

The Christian in Complete Armour - Part 11

by William Gurnall

William Gurnall emphasizes the centrality of justifying faith as the Christian's primary defense against spiritual attacks.

Scripture: Luke 22:32, John 1:16, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 6:16, Hebrews 11:4

Topics: "Christian Armor", "Justifying Faith"

Description

William Gurnall preaches about the pre-eminence of faith among the Christian graces, emphasizing its role as the shield that defends and strengthens all other graces. He explains that faith is the grace that enables the Christian soldier to withstand the attacks of the enemy, quenching all the fiery darts of the wicked. Gurnall delves into the importance of justifying faith, highlighting how it is the only grace that appropriates Christ's righteousness for the believer's justification before God. He also discusses how faith influences, activates, and defends all other graces, bringing strength, acceptance, and succor when they fail or waver.

Transcript

The Fourth piece in the Christian's panoply presents itself in this verse to our consideration --and that is The Shield of Faith. A grace of graces it is, and here fitly placed in the midst of her other companions. It stands, methinks, among them, as the heart in the midst of the body; or, if you please, as David when Samuel 'anointed him in the midst of his brethren,' I Sam. 16:13. The apostle, when he comes to speak of this grace doth, as it were, lift up its head, and anoint it above all its fellows--'above all, take the shield of faith.' The words easily fall into these two general parts. FIRST. An exhortation--'above all, take the shield of faith.' SECOND. A powerful argument pressing the exhortation--'whereby ye are able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.'

explication of the words.

In the exhortation 'Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,' these four particulars call for our inquiry towards the explication of the words. First. What faith it is that is here commended to the Christian soldier. Second. Having found the kind, we are to inquire what his faith is as to its nature. Third. Why it is compared to a shield rather than other pieces. Fourth. What is the importance of this §B4 BF4<, 'above all.'

[The kind of faith here meant.]

First Inquiry. What faith is it that here is commended? This will soon be known, if we consider the use and end for which it is commended to the Christian, and that is to enable him to 'quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;' i.e. of the wicked one, the devil. Now, look upon the several kinds of faith, and that among them must be the faith of this place which enables the creature to quench Satan's fiery darts, yea, all his fiery darts. Historical faith cannot do this, and therefore is not it. This is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that the devil himself, that shoots them, hath this faith. 'The devils believe,' James 2:19. Temporary faith cannot do it. This is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that itself is quenched by them. It makes a goodly blaze of profession, and 'endures for a while,' Matt. 13:21, but soon disappears. Miraculous faith, this falls as short as the former. Judas' miraculous faith, which he had with other of the apostles--for aught that we can read --enabling him to cast devils out of others, left himself possessed of the devil of covetousness, hypocrisy, and treason; yea, a whole legion of lusts, that hurried him down the hill of despair into the bottomless pit of perdition. There is only one kind of faith remains, which is it the apostle means in this place, and that is justifying faith. This indeed is the grace that makes him, whoever hath it, the devil's match. Satan hath not so much advantage of the Christian by the transcendency of his natural abilities, as he hath of Satan in this cause and this his weapon. The apostle is confident to give the day to the Christian before the fight is fully over: 'Ye have overcome the wicked one,' I John 2:13, that is, ye are as sure to do it as if you were now mounted on your triumphant chariot in heaven. The knight shall overcome the giant; the saint, Satan; and the same apostle tells us what gets him the day. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' I John 5:4.

[Justifying faith, as to its nature.]

Second Inquiry. What is this justifying faith as to its nature?

I shall answer this, First. Negatively. Second. Affirmatively.

First. Negatively, in two particulars.

1. Justifying faith is not a naked assent to the truths of the gospel. This justifying faith doth give; but this doth not make it justifying faith. A dogmatical faith, or historical, is comprehended in justifying faith. But dogmatical faith doth not infer justifying faith. Justifying faith cannot be without a dogmatical; it implies it, as the rational soul in man doth the sensitive. But, the dogmatical may be without the justifying, as the sensitive soul in the beast without the rational. Judas knew the Scriptures, and without doubt did assent to the truth of them, when he was so zealous a preacher of the gospel; but he never had so much as one dram of justifying faith in his soul. 'But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him,' John 6:64. Yea, Judas' master, the devil himself--one far enough, I suppose, from justifying faith--yet he assents to the truth of the word. He goes against his conscience who denies them. When he tempted Christ he did not dispute against the Scripture, but from the Scripture, drawing his arrows out of this quiver, Matt. 4:6. And at another time, he makes as full a confession of Christ, for the matter, as Peter himself did, Matt. 8:29, compared with Matt. 16:17. Assent to the truth of the word is but an act of the understanding, which reprobates and devils may exercise; but justifying faith is a compounded habit, and hath its seat both in the understanding and will; and therefore [it is] called a 'believing with the heart,' Rom. 10:10; yea, a 'believing with all the heart,' Acts 8:37. 'Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.' It takes all the powers of the soul. There is a double object in the promise--one proper to the understanding, to move that; another proper to the will, to excite and work upon that. As the promise is true, so it calls for an act of assent from the understanding; and as it is good as well as true, so it calls for an act of the will to embrace and receive it.

Therefore, he which only notionally knows the promise, and speculatively assents to the truth of it, without clinging to it, and embracing of it, doth not believe savingly, and can have no more benefit from the promise, than nourishment from the food he sees and acknowledgeth to be wholesome, but eats none of.

2. Justifying faith is not assurance. If it were, St. John might have spared his pains, who wrote to them that 'believed on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,' I John 5:13. They might then have said 'We do this already. What else is our faith, but a believing that we are such as through Christ are pardoned, and shall through him be saved?' But this cannot be so. If faith were assurance, then a man's sins would be pardoned before he believes, for he must necessarily be pardoned before he can know he is pardoned.

The candle must be lighted before I can see it is lighted. The child must be born before I can be assured it is born. The object must be before the act. Assurance rather is the fruit of faith. It is in faith as the flower is in the root. Faith, in time, after much communion with God, acquaintance with the word, and experience of his dealings with the soul, may flourish into assurance. But, as the root truly lives before the flower appears, and continues when that hath shed its beautiful leaves, and gone again; so doth true justifying faith live before assurance comes, and after it disappears.

Assurance is, as it were, the cream of faith. Now you know there is milk before there is cream, this riseth not but after some time standing, and there remains milk after it is fleted off. How many, alas! of the precious saints of God must we shut out from being believers, if there is no faith but what amounts to assurance? We must needs offend against the generation of God's children, among whom some are babes, not yet come to the use of their reflex act of faith, so as to own the graces of God in them to be true, upon the review that they take of their own actings.

And, must not the child be allowed to be a child, till he can speak for himself, and say he is so? Others there are in Christ's family, who are of higher stature and greater experience in the ways of God, yet have lost those apprehensions of pardoning mercy, which once they were, through the goodness of God, able to have shown--shall we say their faith went away in the departure of their assurance? How oft then in a year may a believer be no believer? even as oft as God withdraws and leaves the creature in the dark.

Assurance is like the sun-flower, which opens with the day and shuts with the night. It follows the motion of God's face. If that looks smilingly on the soul, it lives; if that frowns or hides itself, it dies. But faith is a plant that can grow in the shade, a grace that can find the way to heaven in a dark night. It can 'walk in darkness,' and yet 'trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. 50:10. In a word, by making the essence of faith to lie in assurance, we should not only offend against the generation of God's children, but against the God and Father of these children; for at one clap we turn the greater number of those children he hath here on earth out of doors.

Yes, we are cruel to those he is most tender of, and make sad the hearts of those that he would have chiefly comforted. Indeed if this were true, a great part of gospel provision laid up in the promises is of little use. We read of promises to those that mourn, 'they shall be comforted,' to the contrite, 'they shall be revived,' to him that 'walks in darkness,' and the like. These belong to believers, and none else. Surely then there are some believers that are in the dark, under the hatches of sorrow, wounded and broken with their sins, and temptation for them. But they are not such as are assured of the love of God; their water is turned into joy, their night into light, their sighs and sobs into joy and praise.

Second. I shall answer affirmatively, what justifying faith is, and in the description of it I shall consider it solely as justifying. And so take it in these few words--It is the act of the soul whereby it rests on Christ crucified for pardon and life, and that upon the warrant of the promise. In the description observe,

1. The subject where faith is seated, not any single faculty, but the soul. 2. The object of faith as justifying--Christ crucified. 3. The act of faith upon this object, and that is resting on Christ crucified for pardon and life. 4. The warrant and security that faith goes upon in this act.

1. The subject where faith is seated, not any single faculty, but the soul. Of this I have spoken something before, and so pass on to the second point.

2. Here is the object of faith as justifying, and that is Christ crucified. The whole truth of God is the object of justifying faith. It trades with the whole word of God, and doth firmly assent unto it; but, in its justifying act, it singles out Christ crucified for its object. (1.) The person of Christ is the object of faith as justifying. (2.) Christ as crucified.

(1.) The person of Christ. Not any axiom or proposition in the word. This is the object of assurance, not of faith. Assurance saith 'I believe my sins are pardoned through Christ.' Faith's language is, 'I believe on Christ for the pardon of them.' The word of God doth direct our faith to Christ, and terminates it upon him; called therefore, a 'coming to Christ,' Matt. 11:28, a 'receiving of him,' John 1:12, a 'believing on him,' John 17:20. The promise is but the dish in which Christ, the true food of the soul, is served up; and, if faith's hand be on the promise, it is but as one that draws the dish to him, that he may come at the dainties in it. The promise is the marriage-ring on the hand of faith. Now we are not married to the ring, but with it unto Christ. 'All the promises,' saith the apostle, 'are yea and amen in him.' They have their excellency from him, and efficacy in him--I mean in a soul's union to him. To run away with a promise, and not to close with Christ, and by faith become one in him, is as if a man should rend a branch from a tree, and lay it up in his chest, expecting it to bear fruit there. Promises are dead branches severed from Christ. But when a soul by faith becomes united to Christ, then he partakes of all his fatness; not a promise but yields sweetness to it.

(2.) As Christ is the primary object of faith, so Christ as crucified. Not Christ in his personal excellencies--so he is the object rather of our love than faith--but as bleeding, and that to death, under the hand of divine justice for to make an atonement by God's own appointment for the sins of the world. As the handmaid's eye is to her mistress's hand for direction, so faith's eye is on God revealing himself in his word; which way God by it points the soul, thither it goes. Now there faith finds God, intending to save poor sinners, pitched on Christ, and Christ alone, for the transacting and effecting of it, and him whom God chooseth to trust with the work--him and him alone--will faith choose to lay the burden of her confidence on.

Again, faith observes how Christ performed this great work, and accordingly how the promise holds him forth to be applied for pardon and salvation. Now faith finds that then Christ made the full payment to the justice of God for sin, when he poured out his blood to death upon the cross. All the precedaneous^[1] acts of his humiliation were but preparatory to this. He was born to die; he was sent into the world as a lamb bound with the bonds of an irreversible decree for a sacrifice. Christ himself when he came into the world understood this to be the errand he was sent on, Heb. 10:5. 'Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me;' i.e. to be an expiatory sacrifice. Without this, all he had done would have been labour undone. No redemption but by his blood,

'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,' Eph. 1:7. No church without his blood, 'The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,' Acts 20:28. E latere Christi morientis exstitit ecclesia-- the church is taken out of dying Jesus' side, as Eve out of sleeping Adam's. Christ did not redeem and save poor souls by sitting in majesty on his heavenly throne, but by hanging on the shameful cross, under the tormenting hand of man's fury and God's just wrath. And therefore the poor soul, that would have pardon of sin, is directed to place his faith not only on Christ, but on bleeding Christ, Rom. 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.'

3. The act of faith upon this object, and that is resting on Christ crucified for pardon and life. I know there are many acts of the soul antecedent to this, without which the creature can never truly exercise this. As knowledge, especially of God and Christ, upon whose authority and testimony it relies: 'I know whom I have believed,' II Tim. 1:12. None will readily trust a stranger that he is wholly unacquainted with. Abraham indeed went he knew not whither, but he did not go with he knew not whom. The greatest thing God laboured to instruct Abraham in, and satisfy him with, was--

(1.) The knowledge of his own glorious self --who he was--that he might take his word and rely on it, how harsh and improbable, soever it might sound in sense or reason's ear, 'I am Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

(2.) Assent to the truth of the word of God. If this foundation-stone be not laid, faith's building cannot go on. Who will trust him that he dares not think speaks true?

(3.) A sense of our own vileness and emptiness. By the one he means us see our demerit, what we deserve, hell and damnation; by the other, our own impotency, how little we can contribute--yea, just nothing, to our own reconciliation. I join them together, because the one ariseth out of the other. Sense of this emptiness comes from the deep apprehensions a soul hath of the other's fulness in him. You never knew a man full of self-confidence and self-abasement together. The conscience cannot abound with the sense of sin and the heart with self-conceit at the same time. 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died,' Rom. 7:9--that is, when the commandment came, in the accusations of it, to his conscience, sin, like a sleepy lion had lain still, and he secure and confident by it, when that began to roar in his conscience, then he died--that is, his vain-confidence of himself gave up the ghost. Both these are necessary to faith--sense of sin, like the smart of a wound, to make the creature think of a plaster to cure it; and sense of emptiness and insufficiency in himself or any creature to do the cure necessary to make him go out to Christ for cure. We do not go abroad to beg what we have of our own within doors. These, with some other, are necessary to faith. But the receiving of Christ, and resting on Christ, is that act of faith to which justification is promised. 'He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,' John 3:18. Now every one that assents to the truth of what the Scripture saith of Christ, doth not believe on Christ. No; This believing on Christ implies an union of the soul to Christ and fiduciary recumbency on Christ. Therefore we are bid to take hold of Christ, Isa. 27:5, who is there called God's 'strength,' as elsewhere his arm--'that we may make peace with God, and we shall make peace with him.' It is not the sight of a man's arm stretched out to a man in the water will save him from drowning, but the taking hold of it. Christ is a stone. Faith builds upon Christ for salvation. And how? but by laying its whole weight and expectation of mercy on him. What Paul, II Tim. 1:12, calls 'believing' in the former part of the verse, he calls in the latter part a 'committing to him to be kept against that day.'

(4.) The fourth and last branch in the description, is the warrant and security that faith goes upon in this act. And this it takes from the promise. Indeed, there is no way how God can be conceived to contract a debt to his creature but by promise. There are ways for men to become debtors one to another, though never any promise passed from them. The father is a debtor to his child, and owes him love, provision, and nurture. The child is a debtor to his parent, and owes him honour and obedience, though neither of them promised this to each other. Much more doth the creature stand deep in God's debt-book, and owes himself with all he hath to God his Maker, though he hath not the grace voluntarily to make these over to God by promise and covenant. But the great God is so absolute a Sovereign, that none can make a law to bind him but himself. Till he be pleased to pass an act of grace, of his own good-will, to give this or do that good thing to and for his poor creatures, no claim can be laid to the least mercy at his hands. There are two things therefore that are greatly to be heeded by the soul that would believe.

(1.) He must inquire for a promise to bear his faith out, and warrant him to expect such a mercy at God's hand.

(2.) Again, when he hath found a promise, and observed the terms well on which it runs, the Christian is not to stay for any further encouragement, but upon the credit of the naked promise to set his faith on work.

(a) He is to inquire out a promise, and observe well the terms on which it runs. Indeed upon the point it comes all to one; to believe without a promise, or to believe on a promise, but not observe the terms of it. Both are presumptuous, and speed alike. A prince hath as much reason to be angry with him that doth not keep close to his commission, as with another that acts without any commission. O how little considered is this by many who make bold of God's arm to lean on for pardon and salvation, but never think that the promise, which presents Christ to leaned on as a Saviour, presents him at the same time to be chosen as a Lord and Prince! Such were the rebellious Israelites, who durst make God and his promise a leaning-stock for their foul elbows to rest on. 'They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is his name,' Isa. 48:2; but they were more bold than welcome. God rejected their confidence and loathed their sauciness. Though a prince would not disdain to let a poor wounded man, faint with bleeding, and unable to go alone, upon his humble request, make use of his arm, rather than he should perish in the streets; yet he would, with indignation, reject the same motion from a filthy drunkard that is besmeared with his vomit, if he should desire leave to lean on him because he cannot go alone. I am sure, how welcome soever the poor humble soul--that lies bleeding for his sins at the very mouth of hell in his own thoughts--is to God when he comes upon the encouragement of the promise to lean on Christ, yet the profane wretch that emboldens himself to come to Christ, shall be kicked away with infinite disdain and abhorrency by a holy God for abusing his promise.

(b) When a poor sinner hath found a promise, and observes the terms with a heart willing to embrace them, now he is to put forth an act of faith upon the credit of the naked promise, without staying for any other encouragement elsewhere. Faith is a right pilgrim-grace; it travels with us to heaven, and when it sees us safe got within our Father's doors --heaven I mean--it takes leave of us. Now, the promise is this pilgrim's staff with which it sets forth, though, like Jacob on his way to Padan-aram, it hath nothing else with it. 'Remember the word unto thy servant,' saith David, 'upon which thou hast caused me to hope,' Ps. 119:49. The word of promise was all he had to show, and he counts that enough to set his faith on work. But alas! some make comfort the ground of faith, and experience their warrant to believe. They will believe when God manifests himself to them, and sends in some sensible demonstration of his love to their souls; but, till this be done, the promise hath little authority to silence their unbelieving cavils, and quiet their

misgiving hearts into a waiting on God for the performance of what there is spoken from God's own mouth. It is like old Jacob, who gave no credit to his children when they told him Joseph was yet alive and governor over all the land of Egypt. This news was too good and great to enter into his belief, who had given him {up} for dead {for} so long; it is said, 'his heart fainted, for he believed them not,' Gen. 45:26. But when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him thither, then it is said, 'the spirit of Jacob revived,' ver. 27. Truly thus, though the promise tells the poor humbled sinner Christ is alive, governor of heaven itself, with all power there and on earth put into his hand, that he may give eternal life unto all that believe on him, and he be therefore exhorted to rest upon Christ in the promise, yet his heart faints and believes not. It is the wagons he would fain see--some sensible expressions of God's love that he listens after--if he did but know that he was an elect person, or were one that God did love, then he would believe. But God hath little reason to thank him in the meantime for suspending his faith till these come. This is, as I may so say, to believe for spiritual loves, and is rather sense than faith.

[Why faith is compared to a shield.]

Third Inquiry. Why is faith compared to a shield?

It is so, because of a double resemblance that is between this grace and that piece of armour.

First Resemblance. This shield is not for the defence of any particular part of the body--as almost all the other pieces are--the helmet fitted for the head, the plate designed for the breast, and so others having their several parts which they are fastened to--but is intended for the defence of the whole body. It was used therefore to be made very large, for its broadness called 2LD,ÎH, of {from} 2bD", a gate or door, because so long and large as in a manner to cover the whole body. To this that place alludes, 'For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield,' Ps. 5:12. And if the shield were not large enough at once to cover every part, yet, being a movable piece of armour, the skilful soldier might turn it this way or that way, to latch the blow or arrow from lighting on any part they were directed to. And this indeed doth excellently well set forth the universal use that faith is of to the Christian. It defends the whole man; every part of the Christian by it preserved. Sometimes the temptation is levelled at the head. Satan, he will be disputing against this truth and that, to make the Christian, if he can, call them into question, merely because his reason and understanding cannot comprehend them; and he prevails with some that do not think themselves the unwisest in the world, upon this very account, to blot the deity of Christ, with other mysterious truths of the gospel, quite out of their creed. Now faith interposeth between the Christian and this arrow. It comes into the relief of the Christian's weak understanding as seasonably as Zeruiah did to David, when the giant Ishbi-benob thought to have slain him. I will trust the word of God, saith the believer, rather than my own purblind reason. 'Abraham not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. If sense should have had the hearing of that business, yea, if that holy man had put it to a reference between sense and reason also, what resolution his thoughts should come to concerning this strange message that was brought him, he would have been in danger of calling the truth of it in question, though God himself was the messenger; but faith brought him honourably off.

Again, Is it conscience that the tempter assaults? --and it is not seldom that he is shooting his fiery darts of horror and terror at his mark. Faith receives the shock, and saves the creature harmless: 'I had fainted, unless I had believed,' saith David, Ps. 27:13. He means when false witnesses rose up against him, and such as breathed out cruelty, as appears, ver. 12. Faith was his best fence against man's charge; and so it is against Satan's and conscience's also. Never was a man in a sadder condition than the poor jailer, Acts

16. Much ado he had to keep his own hands from offering violence to himself. Who that had seen him fall trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, with that sad question in his mouth, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ver. 30, could have thought this deep wound that was now given his conscience, would so soon have been closed and cured as we find it, ver. 34. The earthquake of horror that did so dreadfully shake his conscience is gone, and his trembling turned into rejoicing. Now mark what made this blessed calm. 'Believe,' saith Paul, 'on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,' ver. 31; and ver. 34, it is said, he 'rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.' It is faith stills the storm which sin had raised--faith that changed his doleful note into joy and gladness. Happy man he was, that had such skilful chirurgeons so near him, who could direct him the nearest way to a cure.

Again, Is it the will that the temptation is laid to catch? Some commands of God cannot be obeyed without much self-denial, because they cross us in that which our own wills are carried forth very strongly to desire; so that we must deny our will before we can do the will of God. Now a temptation comes very forcible, when it runs with the tide of our own wills. 'What,' saith Satan, 'wilt thou serve a God that thus thwarts thee in everything?' If thou lovest anything more than another, presently he must have that from thee. No lamb in all the flock will serve for a sacrifice, but Isaac, Abraham's only child, he must be offered up. No place will content God, that Abraham should serve him in, but where he must live in banishment from his dear relations and acquaintance. 'Wilt thou,' saith Satan, 'yield to such hard terms as these?' Now faith is the grace that doth the soul admirable service at such a pinch as this. It is able to appease the tumult which such a temptation may raise in the soul, and dismiss the rout of all mutinous thoughts, yea, to keep the King of heaven's peace so sweetly in the Christian's bosom, that such a temptation, if it comes, shall find few or none to declare for it, 'By faith,' it saith, 'Abraham obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither,' Heb. 11:8. And we do not read of one fond look that his heart cast back upon his dear native country, as he went from it, so well pleased had faith made him with his journey. It was hard work for Moses to strip himself of the magistrate's robes, and put his hands on his servants head; hard to leave another to enter upon his labours, and reap the honour of lodging the Israelites' colours in Canaan, after it had cost him so many a weary step to bring them within sight of it. Yet, faith made him willing; he saw better robes, that he should put on in heaven, than those he was called on to put off on earth. The lowest place in glory is, beyond all compare, greater preferment than the highest place of honour here below; to stand before the throne there, and minister to God in immediate service, than to sit in a throne on earth and have all the world waiting at his foot.

Second Resemblance. The shield doth not only defend the whole body, but is a defence of the soldier's armour also. It keeps the arrow from the helmet as well as head, from the breast and breast-plate also. Thus faith it is armour upon armour, a grace that preserves all the other graces. But of this more hereafter.

[The import of the expression 'above all.']

Fourth Inquiry. What doth this 'above all,' import?

There is variety among interpreters about it. Jerome reads it, in omnibus, sumentes scutum fidei --in all things taking the shield of faith, i.e. in all duties, enterprises, temptations, or afflictions--in whatever you are called to do or suffer, take faith. Indeed, faith to the Christian is like fire to the chemist; nothing can be done without it christianly. 'But without faith it is impossible to please God,' Heb. 11:6. And how can the Christian please himself in that wherein he doth not please his God? Others read it, 'Over all take the shield of faith,' i.e. take it over all your graces, as that which will cover them. All other graces have their safety from faith; they lie secure under the shadow of faith, as an army lies safe under the protection and

command of a strong castle planted round with cannon. But we shall follow our translation, as being most comprehensive, and that which will take these within its compass. 'Above all, take,' &c., that is, among all the pieces of armour which you are to provide and wear for your defence, let this have the pre-eminence of your care to get; and having got, to keep it. Now, that the apostle meant to give a preeminency to faith above the other graces appears,

First. By the piece of armour he compares it to --the shield. This, of old, was prized above all other pieces by soldiers. They counted it greater shame to lose their shield, than to lose the field, and therefore when under the very foot of their enemy, they would not part with it, but esteemed it an honour to die with their shield in their hand. It was the charge that one laid upon her son, going into the wars, when she gave him a shield, 'that he should either bring his shield home with him, or be brought home upon his shield.' She had rather see him dead with it, than come home alive without it.

Second. By the noble effect which is here ascribed to faith--'by which ye shall quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.' The other pieces are nakedly commended, 'take the girdle of truth, breast-plate of righteousness,' and so the rest; but there is nothing singly ascribed to any of them, what they can do, yet, when he speaks of faith, he ascribes the whole victory to it. This quencheth 'all the fiery darts of the wicked.' And why thus? Are the other graces of no use, and doth faith do all? What need then the Christian load himself with more than this one piece? I answer, every piece hath its necessary use in the Christian's warfare: not any one part of the whole suit can be spared in the day of battle. But the reason, I humbly conceive, why no particular effect is annexed severally to each of these, but all ascribed to faith, is, to let us know that all these graces--their efficacy and our benefit from them--is in conjunction with faith, and the influence they receive from faith; so that this is plainly the design of the Spirit of God to give faith the precedency in our care above the rest. Only, take heed that you do not fancy any indifferency or negligence to be allowed you in your endeavours after the other graces, because you are more strongly provoked and excited up to the getting and keeping this. The apostle would intend your care here, but not remit it there. Cannot we bid a soldier above all parts of his body to beware of a wound at his heart, but he must needs think presently he need take no care to guard his head? Truly, such a one would deserve a cracked crown to cure him of his folly. The word thus opened, we shall content ourselves with one general observation from them; and it is this.

DIRECTION VIII.--FIRST GENERAL PART.

[The pre-eminence of faith above other graces.]

The exhortation--'Above all, taking the shield of faith' (Eph. 6:16).

Of all graces faith is the chief, and is chiefly to be laboured for. There is a precedency or pre-eminence peculiar to this above all other. It is among graces, as the sun is among the planets, or as Solomon's 'virtuous woman among the daughters,' Prov. 31:29. Though every grace had done virtuously, yet thou, O faith, excellest them all. The apostle indeed give the precedency to love, and sets faith on the lower hand. 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,' I Cor. 13:13. Yet, you may observe, that this prelation of it before faith hath a particular respect to the saints's blissful state in heaven, where love remains, and faith ceaseth. In that regard love indeed is the greater, because it is the end of our faith. We apprehend by faith that we may enjoy by love. But, if we consider the Christian's present state, while militant on earth, in this respect love must give place to faith. It is true, love is the grace that shall triumph in heaven. But it is faith, not love, which is the conquering grace on earth. 'This is

the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' I John 5:4. Love indeed hath its place in the battle, and doth excellent service, but is under faith its leader. 'Faith which worketh by love,' Gal. 5:6. Even as the captain fighteth by his soldiers whom he leads on, so faith works by love which it excites. Love, it is true, is the grace that at last possesseth the inheritance, but it is faith that gives the Christian right unto it. Without this he should never have enjoyed it, John 1:12. In a word, it is love that unites God and glorified saints together in heaven; but it was faith that first united them to Christ while they were on earth--'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,' Eph. 3:17. And if Christ had dwelt in them by faith on earth, they should never have dwelt with God in heaven.

BRANCH FIRST.

[Four Particulars in which faith stands
pre-eminent above other graces.]

I proceed to show wherein it appears that faith hath such a pre-eminence above other graces as we previously have indicated. This takes in the following particulars.

First Particular. In the great inquiry that God makes after faith above all other graces. Nothing more speaks our esteem of persons or things than our inquiry after them. We ask first and most for those that stand highest in our thoughts. 'Is your father well?' said Joseph, 'the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?' Gen. 43:27. No doubt there were others of whose welfare Joseph would have been glad to hear also, but being most pent and pained with a natural affection to his father, he easeth himself of this first.

And when David asks for Absalom above all others, 'Is the young man Absalom safe?' and over again with it to Cush, II Sam. 18, it was easy to guess how highly he valued his life. Now you shall find the great inquiry that God makes is for faith: 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Luke 18:8--implying that this is the grace which he will especially look for and desires to find. We read, John 9, of a great miracle, a man by Christ restored to his sight that was born blind.

This so enraged the malicious Pharisees that they excommunicate the poor man for no other fault but giving his merciful physician a good word. This brings Christ the sooner to him--so tender is he of those that suffer for him, that they shall not long want his sweet company--and he hath no cause to complain for being cast out of man's society that gains Christ's presence by the same. Now, observe what Christ saith to him at his first meeting, ver. 35, 'Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?'

The man had already expressed some zeal for Christ, in vindicating him, and speaking well of him to the head of the bitterest enemies he had on earth, for which he was now made a sufferer at their hands. This was very commendable. But there is one thing Christ prizeth above all this, and that is faith. This he inquires after, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' As if he had said, 'All this thy zeal in speaking for me, and patience in suffering, are nothing worth in my account except thou hast faith also.'

Indeed most of God's dealings with his people, what are they but inquiries after faith? either the truth or strength of it. When he afflicts them, it is 'for the trial of their faith,' I Peter 1:7. Afflictions they are God's spade and mattock, by which he digs into his people's hearts to find out this gold of faith. Not but that he inquires for other graces also; but this is named for all as the chief; which found, all the other will soon appear. When God seems to delay, and makes, as it were, a halt in his providence, before he comes with

the mercy he promiseth, and we pray for, it is exploratory to faith.

'O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. 15:28. She had received her answer without so much ado; only Christ had a mercy in store more than she thought of. With the granting of her suit in the cure of her daughter, he had a mind to give her the evidence of her faith also, and the high esteem God hath of his grace, as that which may have of him what it will.

Second Particular. The commendations that are given to faith above other graces. You shall observe, that in the same action wherein other graces are eminently exercised as well as faith, even then faith is taken notice of, and the crown set upon faith's head rather than any of the other. We hear nothing almost of any other grace throughout the whole 11th of Hebrews but faith. 'By faith Abraham,' 'by faith Jacob,' and the rest of those worthies, did all those famous exploits.

There was a concurrence of the other graces with faith in them all. But all goes under the name of faith. The whole army fight, yet the general or the captain hath the honour of the victory ascribed to him. Alexander and Cæsar's names are transmitted to posterity as the great conquerors that overcame so many battles, not the private soldiers that fought under them. Faith is the captain grace. All those famous acts of those saints are recorded as the achievements of faith.

Thus concerning the centurion, 'Verily,' saith Christ, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,' Matt. 8:10. There were other graces very eminent in the centurion besides his faith;--his conscientious care of his poor servant, for whom he could have done no more if he had been his own child. There are some that call themselves Christians, yet would not have troubled themselves so much for a sick servant. Such, alas! are oft less regarded in sickness than their master's beast.

But, especially his humility; this shined forth very eminently in that self-abasing expression: 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof,' Matt. 8:8. Consider but his calling and degree therein, and it makes his humility more conspicuous. A swordsman, yea, a commander! such use to speak big and high. Power is seldom such a friend to humility. Surely he was a man of a rare humble spirit, that he, whose mouth was used so much to words of command over his soldiers, could so demit^[2] and humble himself in his address to Christ; yet his faith outshines his humility in its greatest strength.

Not, I have not found such humility, but 'such faith' in all Israel. As if Christ had said, 'There is not one believer in all Israel but I know him, and how rich he is in faith also; but I have not found so much of this heavenly treasure in any one hand as in this centurion's.' Indeed the Christian's chief riches is in faith's hand. 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?' James 2:5. Why rich in faith, rather than rich in patience, rich in love, or any other grace?

O great reason for it, when the creature comes to lay claim to pardon of sin, the favour of God, and heaven itself. It is not love, patience,&c., but faith alone that lays down the price of all these. Not 'Lord, pardon, save me, here is my love and patience for it;' but 'here is Christ, and the price of his blood, which faith presents thee for the full purchase of them all.' This leads to a third particular, and indeed the chief of all.

Third Particular. The high office that faith is set in above other graces, in the business of our justification before God--'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. 5:1. Not justified by love, repentance, patience, or any other grace beside faith. O how harsh doth it sound in a Christian ear, justifying patience, justifying repentance! And if they were concerned with the act of justification, as faith is, the name would

as well become them as it doth faith itself. But we find this appropriated to faith, and the rest hedged out from having to do in the act of justification, though included and supposed in the person who is justified. It is faith that justifies without works. This is Paul's task to prove, Rom. 3. But this faith which justifies is not dead or idle, but a lively working faith, which seems to be James' design in the second chapter of his epistle. As God did single Christ out from all others to be the only mediator betwixt him and man, and his righteousness to be the meritorious cause of our justification; so he hath singled faith out from all the other graces, to be the instrument or means for appropriating this righteousness of Christ to ourselves. Therefore, as this righteousness is called 'the righteousness of God,' and opposed to our 'own righteousness,' though wrought by God in us, Rom. 10:3, because it is wrought by Christ for us, but not inherent in us, as the other is; so also it is called 'the righteousness of faith,' Rom. 4:11, 13--not the righteousness of repentance, love, or any other grace. Now, wherefore is it called 'the righteousness of faith,' and not of love, repentance, &c.? Surely, not that faith itself is our righteousness. Then we should be justified by works, while we are justified by faith, contrary to the apostle, who opposeth faith and works, Rom. 4.

In a word, then, we should be justified by a righteousness of our own, for faith is a grace inherent in us, and as much our own work as any grace besides is. But this is contrary to the same apostle's doctrine, Php. 3:9, where our own righteousness, and the righteousness which is by faith, are declared to be inconsistent. It can therefore be called 'the righteousness of faith' for this reason and no other--because faith is the only grace whose office it is to lay hold on Christ, and so to appropriate his righteousness for the justification of our souls. Christ and faith are relatives which must not be severed. Christ, he is the treasure, and faith the hand which receives it. Christ's righteousness is the robe, faith the hand that puts it on; so that it is Christ who is the treasure. By his blood he dischargeth our debt, and not by faith; whose office is only to receive Christ, whereby he becomes ours. It is Christ's righteousness that is the robe which covers our nakedness, and makes us beautiful in God's eye; only, faith hath the honour to put the robe on the soul, and it is no small honour that is therein put upon it above other graces. As God graced Moses exceedingly above the rest of his brethren the Israelites, when he was called up the mount to receive the law from God's mouth, while they had their bounds set them--to stand waiting at the bottom of the hill till he brought it down to them; so doth God highly honour faith, to call this up as the grace by whose hand he will convey this glorious privilege of justification over to us.

Question. But why is faith rather than any other grace else employed in this act?

Answer First. Because there is no grace hath so proper a fitness for this office as faith. Why hath God appointed the eye to see and not the ear? why the hand to take our food rather than the foot? It is easily answered, because these members have a particular fitness for these functions and not the other. Thus faith hath a fitness for this work peculiar to itself. We are justified not by giving anything to God of what we do, but by receiving from God what Christ hath done for us. Now faith is the only receiving grace, and therefore only fit for this office.

Answer Second. There is no grace that God could trust his honour so safely with in this business of justification as with faith. The great design God hath in justifying a poor sinner is to magnify his free mercy in the eye of his creature. This is written in such fair characters in the word, that he who runs {to it} may read it. God was resolved that his free mercy should go away with all the honour, and the creature should be quite cut out from any pretensions to partnership with him therein. Now there is no way like to this of being justified by faith, for the securing and safe-guarding of the glory of God's free grace, Rom. 3:25, 26. When the apostle hath in some verses together discoursed of the free justification of a sinner before God,

he goes on to show how this cuts the very comb, yea throat, of all self-exalting thoughts, ver. 27: 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.' Princes, of all wrongs, most disdain and abhor to see their royal bed defiled. So jealous they have been of this, that, for the prevention of all suspicion of such a foul fact, it hath been of old the custom of the greatest monarchs, that those who were their favourites, and admitted into nearest attendance upon their own persons and queens, should be eunuchs--such whose very disability of nature might remove all suspicion of any such attempt by them. Truly, God is more jealous of having the glory of his name ravished by the pride and self-glorying of the creature, than ever any prince was of having his queen deflowered. And therefore to secure it from any such horrid abuse, he hath chosen faith--this eunuch grace, as I may so call it--to stand so nigh him, and be employed by him in this high act of grace, whose very nature, being a self-emptying grace, renders it incapable of entering into any such design against the glory of God's grace. Faith hath two hands; with one it pulls off its own righteousness and throws it away, as David did Saul's armour; with the other it puts on Christ's righteousness over the soul's shame, as that in which it dares alone see God or be seen of him. 'This makes it impossible,' saith learned and holy Master Ball, 'how to conceive that faith and works should be concauses in justification; seeing the one--that is faith--attributes all to the free grace of God; the other--that is works--challenge to themselves. The one, that is faith, will aspire no higher but to be the instrumental cause of free remission; the other can sit no lower, but to be the matter of justification, if any cause at all. For, if works be accounted to us in the room or place of exact obedience in free justification, do they not supply the place? are they not advanced to the dignity of works complete and perfect in justification from justice?' Treatise of Covenant of Grace, p. 70.

Fourth Particular. The mighty influence, yea universal, that faith hath upon all her sister-graces, speaks her the chief of them all. What makes the sun so glorious a creature but because it is a common good, and serves all the lower world with light and influence? Faith is a grace whose ministry God useth as much for the good of the spiritual world in the saints--called in Scripture the 6"4< 6JÂF4H, 'the new creation,' Gal. 6:15--as he doth the sun for the corporeal. Nothing is hid from the heat of the sun, Ps. 19:6, and there is no grace that faith's influence reacheth not unto.

[The influence of faith reacheth

unto all other graces.]

First. Faith finds all the graces with work. As the rich tradesman gives out his wool, some to this man, and some to that, who all spin and work of the stock he gives them out, so that, when he ceaseth to trade, they must also, because they have no stock but what he affords them,--thus faith gives out to every grace what they act upon. If faith trades not, neither can they.

To instance in one or two graces for all the rest. Repentance, this is a sweet grace, but set on work by faith. Nineveh's repentance is attributed unto their faith: 'The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth,' Jonah 3:5. It is very like indeed that their repentance was no more than legal, but it was as good as their faith was. If their faith had been better, so would their repentance also. All is whist and quiet in an unbelieving soul; no news of repentance, nor noise of any complaint made against sin till faith begins to stir. When faith presents the threatening, and binds the truth and terror of it to the conscience, then the sinner hath something to work upon. As light accentuates colours and brings the eye acquainted with its object, whereupon it falls to work, so doth faith actuate sin in the conscience; now musing thoughts will soon arise, and, like clouds, thicken apace into a storm, till they bespread the soul with a universal blackness of horror and trembling for sin; but then also the creature is at a loss, and can

go no further in the business of repentance, while faith sends in more work from the promise by presenting a pardon therein to the returning soul; which no sooner is heard and believed by the creature, but the work of repentance goes on apace. Now the cloud of horror and terror, which the fear of wrath, from consideration of the threatening, had gathered in the conscience, dissolves into a soft rain of evangelical sorrow, at the report which faith makes from the promise.

Love is another heavenly grace; but faith gathers the fuel that makes this fire. Speak, Christian, whose soul now flames with love to God, was it always thus? No! sure there was a time, I dare say for thee, when thy heart was cold--not a spark of this fire to be found on the altar of thy heart. How is this then, Christian, that now thy soul loves God, whom before thou didst scorn and hate? Surely thou hast heard some good news from heaven, that hath changed thy thoughts of God, and turned the stream of thy love, which ran another way, into this happy channel. And who can be the messenger besides faith that brings any good news from heaven to the soul? It is faith that proclaims the promise; opens Christ's excellencies; pours out his name, for which the virgins love him. When faith hath drawn a character of Christ out of the word, and presented him in his love and loveliness to the soul, now the creature is sweetly inveigled in his affections to him; now the Christian hath a copious theme to enlarge upon in his thoughts, whereby to endear Christ more and more unto him --'Unto him that believes, he is precious;' and the more faith, the 'more precious,' I Peter 1:7. If we should sit in the same room by the dearest friend we had in all the world, and our eyes were held from seeing him, we would take no more notice of him, and give no more respect to him, than to a mere stranger. But if one should come and whisper {to} us in the ear, and tell us this is such a dear friend of yours, that once laid down his life to save yours, that hath made you heir to all the goodly estate that he hath, will you not show your respect to him? O how our hearts would work in our breasts, and make haste to come forth in some passionate expression of our dear affection to him! Yea, how heartily ashamed would we be for our uncivil and unbecoming behaviour towards him, though occasioned by our ignorance of him. Truly thus it is here. So long as faith's eye hath a mist before it, or is unactive and as it were asleep in the dull habit, the Christian may sit very nigh Christ in an ordinance, in a providence, and be very little affected with him, and drawn out in loves to him. But when faith is awake to see him as he passeth by in his love and loveliness, and active to make report to the soul of the sweet excellencies it sees in Christ, as also of his dear bleeding love to his soul, the Christian's love now cannot choose but spring and leap in his bosom at the voice of faith, as the babe did in Elizabeth's womb at the salutation of her cousin Mary.

Second. As faith sets the other graces on work by actuating their objects, about which they are conversant, so it helps them all to work, by fetching strength from Christ to act and reinforce them. Faith is not only the instrument to receive the righteousness of Christ for our justification, but it is also the great instrument to receive grace from Christ for our sanctification. 'Of his fulness...we receive grace for grace,' John 1:16. But how do we receive it? Even by faith. Faith unites the soul to Christ; and as by a pipe laid close to the mouth of a fountain water is carried to our houses for the supply of the whole family, so by faith is derived to the soul supply in abundance for the particular offices of all the several graces. He that believes, 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' John 7:38. That is, he that hath faith, and is careful to live in the exercise of it, shall have a flow and an increase of all other graces, called here 'living waters.' Hence it is that the saints, when they would advance to a high pitch in other graces, pray for the increase of their faith. Our Saviour, Luke 17:3, 4, sets his apostles a very hard lesson when he would wind up their love to such a high pitch as to forgive their offending brother 'seven times' in a day. Now mark, ver. 5--'The apostles,' apprehending the difficulty of the duty, 'said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.' But why did they rather not say, 'Increase our love,' seeing that was the grace they were to exercise in

forgiving their brother? Surely it was not because love hath its increase from faith. If they could get more faith on Christ, they might be sure they should have more love to their brother also. The more strongly they could believe on Christ for the pardon of their own sins, not 'seven,' but 'seventy times' in a day committed against God, the more easy it would be to forgive their brother offending themselves seven times a day. This interpretation, our Saviour's reply to their prayer for faith favours, ver. 6 --'And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.' Where Christ shows the efficacy of justifying faith by the power of a faith of miracles. As if he had said, 'You have hit on the right way to get a forgiving spirit; it is faith indeed that would enable you to conquer the unmercifulness of your hearts. Though it were as deeply rooted in you as this sycamore-tree is in the ground, yet by faith you should be able to pluck it up.' When we would have the whole tree fruitful, we think we do enough to water the root, knowing what the root sucks from the earth it will soon disperse into the branches. Thus that sap and fatness, faith, which is the radical grace, draws from Christ, will be quickly diffused through the branches of the other graces, and tasted in the pleasantness of their fruit.

Third. Faith defends the Christian in the exercise of all his graces. 'By faith we stand,' Rom. 11:20. As a soldier under the protection of his shield stands his ground and does his duty, notwithstanding all the shot that are made against him to drive him back. When faith fails, then every grace is put to the run and rout. Abraham's simplicity and sincerity, how was it put to disorder when he dissembled with Abimelech concerning his wife? and why, but because his faith failed him. Job's patience received a wound when his hand grew weary, and his shield of faith, which should have covered him, hung down. Indeed, no grace is safe if from under the wing of faith. Therefore, to secure Peter from falling from all grace, Christ tells him, 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,' Luke 22:32. This was the reserve that Christ took care should be kept to recover his other graces when foiled by the enemy, and to bring him off that encounter wherein he was so badly bruised and broken. It is said that Christ could not do many mighty things in his own country 'because of their unbelief,' Matt. 13:58. Neither can Satan do any great hurt to the Christian so long as faith is upon the place. It is true he aims to fight faith above all, as that which keeps him from coming at the rest, but he is not able long to stand before it. Let a saint be never so humble, patient, devout, alas! Satan will easily pick some hole or other in these graces, and break in upon him when he stands in the best array, if faith be not in the field to cover these. This is the grace that makes him face about and take him to his heels, I Peter 5:9.

Fourth. Faith alone procures acceptance with God for all the other graces and their works. 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice,' Heb. 11:4. When a Christian hath wrought hardest in a day, and hath spun the finest, evenest, thread of obedience at the wheel of duty, he is afraid to carry home his work at night with an expectation of any acceptance at God's hands for his work's sake. No, it is faith he makes use of to present it through Christ to God for acceptance. We are said, I Peter 2:5, 'To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;' That is, by faith in Christ, for without faith Christ makes none of our sacrifices acceptable. God takes nothing kindly but what the hand of faith presents. And so prevalent is faith with God, that he will take light gold--broken services--at her hand; which, were they to come alone, would be rejected with indignation. As a favourite that hath the ear of his prince, finds it easy to get his poor kindred entertained at court also (so Joseph brought his brethren into Pharaoh's presence with great demonstrations of favour shown them by him for his sake; and Esther wound Mordecai into a high preferment in Ahasuerus' court, who upon his own credit could get no farther than to sit at the gate), thus faith brings those works and duties into God's presence, which else were sure to be shut out, and, pleading the righteousness of Christ, procures them to be received into such high favour

with God, that they become his delight, Prov. 15:8, and as a pleasant perfume in his nostrils, Mal. 3:4.

Fifth. Faith brings succours when other graces fail. Two ways the Christian's graces may fail--in their activity, or in their evidence.

1. In their activity, it is low water sometimes with the Christian. He cannot act so freely and vigorously then as at another time when the tide runs high, through divine assistances that flow in again upon him. Those temptations which he could at one time snap asunder as easily as Samson did his cords of flax, at another time he is sadly hampered with that he cannot shake them off. Those duties which he performs with delight and joy, when his grace is in a healthful plight; at another time he pants and blows at, as much as a sick man doth to go up a hill--so heavily doth he find them come off. Were not the Christian, think you, ill now on it, if he had no comings in but from his own shop of duty? Here now is the excellency of faith; it succours the Christian in this his bankrupt condition. As Joseph got over his brethren to him, and nourished them out of his granaries all the time of famine, so doth faith the Christian in his penury of grace and duty. And this it doth in two ways.

(1.) By laying claim to the fulness of that grace which is in Christ as its own. Why art thou dejected, O my soul, saith the Christian's faith, for thy weak grace? There is enough in Christ, all fulness dwells in him, it pleased the Father it should be so, and that to pleasure thee in thy wants and weaknesses. It is a ministerial fulness; as the clouds carry rain not for themselves but the earth, so doth Christ his fulness of grace for thee. 'He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,' I Cor. 1:30. When the rags of the Christian's own righteousness discourage and shame him, faith hath a robe to put on that covers all this uncomeliness. 'Christ is my righteousness,' saith faith, and 'in Him' we are 'complete,' Col. 2:10. Faith hath two hands, a working hand a receiving hand; and the receiving hand relieves the working hand, or else there would be a poor house kept in the Christian's bosom. We find Paul himself but in a starving condition, for all the comfort his own graces could with their earnings afford him. He is a wretched man in his own account, if these be all he hath to live upon, Rom. 7:24; yet even then, when he sees nothing in his own cupboard, his faith puts forth his receiving hand to Christ, and he is presently set at a rich feast, for which you find him giving thanks, ver. 25, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

(2.) Faith succours the Christian in the weakness and inactivity of his graces, by applying the promises for the saints' perseverance in grace. It brings great comfort to a sick man, though very weak at present, to hear his physician tell him, that though he is low and feeble, yet there is no fear he will die. The present weakness of grace is sad, but the fear of falling quite away is far sadder. Now faith, and only faith, can be the messenger to bring the good news to the soul, that it shall persevere. Sense and reason are quite posed and dunced here. It seems impossible to them, that such a bruised reed should bear up against all the counterblasts of hell, because they consider only what grace itself can do, and finding it so over-matched by the power and policy of Satan, think

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