thereof puts them to silence, like some petitioner to a king, so taken up in speaking to him with many circumlocutions touching his excellency, majesty, greatness, and glory, etc., that he has forgot what he came about, and is not able to recover expressions of his request.

Secondly, The means of cure of such straitenings in prayer; and they are these:—

1. Be sensibly apprehensive of the evil plight of a spirit straitened in prayer. Such prisoners as mourn in the sense of their thralldom, are in the ready way to liberty in all the ways of God, and so in this of prayer. A broken heart will break this deep silence. And to help our apprehensions herein, consider but how sad it is to be tongue-tied otherwise. Christ sighs over it, and you see with what difficulty it is cured. Such are usually as deaf in hearing the word as they are spiritually tongue-tied, they are straitened in hearing as well as praying dispositions: the saints are never more enlarged in praying, than when their spirits are much enlarged in hearing; and so, on the contrary, men that have ears but hear not, have not spiritual use of their ears: they have mouths and speak not, they have not the fruitful use of their mouths in prayer; yea, such a dumb distemper in prayer, is attended with spiritual lameness, and halting in the ways of God wherein they make little progress. Hence the prophet prophesies of spiritual dumbness and lameness to be cured at once. How miserable is the case of a man otherwise dumb, every one will easily conceive; and truly this spiritual condition far exceeds the misery of that, as might be easily demonstrated. When a man which has spoken, is taken speechless, how sad is it accounted in all that behold it, or hear of it? Alas, says one, heard you not of such a sad thing befallen such a one? he has lost his speech: if he could but express his mind, it would never grieve his friends so much; but alas, he is suddenly taken speechless; so might much more be said of such a Christian. Hence, a speechless condition is inflicted upon the unprepared guest, as a sad omen and forerunner of his doom. It was the first effect of divine wrath upon such professors, and it is well if it be not the case of many that hear me this day. Ah, how sad is it to hear that one's tongue is cut out? nay, suppose it be but

gagged by the enemies of our souls, like notorious thieves; first, robbing us of the treasure of our peace, and leaving us conscience-wounded, and then gagging of us, lest by our outcries unto heaven they should soon be pursued and executed. O the weight such poor souls feel! but know not how to remove the same: they would fain cry, as men oppressed in their sleep, and tell how sad it is with them, but they cannot. What, to be thrown into a dungeon, and to be in a manner forbidden all means to send to, or speak with, either our heavenly father, or our elder brother and chief friend, Jesus Christ! How sad is this! What, not to be so much as at prison liberty, even to beg out of the very grate? This is most sad: sure we are in for some great matter-of-fact, else we should not be left under such straits. Begging is but a poor trade, you will say; yea, but whilst we are at liberty to beg for our soul's livelihood, it is comfortable, it is hopeful; but when even that poor trade fails us, verily all will yield that this case is much to be lamented. O how must such needs pine away, like that dumb person mentioned in the Gospel! How will such run upon desperate adventures, like him that sometimes casts himself into the water, sometimes into the fire; and what more contrary one unto the other? Yet verily, if not upheld, thus will these do in that want of this free spirit: a free spirit is an upholding spirit from all such distempers. How unthankfully do such walk, if their mouths be not opened! God has little praise from them. "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." Sad are their cases all the while all these sweets are in their sense, at least in their experience restrained from them, whilst their hearts are hardened, and shut up. The church which complains of her heart as hardened, complains likewise of God's mercies as restrained from her: this evil of a straitened spirit will appear the more, by comparing of it with the grace of a spirit free in prayer, and other holy duties. What David said of his case is true in this, that it argues that the Lord delights in us when he delivers us from this straitened condition, and sets us at a holy liberty in our spirits: the Lord delights in such of his people as he admits and enables to be so free in opening their minds and heart unto him; and as David says: "God girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect, maketh my feet like hinds' feet;" so may we apply the same to this case, that verily the Lord makes our way perfect when there are no more such blunders therein, and he communicates special strength to us, when we can more freely without such stops, keep on in this part of our Christian course. It is an argument, that we shall by him be enabled to do great things, when he thus enlarges our steps: "He setteth me on high places, and thou hast enlarged my steps." And that the Lord has known our souls in adversity, he has owned us, and so also will, when in this wise also he sets our feet in a large room. I have urged this the more to be so apprehensive of the evil of this imprisoning of our spirits in prayer, if ever we mean to get at liberty, because there are a sort of spiritual prisoners, whose hearts are shut up in prayer, and other holy ordinances, and yet they lay it not to heart; or when they feel themselves to be a little restrained, they are but slightly affected with it; they think all is not well with them indeed, or so well as formerly, and wonder what is the matter that they are not so free in prayer as heretofore, but it may be this is but a nine days' wonder to them, and so by degrees their spirits are still more and more straitened, and then they begin to have more serious troubles and fears about the same, what the issue thereof may prove; and sometimes their fears are more desperate, lest the Lord has thus laid them up, as intending ere long to proceed against them in a way of justice; and then they begin to bestir themselves for help. But if this straitening continue long with them, then haply, as it is with prisoners, which although at their first coming into prison, it seemed somewhat strange and sad to them to be thus cooped up, and they many times sadly bemoan their case, yet having been long in prison, then they begin to grow more resolute, and are less solicitous of using means

to get out. So it is here with many Christians: at first, they are much troubled at their straitenings in prayer, but when they have been a long time shut up in their spirits, they are apt to grow more desperate, and secretly to think that there is little hope now, that they should recover their former freedom of spirit: they have used means, but all in vain, they seem but to strive against the stream in wrestling in their poor measure with God and themselves for their liberty, and therefore they may as well be content and quiet, and so suffer their sins like Delilah's to lull them asleep, and to bind them so their strength departs from them, and they are made a miserable prey and reproach unto the enemies of their peace.

2. Plead with God, that his promise and covenant enlarge us. If he will lead us with supplications, then with multiplied enlarged expressions of our hearts in prayer; if with weepings too, then with enlarged affection also. For what God promised to them of old, lie is the same to make it good to us, as need requires: "I will (says God) lead them with weeping and supplications in a strait way wherein they shall not stumble." Yea, set faith on work; enforce such suitable promises made to persons even in their sad plight, upon our own hearts. Since the Lord Jesus is anointed of God for this very purpose, to speak, and that effectually, liberty to the captives; surely, then, to such poor souls as are spirit and heart- bound, groaning under, and mourning over the same as their extreme misery. God is verily faithful in his promise, to make the dumb to sing and speak forth his praise for God's opening their mouths, loosening their tongues in his service.

Yea, but will some poor soul say; I have given just cause of this my imprisonment, I am in for debt and delinquencies, I am justly restrained my former freedom of spirit, and therefore, what have I to plead?

We will grant all this, and if thou have nothing to plead, then cry, Guilty, and confess all is just, and put thyself upon the King's mercy; yet withal plead the benefit of his royal clemency, "engaged in the word of a king for the deliverance of just captives." This promise being as well verified in the delivery of imprisoned and captive spirits, as in that of Babel's captives of old, which were justly delivered for their sins. Imitate David in a like case; after his grievous fall, he felt himself in the net, his spirit strangely entangled and bound up; yet he purposes that he would constantly wait and look for his liberty again: "My eyes are even unto the Lord; he shall pluck my feet out of the net." So do you; and though while you urge your case before the Lord, and press the same upon your own spirit, yet you seem to yourself but hard and slight; as the church when pleading strongly, yet cries out of her hardness of heart: "Why hast thou hardened our hearts from thy fear?" etc., yet cease not to do it still; and when at any time you do get hold of any word of grace, and grant of your liberty from the Lord, hold it fast, and be not beaten out of the same, by any cavils of the enemies of your peace. If when we go on in this, or any other way of God, we would not have our steps any more straitened, take fast hold of any item of God's grace; and if we once get such a gracious information of God's love in his promise, set home by his Spirit, then keep it, for the very life of our souls depends thereon: "When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened: take hold of instruction, let her not go, keep her as thy life."

3. Improve the offices of Christ for this end; Christ was anointed to this work of procuring prisoners liberty: he is given of the father for that end. And if to free spiritual Prisoners at their first conversion; when they are under such strong iron bolts, yet he does it; what will he not do for such as he has once set at liberty? when they are haply held under sonic smaller cords for a time; and

be it that we are justly under such a spiritual restraint for our covenant breaches, yet, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus is given to be a deliverer of all spiritual prisoners, by being their covenant; Therefore, the Lord supposes the free passage of his promised grace to such: "I will give thee for a covenant to bring the prisoners from the prison." The Lord Jesus even begged this office, that he might have the honor of this gracious work of delivering the poor darkened, straitened spirits. hence, the blessed Father is brought in as speaking to the blessed Son, saying, "I have heard thee," etc., "and I will give thee for a covenant," etc., "that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves;" and when he mentions his saying so, he means his operative word of command of their liberty, who are ashamed to show their heads in the sense of their own misdoings.

Improve the priestly office of Christ, the priestly merit and mediation, and intercession of the Lord Jesus for this end; for so in a special manner is he given as a covenant for this purpose. He is our surety, whom the blessed Father will not refuse. His suffering, as "one dumb before the shearer," and as one from whom God withdrew for a time, has purchased our liberty to approach, and freely to pour out our souls before the throne of grace. He was forsaken for a time, that we might not forever be forsaken: "By the blood of his covenant it cometh to pass that the Lord delivereth his prisoners," not only from a Babylonish, but from all other imprisoned conditions of soul or body, therefore let all "the poor prisoners of God, which are prisoners of hope, turn hither as to their strong hold." So did Hezekiah when not able to speak out, or pour out his heart distinctly and freely before the Lord, but in an abrupt manner; and when held under the pressures of his heart, he cried out for the benefit of this his surety, "I am oppressed, O Lord, undertake for me." Improve the intercession of Christ for this likewise; whereby the Lord Christ is fully able to deliver us from this or any other bondage: "He is able to save them to the utmost that come unto God by him, forasmuch as he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Improve his prophetic office also for this purpose, inasmuch as the blessed Father that he might bring about liberty for all spiritual prisoners, has given him to be a light to them, and experience proves it, that no sooner does the Lord become light to poor deserted, tempted ones, but they regain liberty of spirit likewise. It is the Son that makes any free indeed, but it is by discovering some special part of that mind, and covenant, and promise of God; they come to know more of his truth, and that truth so made known to their souls, does set them free in this kind, as well as otherwise: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They are the scruples, and objections, and mists in the mind, which keep the spirit so strait; and so long as that darkness remains, that prison state of soul remains too. But when he brings them that sit in darkness out of the prison, when they are cleared up, then those binding fears and griefs of distrust vanish, and the spirit is sweetly at liberty again, to pray more freely, or to do any other spiritual service. In a word, improve the kingly office of the Lord Christ for the same purpose. The Lord Christ is a true Solomon, who opens his mouth for the dumb. Spiritual bondage of the poor soul, has been occasioned either through some violence of temptation and corruption, or through some wily deceit of their own hearts, drawing them to give at first but a little way to remissness in prayer, or to some other distemper; and then to suffer ourselves to go on in some such unsafe way, until we have been so entangled in the snare, that we know not how to get into a serious and fervent frame; yea, but Christ, as the antitype of Solomon, is promised to redeem his people from deceit and violence. And, as the antitype of Hezekiah under his government, the tongue of his

stammering subjects, such as are spiritually tongue-tied, shall be free and ready to speak plainly of God or to him: "The tongue of the stammerers shall be able to speak plainly."

4. Improve others' liberties of the throne of grace. The Lord ever uses to keep some iii his churches at liberty for this very end; sometimes it is the turn of such subjects and favorites, and household servants to have the liberty of the king's court and presence chamber: sometimes again some others are thereto admitted; now seek out such princely spirits, who may open their mouths for you. As imprisoned Joseph made use of the butler's liberty to be a mean of his. So do we in this case: he that had an impediment in his speech, had got others to speak for him. And those dumb ones which had friends to bring them before Christ, and to cast them down before him, they got cured, and were enabled by Christ thereupon to speak. So will it be here in like cases

5. Be sincere and cordial with God in our approaches to him. Consciousness thereof greatly furthers our liberty of spirit. David, who made conscience to seek God's statutes, and was conscious to himself that he did what he did from obedience and respect unto the commands of God, says, that "therefore he will walk at liberty." When a Christian is conscious of carelessness in the service of God, or secret treachery of heart in his grounds or aims therein, this appalls him, and so straitens him.

6. Improve heedfully the word preached and read. When we continue in Christ's word, then we come to know the truth, and to be set free. We gain oft- times many precious enlargements of spirit in the attentive use of the word preached. Our spirits and consciences so freed on earth, are the freer in heaven too, in respect of their free approaches thither, and suitable entertainments thence.

7. Lastly, cherish joy in God, and Christ, and his covenant; and our hearts being thereby enlarged, will be freer to run in this or any other way of God's commandments: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

Thirdly. How this straitening in prayer, may be discerned from judicial speechlessness: "He was speechless." And from that sad doom of hypocrites, Whose gifts of prayer, and the like, come to be so miserably diminished, and so far to decay, that they cannot pray in any sort as formerly, their gift is in a manner taken from them: "From him shall be taken away even that which he bath." To which I answer,

1. That the straitness incident to the saints is not perpetual. Although they are kept a while under sonic restraint, yet they are set at liberty again. As David, and others have been, and are. Some of the people of God may lie longer by it than others, and God may keep their feet in the stocks longer than others, for wise and holy ends; some again are shut up less while, yet both the one and the other are enlarged at length. They for a time be bound as in earth, so in heaven, like excommunicants; but yet as that bound incestuous Corinthian, was again loosed, so is it with these. But it is otherwise with reprobates and hypocrites, when judicial straitening seizes upon them. These chains of theirs are chains of darkness, and in them are kept too, without bail or mainprize; their straitening grows fast upon them, until that after a while both their words and wwill, and spirit and all fail them in prayer.

2. It is not total and universal in the saints. Speechlessness in hypocrites is accompanied with binding band and foot. In all ordinances, as well as prayer, their spirits are shut up, and to no

service of God are they free, but the saints when straitened in prayer, oftentimes meet with some enlargement of heart in meditation, as the church which found not God in public or private ordinances, yet in meditation upon what the watchmen, the ministers spake, therein found Christ. Sometimes in conference with other Christians whilst sadly complaining of their deserted estate, even therein they meet with Christ.

3. The occasion in the saints, may be some particular defeat in them, or some particular distemper on their part. But the cause in the other, is a total want of true faith and repentance. They have not the wedding garment, and hence become speechless, when called to an account for it. Or some universal barrenness and unprofitableness, as in the slothful servant that does not at all, or to any purpose improve his talent, and therefore it is taken from him:

“But from him that hath not, shall be taken away that which he hath.” Or, it is occasioned by some high-handed contempt of reconciliation to some of God’s people whom they have injured, who thereupon commit their cause to God as the judge of all; and God thereupon as a judge, delivers them over to perpetual imprisonment. Or else it is occasioned from some gross, contemptuous, undervaluing, and unworthy apprehensions of God; as when the hypocrite conceives God to be a most hard and unmerciful master. Or else a man is haply of an unmerciful and implacable spirit towards others, and therefore God justly delivers him to a perpetual imprisoned condition, even in this life, in respect of his Spirit. Or such a one does willfully rest in some gifts of grace received, without due care of continual supply for the future, as well as for the present. They care not for a heart, as well as a brain, treasury, and so like foolish virgins come at length to be fatally straitened of oil. When there is no care of adding to grace received, they come at length to lose their light and vigor of gifts, but he that lacks these things is blind, or cannot see afar off.

4. The ministry of God’s servants uses not to bind, but rather to loose those; ever and anon they meet with some word of grace that enlarges their hearts to God-ward, and in his ways. Christ by his ministers says to such sometimes, “Go forth,” be not ashamed to show your faces before the Lord. The gospel preached by the spirit of Christ, effectually proclaims their liberty. But these are bound by the servants of God, which were sent out to loose others, some prophet is made an instrument to shut their eyes and ears, their hearts and mouths. Some Peter, some minister in his preaching binds them.

5. The former in their straitenings are very sensible of the burden and evil thereof, although not able to get at liberty. Such prisoners are broken-hearted and do mourn; when they cannot utter their minds in prayer, they can sigh; when their mouths are not open to the freewill offerings of prayer and praise, they offer that sacrifice of a broken heart, yea, it makes them meek or submissive to any course that God would take with them. And they make it the main of their begging then, that they might be enlarged, and free to speak to God, especially to his praise: “Open thou my mouth.” But the other are in a manner wholly senseless, and speechless, and therefore doomed to a place and state of weeping afterwards.

6. Those are prisoners of hope, and now and then suffered to walk abroad, yea, to come into their Lord’s gracious presence. But these are forever thence forward excluded God’s gracious presence. They are taken away, cast out. Those have sometimes some glimpses of the light of God’s countenance. But these are cast into utter darkness, therein to reside and abide.

24. Part 3, Chapter 8. Enlargements in Prayer

CHAPTER VIII.

ENLARGEMENTS IN PRAYER WHEN SAVING.

Some other cases, in carrying on this weighty duty of prayer.

1. How enlargements in prayer are discerned to be from saving principles of grace, and differenced from those which are but from natural, common causes.

We must premise, that persons may be strangely enlarged in prayer, sometimes from principles that are not saving. The Pharisees made long prayers; but from a principle of hypocrisy; from carnal and sinful aims; and for a pretence make long prayers. From pride, as in those rhetorical repetitions. From error, as trusting to such enlargements, thinking to be heard for their much speaking. And for those who made many prayers, or multiplied petitions, as the Hebrew phrase imports: some from carnal emulation of some famous men in the church; some from delusive raptures, may be wonderfully enlarged in their expressions in prayer: yet none of these in the right.

Now, saving enlargements in prayer may be discerned from those that are common.

1. They are free, not forced or strained: "As the droppings of the honey-comb," or as the pouring out of water, or oil, which runs down naturally and freely: "They poured out a prayer to thee." Not but that such enlargements do oftentimes issue from foregoing strugglings and conflictings with much opposition, yet the spirit is free at such times, and as far as it is spiritual, is delightfully drawn forth therein.
2. They are sweet, lively, strengthening enlargements, as honey or milk, and that not only to us, but to others that join with us. The church's lips when exercised in prayer, as well as preaching, run down like the best wine, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.
3. They are seasonable enlargements. As when God in his providence calls to them in special sort, whether in way of confession of sins, or of God's mercy; or in a way of petition for mercies, for ourselves or others. Thus Solomon, Ezra, Daniel, and Christ were then in special wise enlarged. These fruits of the lips of the saints are brought forth in season.
4. They are mostly secret closet enlargements. There David prays and cries aloud; there do they pour out largely their secret whispers.
5. They are contrite, melting enlargements. Not some few drops of either, but abundance of such a spirit's influences; it is poured out: they are led as with supplications, so with weepings adjoined to their enlarged prayers; such were those of Christ, his strong cries were with tears likewise. His lips in prayer dropped sweet smelling myrrh, betokening some holy bitterness or brokenness.
6. They are obediential enlargements. David, as he offers a multiplied freewill offering, "Accept the freewill offering of my mouth," so he desired to be taught his further duty; "and teach me thy

judgments.” As he opens his mouth to express his enlarged desires largely, so is it out of obedient longings to do the will of God: “I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for thy commandments.”

Lastly, they are thankful enlargements: “Open thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth thy praise: “if his mouth be open, it will appear in his praises; the Psalmist’s mouth is filled with praise, a fruit and concomitant of the delivery of his imprisoned spirit.

II. By the matter of them. 1. The most acceptable enlargements being mostly and best seen in sensible aggravations of our own wretchedness, as in Ezra and Daniel’s examples. The choice matter of their supplications and enlarged prayer, is, touching the perverting of their way, and their forgetting of the Lord. Oh, how long will a contrite suppliant be here in making sad commentaries upon his own wretched heart? what large declamations will he make against his own sins?

2. In sensible amplifications of God’s grace and mercy to us, as in David, of which his Psalms are a plentiful proof. The love of God makes him eloquent in setting out the beauty and excellency thereof to the life.

3. In spiritual pleas, especially for spiritual mercies, of which the prayers of David and other of God’s servants are full.

4. In the cases of afflicted, tempted ones, especially of afflicted churches. Oh! how large and unwearied is a gracious Nehemiah in such a case! he will spend days in dilating upon so sad a theme in the ears of the Lord. The substance of the largest prayer that is recorded to be made by Solomon, concerns most what the cases of afflicted ones in some kind or other.

III. By the occasional rise of them. The enlargement of the saints in prayer being occasioned,

1. By afflictions. Afflicted Hannah was large and long in prayer, insomuch that Eli observing her moving her lips so long, said, “ How long wilt thou be drunken?” When David’s spirit is so hard bestead, then does he pour out a complaint. And when so persecuted and reproached, then is employed in little else but praying. And this argues that some spiritual principles are within, that such griefs and ails enlarge their hearts; which naturally rather contract the spirits of men, and silence them, as in hypocrites which are then straitened. Bonds of afflictions are bonds to their spirits, they cry not when God binds them. But afflictions sanctified to the saints, make them more abound in prayer.

2. By the conquest of some temptation, or the removal of some sad desertion, and after some foregoing straitenings, then it is not a supplication, but they are supplications. Hence David is large in supplicating, and is bent to spend in a manner his whole time in prayer, after such trials.

3. By the bringing home some word of promise to the heart. When David does pray for a free spirit., and to have his mouth opened, he prays that he might hear of gladness, have some quickening, healing promise manifested to him as the means thereof.

4. By some special sense of love to the Lord. Hence, when the Lord sets forth the lips of his spouse, so freely dropping sweet and savory expressions before him. He magnifies her love therein:

“How fair is thy love!” love is unsatisfied; it thinks it has never spoken enough of its mind to the Lord, that it is never near enough to him, that it has never love-tokens enough from him, that it has never sufficiently declaimed against treacherous distempers and sins, and that it has never spoken sufficiently his praises; so that it is no wonder if then they are so enlarged in their prayers. A fourth way of discovery of such enlargements to be right, is by the issue of them, being in the saints a successful prevailing for conquering graces over their corruptions, over their temptations of fear, care, grief, distrust, and the like; besides, the obtaining of quickening, comforting grace, for doing or suffering the will of God, and depending upon the promises and faithfulness of God in Christ. The fruit of enlarged prayers, is God’s gracious filling them with such grace: “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” The fruit of Jacob’s long-continued supplications, when the angel wrestled with him, was, his distrust and carnal fears of Esau were removed, his faith and joy are revived;

25. Part 3, Chapter 9. Meltings in Prayer

CHAPTER IX.

MELTINGS IN PRAYER. A ninth case is about meltings in prayer; how they may be discerned to be from saving principles, and not from the moving nature of some pathetical expressions in prayer, or from some common natural passion, or melting disposition and aptness of nature to tears.

It is dangerous being deceived in the semblance of that which ordinarily fails not of acceptance with God: yea, never, when such meltings in prayer are in truth. God eyed with a gracious aspect Hezekiah's tears shed in his prayers; and heard the voice of David weeping in his prayer. But we must premise,

1. That God makes use sometimes of pathetical expressions to break his people's hearts, when they are more stupid, and careless. And, therefore, often in the prophets, there is much use made thereof for this purpose. Jeremiah's lamentations abound therewith: yea, the Lord makes use of natural disposition this way, sanctifying a naturally tender, melting disposition, as well as any other: "All things become new."

2. That yet it is very possible, that men may be melted in prayer from such common causes; some from mere natural tempers, some from carnal grief, as those grieved women, whose husbands abusing of them by marrying others in their lifetime, they made them cover the altar of God with tears. Some from the affecting nature of the notions in prayer, (especially praying with others,) as pleasing a curious fancy, or illuminating their minds in material passages, or setting forth to the life some sad afflicting matter. Many of those which with the rest of the congregation at Mizpeh, wept abundantly at the religious exercises there. Verily, in many, this was from such like common principles, though in others it were from holy and spiritual causes; yea, some may from some sudden ecstatical joys conceived, upon some mistaken apprehensions and feelings in prayer, as "Benjamin wept for joy," (which yet had a real ground in him,) so these from mistaken grounds of joy. But that we may come to some answer to the case.

1. When more pathetical expressions are used by ourselves or others in prayer, yet not like melting attending; and when at other times there are fewer such like expressions, yet there are more meltings accompanying the same: yea, when expressions which are more obvious, and not so pathetical, yet melt us: then surely does it evidence, that our meltings are not wrung from us by any force of expression, but from some inward better principle. The father of the possessed child in his request unto Christ for its cure, had many more moving expressions: "Oftimes he hath cast him into the fire. if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us," yet in mentioning of those wherein a father's bowels might have flowed forth into tears, he is not melted: but in the gracious expressions he used in his prayer to Christ: "Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief;" therein he breaks forth into tears.

2. When meltings whilst we pray are without expressions; or do at least prevent our expressions in prayer; such meltings are from more inward principles than moving expressions. As in the woman which silently begged the clearing of her justification to them, as appears by our Savior's answer to her silent and secret desires: "Woman, thy sins are forgiven thee;" she is there weeping behind him, without expressing in words her heart's desire.

David's tears, probably, first spake, ere he uttered his heart; and his tears called out expressions, his expressions did not provoke and urge his tears. Jacob wept and prayed, he was weeping ripe, even as he went about to pray; his heart was so full, that it issued out at his eyes, before his mouth could utter forth his desires.

3. When they are most spiritual strains in prayer, which most affect therein. Here nature is purblind and senseless, as above its element. Or, when nature and self is most vilified, and the Lord and his grace is most exalted, then we are usually most melted; then fear not any force of expressions, or strength of a natural melting temper to be chief in such meltings. Such was Ezra's weeping in his prayers, when he exalted God, and his rich grace, and abased man and self in his expressions.

4. When they are not sudden meltings, as some afflicting matter, is mentioned: nor are they some light, vanishing clew, but they are more continued and abundant; their prayers which melt kindly, sometimes are sealed with tears: so that their prayers at times are rather weeping than words. Hezekiah said little, but wept sore, or much. Ezra began and ended meltingly.

5. When such meltings are not unusual things, but are more frequent and constant. Therefore they are joined with weeping and supplications, as in the usual way which the Lord guides them: yea, when such meltings are opportune, holding some gracious proportion to the occasions which are offered, and which fall into tears and meltings, as in Ezra's more than ordinary weeping, when a more than ordinary cause thereof was given. So in Nehemiah's weeping with his prayers sundry days which he set apart for fasting and prayer for the calamities of the people of God in his native country. It is a part of the saints' spiritual calling and husbandry, to sow such seed-tears. They are mourning beggars: "Blessed are the poor in spirit:" "Blessed are they that mourn."

6. When such meltings are not merely rain-dews, mere notional, fleeting things, but the heart is poured forth with them; they proceed from a melting, contrite heart, as in Josiah's request, which he made and God heard: "I have heard thee," says God; yea, but his prayer is not there recorded; true, but a prayer it is likely he made when his heart melted so before God, else what was it which God heard? or wherein is it said that God heard him? when all suitable workings in spirit do accompany such meltings in prayer, when there is strength and favor of spirit suitable to meltings in prayer, then are they right, as in Christ: "He made supplications with strong crying and tears."

7. When they are not unprofitable meltings, but there comes much good fruit after them, as upright walking with God and men: conscientiousness and tenderness of the least blunders in the ways of God. These are fruits of God's covenant of grace; he used to lead his own with such weepings in their supplications, as that they keep the closer, and the more directly and inoffensively in the way that he has appointed: "I will lead them with weeping and supplications in a strait way."

Lastly, when they are meltings of faith and love. When Christ would show the source of the woman's weeping, in presenting her secret desires of his mercy, he instances her love: "She loved much," in her faith, "Thy faith hath saved thee." "She stood behind him weeping, and washed his

feet with her tears.” Thus that poor man, when in a believing frame in his prayer to Christ, then he cried out with tears. When in prayer the saints are apprehensive by faith, that, notwithstanding their unworthiness, and backslidings, yet the Lord is willing to hear them and accept of them, then are their hearts full, then with grief and shame for their own vileness, and joy in the favor of God in Christ towards them, they are dissolved in tears.

26. Part 3, Chapter 10. In What Way We Are to Conceive of God In Prayer

CHAPTER X. IN WHAT WAY WE ARE TO CONCEIVE OF GOD IN PRAYER. A tenth case is about the thoughts which we are to have of God, when we do pray, it being requisite that such as worship God in prayer, should in some measure be able to conceive of God whom they worship. We know what we worship.

Observe then these rules:—

1. Conceive not of God under any shape or resemblance. As God gave rules of worship to his people of old by voice; but in giving the same, he represented no similitude of himself unto them: so are his people in like manner to perform obedience to his commandments, without framing to themselves either inwardly or outwardly any similitude of God. In seeking the Lord we ought not so much as to think that the Godhead can be resembled any way to any other thing. This was one main rise of idolatry in practice, to make a mental idol of God; when men would not glorify God, in worshipping of him as such a one as he made himself known in his very works, even as an Almighty one, but would strain to fancy things of him beyond his revealed will, to seem to be men of profound and exquisite understandings: then they were given up to misshaped apprehensions and idolatrous practices. All things without God are finite, and too short a portraiture of an infinite Majesty. In all comparisons there must be some proportion and equality: now, unless we could equal God to any thing, how can he be likened to it.

2. Do not go about to comprehend in our minds his glorious essence, prying too far into his Majesty. His Godhead is one of the invisible things of God, and must no further be reached after by our shallow and dark minds, than as shining forth in the works and word of God. If we go further, we shall become vain in our imaginations. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?" we show ourselves in affecting such wisdom, to be but vain men. Jacob, when he was at prayer, was a little too busy herein, and too inquisitive after the name of the Son, or angel of God; and therefore is rebuked for asking his name: yet his weakness is passed over, and the Lord blessed him notwithstanding. But rather in our approaches unto God, conceive of him in his glorious attributes: conceive of him as one not to be fully known by us, and so pray to him. Moses did desire in prayer to have God show him his glory: his invisible being and majesty was too much for him to ask. God tells him, he could not see his glory and live; man's finite understanding and spirit would be confounded therein, but his goodness, and name of grace are fitter objects for Moses to behold. When God came down to his people that they might worship him, he came down in a cloud, that their prying eyes or spirits might be bounded: the altar of incense, where the incense of prayer was to be offered, was before the veil that was by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat. God would have his servants to behold him in their prayers; but yet his mercy-seat was covered with cherubs' wings, they might not pry too far: and, indeed, it is but an endless work; we may weary ourselves in this maze of the divine nature, but make nothing of our work when we have done. It is a fruitless work, no good comes of it, but amazement

and discouragement: we shall but reflect upon ourselves as if we were very atheists: conceiving and believing nothing at all of God, when we go about to conceive more of him than is meet. When at any time the saints of God, out of a witty kind of reasoning of their deceitful hearts, persuading that it is meet that we should conceive of God, to whom we pray, do launch out in their slender skiffs into this vast ocean, without the compass of the Scriptures; now if any gust of temptation arise, how are they amazed, and know not where they are, nor how to get safe ashore again, having forgotten the work they intended at the first? and commonly the business of prayer is for that time left undone, being never at such a time performed to any purpose. Besides, the advantage we give to the enemy of peace and truth hereby, is great; and if no worse thing follow, yet we get a check from God for our labor, as Jacob, and Manoah, are reprov'd for asking after the name of that Angel, the Son of God, which was secret: "Why askest thou after my name, since it is secret?"

3. Conceive not God absolutely, as in Christ, and so merciful, gracious, and abundant in goodness and truth. We must look, as they of old, to the glory of God, in offering up our spiritual incense; but as in Christ, considered as mediator, who is that mercy seat; for so the Hebrew Capporeth, translated usually by the Septuagint, by the word Hilasterion, and approved by the Holy Ghost, Hebrews 9:5, which in Romans 3:25, is applied to Christ, whom God has set forth to be Hilasterion, the mercy-seat, or merciful covering, or propitiation for our sins; or that Capporeth, to which God's priests must look when offering their incense of prayer. We are not taught in the Lord's prayer to look at, or think of God absolutely, but relatively, as a father; namely, in Christ. Our thoughts of God must be suitable to our worship of him in prayer; which is coming to God, not immediately, nor absolutely considered, but by Christ: "Which come to God by him."

4. Let us not too much beat our thoughts about particular and personal apprehensions of God, or conclude that we are atheists in defect thereof: but be satisfied in conceiving and believing that he is, and that he is a rewarder of such as seek him with such general apprehensions, as serve to keep the heart humble, awful, and attentive: namely, that he to whom we pray, is a God that knows all our secrets, our thoughts, wants, and sins: that he is with us wherever we are; and that we are in him, and live by him; that he observes in what manner we do any service before him; that he is a very holy God; that he comprehends us, though we cannot so fully comprehend him; and that therein lies our bliss. Let the awe and impression of God, either as most holy, or most wise, or most mighty, carry us as far along as the Lord helps, and then consider him under some one or other like notion; and in our prayers carry that along in our minds as far as we can; and if our spirits flag, notwithstanding, try them with thoughts of God under some other notion, as before mentioned.

5. Limit not God to our shallow comprehensions; but conceive of God as infinitely above all our conceptions, as Agur did: yet conceive of him to be one that is ready, yea, engaged to teach us to know him; and to do for us above what we are able to ask or think of him.

6. Let us with wisdom proportion out our conceptions of God, under such a notion of his name and nature revealed in his word, as is most suitable to that which we are about in prayer. When God had proclaimed divers attributes of his name, Moses does not go about to fill his mind with them all at once, but selects such a one as is most suitable to the request he has hereupon to make for himself, and for Israel; which was, that "God would pardon their iniquity," which was suitable to one

of the last mentioned branches of the name of his grace, namely, that he was “one forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.” We are to glorify God in prayer, according to what we know of him, especially to improve that of God's nature, by which he has practically discovered himself to us; as we have found him by experience, and as we are convinced he has carried himself toward us: have we found the experience of his wisdom? pray to him as one infinitely wise: have we tasted of the fruits of his faithfulness? pray to him as such a one, and that part of his name wherein he has last held himself forth unto our hearts and spirits, in a convincing manner, and with which we are last affected most of all; worship him, and pray to him under that notion: but especially consider him in the glorious and precious dimensions of his love, “that we may comprehend with all saints what is the height, and length, and breadth, and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

7. Let holy admiration be the issue of our thoughts of God, as in David, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit?” or glorious Deity; he looks at it as wonderfully filling all places: and he cannot express the thoughts of God towards him. And likewise let humility and reverence attend the same. So it was in Habakkuk's prayer, wherein he is carried out to a glorious conceiving of God, his heart the while trembling. The incomprehensibleness of God, and his unsearchable excellency, must make men therefore fear him. Let our shallowness in conceiving of God drive us more out of ourselves, and abase us much that we know so little of him, and inflame us with desire after that time when we shall in a glorious manner conceive of him: we understand but as children, but in part, in comparison of that time when we shall know the Lord as we are known by him, according to the measure of our capacity.

27. Part 3, Chapter 11. Direct Our Prayers to the Trinity

CHAPTER XI.

HOW AND IN WHAT ORDER WE ARE TO DIRECT OUR PRAYERS TO THE PERSONS OF THE BLESSED TRINITY. In last case briefly to be spoken unto is, how and in what order we are to direct our prayers to the persons of the blessed Trinity? and whether we may not single out any one of the persons, to whom we may direct more immediately such or such a prayer. This case has some more difficulty in it than the former, yet I will endeavor to lay down the answer thereunto, as briefly as I can, in these following conclusions.

1. That in all parts of divine worship, and so in this of prayer, the Trinity in unity, and unity in Trinity is to be worshipped, and therefore we are not so to fix our thoughts on God as one; but rather to have this meditation and thought attending, that this one God in essence is in personal proprieties three subsistences, really distinct: nor yet are we so to let our thoughts expatiate and feed themselves in musings upon the blessed persons as distinct in personal proprieties, but still with an attending apprehension of them as one in essence, one Jehovah, one God, and no more. He to whom the Scripture applies the property of begetting, is Jehovah, God the Father, and not the Son, or the Holy Ghost, to whom that property in reference to the eternal begotten of God is never ascribed: he to whom the Scripture gives the property of being the only begotten Son of God, he is Jehovah, God the Son, and no other person; the Scripture ascribing that propriety of communication of the divine being, in a way of begetting, to none other; and so he to whom the Scripture applies that propriety of proceeding, he and only he is God the Holy Ghost: the Scripture applying to none other of the persons that propriety of communication of the divine being in a way of proceeding, or being as it were breathed forth from the Father; and therefore is called his Spirit, and from the Son; therefore is called the Son's Spirit, yet the holy Scripture never mentions but one Jehovah, or any more than one God, even when it mentions him in personal distinctions three, yet essentially but one; and not otherwise surely are we to worship him, or to conceive of him in our worship. Let the beams of the glorious Unity of the Deity lead us in worshipping or praying unto God, to the consideration of the blessed Trinity; and let the mediation of the Trinity of the persons in our prayers lead us forthwith to this glorious Unity in the Deity.

2. In our prayers fix not our minds so upon one of the glorious persons, as not thereby to be led to the contemplation of the other; or direct any prayer so to one person in the blessed Trinity, as not to exclude the other: the Father being in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost in them both: we cannot look at one, and behold one by a spiritual eye, but we must eye the other, and be led to the other; as our Savior reasons, to prove that if they had seen him, they must see his Father also.

They who look at Christ as their mediator, must eye the Father, as giving him so to be; yea, and at the Holy Ghost as one who with the blessed Father consented to his designment to that office, as the Lord Christ says, Isaiah 48:16, "and now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me: " yea, they must eye the Holy Ghost as that blessed Spirit and more immediate efficient, by whose power and

grace they thus come to the Lord, and are enabled to pray to him, or look to him. We cannot look aright to the blessed Father, but we must look to him as it were through the blessed Son; neither can we look upon the Son but by the Spirit. As he said in 1 Corinthians 12:3, so may I in this: If we worship God as our Father, with whom we have union and communion, we believe him to be so to us in his Son, and that this union and communion is effected by the Holy Ghost: so that if we worship God aright, we worship each person in the Trinity in any one person, as united by the cause of our Sonship, and union with God the Father, as first in order regenerating and adopting of us; the Son as one in and by whom we are redeemed and reconciled, and for whose sake we are accepted with God, and expect to be heard; the Holy Ghost as the immediate efficient of and with the blessed Father and Son, of our calling and adoption, etc., and therefore is he called the spirit of Son ship, as the Greek word signifies, and he by whom more immediately we are enabled to pray to the Father in the name of his blessed Son. True, a Christian may not in every particular petition or confession, particularly and distinctly consider of the other two persons in that one person, to whom more properly he directs his prayer; but yet he must in the general bent of his mind and spirit do it and intend it.

3. That in order we are first to direct our prayers to the blessed Father; yet not as first or chief in honor and dignity above the other two (for even the Son who though as man and as mediator is inferior to the Father, yet as God, as the Son of God he is equal with him, and the Son is to be honored, as equal with the same honor as the Father,) but as first in order of subsisting; according as the Scripture in two places, where the order of the blessed persons is set down, the Father is first set down in order of witnessing, and in invocation and worship, as first in order to be mentioned and invoked: and as he is the first in order, who was displeased, and to whom we are first in order reconciled in Christ; and who is first in order pleased on him, yea, who first in order among the persons laid the foundation of our redemption; and therefore to him is ascribed the work of giving his Son, and of sanctifying or anointing and appointing the Lord Christ to his office of mediator, (albeit as was said, the Holy Ghost be not excluded, but included, as acting in the blessed work,) so are we in that order to worship him, and to breathe after nearest fellowship with him, through Christ, by the help of his blessed Spirit.

4. In singling out any one person in the blessed Trinity, we are to pitch most usually upon the Father, as he to whom we direct our prayers through the mediation of Christ, and by the help of the Holy Ghost: that is the rule and method prescribed by Christ, to ask the Father in his name, and has been the usual practice of the saints: and yet in such directings of prayers to the Father, in the general intention of their spirits, do the saints eye the other two persons, and include them as jointly worshipped; and therefore in their prefaces of prayer oftentimes mention expressly, that blessed God one in essence, yet three in persons, as he to whom they speak; and in the close they subscribe glory to the blessed Father, Son, and Spirit, three persons yet one God, etc.

5. We may single out the Son of God the Lord Christ, as he to whom we occasionally present some special request, either by way of apostrophe, whilst we are directing our prayers to the Father, or in way of ejaculation, as did Stephen: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit: " and so in the instance of that short prayer of the converted thief: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom;" and so in that short prayer of Jacob, "the angel which hath delivered me from all evil, bless thee." This angel was Christ: the Father never being called an angel in Scripture or being said to be sent of any other of the persons; nor do I find where the Holy Ghost is called an angel;

and a created angel surely it was not: it being unlawful to Jacob, as well as to any others, to worship angels; and in more continued and solemn wise did Abraham pray to that angel, which in the same chapter is called the Lord; which indeed was Christ by the reasons foregoing, to him did Jacob pray and make supplication, by the space almost of the whole night, yea, he had power over the angel; to him is the prayer of the afflicted made: and the primitive saints they are said to call, not simply and only upon the name of the Father, but of the Lord Jesus Christ: for it was the Lord Jesus whom Saul persecuted, that appeared to Saul, and afterwards to Ananias: it was the Lord whose saints Saul so much injured, and upon whose name such as called, Saul had commission to bind, and the reasons hereof are evident,

1. Because prayer is a divine worship of God, as God; and therefore due to the Son, and so to the Holy Ghost as well as to the Father.

2. We are baptized into the name of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as well as into the name of the Father: and therefore both the Son and the Holy Ghost likewise may be particularly and personally invoked, and worshipped as well as the Father.

3. We are to believe in the Son, and so in the Holy Ghost as well as in the Father, and that personally and particularly: and therefore so are to pray to either. That which the Apostle expounds of the Gentiles trusting Christ, the prophet expressed of their seeking to him, so that they are inseparably due to one and the same Christ, upon one and the same ground. It is supposed that he on whom men call, must be believed on, or else he cannot be called upon by any; and when the Apostle mentions the name of the Lord, as that which is called upon, he expounds it to be meant of the Lord himself: to call upon the Lord's name, is to call upon himself.

4. Christ promises that he himself will do what we ask, and therefore he may be sought to do the same; and indeed he thereby proves himself in that chapter to be equal with the Father, by this argument, because petitions shall not only be granted in his name, but by him; neither does he make account that this is any disparagement to the Father, but glorifying him: I will do it, that my Father may be glorified. What we have said, to prove that in our prayers we may single out the Son of God, may serve to prove the same may be done to the Holy Ghost: and more arguments might have been added if need were.

Against this which we have spoken, it may be objected, we are to ask all we do ask in the name of Christ; and therefore how can we be said to ask him, or pray to him? To which I answer: 1. Christ is prayed unto in that prayer that is put up to the Father in his name. Christ, speaking of the time after his resurrection and ascension, says, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing: Verily, ye shall ask the Father nothing in my name, but he will give it you." He is glorified as God, in that all is done with God in his name, and for his Father. For though it be sometimes said, for Abraham and David's sake God will do this or that; yet this is meant in reference to God's covenant of grace with them, and so to Christ properly, in whom that covenant is ratified: "They called on the name of the Lord Jesus in all places." Yet surely they brake not that rule, John 16:23, they called on the Father in Christ's name also, yet are said to call on Christ's name, even in their calling upon God in his name: and Christ as God is also called upon, in that his Father as God is also called upon.

2. In all external worship of God, one person of the Trinity being named, the others are understood, and are not to be excluded.

3. If Christ be considered as the Son of God in essence the same with the Father, He is he to whom we come, coming in prayer to the Father: if considered as mediator, God incarnate, God and man, He is he by whom we come to the Father, and as it is another part of his divine glory ascribed to him, which is true of him as the Son of God, he by his divine power does subject all to himself: and yet in another consideration and respect, namely, as mediator, he has all things subjected to him of the Father, so it is here in this part of his glory; as the Son of God he may be, he must be prayed to, which is God and man in one person; but is not prayed to as man, but as God. So much be spoken to this weighty duty of prayer, and to the incessant practice thereof.

END.

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