

SEARCHING OUR HEARTS IN PERILOUS TIMES

by John Owen

Brief discourses by Owen delivered at church meetings for devotion and Christian conference, dealing with cases of conscience and questions of religious experience. He addresses how believers should examine their hearts in difficult times, the importance of maintaining communion with Christ as the spring of spiritual life, and the dangers of formalism in religion.

20 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.1. Searching Our Hearts in Perilous Times
2. 01. PREFATORY NOTE
3. 02. DISCOURSE I
4. 03. DISCOURSE II
5. 04. DISCOURSE III
6. 05. DISCOURSE IV
7. 06. DISCOURSE V
8. 07. DISCOURSE VI
9. 08. DISCOURSE VII
10. 09. DISCOURSE VIII
11. 10. DISCOURSE IX
12. 11. DISCOURSE X
13. 12. DISCOURSE XI
14. 13. DISCOURSE XII
15. 14. DISCOURSE XIII
16. 15. DISCOURSE XIV
17. 16. THE USE AND ADVANTAGE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF PUBLIC CALAMITY
18. 17. THE USE OF FAITH UNDER REPROACHES AND PERSECUTIONS
19. 18. THE USE OF FAITH, IF POPYRY SHOULD RETURN UPON US
20. 19. THE USE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF GENERAL DECLENSION IN RELIGION

00.1. Searching Our Hearts in Perilous Times

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01. PREFATORY NOTE

PREFATORY NOTE

THESE brief Discourses are included in the folio edition of Owen's Sermons, published in 1721, and are there, for obvious reasons, made to occupy a place by themselves. They were delivered at church meetings for the purposes of devotion and conference among Christian brethren (see p. 403); and they relate to a particular department of Christian ethics. CASUISTRY—the science and doctrine of conscience—is designed, as the name denotes, to resolve cases of doubt and uncertainty in regard to points of subjective morality. As a branch of theological inquiry and discussion, it has in a great measure fallen into disrepute. It came to be regarded with suspicion and odium from the use made of it by the Jesuits in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who converted it into an engine of successful villany. It was denounced as "the art of quibbling with God;" and it was partly the casuistical system of the Jesuits against which Pascal, in his "Provincial Letters," launched with scathing effect the bolts of his brilliant sarcasm. But this science was for a time in great favour with the divines of the Reformation also; though studied and taught by them on different principles, and assuredly for very different ends. Mayer, a German theologian of the Lutheran Church (1650–1712), in his "Bibliotheca Biblica," has a list of the authors on Casuistry under three divisions, comprehending the Calvinistic, Lutheran, and Romish Churches. The science was at one time extensively cultivated in England, and by divines of eminent reputation. Sanderson, bishop of Lincoln after the Restoration, has two works on it,—"*Casus Conscientiæ*," and *De Obligatione Conscientiæ Prælectiones*." The "*Ductor Dubitantium*" of Jeremy Taylor is widely known as one of the most learned and important works on this subject. Baxter's "*Christian Directory*" deserves also to be mentioned. Pike and Hayward's "*Cases of Conscience*" is a work that has been extensively circulated. There is a quarto volume in Latin entitled "*Therapeutica Sacra*," in which cases of conscience are discussed, by David Dickson, a Scotch divine, who, about 1650, was translated from the professorship of divinity in the University of Glasgow to the same chair in the University of Edinburgh. Four volumes of "*The Morning Exercises*" are occupied with the discussion and resolution of cases of conscience.

Casuistry is liable to abuse, and has often been abused. It tends to foster a morbid subjectivity, and to enervate principle. Every Christian pastor, however, in the course of his official duties, must sometimes be called to resolve the doubts and scruples which are apt to embarrass the tender conscience. As handled by the divines to whom we have last referred, it really embraces all questions of Christian obligation and practice; and on some points their discussions are among the best treatises on practical religion in the language. Nor can the divine entirely overlook casuistry, even in the strict sense of the term, seeing the apostle Paul was very careful to direct and enlighten the consciences of Christians in his day, who scrupled to eat "things offered in sacrifice unto idols."

It would be matter of regret, if the prejudice now entertained against a field of theological discussion cultivated to such an extent by divines of former generations, should prevent any

reader from perusing the Discourses of our author which follow. Owen's was not the mind on any subject to be lost in obscure mysticism and refined subtilities, and to disport itself in a species of moral gymnastics, from which no overt and positive advantage could accrue to himself or to his hearers. These Discourses deal with momentous questions of religious experience, and are replete with suggestions and advices, which will be prized in proportion as the religion of the heart prevails, and so long as Christianity is not buried in formalism. The spirit which pervades all these brief but important Discourses, may be gathered from a weighty observation in one of them: "Suppose we should resolve with great earnestness, diligence, watchfulness, to abide in duties, in inward duties, to watch over our hearts,—which is required of us; yet if in our so doing we are taken off thereby from frequent actings of faith upon Christ, as the spring of our life, we shall decay, under all our endeavours, watchfulness, and multiplication of duties."—ED.

02. DISCOURSE I

DISCOURSE I

QUESTION. What conviction of a state of sin, and of the guilt of sin, is necessary to cause a soul sincerely to look after Christ?

ANSWER. There is one thing only that I shall at present speak to, and that is this: What is the lowest condition that hath the nature of conviction in sincerity, so as that souls may not be discouraged from closing with Christ because they have had no greater convictions of sin? And I shall speak to it on this account,—because, although the things that have already been spoken by others are true, and such as those who have spoken them have found to be true by the word and their own experience; yet, it may be, others have not come up in their experience unto such a distinct observation of the work of conviction as hath been laid down, [so] that they may be discouraged. For, seeing conviction is so indispensably necessary, some may say, "It hath not been thus and thus with me,—according as hath been declared." Therefore, I would only show what I judge to be so necessary, as that without it a soul cannot be supposed sincerely to have closed with Christ. And we having all made our profession of choosing and closing with Christ, as I would be loath to say any thing that might discourage any, lest they should have failed in the very necessary work of conviction; so I would not betray the truth of God, nor the souls of any.

Therefore, I shall place it upon this: What Jesus Christ doth indispensably call men unto, in order to believing in him, that is indispensably required of them. And this I shall manifest out of two or three places of Scripture:—Mark 2:17, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Now, this calling them unto repentance, is a calling them unto it by the faith which is in him. The apostle saith, 1 Timothy 1:15, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." What kind of sinners doth Christ call? Whom he calls to repentance, he calls to faith; and whom he calls to faith, that they may truly believe, they are sinners—opposed unto them that are righteous: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The righteous!" who are those righteous? The Scriptures tell us of these very men, that there were two sorts of them: First, Such as trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised other men. As long as a man trusteth in himself that he is righteous, Christ doth not call that man to believe. So long as a man is persuaded that his condition is good enough, he shall do well enough, that man hath no warrant to believe. Another description of these very persons, though upon another occasion, is given by the apostle Paul, Romans 10:3, where he says, they were ignorant of the righteousness of God, and went about to establish their own righteousness. Though they did not come to trust in themselves for righteousness, yet sought righteousness as it were by the works of the law, and went about to establish their own righteousness;—Jesus Christ doth not call these men to believe: these righteous persons have no ground for believing. What is the conclusion? "Lost sinners," saith Christ, "this is that I require of you." So that this is what I assert to be indispensably necessary,—namely, that they are so far convinced that they are sinners as to state and course, that they are not righteous in themselves, and can have no

righteousness in themselves. I say, therefore, when a person is not really convinced that he is not righteous, he is not under the call of Jesus Christ; and if he doth believe this, he is under a sovereign dispensation, and let not such despond.

Another direction of Christ is, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," Matthew 9:12. There are, in my apprehension, two things in a sick person that have need of a physician: First, He hath an uneasiness. A man who is sick, though he would shift it, yet his uneasiness will cause him to send for a physician. Saith Christ, "I come to such persons who say they can find no rest nor ease in their present condition." It may be they have often tried this and that, and see all will not do,—they are sick still; conscience reflects, and their hearts are burdened, and they must have relief, or they shall not be free. Secondly, There is a fear that it will end in death. This puts the sick person upon sending for a physician. When the soul is made uneasy in its state and condition, can find no rest nor ease, it thinks, "If I abide here, I shall be lost for ever." This soul doth Christ call; this man will be at the charge of a physician, cost what it will.

There is another word of Christ [which] very remarkably speaks just to the same purpose, Matthew 11:28, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"—a soul finding itself under want, labouring after something whereby it may be accepted with God. I will not confine this to extraordinary instances, for sometimes he is found of them that sought him not; but the ordinary case of a labouring soul, before closing with Christ, is to abstain from sin, pray more or less, be found in duties, and under strong desires to be accepted with God. And what is the end of these labours and endeavours? They labour and are weary;—that is, they see their labour comes to no effect; they do not find rest, and peace, and acceptance with God. And here is the turning point; Isaiah 57:10, "Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope." When the soul hath laboured for acceptance with God, and comes to be weary, saith Christ, "Come unto me." "No," saith the light of nature, "come unto me; trust unto your own endeavours." Saith the soul, "I will try what it will do; I will not say, 'There is no hope.'" Saith another, "I will not say so; I will go unto Christ:"—this is he whom Christ calls.

Now, these things I do account indispensably necessary, antecedently to believing, as to the substance of them. And this, I hope, hath been found in all our souls. And if we have obtained so far, we need not then question whether our closing with Christ be sincere or not. This is all that I dare assert to be absolutely and indispensably necessary. Many pretend to believe, though they never were convinced thoroughly that they were not righteous,—never were sick in their lives,—never had fears that they should die. These are contrary to the express rule Christ hath given, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners;"—not those that say, "There is hope," but those that say, "There is no hope."

03. DISCOURSE II

DISCOURSE II

QUESTION. Seeing the act of closing with Christ is secret and hidden, and the special times and seasons of our conversion unto God are unknown unto most, what are most certain evidences and pledges that we have cordially and sincerely received Christ, and returned unto God!

ANSWER. I do acknowledge the inquiry is very large, and such as we may be straitened in, through the abundance of it. I shall only speak plainly some few things that to me are an evidence of a sincere closing with Christ, and receiving of Christ,—such as I know have been of use unto some.

First. When there is a permanency and abiding in the choice we have made of Christ, notwithstanding opposition against it that we shall be sure to meet withal. I do not speak to the nature of the choice, or the means of it,—how the mind is prepared for it; but I speak unto the poorest, the weakest of the flock, that may be inquiring whether they have made a sincere choice of Christ or not: I say, they may try it by the permanency and abiding in their choice against opposition. And there are two sorts of oppositions that will try us and shake us, as to our choice, as I have found it, if I have had any experience of these things.—1. Opposition from charges of the guilt of sin and the law. 2. Opposition from temptations unto sin:—

1. There will, even after sincere believing and closing with Christ, be many a heavy charge brought against a soul from the law, and the guilt of sin in the conscience. Now, in such a case, the inquiry is, What the soul abides by when it is shaken? Why, truly, if a man go only upon mere convictions, on such shaking impressions of the guilt of sin, he will be very ready and inclined in his own mind to tack about to some other relief. He puts out fair for his voyage,—the storm arises,—the ship will not carry him;—he must tack about for another harbour. I have known it so with some; and experienced, when the wind hath set very strong that way with myself,—when the guilt of sin hath been charged with all its circumstances,—the soul hath been very hardly able to keep its hold, yet notwithstanding resolved, "I will trust to Christ:" but it hath been tacking about to self again,—"I must remedy this,—have relief for this from myself; I cannot abide by it, and live wholly upon Christ; and when the storm is over, then I will out to sea again." I say, this is no good sign to me when things are so; but when a soul in all those charges that sometimes come upon it abides the issue,—"Here I will trust upon Christ, let the worst come upon me;"—this I call a permanency in our choice against opposition. I hope you have experience of it.

2. There must be a permanency in our choice of Christ against temptations unto sin, as well as against the charges from sin. Truly, the former—of abiding with Christ against the charges from sin—is our daily work: it is sometimes more high and pressing, but it is our daily work. But there are also temptations unto sin,—it may be to the neglect of our duty, or to a compliance in any evil way (which we are subject unto while in the body); and perhaps great sins. Here Joseph's reply, applied to Christ, is that which doth argue our choice of Christ to be sincere,—"How shall I do this

great wickedness, and sin against God?" When the soul can draw a prevailing argument from that, "How shall I do this, and relinquish my Lord Christ?"—"I will not do this against him whom I have chosen,"—this is a good argument, if frequently reiterated, that our choice of Christ is sincere.

Secondly. Growing up in a love unto the person of Christ is a great evidence to me of a sincere choice of Christ. It is a blessed field that is before me, but I shall but hint things unto you. When the soul hath received Christ, it cannot but study Christ; and though it is no argument against the sincerity of a man's faith and grace, that he doth principally regard the offices and graces of Christ, and the benefits we have by him, yet it is an argument against the thrift and growth of it: for a thriving faith and grace will come to respect principally the person of Christ. I mean this;—when the soul studies the person of Christ,—the glory of God in him,—of his natures, the union of them in one person,—of his love, condescension and grace; and the heart is drawn out to love him, and cry, "Doubtless I count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of Christ Jesus my Lord." "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand; he is altogether lovely." To see an excellency, a desirableness in the person of Christ, so as to grow in admiration and love of him, is to me an evidence that, when all fails besides, will greatly support the soul, and persuade it that its choice is true. Nay, it is one of the most spiritual evidences; for I much question whether an unregenerate man can love Christ for his own sake at all. But it is a good sign of growth, when our love to the person of Christ grows, when we meditate much upon it, and think much about it. I could show you wherein the beauty of Christ's person doth much consist; but I have not time now to do it.

Thirdly. Another evidence to me of the soul's having made a sincere choice of Christ is, when it continues to approve, judge well of, and every day more and more to see, the glory, the excellency, the holiness, the grace, which is in the way of salvation by Jesus Christ; approves of it as not only a necessary way,—a way it has betaken itself to, because it must unavoidably perish in any other way,—but when it approves of it to be a most excellent way, in pardoning sin freely through the atonement he hath made, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us,—while the righteousness, the holiness, and the grace of God in all this is glorified. Saith the soul, "What a blind, wretched creature was I, that I did not see an excellency in this way before! It is better than the way of the law and the old covenant. I approve of this way with all my heart. If all other ways were set before me, and made possible, I would choose this way, of going to God by Jesus Christ, as the best way,—that brings most glory to God and most satisfaction unto the creature, and is most suited to the desires of my heart. I would have no other way. 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' says Christ; and this I will abide by, whatsoever becomes of me," replies the soul; "though I should perish, I will abide by it, since God hath given me such a discovery of the glory of saving sinners by Christ, that is inferior to nothing but the glory of heaven. I see that glory to God in it,—that exaltation to Christ, whom I would love,—that honour to the Holy Spirit, and safety to my own soul,—that I will abide by it." A growing in the approbation of this way gives some assurance that we have made a true and sincere choice of Christ.

Give me leave to add this one thing more:—

Fourthly. That a delight in obedience unto God by Christ, in the ways of his own appointment, is a great evidence that we have chosen Christ, and he us;—chosen him as our king, prophet, and priest. The ways of the worship of God in his church and ordinances, are the ways and worship of

God in Christ, which he hath appointed. Take these things abstractedly and in themselves, and we should be apt to say of them, as was said of Christ, "There is no beauty in them, nor glory, that they should be desired." There is much more outward beauty and glory in other ways, that Christ hath not appointed. But if we love the ways Christ hath appointed, because he hath appointed them, then we choose those ways because we have chosen him to be our king; and that is it which gives them beauty and life. And when the ways of Christ's appointment grow heavy and burdensome to us, we are weary of them, and are willing to have our neck from under the yoke,—it is a sign we grow weary of him who is the author of them; and this is a great sign that we never made a right and sincere choice of him.

Many other things might be offered as evidences of sincere closing with Christ; but these are some which have been of use to me: and I hope they may be so unto some of you.

04. DISCOURSE III

DISCOURSE III QUESTION. What concern have we in the sins of the day wherein we live?

ANSWER. All sins may be referred to two heads:—First, Irreligion. Secondly, Immorality.

First. Irreligion; and that may be reduced to two heads,—atheism and false worship: you may add, also, particularly, the contempt of all instituted worship. It takes up much of the sins against the first table; however, at present I shall only speak of the first of them:— As to atheism, then, it may be no age can parallel that wherein we live, considering all the ways whereby the atheism of man's heart may discover itself. For, take it absolutely, and in the seat of it, it is found only in the heart of man; unless some one or other prodigious instance breaks out sometime, as we have had in our days: but otherwise, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The heart is the seat of atheism. But we consider the ways whereby this atheism may and doth manifest itself:—

(1.) By horrid, cursed, blasphemous swearing; which is a contempt of the name of God. And when did it ever more abound in this nation?

(2.) By reproaching of the Spirit of God. Perhaps this is the peculiar sin of the nation at this day; and that the like hath not been known or heard of in any nation under the sun.

(3.) By scoffing at all holy things;—at the Scriptures,—at every thing that carries a reverence and fear of God; so that a man who dares profess a fear of God in what he doth, makes himself a scorn.

(4.) Contempt of all God's providential warnings is another proof of atheism. Never had a nation more warnings from God's providence, nor ever were they more despised. These things, brethren, are not done in a corner; they are perpetrated in the face of the sun. The steam of them darkens the whole heaven, and they abound more and more every day.

Secondly. Shall we go to the other head,—namely, Immorality,—and see how it is there? It would be an endless thing, to go over the sins that reign among us: oppression, blood, uncleanness, sensuality, drunkenness,—all to the height, raging and reigning in the nation. I mention these things as a matter to be bewailed before the Lord by us this day; and we ought to be affected with the consideration of them.

Unto this great prevalency and predominancy of sin in the whole nation, there is added a strange and unspeakable security. The truth is, men were a little awakened one while in the nation. When the judgments of God—the pestilence, the fire, the sword, and, the year after, another warning from heaven—were upon us, then there was a little awakening, like a man out of a dead sleep, that lifts up his head, and rubs his eyes for a time. But I can say this, that it is now towards forty years since God enabled me to observe something in the world; and, to my knowledge, I never observed this nation in that state of security wherein it is at this day. For, even in former times, there were warnings continually that God had a controversy with the nation; and those that had any fear of God spake one to another about it; and we saw and found their warnings were not in

vain. But here is now a general security. Men complain of straits, want, poverty, and the like; but as to any thing wherein God hath to do with the world, either my observation doth greatly deceive me, or I never saw, I think, so general a security as at this day in this nation. And this security hath reached us all,—even the churches of God themselves.

These things are matter of fact. The whole question is, Whether we are greatly to be concerned in these things or not? "They are the sins of wicked men, and they are the sins of the persecutors of God's people, and the like; and what have we to do with them?" The psalmist of old said, that "rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because men did not keep the law of God." And you know that God doth set a special mark upon those, not that are free from the abominations of the age, but upon those that mourn for the abominations that are in the midst of us. It will not be enough for us, that we are free from those abominations, unless we are found to mourn for them. Brethren, our own hearts know we are guilty in this matter, and that we had need seek the face of God this day to give us a deeper sense of these things than we have obtained. The name of God is blasphemed, the Spirit of God reproached, a flood of iniquity spreads itself over the nation, the land of our nativity, over the inheritance of Christ, over a nation professing the reformed religion;—all things go backward,—every thing declines. Indeed, brethren, if you will not, I do acknowledge here before you, and to my own shame, I have great guilt upon me in this matter, that I have not been sensible of the abominations of the nation, so as to mourn for them and be humbled for them, as I ought to have been. And you will do well to search your hearts, and consider how it is with you;—whether indeed you have been affected with these things; or whether you have not thought all is well, while all hath been well with yourselves and families, and, it may be, with the church, that may have no trouble upon that account. The security that is upon the nation is dismal; and, I may say, I see no way or means whereby the nation should be freed from this security. The conduct of the ministry, which they are under generally, is not able to free them from this security; nor the dispensation of the word: [so] that it seems to be a security from God to lead on the nation to judgment; the means for the removal of it and the awakening of us being laid aside. And if it comes this way, or that way, any way, though we see not the morning of it, you will find yourselves concerned in it.—"Who may abide the day of his coming?"

We may do well, brethren, to consider the state of the church of God in the world, among ourselves, and our own condition. I need not tell you how it is in the world; but this I can say, that to my apprehensions, the interest of Christ and the gospel was never so fast going down in the world since it came into it, as at this day. I will give you my reason of what I say: When the gospel was first planted and brought into the world, the devil was not able to bring the church into its apostasy, under six, or seven, or eight hundred years, and that by degrees. Since the time of the Reformation, the church was progressive for about seventy years; it stood at a stay about the same proportion of time; and ever since, it hath been going backward, straitened in all places: the power of it decays, and the peace of it is taken away, and destruction everywhere seems to lie at the door. Many, indeed, are in great misery and distress: some I have heard of lately sold for slaves, for the testimony of their conscience. How is it with the church of Christ in this nation? Truly, some [are] in great poverty, in great affliction, in great distress; and I am afraid we and others have not hearts to relieve them, as we ought to do, in a due manner: however, let us help them with our prayers. And that which is worst of all, there seems to me, I must acknowledge it, to be a very great decay in all churches of Christ in the nation, especially among those of us who

have had most peace, most prosperity. That which we call zeal for God is almost quite lost among us. Some of us have almost forgot whether there be such a thing as the cause and interest of Christ in the world. We who have cried and prayed about it, and had it upon our hearts, have sat down in our narrow compass, and almost forgot there is such a thing as the interest of Christ in the world, so as to have an active zeal for the ordinances of God according to rule, as God requires of us. Our primitive love,—how is it decayed! Value of the ordinances of Christ, and the society of his people for edification,—how cold are we grown in these things! How little is the church society upon our hearts, which some of us remember when it was the very joy of our souls! Truly we have reason to lift up our cry to God, that he would return and visit the churches, and pour out a new, fresh, reviving spirit upon them, that we fall not under the power of these decays till we come to formality, and God withdraws himself from us, and leaves us; which he seems to be at the very point of doing.

Then, brethren, let us remember our own church; that God would in an especial manner revive the spirit of life, power, and holiness among us; that he would be pleased to help the officers of the church to discharge their duty, and not suffer them to fall under any decay of grace or gifts, unfitting of them to the discharge of their office to the edification of the church; that he would give them also to beware and take heed of formality as to the exercise of gifts in their administration; and that he would take care of us, since we are apt to fall under these things. Let us pray that we may be acted by the Spirit of God, and enlivened by the grace of God, in all things we do. Have any of us any particular occasions in reference to temptations, trials, and troubles?—we may bear it upon our hearts to the Lord this day. This is much better than by multiplying a company of formal bills. The Lord help us to know the plague of our own hearts, and to be enabled to plead with the Lord, upon this opportunity, for grace and mercy to help us in every time of need!

05. DISCOURSE IV

DISCOURSE IV QUESTION. How may we recover from a decay of the principle of grace?

ANSWER. We have been speaking concerning the decay of the principle of grace; and I will now offer you some few thoughts that may be applied unto our recovery from the decay of this principle. In doing which, I shall tell you no more than I think I have found myself.

If we would recover spiritual life, we must come as near as we can unto, and abide as much as we are able at, the well-head of life. Christ is the spring of our spiritual life; he is every way our life. It is in a derivation of life from Christ, and in conformity to him, that we must look for our spiritual life.

Before I mention how we should approach unto and lie at this well-head of life, let me observe to you this one thing,—that when there is a general contagious disease (the plague, or the like), every man will look to his health and safety with reference to other occasions, but will be most careful in regard to the general contagion. Now, if forsaking this spring of life be the plague of the age, and the plague of the place where we live, and the plague of Christians, we ought to be very careful lest this general contagion should reach us, more or less, one way or other. It is evident to me,—who have some advantage to consider things, as much as ordinary men,—that the apostasy, the cursed apostasy, that spreads itself over this nation, and whose fruits are in all ungodliness and uncleanness, consists in an apostasy from and forsaking the person of Christ. Some write of how little use the person of Christ is in religion;—none, but to declare the doctrine of the gospel to us. Consider the preaching and talk of men. You have much preaching and discourse about virtue and vice; so it was among the philosophers of old: but Jesus Christ is laid aside, quite as a thing forgotten; as if he was of no use, no consideration, in religion; as if men knew not at all how to make any use of him, as to living to God. This being the general plague, as is evident, of the apostasy of the day wherein we live, if we are wise, we shall consider very carefully whether we ourselves are not influenced more or less with it; as where there is a general temptation, it doth more or less try all men, the best of believers, and prevail more or less upon their spirits. I am afraid we have not, some of us, that love for Christ, that delight in him, nor do make that constant abode with him, as we have done. We have very much lost out of our faith and our affections him who is the life and centre, the glory and the power, of all spiritual life, and of all we have to do with God,—Jesus Christ himself. I brought it in only to let us know, that if we would revive our spiritual life (and, believe it, if any of us are not concerned in our spiritual decays, these are sapless things, and will be heard with as much weariness as spoken), we are to abide more at the well-head of life. It is the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ, "Abide in me: unless ye abide in me, ye can bring forth no fruit. And every such branch shall be so and so purged." But you will say, "How shall we do so? how shall we abide, more than we have done, at this well-head of life?"

1. We are to abide at the well-head of life by a frequency of the acts of faith upon the person of Christ. Faith is that grace, not only whereby we are implanted into Christ, but whereby we also abide in him. If so, methinks the frequent actings of faith upon the person of Christ are a drawing near to the well-head of life. And though we are to put forth the vigour, the earnestness, the

watchfulness of our hearts unto obedience; yet a ceasing to continue in the acting of faith upon the person of Christ, even under the vigour of our own endeavours by those general, outward desires of walking with God and living to him, will weaken us, and we shall find ourselves losers by it. Do you all understand me? I am not teaching the wise and more knowing of the flock; I would speak unto the meanest. I say, suppose we should resolve with great earnestness, diligence, watchfulness, to abide in duties, in inward duties, to watch over our hearts, which is required of us; yet, if in our so doing we are taken off thereby from frequent actings of faith upon Christ, as the spring of our life, we shall decay under all our endeavours, watchfulness, and multiplication of duties. Wherefore, my brethren, let me give you this advice,—that you would night and day, upon your beds, in your ways, upon all occasions, have the exercise of faith upon the person of Christ; faith working by a view of him as represented in the gospel, by trust in him, and by invocation of him,—that he may be continually nigh unto you. And you cannot have him nigh unto you, unless you make yourselves, by these actings of faith, through his grace, continually nigh unto him: so you will abide at the well-head.

I could show you those excellent advantages that we should have by continually being near to Christ, who is the overflowing spring of grace, and from whence it will issue out to us, if we abide with him, be nigh to him, and keep up to this well-head

2. Abide with him in love. Oh, the warm affections for Christ which some of you can witness concerning yourselves,—that your hearts have been filled withal towards Christ, when you have been under his call to believe on him! And it is a marvellous way of abiding with Christ, to abide with him by love; which is called "cleaving to God and Christ:" it is the affection of adhesion, and gives a sense of union.

"How, then, shall we get our hearts to abide with Christ by love?" This is a subject that if I were to preach upon, how many things would presently offer themselves to us, from the excellency of his person, from the excellency of his love, from our necessity of him, the advantages and benefits we have by him, and his kindness towards us! All these things, and many more, would quickly present themselves unto us. But I will name but one thing, and I name it the rather, because I heard it mentioned in prayer since I came in: Labour to have your hearts filled with a love to Jesus Christ, as there is in him made a representation of all divine excellencies. This was God's glorious design. It is not to be separated from his design of glorifying himself in the work of redemption; for a great part of God's glorious design in the incarnation of Christ, was in him to represent himself unto us, "who is the image of the invisible God, the express image of his person." Now, if you do but consider Christ as God is gloriously represented unto you in him, you will find him the most proper object for divine love,—for that love which is wrought in your hearts by the Holy Ghost,—for that love that hath sweetness, complacency, satisfaction in it. Then, let us remember that we exercise our minds to consider Christ, as all the lovely properties of the divine nature and counsels of his will, as to love and grace, are manifested by Christ.

If we would abide at the well-head of life, we must abide in these things; and let love be excited to Christ under this especial consideration,—as he who represents the supreme object of your love, God himself, in all the glorious properties of his nature.

3. Add meditation hereunto; study Christ more, and all the things of Christ; delight more in the hearing and preaching of Christ. He is our best friend; let not the difficulties of the mystery of his

person and grace deter you. There are wonderful things of the counsels of heaven, and of the glory of the holy God, in the person of Christ as the head of the church; if you would be found inquiring into them, an unsearchable treasure of divine wisdom, grace, and love is laid up in Christ: therefore meditate upon them more. Let me assure you this will prove the best expedient for the recovery of our spiritual life. And I will abide by this doctrine to eternity, that without it we shall never recover spiritual life to the glory of God in Christ.

4. And then, brethren, seeing we have, in the next place, felt decays in the midst of the performance of multiplied duties, labour to bring spirituality into your duties.

"What is that," you will say, "and wherein doth it consist?"

It is the due exercise of every grace that is required to the discharge of that duty. Let every such grace be in its due exercise, and that is to be spiritual in duty. As, for instance, would a man be spiritual in all his prayers?—let him, then, consider what grace and what exercise of grace is required to this duty. A due fear and reverence of the name of God; faith, love, and delight in him; an humble sense of his own wants, earnest desires of supply, dependence upon God for guidance, and the like;—we all know that these are the graces required to the discharge of this duty of praying by the Holy Ghost. And let these graces be in a due exercise, and then you are spiritual in this duty. Is the duty charity,—giving a supply to the poor? There is to be a ready mind, a compassionateness of heart, and obedience unto the command of Christ in that particular. These are the graces required to the discharge of that duty, and to watch against the contrary vices. So that if we would bring spirituality into duty, it is to exercise the graces that are required by the rule to the performance of that duty.

I shall only farther give you this one caution,—have a care that your head in notion and your tongue in talk do not too fast empty your hearts of truth. We are apt to lay it up in our heads by notions, and bring it forth in talk, and not let it be in our hearts; and this weakens spiritual life greatly. Ye hear the word preached; and it is of great concernment what account we shall give of the word that hath been preached unto you: for we that preach must give an account of our preaching, and so must you of what you hear; and many a good word is spoken, truly, and yet we see but little fruit of it. And the reason of this is, that some, when they hear it, take no farther regard of it, but "let it slip," as the apostle speaks, Hebrews 2:1. And if we complain of the treacherousness of our memories,—it is the most harmless way of the slipping out of the word. It is not the treachery of our memories, but of our hearts and affections, that makes the heart like a broken vessel,—that makes all the rents in it where the water runs out, as the comparison is. The word slips out by putting your affections into carnal exercise; and it quickly finds its way to depart from the heart that gives it no better entertainment. We talk away a sermon and the sense of it; which robs us both of the sermon and the fruit of it. A man hears a good word of truth, and, instead of taking the power of it into his heart, he takes the notion of it into his mind, and is satisfied therewith. But this is not the way to thrive. God grant that we may never preach to you any thing but what we may labour to have an experience of the power of it in our own hearts, and to profit ourselves by the word wherewith we design to profit others! And I pray God grant that you also may have some profit by the word dispensed to you,—that it slip not out through carnal affections, and be not drawn out through notions and talk, with a regardlessness to treasure it up in your hearts!

These things we are diligently to attend unto, if we would recover our spiritual losses that we are complaining of, and that not without just cause.

06. DISCOURSE V

DISCOURSE V

QUESTION. It was queried by some, how we may make our application unto Christ; not in general, but under what notion and apprehension of the person of Christ?

ANSWER. Because some seem to apprehend there might be danger in terminating our worship upon the nature of Christ as a creature, I shall give you my thoughts and directions in it. And,—

First. You must observe we are to have no conceptions, in our acting of any duty, towards Christ or about him, but with respect unto his person as he is God and man in one person. It is not lawful for us to have any apprehensions of Christ, to make any application to him, as man only; nor is it lawful for us to have any apprehensions of him as God only: but all our apprehensions of Christ, and all our addresses unto him, must be as God and man in one person. So he is, and so he will be to all eternity. The union is inseparable and indissoluble; and for any man to make his application unto Christ either as God or as man, is to set up a false Christ. Christ is God and man in one person, and no other. So, in all our actings of faith upon him, and applications unto him, we ought to consider him as he was "the seed of David," and as "God over all, blessed for ever," in one person. This makes the great idolatry among the Papists;—in the image of Christ they represent the human nature of Christ separated from his Deity; for they can make no representation of one that is God and man in one person: hereby they become guilty of double idolatry, referring the mind unto one that is a man, and no more,—and doing it by means of an image.

Secondly. The person of Christ is the immediate and proper object of all divine worship. The worship of Christ is commanded in the first commandment. By worship, I intend faith, love, trust, subjection of soul, invocation on the name of Christ,—every act of the soul and mind whereby we ascribe infinite divine excellencies unto God; which is the worship of the mind. See John 5:23. It is the will of God "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." How do we honour the Father? By divine faith, trust, love, and worship; making him our end and our reward. So the Son is to be honoured. And as to the divine person of the Son of God, being of the same nature, essence, and substance with the Father, there is no dispute of that among them by whom his Deity is acknowledged.

Thirdly. The divine person of the Son of God lost nothing of his glory and honour that was due unto him by the assumption of our human nature. Though thereby he became the Son of man as well as the Son of God,—a Lamb for sacrifice; yet he is still, in his whole and entire person, the object of all that worship I spake of before;—and the whole church of God agree together in giving that worship unto him, Revelation 5:8-9; Revelation 5:11-13, "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast

redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Jesus Christ is here distinguished from the Father. There is, "He that sitteth upon the throne," and "The Lamb;" and he is considered as incarnate,—as a Lamb slain: and yet there is all the glory, honour, praise, and worship, that is given to him that sitteth upon the throne, the Father, given to Jesus Christ, God and man, the Lamb slain, who hath redeemed us with his blood.

Fourthly. This person of Christ, God-man, must not be so much as severed by any conception of the mind. For distinction, as God and man, he may be considered two ways; either absolutely in himself, or in the discharge of his mediatory office. And this double consideration produceth a double kind of worship to the person of Christ.

1. Consider Christ absolutely in his own person, as the Son of God incarnate; and so he is the immediate and ultimate object of our faith, prayer, and invocation. So that a man may lawfully, under the guidance and conduct of the Spirit of God, direct his prayer immediately to the person of Christ. You have the example of Stephen in his last prayer. "Lord Jesus," saith he, "receive my spirit." These were the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he died, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And Stephen, when he died, committed his spirit into the hands of Jesus Christ: "Lord Jesus," (for that is the name of the Son of God incarnate, "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins,") "receive my spirit." So that a person may make an immediate address in his prayers and supplications unto the person of Christ, as God and man. I look upon it as the highest act of faith that a believer is called unto in this world,—to resign a departing soul into his hands, letting go all present things and future hopes; to resign, I say, a departing soul quietly and peaceably into the hands of Christ. Now, this Stephen did with respect unto Jesus: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." There he left himself by faith. So we may apply ourselves unto him upon any other account, in the acting of faith, upon any other occasion.

2. Consider Christ in the discharge of his mediatory office. And under that formal consideration, as discharging his mediatory office, he is not the ultimate object of our faith and invocation; but we call upon God, even the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ. "We through Christ have believed in God," saith Peter in one of his epistles. And it implies a contradiction to have it otherwise: for the calling him Mediator, showeth he is a means between God and us; and so it is contradictory to say our faith is terminated on his mediatory office. This he calls asking the Father in his name: "You shall ask the Father in my name;" that is, expressly plead the intervention of the mediation of Christ. And so the apostle tells us, in that grand rubric and directory of church worship, Ephesians 2:18, "By whom we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The Father is proposed as the ultimate object of access in our worship; and the Spirit is the effecting cause, enabling us unto this worship; and the Son is the means whereby we approach unto God.

All that I shall add hereunto is this:—Seeing there is in Scripture a double worship of Christ that is immediate (for his person is considered absolutely, and as mediator between God and man), which of these ought we principally to apply ourselves unto?

I answer plainly,—

(1.) Our direction for solemn worship in the church generally respects Christ as mediator, in Scripture. The general worship that is to be performed unto God in the assemblies of the saints, doth look upon Christ as executing his mediatory office; and so our address is unto the throne of grace by him. By him we enter into the holy place,—through him and by him unto God. "I bow my knees unto (God) the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," Ephesians 3:14. God, considered as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the proper, ultimate object of the solemn worship of the church.

(2.) In treating and dealing about our own souls, under the conduct of the Spirit of God, it is lawful and expedient for us in our prayers and supplications to make addresses to the person of Christ; as Stephen did.

07. DISCOURSE VI

DISCOURSE VI

QUESTION. How may we make our addresses to Christ for the exercise of grace; that is, that we may have grace strengthened, and be ready for all exercise? or, How may we make application to Christ, that we may receive grace from him to recover from decays?

ANSWER. I think the direction given by our Saviour himself is so plain, and doth so fall in with our experience, that we need not look much farther. Saith he, "Unless ye abide in me, ye cannot bear fruit." The business we aim at is fruit-bearing; which consists as much in the internal, vigorous actings of grace, as in the performance of outward duties,—to be faithful in our minds and souls, as well as in our lives. "The way for that," saith our Saviour, "is, 'Abide in me.' " And unless we do so, he tells us plainly, do we whatever we will else, we "cannot bring forth fruit." So that the whole of our fruitfulness depends upon our abiding in Christ. There cannot, then, be much more said unto this business, but to inquire a little what it is to abide in Christ.

Certainly, it is not a mere not going off from Christ; as we say, a man abides when he doth not go away. For I hope that, under all the decays we have complained of, and want of fruitfulness, yet we have not left Christ, and gone away from him. "We have so far abode in him as the branch abideth in the root, from whence it hath its communication and supplies. Therefore there is something in particular included in this abiding in Christ, dwelling in Christ, and Christ dwelling in us. And there seems to be this in it,—that to abide in Christ, is to be always nigh unto Christ, in the spiritual company of Christ, and in communication with Christ. It doth not lie in a naked, essential act of believing, whereby we are implanted into Christ, and will not go from him; but there is something of an especial, spiritual activity of soul in this abiding in Christ: it is abiding with him, and in his presence. And as this abiding with Christ must be by some acts of our souls, let us consider what acts those are; which may give a little farther light into this matter. And, First, It must be, certainly, by some act of our minds. Secondly, By some act of our wills. Thirdly, By some act of our affections. And thus we abide with Christ; which is the way certainly to bring forth fruit.

First. There is an abiding with Christ in our minds. Now this, to me, is in contemplation and thoughts of him night and day,—"I sought him on my bed, in the night," saith the spouse;—to consider very much the person of Christ, to contemplate upon him as vested with his glorious office, and as intrusted and designed by the Father to this work. "We all," saith the apostle, "with open face beholding the glory of the Lord as in a glass, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord." My brethren, that which you and I are aiming at is, to be "changed into the same image;" that is, into the image and likeness of the glory of God in Christ. I dare boldly say, by those of us who have reason to have daily apprehensions of our going out of the world, and leaving this state of things, that we have no greater desire, nor is there any thing more frequent in our minds, than this, that we may be more and more changed into that image before we go out of this world; for we are looking after perfection in likeness to Christ. Therefore aged Christians especially will bear witness, that there is nothing now we long for more than to be

more and more changed into the image and likeness of Christ. How shall we get to this? Why, saith he, "The way is, by looking steadily upon Christ, as a man looks with an optic glass to an object at a great distance. We behold him," saith he, "by looking steadily upon Christ himself, and the glory of God in him." Now there is a wonderful large object for us to behold; for when you look upon the glory of God in Christ, you have what you please of Christ for the object of your eye and view;—the person of Christ, the office of Christ, the merit of Christ, the example of Christ, the death of Christ, and what you will, so you be much intent in your thoughts and minds, much in immediate contemplation about Christ. I do not know how you find it, brethren; but it is the advice I would give you who are aged Christians, and not likely to continue long in this world, to exercise yourselves in immediate contemplations upon Christ. All the teachings you have had from ministers, the principal end of them has been to enable you to this; and really, if I know any thing, we shall find them accompanied with a sweet transforming power, beyond what we have had experience of in other ways and duties. "We shall be changed into the same likeness."

Well, then, we abide with Christ in the acts of our mind, by immediate thoughtfulness and contemplation upon Christ in the night, and upon our beds, and in our walkings, and by the wayside, and in times we set apart for meditation. We are greatly to labour after an intuitive view of Christ; that is, a direct view in the contemplation of Christ.

Secondly. If you will abide with Christ, there must be an acting of your will in it also; and that is, in great diligence and carefulness about that obedience which Christ doth require, in all the instances of it. This is a great way of abiding with Christ, when we labour to have our wills in a readiness unto all the instances of obedience that Christ requireth at our hands. Let that be the question, whether it be the will of God that we should do thus, or not? And if it be so, pray let us be ready to show we do abide with Christ, by yielding cheerful and willing obedience to him in this instance and duty which he calleth us unto; and so in all other things. I would have every one of us think often of this matter,—what it is Christ requires of me personally, in a way of duty and obedience. And I would have us labour to have in great readiness all things which Christ requires of us. And especially, brethren, I would have this in a readiness, that Christ requires of me to walk very circumspectly and carefully,—to keep myself from spots and pollution, and defilements, by converse in the world. This Christ requires at all times, in all instances, and upon all occasions. What have we been preaching? what have former teachers been instructing us in? All that you are taught is, that you should come to the knowledge of all instances of duty, and the way of them, which Christ requires at your hands. And "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." This is your fruit-bearing,—a direct contemplation upon Christ; wherein I would beg that both you and my own soul might be found more to abound, while we are in this world (and you will find Christ, in the discharge of this duty, will make very near approaches and frequent visits to your hearts,—more in the discharge of this duty than of any other); and to have our hearts in a readiness to comply with every instance of obedience Christ requires at our hands.

Thirdly. There is an abiding with Christ in point of affection. There may be love and delight in all these things; if there be not, very spiritual contemplations will be a bar. There is no duty that is required of any man in this world so spiritual, so heavenly, so evangelical, but, through want of love and delight, a man may be slothful in performing of it. I may tie myself to do so this hour or that hour, and have no benefit to my own soul, nor give any glory unto God, if there be not love and delight in it. They will sweeten the duty, and refresh the heart of God and man, Christ and us.

So labour, brethren, and pray greatly for it, that you may abide with Christ with delight, that you may find a sweetness and refreshment in it, and that every season of retiring unto Christ may bring a kind of spiritual joy and gladness to your hearts. Now you have a great opportunity, having shaken off the occasions of life and other concernments, to dwell with Christ;—now it is a good time.

08. DISCOURSE VII

DISCOURSE VII

QUESTION. When our own faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers—when we ourselves are hindered within ourselves from believing the answer of our prayers, have no ground to expect we should be heard, or no ground to believe we are heard—what are those things that greatly weaken our faith as to the answer of our prayers; that though we continue to pray, yet our faith is weakened as to the hearing of our prayers? and what are the grounds that weaken men's faith in such a state?

ANSWER. If our hearts are not duly prepared to the consideration of the great and glorious properties, presence, and holiness of God, and duly affected with them in our preparation for prayer, it is certain we can have no faith for the hearing of our prayers.

It is also of great importance that we consider aright in what state the things we seek for are promised;—whether temporal things, that are left to God; or spiritual, that lie under a promise, and so we may press God immediately about them.

There are two things that are certainly great weakeners of our faith as to God's hearing our prayers:—

First. The one is, that intermixture of self which is apt to creep into our prayers, in public especially, in the congregation and assemblies. Self-reputation in the exercise of gifts, or whatever it be, weakens our faith as to the expectation of God's hearing our prayers.

Secondly. The other is, that we pray with earnestness and fervency, with noise and clamour of speech, but do not industriously pursue the things we pray for. Unless we watch and follow after these things, we shall not have ground of faith for the hearing of our prayers;—as, for instance, when the soul is burdened with a corruption, there is nothing we are more fervent in prayer unto God against; yet, when we have done this, we take no more care to get it mortified. Where is our faith that our prayers may be heard in this thing? We must pursue our prayers, or it will weaken our faith as to the hearing of them. We all pray; but do we believe that God will hear and answer our prayers?

I shall not speak unto the nature of that faith we exercise, or what assurance we may have of God's hearing our prayers; but I will tell you plainly what hinders in us the answer of our prayers:—

1. We are not clear that our persons are accepted. God had respect unto Abel and his offering, and not unto Cain and his offering. We can have no more faith that our prayers are heard than we have faith that our persons are accepted. How many of us are dubious, and know not whether we believe or no! or are the children of God or no! According as our faith is as to the acceptance of our persons, so, ordinarily, our faith will be as to the hearing of our prayers. I do acknowledge that sometimes, under extraordinary darkness or temptation, whilst a person doth not at all know nor hath any assurance what is his own condition,—whether approved or rejected of God,—yet the

Holy Spirit of God many times gives assurance of the hearing of that prayer which is poured out in the anguish of the soul. But let us bring things unto a good issue between God and our souls, and not complain that our prayers are not heard, when we are negligent to come unto the assurance of faith about the acceptance of our persons. We have had many days of prayer, and have not seen that return of our prayer that we designed. This evil lies at the bottom,—that we have been dubious as to our state of acceptance with God. Let us labour to amend it.

2. Another thing is this,—pray while you will, you will not believe your prayers are answered if you indulge any private lust, or do not vigorously endeavour the mortification of it, according to what the Scripture and duty require. If any lust ariseth in the soul, and we do not immediately engage to mortify it, as God requires, it will break out, and weaken our faith in all our prayers. Therefore, if you will be helped to believe the answer of your prayers, labour to search your hearts. Do not think that no corruption you indulged but such as break out into open sin. It may be you do not know the corruption is indulge; labour, therefore, to find it out, and you will find how your faith is weakened thereby.

3. Again; want of having treasured up former experiences of the hearing of prayer. We have not provided as we ought in this matter. If we had laid up manifold experiences of God's having heard our prayers, it would strengthen our faith that God doth hear them. It may be some have prayed all their days; God hath kept their souls alive, that they have not wickedly departed from God, and they have obtained particular mercies;—why, such ought to keep a constant record of God's hearing their prayers. Every discovery made of Christ that draws our souls more to love him, and engageth us to cleave unto him, is our experience of God's hearing our prayers.

4. I might add, when we ourselves are not sensible that we arise unto that fervency of prayer that is required of them that believe. If we pray in the congregation, in our closets, or families, and when we have done, are not sensible that we have risen up unto that fervency that is required, we cannot believe our prayers are answered.

It is the duty of all men to pray unto the Lord; but it is incumbent on none more than those who have really and sincerely given up themselves unto God, and yet in truth have no comfortable persuasion concerning their condition. That is a state wherein I am so far from discouraging prayer, that it is your season for prayer in the whole course of your lives. When Paul was first called, before such time as he had evidence of the pardon of his sins, it is said, "Behold, he prays." If they truly attend unto their state and condition, they may be sure to be the persons of whom also it will be said, "Behold, they pray." And even in these prayers they may exercise faith, when they have not faith to believe that their prayers are heard. But while in this condition, it will be hard to believe that their prayers are heard, when they cannot believe that their persons are accepted.

09. DISCOURSE VIII

DISCOURSE VIII QUESTION. When may any one sin, lust, or corruption, be esteemed habitually prevalent?

ANSWER. I shall premise some few things before I come to answer the question:—

First. All lusts and corruptions whatsoever have their root and residence in our nature,—the worst of them. For, saith the apostle James, chap. 1:14, "Every man is tempted of his own lust." Every man hath his own lust, and every man hath all lust in him; for this lust, or corruption, is the depravation of our nature, and it is in all men. And in the root and principle of it, it is in all men even after their conversion. So saith the apostle concerning believers, Galatians 5:17, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; so that ye" (believers) "cannot do the things that ye would." What doth the flesh lust unto? Why, it lusts unto the works of it. What are they? "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." The flesh lusteth unto all these things in believers,—the worst things that can be mentioned; whence is that [saying] of our Saviour, which yields to me a doctrine which is a sad truth, but so plain that nothing can be more. He foretells marvellous troubles, great desolations and destructions, that shall come upon the world, and befall all sorts of men, and says, "It is a day that 'as a snare shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.' " Nothing makes me more believe that day, that terrible day of the Lord, is coming upon the face of the whole earth, than this, that it comes "as a snare." "Men do not take notice of it; do you, therefore, take heed to yourselves, you that are my disciples: believers, 'take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you at unawares.' " The doctrine I observe from thence is this,—that the best of men have need to be warned to take care of the worst of sins in the approach of the worst of times. Who would think, when such troubles, distresses, desolations, were coming upon a nation, in that place the disciples of Christ should be in danger of being overtaken with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life? Yet he who is the wisdom of God, knew how it would be with us. Nay, what if a man should say, from observation, that professors are never more in danger of sensual, provoking sins, than when destruction is lying nearest at the door? "In that day," saith he, "take care."

Secondly. Another thing I would premise is this,—that this root of sin abiding in us, as I have showed, will, upon its advantage, work unto all sorts of evils;—which should give us a godly jealousy over our souls, and over one another. Saith the apostle, Romans 7:8, "Sin wrought in me all manner of concupiscence."

Thirdly. If it be so, that sin doth thus always abide in us, and will upon occasions work to all its fruit, to all manner of concupiscence, then the mortification of sin is a continual duty, that we ought to be exercised in all our days. Colossians 3:3, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." A blessed state and condition! I desire no better attainment in this world than this holds out. But what duty does the apostle infer from thence? "Therefore," saith he, "mortify your members which are

upon the earth." What, I pray? "Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." The mortification of sin is a duty incumbent upon the best of saints.

Fourthly. The fourth thing I would premise is this,—that a particular sin doth not obtain a signal prevalency without it hath some signal advantage; for our corrupt nature is universally and equally corrupt; but a particular sin obtains prevalency by particular advantages.

It would be too long to speak of all those advantages. I shall name two, whereunto others may be reduced:—

1. The inclination of constitution gives particular advantages unto particular sins. Some may be very much inclined to envy; some to wrath and passion; and others to sensual sins,—gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness,—to name the things which our Saviour names, and warns us of. It is with respect hereunto that David said he "would keep himself from his iniquity," as some think. I have only this to say,—that it hath been much from the fallacy of the devil that men have been apt to plead constitution and the inclination of their constitution to the extenuation of their sin; when, indeed, it is an aggravation. "I am apt to be passionate in my nature," saith one; "I am sanguine," saith another, "and love company." They make their natural inclinations to be a cover and excuse for their sin. But this I must say, as my judgment,—that if grace does not cure constitution-sins, it hath cured none; and that we can have no trial of the efficacy of grace, if we have it not in curing constitution-sins. The great promise is, that it shall change the nature of the wolf and the lion, of the bear, the asp, the cockatrice, and that they shall become as lambs; which it can never do, if it doth not change it by an habitual counterworking of inclinations arising from constitution. If grace, being habitual, doth not change the very inclination of constitution, I know not what it doth. That is the first advantage whereby particular sins come to have signal advantage and prevalency.

2. Outward occasions; and I refer them unto two heads:—

(1.) To education. Particular sins get advantage by education. If we do even in education instruct our children to pride, by their fineries and deportment to themselves,—if we teach them to be proud, we heap dry fuel upon them, till such time as lust will flame. Let us take heed of this. It is an easy thing to bring forth a proud generation by such means.

(2.) Society in the world, according to occasion of life, is that which inflames particular corruptions. According as men delight in their converse, so corruption will be provoked and heightened by it.

I have spoke all these things previously, to show you where lies the nature and principle of the danger we are going to inquire into, and how it comes to that condition.

Now, I shall inquire a little into the question itself,—how we may know whether a particular corruption be habitually predominant or no?

Brethren, I take it for granted the vilest of those lusts which our Saviour and his apostles warn us against, to mortify and crucify, may be working in the hearts and minds of the best of us; and that a particular lust may be habitually prevalent, where, for particular reasons, it never brings forth outward effects: therefore, look to yourselves. I say, then, when the mind and soul is frequently and greatly, as there are occasions, urged upon and pressed with a particular lust and corruption, this doth not prove that particular lust and corruption to be habitually prevalent; for it may be a

temptation. This may all proceed from the conjunction of temptation with indwelling sin; which will make it fight and war, and use force, and lead captive. But suppose a person be in that condition, how shall he know whether it be a temptation in conjunction with indwelling sin in general, or whether it be an habitual prevalency of a particular corruption?

I answer,—

I. It is not from the prevalency of corruption these three ways:—

1. If the soul be more grieved with it than defiled by it, it is a temptation, and not a lust habitually prevalent. In this case, when a heart is so solicited with any sin, sin and grace are both at work, and have their contrary aims. The aim of grace is to humble the soul; and the aim of sin, to defile it. And the soul is so far defiled as, by the deceitfulness and solicitations of sin, consent is obtained. Defilement ariseth not from temptation as active upon the mind, but from temptation as admitted with consent: so far as it consents, whether by surprisal or long solicitations, so far it is defiled. It is otherwise if the soul be more grieved with it than defiled by it.

2. It is so, when the soul can truly, and doth, look upon that particular corruption as its greatest and most mortal enemy. "It is not soldiers who have ruined my estate, nor a disease that hath taken away my health, nor enemies who have ruined my name or opposed me; but this corruption, which is my great and mortal enemy." When the soul is truly under this apprehension, then it is to be hoped it is the power of temptation, and not the prevalency of lust or corruption.

3. It is so, also, when a man maintains his warfare and his conflict with it constantly, especially in those two great duties of private prayer and meditation; which if once the soul be beat off from, it is driven out of the field, and sin is conqueror. But so long as a man maintains the conflict in the exercise of grace in those duties, I look upon it as a temptation, and not an habitual, prevalent lust.

II. I shall now proceed to show when a corruption is habitually prevalent. And here is a large field before me, but I shall only speak some few things:—

1. When a man doth choose, or willingly embrace, known occasions of his sin, that sin is habitually prevalent. There is no man that hath the common understanding of a Christian, and hath any corruption or lust working in him, but he knows what are the occasions that provoke it. No man, unless he is profligately wicked, can choose sin for sin's sake; but he who knows what are the occasions that stir up, excite, and draw forth, any particular corruption, and doth choose them, or willingly embrace them, there is the habitual prevalency of sin to a high degree in the mind of that man, whosoever he be: for sin is to be rejected in the occasion of it, or it will never be refused in the power of it.

2. Let a man fear it is so, when he finds arguments against it to lose their force. No man is under the power of particular corruption, but will have arguments suggested to his mind from fear, danger, shame, ruin, against continuing under that corruption. When a man begins to find these arguments abate in their force, and have not that prevalency upon his mind they have had, let him fear there is an habitual prevalency of his corruption.

3. When a man, upon conviction, is turned out of his course, but is not turned aside from his design,—when he traverseth his way like the wild ass, "In her occasion who shall turn her aside?"—if you meet her, or pursue her, you may turn her out of her way; but still she pursues her

design. Men meet with strong convictions of sin, strong rebukes and reproofs; this a little puts them out of their way, but not from their design or inclination; the bent of their spirit lies that way still; and the secret language of their heart is, "that it were free with me to be as in former days!" Certainly a corruption is habitually prevalent, if it seldom or never fails to act itself under opportunities and temptations. If a man who trades cheats every time lie is able to do so, he hath covetousness in his heart; or if a man whenever opportunity and occasion meet together to drink, doth it to excess,—this is a sign of an habitual corruption, if he be not able to hold out scarce at any time against a concurrence of temptation and opportunity.

4. When the soul, if it will examine itself, will find it is gone from under the conduct of renewing grace, and is, at the best, but under the evidence [influence?] of restraining grace. Believers are under the conduct of renewing grace; and I grant that sometimes, when, under the power of corruption and temptation, even they have broken the rule of renewing grace, God will keep them in order by restraining grace,—by fear of danger, shame, and infamy,—by outward considerations set home upon the mind by the Spirit of God, which keeps them off from sin: but this is but sometimes. But, if a man finds his heart wholly got from under the rule of renewing grace, and that he hath no leading or conduct but restraining grace, his sin hath got the perfect victory over him; that is, he would sin on to the end of his life, were it not for fear of shame, danger, death, and hell; he is no longer acted by renewing grace, which is faith and love,—faith working by love. A man who hath a spiritual understanding may examine himself, and find under what conduct he is.

4. Lastly, when there is a predominant will in sinning, then lust is habitually prevalent. Sin may entangle the mind and disorder the affections, and yet not be prevalent; but when it hath laid hold upon the will, it hath the mastery.

10. DISCOURSE IX

DISCOURSE IX QUESTION. Whether lust or corruption, habitually prevalent, be consistent with the truth of grace?

ANSWER. This is a hard question; there are difficulties in it, and, it may be, it is not precisely to be determined. I am sure we should be wonderfully careful what we say upon such a question, which determines the present and eternal condition of the souls of men.

Supposing we retain something of what was spoken in stating a lust or corruption so habitually prevalent, because this is the foundation of our present inquiry, I shall bring what I have to say upon this question to a few heads, that they may be remembered.

I say, then,—

First. It is the duty of every believer to take care that this may never be his own case practically. We shall meet with straits enough, and fears enough, and doubts enough about our eternal condition, though we have no lust nor corruption habitually prevalent; therefore, I say, it is the duty of every believer to take care this may never be his case. David did so, Psalms 19:12-13, "Who can understand his errors?" saith he, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." He acknowledges his errors and sins, and prays for cleansing, purifying, pardon; but for presumptuous sins, sins with a high hand, and every habitual corruption, which hath something of presumption,—"Lord, keep back thy servant from them," saith he. The apostle's caution is to the same purpose, Hebrews 12:15, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness spring up." There is the root of bitterness in every one; which I look upon as a corruption in some measure habitual, if it springs up unto great defilement. And I beseech you, brethren, beg of God, for your own souls and mine, that we may be careful this be never our case.

Secondly. The second thing I would observe is this,—whatever may be said concerning its consistency with grace, it is certainly inconsistent with peace. I wish we could remember what description was given before of this prevalent corruption, that we might consider the things now applied unto it Here (though I would be as tender as of the apple of mine eye in these things) I will not fear to say this, that the peace which any one hath concurring with a prevalent corruption, is security, not peace. I know men may be at great peace under prevalent corruptions, and live upon good hopes that they shall be accepted with God,—that it shall be well with them in the latter end; and that they shall have power one time or other against this corruption, and will leave it when it is seasonable, and strive against it more than they have done: but all such peace is but security. Under prevalent corruption there is a drawing back; for I would state the matter thus:—a person who is a professor, and hath kept up to duties and obedience till some lust hath gotten strength, by constitution, temptations, or occasions of life, and hath drawn him off from his former renovation in walking with God; there is then a drawing back. Now, saith the apostle, "If any man draw back, my

soul shall have no pleasure in him," Hebrews 10:38. And when God hath no pleasure according to the several degrees of backsliders (it may be that is meant of final apostasy), he doth not intimate any thing that is a ground of peace to that soul. So Isaiah 57:17; "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and hid myself from him." If there be an incurable iniquity of covetousness, or any other iniquity, whether manifest unto us or no, God is angry, and doth hide himself from us. I pray, brethren, let us examine our peace; and if we find we have a peace that can maintain its ground and station under prevalent corruption, trust no more to that peace,—it will not stand us in stead when it comes to a trial.

Thirdly. The third thing I would say is this,—that if a prevalent corruption be not inconsistent with the truth of grace, It is certainly inconsistent with the true exercise of grace. It is not, indeed, inconsistent with the performance of duties; but it is inconsistent with the true exercise of grace in the performance of duties. It is often seen and known, that persons under prevalent corruption will multiply duties, thereby to quiet conscience, and to compensate God for what they have done amiss. Persons may multiply prayers, follow preaching, and attend to other duties, when they use all these things, through the deceitfulness of sin, but as a cloak unto some prevailing corruption; but in all those duties there is no true exercise of grace. The true determination of this question depends upon a right exposition of 1 John 2:15. If we could understand that verse, it determines this point, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." There is the question, whether prevalent corruption be inconsistent with true grace? I know the words may have this construction, "If any man do make the world his chiefest good, if any man put the world in the place of God, then the love of the Father is not in him; he hath either received no love from God, or he hath no love to God as a Father in Christ." But indeed the apostle, speaking unto believers, I am apt to think speaks not of the whole kind, but degrees,—if there be a prevalency of love of the world, there is no prevalency of the actings of the love of the Father,—that they do not concern the habitual principles of the love of the world, and of the love of the Father, but the prevailing actings of the one and the other. And, accordingly, it may be said of all other graces whatsoever, that where there is a prevalency of the acting of sin, there is a suspension of the exercise of grace. Brethren, if any of us have been under the power of prevalent corruption (I will be still tender, and speak what ought to be received and believed, whether people do or not), it is much to be feared we have lost all our prayers and hearing, because we have not had a true exercise of grace in them. Some exercise there may be, but a due and true exercise of grace will be laid asleep by prevalent corruption. And therefore let us take heed of prevalent corruption, as we would take heed of losing all things that we have wrought,—our praying, hearing, suffering, charity,—for want of a due exercise of grace in them.

Fourthly. I shall grant this, that spiritual life may be in a swoon, when the spiritual man is not dead. There is a kind of deliquium of the spirits, called swooning away, that may befall believers, which suspends all acts of life, when yet the man is not dead. So I say, though I should see a man, through the prevalency of corruption, have all the evidences of a spiritual life cast into a swoon, yet I will not presently conclude the spiritual man is dead. Take the case of David, from the time of his great fall and transgression in the matter of Uriah until the coming of Nathan the prophet. Persons are generally inclined to believe that the spiritual life was in a swoon, when the spiritual man was not dead. His fall, as an honest man said, beat the breath out of his body, and he lay a long time like a man dead, by reason of that power, which one signal sin left in his soul. And take that as a

great instance that one sin, not immediately taken off by great humiliation, leaves great and even habitual inclinations in the soul to the same sin. So that some ascribed it unto the corruption of our nature. For it is a great and difficult question in divinity, how one particular sin, as the sin of Adam was, should bring in habitual corruption to our nature. To which some answer thus: That any one single moral act, performed with a high hand, hath great obliquity in it, disposing our whole nature to corruption. David, by that single act of flagrant wickedness, did continue in it for so long a space of time, till Nathan came and administered some good spirits to him, that relieved him out of his swoon. Wherefore I say that I will not judge a person to be spiritually dead, whom I have judged formerly to have had spiritual life, though I see him at present in a swoon as to all evidences of the spiritual life. And the reason why I will not judge so is this,—because if you judge a person dead, you neglect him, you leave him; but if you judge him in a swoon, though never so dangerous, you use all means for the retrieving of his life. So ought we to do to one another and our own souls.

Fifthly. There is a prevalency of sin that is inconsistent with true grace, which may befall those who have been professors. So the apostle doth plainly declare, Romans 6:16, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" There is such a serving of sin as puts a man into a contrary state.

Sixthly. I shall add but one thing more, and that is this,—there may be a corruption, sin, or lust, habitually prevalent, as to whatsoever evidences the person in whom it is or others can discern; and yet the root of the matter, the root of spiritual life, be notwithstanding in the person.

Suppose, then, there be such a prevalency, that the soul judges to be habitual, how shall we know whether the root of the matter be in such a person or no?

If the soul hath any thing left of spiritual life, there will be something of vital operations in that soul. Now, the vital operations that give evidence the soul is not absolutely slain by prevalent corruption, are opposition and humiliation. So long as the soul, though it be never so much captivated, is conscious to itself of a sincerity in the opposition it makes, there is an evidence of a vital operation; as likewise where it is constant in its humiliation on that account. But if it be farther inquired, how it may be known that this humiliation is sincere?

I answer, It cannot be known from its vigour and efficacy; for that overthrows the question. For if the opposition was vigorous and effectual, it would break the power of lust and corruption, so that it would be no more prevalent. But two ways it may be known.

1. By its constancy. If the root of the matter be still in us, there will be a constant opposition to every act of any prevailing corruption whatsoever. I do not speak about violent temptations, but ordinary cases; in which I know not whence we should conclude the root of the matter is in that man who doth not make a sincere opposition to every instance of the acting of prevalent corruption. If a man can pass over one and another instance of prevalent corruption without any humiliation for it, the holy, sovereign God show him grace and mercy! but it is to me "the way of a serpent upon a stone,"—I see it not, I know it not.

2. It is sincere, if it be from its proper spring; that is, if the opposition be not from conviction, light, or conscience only, but from the will of the poor sinner. "I would do otherwise; I would have this sin destroyed,—I would have it rooted out, that it should be no more in me; my will lies against it,

however it hath captivated my affections and disturbed my course." This is all I dare say upon this question,—that there may be an habitual prevalency of corruption, which may seem so to them in whom it is, as also to those who converse with them, and yet the root of the matter be in them. We may know the root of the matter by the acting of spiritual life,—in opposition going before, and humiliation coming after. We may know the sincerity of these vital actings by their constancy, and by their spring,—if we are constant in them, and if they arise from our wills.

11. DISCOURSE X

DISCOURSE X QUESTION. What shall a person do who finds himself under the power of a prevailing corruption, sin, or temptation?

ANSWER. I shall premise only this, one thing, and then inquire whether it belongs to us or no:— This prevalency hath many degrees. It may be a prevalency to outward scandal, or to the utter loss of inward peace, or to the disquieting and divesting of us of that tranquillity of mind usually which Christ calleth us unto. Now, pray consider that I speak to it equally and in every degree. And perhaps there may be none of us but, at one time or other, after inquiry, will have had experience in one degree or other, either to disquietment, loss of peace, or scandal.

What shall such a person then do, who finds it so with him?

I answer,—

First. He should labour to affect his mind with the danger of it. It is not conceivable how subtle sin is to shift off an apprehension of the danger of it. "Notwithstanding this," says the man, "yet I hope I am in a state of grace, and shall be saved, and come to the issue of it at one time or other;" and so the mind keeps off a due sense of the danger of it. I beseech you, brethren and sisters, if this be your condition, labour to affect your minds that this state, as far as I know, will end in hell; and let not your minds be relieved from the apprehension that, upon due and good grounds of faith, these ways go down to the chambers of death. Do not please yourselves, imagining you are members of the church, and have good hopes of salvation by Jesus Christ; but consider whither this tends, and affect your minds with it.

Secondly. When the person is affected with the danger of it, the next thing to be done is, to burden his conscience with the guilt of it. For the truth is, as our minds are, upon many pretences, slow to apprehend the danger of sin; so our consciences are very unwilling to take the weight of the burden of it as to its guilt. I speak not of men of seared consciences, that, lay what weight you will upon them, will feel none; but even of the consciences of renewed men, unless they use all the ways and means whereby conscience may be burdened,—as by apprehensions of the holiness of God, of the law, of the love of Christ, and of all those things whereby conscience must be made to feel the weight of its guilt. No sooner doth it begin to be made a little sick with a sense of the guilt of sin, but it takes a cordial presently. "Here this sin hath taken place, it hath contracted this and that guilt; I have been thus long negligent in this or that duty; I have thus long engaged in this and that folly, and been so given up unto the world: I must take to Christ by faith, or I am undone." It is afraid of making its load. But let conscience bear the burden, and not easily shift it off, unless it can, by true faith, guided by the word, load it upon Christ; which is not a thing of course to be done.

Thirdly. "What shall we do in case we have this apprehension of its danger, and can be thus burdened with its guilt?" Pray for deliverance. "How?" you will say. There is in the Scriptures mention of "roaring," Psalms 32:3, "The voice of my roaring;" and likewise of "shouting,"

Lamentations 3:8, "I shouted and cried." This is a time to pray that God would not hide his face from our roaring, nor shut out our prayers when we shout unto him; that is, to cry out with all the vigour of our souls. Christ is able "to succour" and help them that "make an outcry" to him. The word signifies so; and our word "succour," signifies a running in to help a man who is ready to be destroyed. These may seem hard things to us, but it is a great thing to save our souls, and to deliver ourselves from the snares of Satan.

Fourthly. Treasure up every warning, and every word that you are convinced was pointed against your particular corruption. There is none of you who may have the power of particular corruptions, but God, at one time or other, in his providence or word, gives particular warning, that the soul may say, "This is for me, I must comply with it;" but "it is like a man that sees his face in a glass, and goes away, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was,"—there is an end of it. But if God give you such warnings, set them down, treasure them up, lose them not; they must be accounted for. "He that, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Fifthly. I shall mind you of two rules, and so have done:—

1. In your perplexities as to the power of sin, exercise faith, that, notwithstanding all you see and find that you are almost lost and gone, there is a power in God, through Christ, for the subduing and conquering of it.

2. It is in vain for any to think to mortify a prevailing sin, who doth not at the same time endeavour to mortify all sin, and to be found in every duty. Here is a person troubled and perplexed with a temptation or corruption; both are the same in this case: he cries, "O that I were delivered! I had rather have deliverance than life! I will do my endeavour to watch against it." But it may be this person will not come up to a constancy in secret prayer;—he will go up and down, and wish himself free, but will not be brought up to such duties [as] wherein those lusts must be mortified. Therefore, take this rule along with you,—never hope to mortify any corruption whereby your hearts are grieved, unless you labour to mortify every corruption by which the Spirit of God is grieved; and be found in every duty, especially those under which grace thrives and flourishes.

12. DISCOURSE XI

DISCOURSE XI QUESTION. What is our duty with respect to dark and difficult dispensations of God's providence in the world?

ANSWER. In answer unto this question, three things are to be considered:—First. What are, in a Scripture sense, those things that make a season of providence dark and difficult? Secondly. What are the open signs of the coming and passing of such a season over us? And, Thirdly. What are our special duties in reference to our entering into, and passing through, such a season?

First. What are those things that make a season of providence dark and difficult?

I find four things in Scripture that make a dark season of providence; and, if I mistake not, they are all upon us:—

1. The long-continued prosperity of wicked men. This you are sensible is the most known case of all the Old Testament, Psalms 73; Jeremiah 12:1-3; Habakkuk 1:4; Habakkuk 1:13, and many other places. The holy men of old did confess themselves in great perplexity at the long-continued prosperity of wicked men, and their long-continued prosperity in ways of wickedness. Give but this one farther circumstance to it,—the long-continued prosperity of wicked men in their wickedness, when the light shines round about them to convince them of that wickedness, and God speaks in and by the light of his word against them; that is a trial. When all things were wrapped up in darkness and idolatry, it is no wonder at the patience of God; but when things come in any place to that state that many continue prosperous in wickedness when the day is upon them that judges them,—it is a difficulty.

2. It is a difficult season of providence, when the church is continued under persecution and distress in a time of prayer, when they give themselves to prayer. The difficulty seems mentioned, Psalms 80:4, "O LORD, how long wilt thou smoke against the prayer of thy people?" This made it hard, that God should afflict his church, and keep her under distresses, and suffer the furrows to be made long upon her back, and continue her under oppression from one season to another. There may be evident reason for that. But saith God, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear." God hath promised to hear the church: Will not God avenge the elect, that call upon him day and night? He will do it speedily. Now, when God seems to be angry with the prayers of his people, that is a difficult season: when they cry and shout, and God shuts out their prayers, that makes a dark providence. As the other difficulty is evidently upon us, so I hope we have this difficulty to conflict withal, that the anger of God continues to smoke against the prayers of his people, as having stirred up many a blessed cry to himself; for there is a time when he will hear and answer their prayers.

3. It is a dark and difficult dispensation of providence, when the world and nations of the world are filled with confusion and blood, and no just reason appearing why it should be so. When our Saviour foretells a difficult season, Matthew 24 and Luke 21, he says, "There shall be terrible times, such as never were; nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and

there shall be wars, bloodshed, and earthquakes; and the very elect shall hardly escape." Therefore God calls such a time, "a day of darkness," yea, of "thick darkness," Joel 2:2, a dark, gloomy day. There is nothing to be seen in all the confusions that are in the world at this day, but that the frogs or unclean spirits are gone forth to stir up the lusts of men to make havoc of one another.

4. It adds greatly to the difficulty of a season, when we have no prospect whither things are tending, and what will be their issue.

There are two ways whereby we may have a prospect of things that are in being;—by the eye of God's providence, when we perceive which way that looks; and by Scripture rule. The truth is, we are in a time wherein no man can discern a fixed eye of providence looking this way or that way. What will be the issue of these things; whether it will be the deliverance of the church, or the desolation of the nation and straitening of the church; whether God will bring good out of them in this generation, or any other time, none knows: this makes it difficult. Psalms 74:9, "We see not our signs,"—have no tokens what God intends to do; "neither is there among us any to tell us how long."

There is none of these things but make a season difficult, and providence dark; but when all of them concur together, they cannot but greatly heighten it: and I think they are all upon us.

Secondly. What are the open signs of the coming and passing of such a season over us?

There are three tokens or outward evidences of a difficult season. It is so,—

1. When God's patience is abused. You know that place, Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Things pass thus:—men fall into wickedness, great wickedness; their consciences fly in their faces, and they are afraid; the power of their lusts carries them into the same wickedness again, and their consciences begin to grow a little colder than they were: no evil comes of it, and judgment is not speedily executed; and so their hearts at last come to be wholly set to do evil. Hence others that look on say, "Here are men given up to all wickedness; surely judgment will speedily come upon these men." Judgment doth not come,—God is patient; and so they themselves turn as wicked as the former. Abusing of God's patience is an evident sign of a dispensation of the displeasure of God in his providence: and if ever it was upon any, it is upon us; and men learn it more and more every day. Every one talks of other men's sins; and seeing no judgment falls upon them, they give up themselves to the same sins.

2. It is so when God's warnings are despised: "When thine hand is lifted up, they will not see." That is a difficult season; for, saith God, "The fire of thine adversaries shall consume thee." Never had people more warnings than we have had;—warning in heaven above, and warning on the earth beneath; warnings by lesser judgments, and warnings by greater; and warnings by the word. God's hand hath been lifted up; but who takes notice of it? Some despise it, and others talk of it as a tale to be told; and there is an end of it. Who sanctifies the name of God in all the warnings that are given us? "The LORD's voice crieth unto the city," Micah 6:9; but it is only "the man of wisdom," of substance, that seeth the name of God in these his cries unto the city by his warnings from heaven and earth, signs and tokens, and great intimations of his displeasure.

3. An inclination in all sorts of people to security, and to take no notice of these things. I have spoken unto this business of security formerly, and I pray God warn you and myself of it; for I believe none of us are such strangers to our hearts, but we can say, that under all these warnings there is an inclination to security: if God did not prevent it, we should fall fast asleep under all the judgments that are round about us.

Any of these things shows that we are under a difficult dispensation of providence; but where all concur,—God be merciful to such a people!—it is the opening of the door to let out judgments to the uttermost.

Now if this be such a season, as I do verily believe we are all sensible it is, then,—

Thirdly, What shall we do? what are our special duties in reference to our entering into, and passing through, such a season?

I might speak unto the peculiar exercise of those graces which are required unto such a season; as faith, resignation to the will of God, readiness for his pleasure, waiting upon God, weanedness from the world, and the like; but I will only give you three or four duties, which are peculiarly hinted in such a season, and so have done;—

1. Our first duty is, that we should meet together, and confer about these things, Malachi 3:16-17. A good plan in difficult seasons, such as some of us have seen. The day of the Lord was coming that would burn as an oven: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." When was this? In a time of great judgment, and great sin,—"when they called the proud happy, and they that wrought wickedness were set up, and they that tempted God were even delivered;" that is, "appeared to be delivered." It is the great duty of us all, as we have opportunity and occasion, to confer about these things; about the causes of them,—what ariseth from the profane, wicked world; what from a persecuting, idolatrous world; and (wherein we are more concerned) what from a professing generation; and see how we can sanctify the name of God in it. We might have as great advantages as any under the face of heaven for the discharge of this duty, if we did but make use of that "price" [Proverbs 17:16] which God hath put into our hands; but if we are "fools," and have no "heart" to improve it, the blame will be our own. You have opportunities for meeting and assembling: I fear there are cold affections in your private meetings; I wish there be not. It may be some thrive and grow; I hope so: and others are cold and backward; it is not a season for it. If God would help us to manage this church aright, and as we ought to do, there can be no greater advantage under such a season than we enjoy: but we want voluntary inspection; and the Lord lay it not to our charge we have deferred it so long. Much want of love might have been prevented, many duties furthered, and many evils removed, if we had come up to the light God hath given to us. But we are at a loss; and God knows we suffer under it, for want of discharging our duty. That is the first thing,—to speak often one to another;—to sanctify the name of God by an humble, diligent inquiry into the causes of these dispensations, and preparation for these things.

(2.) We cannot well provide an ark for ourselves, unless we be guided by faith, as well as moved by fear. "By faith, Noah prepared an ark." How many things there are to encourage faith, you have heard;—the name, the properties of God, and the accomplishment of the promise of God. By virtue of all those properties, encourage faith in providing an ark. But you will say, "We are yet at a loss what this providing of an ark and hiding of ourselves is. 'A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself.' God calls us to enter into the chamber of providence, and hide ourselves till the indignation be overpast. If we knew what this was, we should apply ourselves unto it." I will tell you what I think in one instance:—give no quiet to your minds, until, by some renewed act of faith, you have a strong and clear impression of the promises of God upon your hearts, and of your interest in them. If it be but one promise, it will prove an ark. If, under all these seasons, moved with fear, acted by faith, we can but get a renewed sense and pledge of our interest in any one promise of God, we have an ark over us that will endure, whatever the storm be. Think of it, and if nothing else occur to you, apply your minds to it, that you may not wander up and down at uncertainties; but endeavour to have a renewed pledge of your interest in some special promise of God, that it belongs unto you, and it will be an ark in every time of trouble that shall befall you

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13. DISCOURSE XII

DISCOURSE XII

I DID at two meetings inquire among ourselves what was required in the time of approaching judgments and calamities, that the world hath been, and is like to be, filled withal? And God was pleased to guide us to the discovery of the necessary exercise of many graces, and the necessary attendance unto many duties, for that end and purpose. And we did design to spend our time this day to beg that God would give us those graces, and stir them up by his Spirit unto a due exercise; and that he would help us unto such a performance of those duties, that when the Lord Christ shall come, by any holy dispensation of his providence, we may be found of him in peace. That was the especial occasion of allotting the present time unto this duty; no ways excluding the reasons, occasions, and matter of prayer, which at other times we attend to for ourselves, the church, and the nation.

I would offer a few words that may stir us up unto this duty:— The Scripture doth everywhere, upon all such occasions, call expressly unto us for a special preparation, by the exercise of grace, in reformation and holiness: "Judgment must begin at the house of God;" and "what will be the end of them that obey not the gospel?" What, then, is our duty? Why, saith he, "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved" (all this outward frame of things), "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" Brethren, we ought at all times to attend unto "all holy conversation and godliness;" but saith the apostle, "The approach of judgment is a peculiar motive thereunto;—'seeing that all these things are to be dissolved.'" It is true, seeing Christ hath died for us, washed us in his blood, and given his Holy Spirit unto us, "What manner of persons ought we to be?" But the great motives are not exclusive of occasional exercises, but give an addition unto them. "Take heed that ye be not overtaken with surfeiting and drunkenness,"—with any excess in the use of the creature. What if it be so? "Then that day will come upon you at unawares;"—the day when all shall be dissolved,—the day of judgment,—the day of approaching calamities. "You ought at all times to take care of these things; but if your minds are not influenced in the consideration of the approach of that day, 'you are not my disciples.'" I do not at all speak unto what preparations are required.

I could also reflect on those places where God expresseth his great displeasure against such who did not labour for a peculiar preparation upon approaching calamities. Isaiah 22:12-14, " 'I called for mourning, and fasting, and girding with sackcloth,' and you betook yourselves unto feasting on all occasions." "Surely, saith the LORD, this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die." And it is reckoned among the sins of the most profligate persons, that when God's hand is lifted up and ready to strike, they will not see, so as to learn righteousness, Isaiah 26:11.

Let us, therefore, beg for grace. Though God multiplieth warnings, makes appearances of mercy, and then writes death upon them, and entangles every thing in darkness, yet our work goes slowly on in preparation. Cry earnestly unto God for such supplies of his grace and Spirit that may effectually bring us unto him; that we may no longer abide in the frame wherein we are.

There are three things, and no more, that I know of (others may be named, but they may be reduced unto these three heads), that are required of us in reference unto approaching judgments; and there is not one of them through which we can pass, or which we can perform in a due manner, comfortably unto ourselves, and unto the glory of God, without we have some singular and eminent preparation for it. And they are these:—First. That we ourselves stand in the gap, to turn away the threatened judgments. Secondly. That we may be fit for deliverance, if it please the Lord graciously to give it unto us. Saith Christ, speaking of great calamities, "Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Thirdly. That we may cheerfully and comfortably go through the calamities, if they shall overtake us.

These three are comprehensive of all the threats of approaching judgments and darkness that encompass us at this day. Now, there is not one of them that we can be any way fit for, unless our hearts and lives are brought into an extraordinary preparation, according as God calls and requires. I do not know whether we believe these things or no, but they will be shortly found to be true.

First. Who dares among us to propose himself to stand in the gap, to divert judgments from the nation, otherwise than in a formal manner, who is not prepared by these things we have spoken of, and hath not some good and comfortable persuasion of his own personal interest in Christ, and hath not freed himself from those sins that have procured these judgments, and who lives not in a resignation of himself unto the will of God? who dares to do this? We shall provoke God, if we think to stand in the gap, and turn away judgments from the nation, when we see ourselves are concerned in procuring those judgments.

Secondly. We cannot be meet for deliverance, unless we are thus prepared. I have heard a notion preached and spoken upon other occasions,—which I confess I never liked, and the more I consider it, the more I dislike it; and that is, that God, in the deliverance of his people, works for his own name's sake, that he may have all the glory,—that it shall be seen merely to be of grace: and therefore he will oftentimes deliver his people, when they are in an unreformed and unreforming condition, that he may shame them and humble them by his mercy and grace afterward. I know no rule of Scripture upon which this notion may be grounded, nor one instance or example whereby it may be made out.

Here lies the truth of it,—when there are two things concurring in the deliverance of the church, God will deliver them, notwithstanding all their sins and unworthiness, without any previous humiliation in themselves:—first, When God hath fixed and limited a certain season in his word and promise for their deliverance; and, secondly, When, antecedent unto their deliverance, they want means for humiliation. God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt when they were in a very bad condition,—an ignorant, stubborn, faithless generation; but both these things were concurring:—God was engaged, in point of his promise, that, at the end of four hundred and thirty years, he would visit and deliver them; and they were deprived of all ordinances of worship in Egypt: not a sacrifice could they offer while they were there; not a Sabbath, I believe, though it is not expressed in Scripture, could they observe;—the way of worship and knowledge of God was taken from them. So, when God delivered the children of Israel out of Babylon, they were in no very good condition; but God was engaged in point of promise as to that time, that at the end of seventy years they should be delivered; and in Babylon they had no means for instruction or

reformation,—no temple, no sacrifice;—these were denied. But whenever God doth afford unto persons all the means of grace for humiliation, reformation, and turning unto himself,—it may be as good as ever they shall in this world,—that God did ever deliver that people out of their distresses, when they refused to be reformed, humbled, or to turn unto him, neither instances of Scripture nor God's dealing with his church will make this good. Therefore it is vain for us to expect any thing of this nature. If, indeed, for so many years we had been thrown into a wilderness condition, and had no preaching, no assemblies, no administration of ordinances, no warnings or charges from God, we might have expected the Lord would have given us deliverance; but to us, who have had all these things, and yet will not make use of what we have now at present, we have no ground to expect any such thing. Therefore I confess, neither by rule, instance, or example, do I expect deliverance, until God come in to work a thorough change and reformation in our hearts and lives; which makes it very necessary to be preparing to meet God in the way of his judgments.

Thirdly. The third thing that may lie before us is, how we may cheerfully go through the calamities which may overtake us. I will say no more unto that, because it is that which we did expressly insist upon in our former discourse. As to the best of us, who have been long in the ways of God, woful will be our surprisal when the days of calamity come, if we have lived in negligence of complying with the calls and warnings of God that we have had, to bring ourselves unto a more even and better frame. We shall find our strength to fail us, and have our comforts to seek, and be left to inward darkness when outward darkness increaseth, and not know whither to cause our sorrows to go.

These things, brethren, I thought fit to mention unto you, that, if it be the will of God, they may be of use to take us off from those false hopes and false expectations which we are wonderfully ready to feed ourselves withal in such a day as this is wherein we live. It is high time for us to be calling upon God for this end.

14. DISCOURSE XIII

DISCOURSE XIII THE prophet Daniel tells us, when he understood by books—namely, the writings of the prophet Jeremiah—that the time wherein the great contest between Babylon and the church was to have its issue was come to a point, "Then," saith he, "I set my face to seek the LORD with prayer and supplications, and fasting." And if you will read his prayer, you will find nothing of confidence, nothing of self-ascription; but a deep acknowledgment of sin: "We, our kings, our princes, our fathers" (our church), "have all sinned;" so as that "to us belong shame and confusion of face." And never had such shame and confusion of face befallen the church as would have befallen them, if they had been disappointed in that trial. But he adds, "Unto thee belong mercies and forgivenesses." There he issues the whole business, upon "mercy and forgiveness," though he knew by books that the time was come.

Truly, brethren, we do not know by any Scripture revelation, as he did, that the time is come wherein the long contest and conflict between Babylon and the church will have its issue; but it looks like it in the book of providence, and so like it, that it is a plain duty we should give ourselves unto prayer and supplication, that it do not issue in shame and confusion of face; which belongeth unto us by reason of our sins. It is that contest which is now under consideration, and which seems to be coming to its issue, and all men are in expectation of it. It is the greatest, save one, that ever was; for the greatest contest that ever was in this world was between the person and the gospel of Christ on the one hand, and the devil and the pagan world on the other; and the next to that is the contest between Christ—in his offices and grace, in his gospel and worship—and Antichrist. And it is at this day upon its trial, in as signal an instance as ever it received. The question is, as to us and our posterity, Whether Christ or Antichrist? whether the worship of God or of idols? whether the effusion, and waiting for the effusion, of the Spirit of God in his worship, or all manner of superstitious impositions? This is the present contest; and, it may be, under heaven there never was a more signal instance of the issue of this contest than will be in these nations in these days;—I do not say presently or speedily; but this, you all know, is our state.

I mention it only to let you know that there is more than an ordinary earnestness and fervency of spirit and wrestling with God required of us at this day for the cause of Zion, the interest of Christ, and defeating of his adversaries. What way God will work we know not. If he be at work, he hath said, that when a flood was cast out of the mouth of the dragon, to swallow up the woman everywhere (and we have had a flood cast out of the mouth of the dragon to swallow up the whole interest of Christ in this nation), the earth lifted up herself and helped the woman, and turned aside the flood. Good old Eli's heart trembled for the ark of God. The interest of God and the truths of Christ are yet among us, but hardly beset by the Philistines; and whether they may not take them I know not,—God only knows. But assuredly, brethren, our hearts ought now to tremble for the ark of God, that God would continue it among us, and not give his glory into the hands of the adversary.

I have mentioned these things only for this end,—that if God will, our hearts may be a little warmed, upon all occasions, in this great contest and conflict between Christ and Antichrist, to come in with our prayers to the help of the Lord, and of the ark of the Lord,—that we may see a blessed issue of this trial, and not be covered with that shame and confusion of face which belong unto us.

15. DISCOURSE XIV

DISCOURSE XIV THIS meeting is for conference, and I would ask you a few questions:—

First. Whether do you think there are extraordinary calls and warnings of God towards this nation at this time?

Secondly. If there be, what is the voice of these calls?

Thirdly. Whether any sort of men, believers, or churches, are exempted from attending unto and complying with these calls of God? For there lies a reserve in our hearts. The nation is very wicked (I shall not repeat the sins of the nation), the warning is general to the nation, the body of the people, and God testifies his displeasure against them. Now, the inquiry is, Whether there be any rule that we, who profess ourselves believers, and a church, should count ourselves exempted from a particular compliance with these extraordinary calls of God,—that they are for others, and not for us? "If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent," Job 9:23. And the good figs went first into captivity.

Fourthly. What have we done hitherto in order to it, that may evidence itself to be an answer to, a compliance with, these calls of God, which we have owned here before the Lord? We have been speaking of it, and it becomes me to judge that we have had good and sincere desires after it. And neither the church, nor any one in the church, shall have any reflections from me beyond evidence. It becomes me to judge that we have had in ourselves good intentions, and sincere endeavours after it, though they have been, it may be, no way suitable or proportionable to the present occasion; and therefore I must say, that, in an eminent and extraordinary manner, as yet we have done nothing. We have not consulted of it yet, what we should do, and "what it is" in particular "that the LORD our God requireth of us;" nor declared our designs and intentions for a universal compliance with these great calls of God for repentance and turning unto the Lord. I mourn over myself night and day; I mourn over you continually. I do not see that life and vigour in returning unto God, either in our persons or in our church relation, as I could desire. And give me leave to say, from an experience in my own heart, I am jealous over you. We may proceed to consider something of outward duties afterward; but as yet we are not at all come to it, but only to inquire into our hearts what we have done in compliance with these calls of God, in the reformation and change of our hearts, and vigour of spirit in walking with him. I speak it with all tenderness, that none might take offence; but I do acknowledge to you, that I have not myself attained, nor can I, though I am labouring to bring my heart to that frame which God requireth in us all at this time. I find many obstructions: if you have attained I shall rejoice in it with all my heart and soul; but if not, help them that are labouring after it. I intend no more at present but this,—to settle upon our souls a conviction that we have not as yet answered the calls of God in the heart: for if we have all apprehensions we have complied, the work is at an end.

I hope we may in due time go on to consider all the ways and instances whereby we may reform and return unto God; but in the meantime I offer this to you,—that unless the foundation of it be

laid in a deep and broken sense of our past miscarriages and present frames, and I can see in the church some actings of a renewed spirit with vigour and earnestness to pursue our recovery and return to God, I shall much despond in this thing. But let us be persuaded that we are to lay this foundation (I desire we may agree upon this), that it is our duty to get a deep sense upon our hearts, as the first thing God aims at in his calls, of our past miscarriages, and of our present dead, wretched frame; in comparison of that vigour, liveliness, and activity of grace that ought to be found in us. Ought we not to lay the foundation here? If so, then we ought to apply ourselves unto it. It may be, though it be so with some, that they have such a lively, vigorous acting of faith in a deep and humble sense of their past miscarriages, yet it is not so with others; and we are looking for the edification of the whole. And therefore, brethren, do we judge it our present duty to labour to affect our hearts deeply with a sense of our present unanswerable frame unto the mind of God and Christ, and of our past miscarriages.

If it be so, let us every day pray that God would keep this thing in the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts; not only of ourselves, but of one another. Observe the phrase of the Holy Ghost: when you come to "the thoughts of the heart," you think you can go no farther; but saith David, "I pray, O LORD, preserve this 'in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people;" that is, "in the first internal framing of our thoughts." There must be a frame acting and coining thoughts (if I may so say) continually in us to this purpose. But I recommend this to you,—that if this be a truth, and we are convinced it is our duty to labour to affect our hearts with a sense of the unanswerableness of our souls, and the frame of our minds unto the will of God and the holiness of Christ, who is coming to visit his churches,—"What manner of persons ought we to be?" Not such as we have been. We should labour for a deep sense of this, and I hope it may not be unsuitable unto you; for if any of us have any corruption, temptation, or disorder in our spirits and ways to conflict withal, in vain, believe me, shall we contend against it, unless we lay this foundation.

I know one great means for the beginning and carrying on of this work, is by earnest crying unto God,—by prayers and supplications, and humiliations. I am loath to issue it there; I have seen so many days of humiliation without reformation, that I dare not issue it there: we shall make use of them as God shall help us. I desire the church would do so, if they find in themselves a sense of duty, and a heart crying to God in sincerity and truth. I have now been very long, though very unprofitable, in the ministration of the word; and I have observed the beginning of churches, and wish I do not see the end of them in this their confidence of mere profession, and the observation of these duties of humiliation. God knows, I have thought often of this thing; and I say I dare not issue it there. Let us have as many as we have hearts for, and no more; and as many as shall end with reformation, but no more. But let us all begin among ourselves; and who knows but that God may give wisdom to this church? I am ready to faint, and give over, and to beg of the church they would think of some other person to conduct them in my room, without these disadvantages. The last day will discover I have nothing but a heart to lead you in the ways of God,—to the enjoyment of God.

Perilous Times - 2 Timothy 3:1 "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."—2 Timothy 3:1.

YOU know, my way and manner upon these occasions is to speak as plainly and familiarly as I can unto what is of our present concernment; and so I design to do at this time, if it shall please

God to help under infirmities. The words contain a "warning of imminent dangers. And there are four things in them:—First, The manner of the warning: "This know also." Secondly, The evil itself that they are warned of: "Perilous times." Thirdly, The way of their introduction: "They shall come." Fourthly, The time and season of it: "They shall come in the last days:"—

First. The manner of the warning: "This know also;"—"Thou Timothy, unto the other instructions which I have given thee how to behave thyself in the house of God, whereby thou mayest be set forth as a pattern unto all gospel ministers in future ages, I must also add this, 'This know also.' It belongs to thy duty and office to know and consider the impending judgments that are coming upon churches." And so, as a justification of my present design, if God enable me unto it, I shall here premise, that it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to foresee and take notice of the dangers which the churches are falling into. And the Lord help us, and all other ministers, to be awakened unto this part of our duty! You know how God sets it forth (Ezekiel 33) in the parable of the watchman, to warn men of approaching dangers. And truly God hath given us this law:—If we warn the churches of their approaching dangers, we discharge our duty; if we do not, their blood will be required at our hands. The Spirit of God foresaw negligence apt to grow upon us in this matter; and therefore the Scripture only proposeth duty on the one hand, and on the other requires the people's blood at the hands of the watchmen, if they perform not their duty. So speaks the prophet Isaiah, chap. 21:8, "He cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower." A lion is an emblem of approaching judgment. "The lion hath roared; who can but tremble?" saith the prophet Amos. It is the duty of ministers of the gospel to give warning of impending dangers.

Again; the apostle, in speaking unto Timothy, speaks unto us also, to us all, "This know ye also." It is the great concern of all professors and believers, of all churches, to have their hearts very much fixed upon present and approaching dangers. We have inquired so long about signs, tokens, and evidences of deliverance, and I know not what, that we have almost lost the benefit of all our trials, afflictions, and persecutions. The duty of all believers is, to be intent upon present and imminent dangers, "O Lord," say the disciples. Matthew 24, "what shall be the sign of thy coming?" They were fixed upon his coming. Our Saviour answers, "I will tell you: 1. There shall be an abounding of errors and false teachers: many shall say, 'Lo, here is Christ,' and, 'Lo, there is Christ.' 2. There shall be an apostasy from holiness: 'Iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.' 3. There shall be great distress of nations: 'Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.' 4. There shall be great persecutions: 'And they shall persecute you, and bring you before rulers; and you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.' 5. There shall be great tokens of God's wrath from heaven: 'Signs in the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars.' " The Lord Christ would acquaint believers how they should look for his coming; he tells them of all the dangers. Be intent upon these things. I know you are apt to overlook them; but these are the things that you are to be intent upon. Not to be sensible of a present perilous season, is that security which the Scripture so condemns; and I will leave it with you, in short, under these three things:—1. It is that frame of heart which, of all others, God doth most detest and abhor. Nothing is more hateful to God than a secure frame in perilous days. 2. I will not fear to say this, and go with it, as to my sense, to the day of judgment: A secure person, in perilous seasons, is assuredly under the power of some predominant lust, whether it appears or not. 3. This secure, senseless frame is the certain presage of approaching ruin. This know, brethren, pray know this, I beg of you, for yours and my own soul, that you will be sensible of, and affected with, the perils of the season

whereinto we are cast. What they are, if God help me, and give me a little strength, I shall show you by-and-by.

Secondly. There is the evil and danger itself thus forewarned of; and that is, **καίρο■ χαλεπο■**,—hard times, perilous times, times of great difficulty, like those of public plagues, when death lies at every door; times that I am sure we shall not all escape, let it fall where it will. I will say no more of it now, because it is that which I shall principally speak to afterward.

Thirdly. The manner of their introduction, **■νστ■σονται**,—"shall come." We have no word in our language that will express the force of **■ν■στημι**. The Latins express it by "immineo, incido,"—the coming down of a fowl unto his prey. Now, our translators have given it the greatest force they could. They do not say, "Perilous times will come," as though they prognosticated future events; but, "Perilous times shall come." Here is a hand of God in this business; they shall so come, be so instant in their coming, that nothing shall keep them out; they shall instantly press themselves in, and prevail. Our great wisdom, then, will be, to eye the displeasure of God in perilous seasons; since there is a judicial hand of God in them, and we see in ourselves reason enough why they should come. But when shall they come?

Fourthly. They "shall come in the last days,"—**■ν ■σχ■ταις ■μ■ραϊς**. The words "latter" or "last days" are taken three ways in Scripture;—sometimes for the times of the gospel, in opposition to the Judaical church-state; as in Hebrews 1:2, "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;"—and elsewhere it may be taken (though I remember not the place) for days towards the consummation of all things and the end of the world;—and it is taken often for the latter days of churches; 1 Timothy 4:1, "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith." And so the apostle John, 1 Epist. 2:18, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." And that is the season here intended. But yet you may take it in what sense you will: the last days, the days of the gospel; the last days, towards the consummation of all things and the end of the world; the last days, following the days of the profession of churches, those called Reformed Churches, or our own churches, in the ways wherein we walk; and the last days with many of us, with respect to our lives. In whatever sense the words are taken, it is time for us to look what shall come in these last days. But the observation which at present I shall insist on from the text is this:—

Observation. When churches have been continued for a while in their profession, and begin to fall under decays therein, perilous seasons shall overtake them, which it will be hard for them to escape: "This know also, that perilous times shall come." My design is only to dispose your minds a little to the work of the day: and all I shall do is, to show, in several instances, what are the things that make a season perilous; and what is our duty with reference unto such perilous seasons, both as to particular perils and perilous times in general. And it must not be said, as once it was of the prophet Ezekiel, "He prophesied of things a great way off." We do not prophesy of things a great way off; no, we shall speak of things that are even upon us,—what we see and know, and is as evident as if written with the beams of the sun.

I. The first thing that makes a season perilous is, when the profession of true religion is outwardly maintained under a visible predominancy of horrible lusts and wickedness. And the reason why I name it in the first place is, because it is what the apostle gives his instance in, in this place,

"Perilous times shall come." Why? " 'For many shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false-accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness;'—maintaining their profession of the truth of religion under a predominancy, a visible, open predominancy, of vile lusts, and the practice of horrible sins." This rendered the season perilous. Whether this be such a season or not, do you judge. And I must say, by the way, we may and ought to witness against it, and mourn for the public sins of the days wherein we live. It is as glorious a thing to be a martyr for bearing testimony against the public sins of an age, as in bearing testimony unto any truth of the gospel whatsoever.

Now, where these things are, a season is perilous,—

1. Because of the infection. Churches and professors are apt to be infected with it. The historian tells us of a plague at Athens, in the second and third years of the Peloponnesian war, whereof multitudes died; and of those that lived, few escaped but they lost a limb, or part of a limb,—some an eye, others an arm, and others a finger,—the infection was so great and terrible. And truly, brethren, where this plague comes,—of the visible practice of unclean lusts under an outward profession,—though men do not die, yet one loses an arm, another an eye, another a leg by it: the infection diffuses itself to the best of professors, more or less. This makes it a dangerous and perilous time.

2. It is dangerous, because of the effects; for when predominant lusts have broken all bounds of divine light and rule, how long do you think that human rules will keep them in order? They break through all in such a season as the apostle describes. And if they come to break through all human restraints, as they have broken through divine, they will fill all things with ruin and confusion.

3. They are perilous in the consequence; which is, the judgments of God. When men do not receive the truth in the love of it, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, God will send them strong delusion, to believe a lie. So 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11, is a description how the Papacy came upon the world. Men professed the truth of religion, but did not love it,—they loved unrighteousness and ungodliness; and God sent them Popery. That is the interpretation of the place, according to the best divines. Will you profess the truth, and at the same time love unrighteousness? The consequence is, security under superstition and ungodliness. This is the end of such a perilous season; and the like may be said as to temporal judgments, which I need not mention.

Let us now consider what is our duty in such a perilous season:—

(1.) We ought greatly to mourn for the public abominations of the world, and of the land of our nativity wherein we live. I would only observe that place in Ezekiel 9, God sends out his judgments, and destroys the city; but before, he sets a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof. You will find this passage referred in your books to Revelation 7:3, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." I would only observe this, that such only are the servants of God, let men profess what they will, "who mourn for the abominations that are done in the land." The mourners in the one place are the servants of God in the other. And truly, brethren,

we are certainly to blame in this matter. We have been almost well contented that men should be as wicked as they would themselves, and we sit still and see what would come of it. Christ hath been dishonoured, the Spirit of God blasphemed, and God provoked against the land of our nativity; and yet we have not been affected with these things. I can truly say in sincerity, I bless God, I have sometimes laboured with my own heart about it. But I am afraid we all of us come exceeding short of our duty in this matter. "Rivers of waters," saith the psalmist, "run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." Horrible profanation of the name of God, horrible abominations, which our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, and yet our hearts been unaffected with them! Do you think this is a frame of heart God requireth of us in such a season,—to be regardless of all, and not to mourn for the public abominations of the land? The servants of God will mourn. I could speak, but am not free to speak, to those prejudices which keep us off from mourning for public abominations; but they may be easily suggested unto all your thoughts, and particularly what they are that have kept us off from attending more unto this duty of mourning for public abominations. And give me leave to say, that, according to the Scripture rule, there is no one of us can have any evidence that we shall escape outward judgments that God will bring for these abominations, if we have not been mourners for them; but that as smart a revenge, as to outward dispensations, may fall upon us as upon those that are most guilty of them, no Scripture evidence have we to the contrary. How God may deal with us, I know not.

This, then, is one part of the duty of this day,—that we should humble our souls for all the abominations that are committed in the land of our nativity; and, in particular, that we have no more mourned under them.

(2.) Our second duty, in reference to this perilous season is, to take care that we be not infected with the evils and sins of it. A man would think it were quite contrary; but really, to the best of my observation, this is, and hath been, the frame of things, unless upon some extraordinary dispensation of God's Spirit:—as some men's sins grow very high, other men's graces grow very low. Our Saviour hath told us, Matthew 24:12, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." A man would think the abounding of iniquity in the world should give great provocation to love one another. "No," saith our Saviour, "the contrary will be found true: as some men's sins grow high, other men's graces will grow low." And there are these reasons for it:—

[1.] In such a season, we are apt to have light thoughts of great sins. The prophet looked upon it as a dreadful thing, that upon Jehoiakim's throwing the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy into the fire, till it was consumed, "yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words," Jeremiah 36:24. They were grown senseless, both of sin and judgment. And where men (be they in other respects never so wise) can grow senseless of sin, they will quickly grow senseless of judgments too. And I am afraid, the great reason why many of us have no impression upon our spirits of danger and perils in the days wherein we live, is because we are not sensible of sin.

[2.] Men are apt to countenance themselves in lesser evils, having their eyes fixed upon greater abominations of other men, that they behold every day; nay, there are those who pay their tribute to the devil,—walk in such and such abominations, and so countenance themselves in lesser evils. This is part of the public infection,—that they "do not run out into the same excess of riot that others do," though they live in the omission of duty, conformity to the world, and in many foolish,

hurtful, and noisome lusts. They countenance themselves with this, that others are guilty of greater abominations.

[3.] Pray let such remember this, who have occasion for it (you may know it better than I; but yet I know it by rule, as much as you do by practice), that general converse in the world, in such a season, is full of danger and peril. Most professors are grown of the colour and complexion of those with whom they converse. This is the first thing that makes a season perilous. I know not whether these things may be of concern and use unto you; they seem so to me, and I cannot but acquaint you with them.

II. A second perilous season, and that we shall hardly come off in, is, when men are prone to forsake the truth, and seducers abound to gather them up that are so; and you will have always these things go together. Do you see seducers abound? You may be sure there is a proneness in the minds of men to forsake the truth: and when there is such a proneness, they will never want seducers,—those that will lead off the minds of men from the truth; for there is both the hand of God and Satan in this business. God judicially leaves men, when he sees them grow weary of the truth, and prone to leave it; and Satan strikes in with the occasion, and stirs up seducers. This makes a season perilous. The apostle describes it, 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times" (these perilous days) "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." And so Peter warns them to whom he writes, 2 Epist. 2:1, 2, that "there shall come false teachers among them, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction: and many shall follow their pernicious ways." There shall come times full of peril, which shall draw men off from the truth into destruction.

If it be asked, how we may know whether there be a proneness in the minds of men in any season to depart from the truth? there are three ways whereby we may judge of it:—

1. The first is that mentioned, 2 Timothy 4:3, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." When men grow weary of sound doctrine,—when it is too plain, too heavy, too dull, too common, too high, too mysterious, one thing or other that displeases them, and they would hear something new, something that may please,—it is a sign that there are in such an age many who are prone to forsake sound doctrine: and many such we know.

2. When men have lost the power of truth in their conversation, and are as prone and ready to part with the profession of it in their minds. Do you see a man retaining the profession of the truth under a worldly conversation? He wants but baits from temptation, or a seducer, to take away his faith from him. An inclination to hearken after novelties, and loss of the power of truth in the conversation, is a sign of proneness unto this declension from the truth. Such a season, you see, is perilous. And why is it perilous? Because the souls of many are destroyed in it. The apostle tells us directly, 2 Peter 2:1, of "false prophets among the people, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." Will it abide there? No: "And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of," Brethren, while it is well with us, through the grace of God, and our own houses are not in flames, pray do not let us think the times are not perilous, when so many turn unto Popery and Quakerism, into pernicious errors, and fall into swift destruction. Will you say

the time of the public plague was not perilous, because you are alive? No. Was the fire not dreadful, because your houses were not burned? No; you will, notwithstanding, say it was a dreadful plague, and a dreadful fire. And pray consider, is not this a perilous season, when multitudes have an inclination to depart from the truth, and God, in just judgment, hath permitted Satan to stir up seducers to draw them into pernicious ways, and their poor souls perish for ever.

Besides, there is a great aptness in such a season to work indifferency in the minds of those who do not intend utterly to forsake the truth. Little did I think I should ever have lived in this world to find the minds of professors grown altogether indifferent as to the doctrine of God's eternal election, the sovereign efficacy of grace the conversion of sinners, justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; but many are, as to all these things, grown to an indifferency: they know not whether they are so or not. I bless God I know something of the former generation, when professors would not hear of these things without the highest detestation; and now high professors begin to be leaders in it: and it is too much among the best of us. We are not so much concerned for the truth as our forefathers; I wish I could say we were as holy.

3. This proneness to depart from the truth is a perilous season, because it is the greatest evidence of the withdrawing of the Spirit of God from his church: for the Spirit of God is promised to this end, "to lead us into all truth;" and when the efficacy of truth begins to decay, it is the greatest evidence of the departing and withdrawing of the Spirit of God. And I think that this is a dangerous thing; for if the Spirit of God departs, then our glory and our life depart.

What, now, is our duty in reference to this perilous season? Fore-warnings of perils are given us to instruct us in our duty.

(1.) The first is, not to be content with what you judge a sincere profession of truth; but to labour to be found in the exercise of all those graces which peculiarly respect the truth. There are graces that peculiarly respect the truth that we are to exercise; and if these are not found in our hearts, all our profession will issue in nothing. And these are,—

[1.] Love: "Because they loved not the truth." They made profession of the gospel; but they received not the truth in the love of it. There was want of love of the truth. Truth will do no man good where there is not the love of it. "Speaking the truth in love," is the substance of our Christian profession. Pray, brethren, let us labour to love the truth; and to take off all prejudices from our minds, that we may do so.

[2.] It is the great and only rule to preserve us in perilous times,—to labour to have the experience of the power of every truth in our hearts. If so be ye have learned the Lord Jesus. How? So as to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;" and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," Ephesians 4:22-24. This is to learn the truth. The great grace that is to be exercised with reference to truth in such a season as this, is to exemplify it in our hearts in the power of it. Labour for the experience of the power of every truth in your own hearts and lives.

[3.] Zeal for the truth. Truth is the most proper object for zeal. We ought to "contend earnestly for the truth once delivered to the saints;" to be willing, as God shall help us, to part with name and reputation, and to undergo scorn and contempt, all that this world can cast upon us, in giving testimony unto the truth. Every thing that this world counts dear and valuable is to be forsaken,

rather than the truth. This was the great end for which Christ came into the world.

(2.) Cleave unto the means that God hath appointed and ordained for your preservation in the truth. I see some are ready to go to sleep, and think themselves not concerned in these things: the Lord awaken their hearts! Keep to the means of preservation in the truth,—the present ministry. Bless God for the remainder of a ministry valuing the truth, knowing the truth, sound in the faith;—cleave unto them. There is little influence upon the minds of men from this ordinance and institution of God, in the great business of the ministry. But know there is something more in it than that they seem to have better abilities to dispute than you; more knowledge, more light, better understandings than you. If you know no more in the ministry than this, you will never have benefit by it. They are God's ordinance; the name of God is upon them; God will be sanctified in them. They are God's ordinance for the preservation of the truth.

(3.) Let us carefully remember the faith of them who went before us in this nation, in the profession of the last age. I am apt to think there was not a more glorious profession for a thousand years upon the face of the earth, than was among the professors of the last age in this nation. And pray, what faith were they of? Were they half Arminian and half Socinian; half Papist and half I know not what? Remember how zealous they were for the truth; how little their holy souls would have borne with those public defections from the doctrine of truth which we see, and do not mourn over, but make nothing of, in the days wherein we live. God was with them; and they lived to his glory, and died in peace: "whose faith follow," and example pursue. And remember the faith they lived and died in: look round about, and see whether any of the new creeds have produced a new holiness to exceed theirs.

III. A third thing that makes a perilous season is, professors mixing themselves with the world, and learning their manners. And if the other perilous seasons are come upon us, this is come upon us also. This was the foundation and spring of the first perilous season that was in the world, that first brought in a deluge of sin and then a deluge of misery. It was the beginning of the first public apostasy of the church, which issued in the severest mark of God's displeasure. Genesis 6:2, "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." This is but one instance of the church of God, the sons of God, professors, mixing themselves with the world. This was not all, that they took to themselves wives; but this was an instance the Holy Ghost gives that the church in those days did degenerate, and mix itself with the world. What is the end of mixing themselves in this manner with the world? Psalms 106:35, "They mingled themselves with the nations." And what then? "And learned their manners." If any thing under heaven will make a season perilous, this will do it,—when we mingle ourselves with the world, and learn their manners.

There are two things I shall speak to on this head:—1. Wherein professors do mingle themselves with the world. 2. The danger of it.

1. Professors mingle themselves with the world in that wherein it is the world, which is proper to the world. That which is more eminently and visibly of the devil, professors do not so soon mingle themselves withal; but in that wherein it is the world, in its own colours;—as in corrupt communication, which is the spirit of the world, the extract and fruit of vanity of mind,—that wherewith the world is corrupted, and doth corrupt. An evil, rotten kind of communication, whereby the manners of the world are corrupted,—this comes from the spirit of the world. The devil hath his

hand in all these things; but it is the world and the spirit of the world that is in corrupt communication. And how hath this spread itself among professors! Light, vain, foolish communication!—to spend a man's whole life therein; not upon this or that occasion, but almost always, and upon all occasions everywhere!—Vain habits and attire of the world is another instance. The habits and attire of the world are the things wherein the world doth design to show itself what it is. Men may read what the world is by evident characters, in the habits and attire that it wears. They are blind that cannot read vanity, folly, uncleanness, luxury, in the attire the world putteth upon itself. The declension of professors in imitating the ways of the world in their habits and garb, makes a season perilous: it is a mixture wherein we learn their manners; and the judgments of God will ensue upon it.—In this, likewise, we are grown like the world, that upon all occasions we are as regardless of the sins of the world, and as little troubled with them, as others are. Lot lived in Sodom, but "his righteous soul was vexed with their ungodly deeds and speeches." Live we where we will, when are our souls vexed, [so] that we do not pass through the things of the world, the greatest abominations, with the frame of spirit that the world itself doth? Not to speak of voluptuousness of living, and other things that attend this woful mixture with the world that professors have made in the days wherein we live,—corrupt communication, gaiety of attire, senselessness of the sins and abominations of the world round about us, are almost as much upon professors as upon the world. We have mixed ourselves with the people, and have learned their manners. But,—

2. Such a season is dangerous, because the sins of professors in it lie directly contrary to the whole design of the mediation of Christ in this world. Christ gave himself for us, that he might purge us from dead works, and purify us unto himself a peculiar people, Titus 2:14. "Ye are a royal nation, a peculiar people." Christ hath brought the hatred of the devil and all the world upon him and against him, for taking a people out of the world, and making them a peculiar people to himself; and their throwing themselves upon the world again is the greatest contempt that can be put upon Jesus Christ. He gave his life and shed his blood to recover us from the world, and we throw ourselves in again. How easy were it to show that this is an inlet to all other sins and abominations, and that for which I verily think the indignation and displeasure of God will soonest discover itself against professors and churches in this day! If we will not be differenced from the world in our ways, we shall not long be differenced from them in our privileges. If we are the same in our walkings, we shall be so in our worship, or have none at all. As to our duty in such a perilous season, let me leave three cautions with you, and the Lord fix them upon your hearts:—

(1.) The profession of religion, and the performance of duties, under a world-like conversation, are nothing but a sophistical means to lead men blindfold into hell. We must not speak little things in such a great cause.

(2.) If you will be like the world, you must take the world's lot. It will go with you as it goes with the world. Inquire and see, in the whole book of God, how it will go with the world,—what God's thoughts are of the world,—whether it saith not, "If it lies in wickedness, it shall come to judgment," and that "the curse of God is upon it." If, therefore, you will be like the world, you must have the world's lot; God will not separate.

(3.) Lastly, consider we have by this means lost the most glorious cause of truth that ever was in the world. We do not know that there hath been a more glorious cause of truth since the apostles'

days, than what God hath committed to his church and people in this nation, for the purity of the doctrine of the truth and ordinances, but we have lost all the beauty and glory of it by this mixture in the world. I verily think it is high time that the congregations in this city, by their elders and messengers, should consult together how to put a stop to this evil, that hath lost all the glory of our profession. It is a perilous time, when professors mix themselves so with the world.

There are other perilous seasons that I thought to have insisted on; but I will but name them.

IV. When there is great attendance on outward duties, but inward, spiritual decays. Now herein, my brethren, (most of this congregation are so in a peculiar manner, I hope, through the goodness of God,—in sincerity, though in much weakness, "Liberavi animam meam,") you know how long I have been treating of the causes and reasons of inward decays, and the means to be used for our recovery; I shall not, therefore, again insist upon them.

V. Times of persecution are also times of peril.

Now, I need not tell you whether these seasons are upon us or not; it is your duty to inquire into that. Whether there be not an outward retaining of the truth under a visible prevalency of abominable lusts in the world; whether there be not a proneness to forsake the truth, and seducers at work to draw men off; whether there be not a mingling ourselves with the world, and therein learning their manners; whether there be not inward decays, under the outward performance of duties; and whether many are not suffering under persecution and trouble, judge ye, and act accordingly.

One word of use, and I have done.

Use 1. Let us all be exhorted to endeavour to get our hearts affected with the perils of the day wherein we live. You have heard a poor, weak discourse concerning it, and perhaps it will be quickly forgotten. O that God would be pleased to give us this grace,—that we may find it our duty to endeavour to have our hearts affected with the perils of these seasons! It is not time to be asleep upon the top of a mast in a rough sea, when there are so many devouring dangers round about us. And the better to effect this,—

(1.) Consider the present things, and bring them to rule, and see what God's word says of them. We hear this and that story of horrible, prodigious wickedness; and bring it in the next opportunity of talk, and there slightly pass it over. We hear of the judgments of God abroad in the world; and bring them to the same standard of our own imaginations, and there is an end. And so we do with the distresses of others; we talk of them, and there is an end. But, brethren, when you observe any of these things, how it is with the world, if you would have your hearts affected, bring it to the word, and see what God saith of it: speak with God about it; ask and inquire at the mouth of God what God saith unto these prodigious wickednesses and judgments,—this coldness that is upon professors, and their mixtures with, and learning the manners of the world. You will never have your hearts affected with it, till you come and speak with God about it; and then you will find them represented in a glass that will make your hearts ache and tremble. And then,—

(2.) If you would be sensible of present perilous times, take heed of centring in self. While your greatest concern is self, or the world, all the angels in heaven cannot make you sensible of the peril of the days wherein you live. Whether you pursue riches or honours, while you centre there,

nothing can make you sensible of the perils of the day. Therefore do not centre in self.

(3.) Pray that God would give us grace to be sensible of the perils of the day wherein we live. It may be we have had confidence, that though thousands fall at our right hand and at our left, yet we shall be able to carry it through. Believe me, it is great grace. Point your private, closet prayers, and your family prayers this way; and the Lord help us to point our public prayers to this thing, that God would make our hearts sensible of the perils of the time whereinto we are fallen in these last days!

Use 2. The next thing is this, that there are two things in a perilous season,—the sin of it, and the misery of it. Labour to be sensible of the former, or you will never be sensible of the latter. Though judgments lie at the door,—though the heavens be dark over us, and the earth shake under us at this day, and no wise man can see where he can build himself an abiding habitation,—we can talk of these things; and hear of other nations soaking in blood; and have tokens of God's displeasure,—warnings from heaven above and the earth beneath; and no man sensible of them! Why? Because they are not sensible of sin; nor ever will be, unless God make them so.

I shall range the sins that we should be sensible of under three heads:—the sins of the poor, wretched, perishing world, in the first place; the sins of professors in general, in the second place; and our own particular sins and decays, in the third place. And let us labour to have our hearts affected with these. It is to no purpose to tell you this and that judgment is approaching;—for your leaders, and those that are upon the watch-tower, to cry, " 'A lion; my lord,' we see a lion." Unless God make our hearts sensible of sin, we shall not be sensible of judgments.

Use 3. Remember there is a special frame of spirit required in us all in such perilous seasons as these are. And what is that? It is a mourning frame of spirit. O that frame, that jolly frame of spirit that is upon us! The Lord forgive it, the Lord pardon it unto us; and keep us in a humble, broken, mournful frame of spirit: for it is a peculiar grace God looks for at such a time as this is. When he will pour out his Spirit, there will be great mourning, together and apart; but now we may say there is no mourning. The Lord help us, we have hard hearts and dry eyes under the consideration of all these perils that lie before us.

Use 4. Keep up church watch with diligence, and by the rule. When I say rule, I mean the life of it. I have no greater jealousy upon my heart, than that God should withdraw himself from his own institutions because of the sins of the people, and leave us only the carcase of outward rule and order. What doth God give them for? for their own sakes? No; but that they may be clothing for faith and love, meekness of spirit and bowels of compassion, watchfulness and diligence. Take away these, and farewell to all outward rule and order, whatever they are. Keep up a spirit that may live affected with it: get a spirit of church watch; which is not to lie at catch for faults, but diligently, out of pure love and compassion to the souls of men, to watch over them,—to wait to do them good, all we can. As it was with a poor man, who took a dead body and set it up, and it fell; and he set it up again, and it fell; upon which he cried out, "Oportet esse aliquid intus,"—"There wants something within," to enliven and quicken it;—so is it with church order and rule; set them up as often as you will, they will all fall, if there be not a love to one another, a delighting in the good of one another, "exhorting one another while it is called To-day, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Use 5. Reckon upon it, that in such times as these are, all of us will not go free. You find no mention of a perilous season in Scripture, but it follows some shall have their faith overthrown, others shall follow pernicious ways, and others shall turn aside. Brethren and sisters, how do you know but you or I may fall? Let us double our watch, every one; for the season is come upon us wherein some of us may fall, and fall so as to smart for it. I do not say we shall perish eternally;—God deliver us from going into the pit! but some of us may so fall as to lose a limb, some member or other; and our works will be committed to the fire that shall burn them all. God hath kindled a fire in Zion that will try all our works; and we shall see in a short time what will become of us.

Use 6. Lastly, take that great rule which the apostle gives in such times as those wherewith we are concerned, "Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure,"—O blessed be God for it!—"God knows who are his."

What, then, is required on our part? "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from evil." Your profession, your privileges, your light, will not secure you; you are gone, unless every one that nameth the name of Christ departs from all iniquity. What multitudes perish under a profession every day! O that our hearts could bleed to see poor souls in danger of perishing under the greatest profession! Will you hear the sum of all? Perilous times and seasons are come upon us; many are wounded already; many have failed. The Lord help us! the crown is fallen from our head,—the glory of our profession is gone,—the time is short,—the Judge stands before the door. Take but this one word of counsel, my brethren: "Watch, therefore, that none of these things may come upon you, but that you may escape, and be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of God."

Living by Faith in Difficult Times

16. THE USE AND ADVANTAGE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF PUBLIC CALAMITY

THE USE AND ADVANTAGE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF PUBLIC CALAMITY "The just shall live by his faith."—Habakkuk 2:4. THIS is the first time these words are mentioned in the Scripture, but they are three times quoted by the apostle Paul: he preached, as it were, thrice upon them, Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38; for it is full of heavenly matter, and is made use of by the apostle to several purposes. I know no one text that hath been more preached upon, or more written upon by them who have treated of the life of faith;—how the just live the life of justification, and how they live the life of sanctification, the life of consolation, the life of peace, the life of joy, the life of obedience, etc. My design is quite of another nature, and is that which falls in with the design of the prophet in the first use of the words; as we shall presently see.

You know that, for many years, upon all these occasions, without failing, I have been warning of you continually of an approaching calamitous time, and considering the sins that have been the causes of it. The day is with the Lord,—the year and month I know not: but I have told you that "judgment will begin at the house of God;" that in the latter days of the church, "perilous times will come;" that God seems to have "hardened our hearts from his fear, and caused us to err from his ways;" and that none knows what "the power of his wrath" will be. In all these things I have foretold you of perilous, distressing, calamitous times; and in all men's apprehensions they now lie at the door, and are entering in upon us. Now I must change my design; and my present work will be, both upon this and, if I live, upon some other occasions, to show how we ought to deport ourselves in and under the approaches of distressing calamities that are coming upon us, and may reach, it may be, up to the very neck.

What this text teaches us is, that in the approaches of overwhelming calamities, and in the view of them, we ought, in a peculiar manner, to live by faith. That is the meaning of the place. And that this is our duty appears from this passage and the context. For the prophet had received a vision, a dreadful vision, from God, of the coming in of the Chaldeans, and of the destruction they would bring upon the church and upon all the land, in the foregoing chapter. Having received this vision, he considers what is his own duty, and what is the duty of the church, in the approaches of this distressing, calamitous season. Why, saith he, verse 1, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."—"God will reprove me; there will be great arguings between God and my soul: I know my own guilt and sin, and I would be in a readiness to have something to answer God when I am reproved,—something to betake myself unto. The answer," saith he, "I will betake myself unto is this, 'The just shall live by his faith.' " Two things are here included:—

First. Saith he, "I will betake myself" (as the apostle makes use of it) "unto Jesus Christ for righteousness. I have nothing else to answer God when I am reproved."

Secondly. "I will pass through all these terrible and dreadful dispensations of providence that are coming upon me, by living the life of faith:" a peculiar way of living, as we shall presently see. When the flood was coming upon the world, Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," 2 Peter 2:5. What righteousness did Noah preach? Why, that righteousness whereof he himself was partaker; for he "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith," Hebrews 11:7. When the flood was coming, Noah preached the righteousness of faith to the world, that they might escape, if they would attend unto it; but it was rejected by them. Wherefore, I say, in the approach of a calamitous season, there is, in an especial way and manner, a living by faith required of us. But you will say, "What is a calamitous season?" or, "When do you esteem a season calamitous?"

I will give you two things for the description of such a season as I judge to be manifestly calamitous:—

1. When it exceeds the bounds of affliction, or when the dispensations of God's anger in it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction. Ezekiel 21:9-10; Ezekiel 21:13, "Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. Because it is a trial, and what if the sword contemn even the rod?" The rod comprises all affliction; but God will bring a sword,—a judgment that shall not be reducible to the head of affliction; it shall contemn it. Now, I say, let it be what it will, when a calamity doth befall a people, or the church of God, that cannot be reduced to the head of affliction, but that every one shall find there is anger, judgment, wrath in it; then it is a distressing time.

2. When judgments fall promiscuously upon all sorts of persons, and make no distinction, then I take it to be a distressing time; for they strip men of the comforts they cherish in their own minds. Job 9:22-23, "This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked." "What! doth God always do so? doth he never make a distinction about judgments?" Yes, sometimes; but "if the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." When God brings a scourge, or a sword that shall slay promiscuously, that shall seize upon, destroy, and devour the innocent, so that they shall not escape, he will be as one that standeth by rejoicing to see how they carry themselves under their trial.

Now, this is enough to give satisfaction as to what I intend by a distressing, calamitous time:—it cannot be reduced to the head of affliction; and it slayeth suddenly and promiscuously the perfect and the wicked; and, it may be, "the good figs shall go first into captivity." I am not much otherwise minded; and God may have mercy for them in that dispensation. I shall now show you these two things:—I. How we shall live by faith,—how we should deport ourselves; what faith will do in such a season,—what our duty is under the approach of these calamitous, distressing times that are coming upon us. II. I shall show you how faith doth and will carry it under other perplexities that we have upon us, that we either feel or fear:—

I. Faith will guide and act the soul, under the approach of these distressing calamities, in these following things:—

1. It will give the soul a reverential fear of God in his judgments. So it did unto the saints of old, Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God;" ε■λαβηθε■ς,—"moved with a reverential

fear." There is no man that is not stout-hearted and far from righteousness, but is, upon God's warning, moved with a reverential fear of God in his judgments. It was so with David, Psalms 119:120, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments," He was not afraid as to outward judgments, but under them his flesh trembled with a reverential fear of God. And so was it with the prophet Habakkuk, upon the vision he had of the approach of the Chaldeans, chap. 3:16, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops." He had a reverential fear of God in his judgments working upon him. According to my best observation of things in this state wherein we are, the generality of people may be distributed under these three heads:—

(1.) There are some that are, indeed, really afraid of approaching judgments; they do not know how soon they will reach unto themselves, their persons, their families, their relations, their estates,—all that they have laboured for, and exerted their utmost care and industry about in the world; the flood flies at the door, ready to carry all before it; they fear every day. Some men die, also, for fear of dying; they are poor for fear of poverty;—they will part with nothing, because they fear they must part with all. A strange contradiction of spirit! Now this is not the work of faith. So far as it prevails upon any of our spirits, God will rebuke us for it, Isaiah 51:12-13, "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the LORD thy maker, and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor?" (chap. 8:10,) "and hast not sanctified the LORD in thy heart, nor made him thy fear?" Who art thou? God hates this sinful fear; it is an abomination unto him. This is nothing but the fear of self; we will keep all warm about us, while we are in this world, and are afraid of the besom of destruction.

(2.) There are others who utterly despise these things,—take no notice of them; who do not think any such distressing calamity shall come upon them: if it does, they shall deal well enough with it. Isaiah 28:14-15, "They have made a covenant with death, and with hell are they at agreement;" and say, "When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us." They have a thousand ways to disinterest themselves from any thing of the most distressing calamity that is coming over the world. This swallows up the generality of mankind, and is that which the prophet doth so reflect upon, Isaiah 26:11, "When thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them."

(3.) The other sort is mentioned in Judges 5:6, and may be called way-side men, idle, discursive men, that have nothing else to do but to walk up and down and talk, and are not concerned with a reverence of God and his judgments; they talk of them as if there were no God in heaven to regard them, or as if they had no concernment with him. If we have the least true saving faith in exercise, it will cast this cursed frame out of our hearts, it will be daily working it out of our souls, and will bring us to that which I told you is its proper work "God," saith the psalmist, Psalms 9:16, "is known by the judgment which he executeth." And what of God is principally known in the judgments which he executes in the world, is but little considered. That which God makes known of himself in a peculiar manner in these dreadful dispensations is, his majesty, his holiness, and his power.

God will appear to be awfully majestic and wonderfully glorious in such dispensations. He speaks of himself upon that occasion, Isaiah 2:20-21, "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and

his idols of gold, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." If we have the light of faith to let it in, we shall see a majesty and glory in God's actings, even in his public and distressing judgments,—such a greatness and a glory that the soul will be constrained to bow down before him.

God doth in his judgments also manifest his holiness; of which we shall speak afterward. So Revelation 15:4, "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy." How doth this appear? "For thy judgments are made manifest." When God makes his judgments manifest, his holiness will appear. And so, when Habakkuk came to plead with God about that great judgment of the Chaldeans which gave occasion to my text, he cries out, "O LORD my God, my Holy One, thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."

God in them also glorifies himself in his power. He sets up one, and pulleth down another, and doth whatsoever he pleases. Herein he manifestly shows his sovereign power.

Now, to live by faith, is to cast out all those cursed frames before mentioned, and to bring this frame into your hearts, as the foundation of all that follows,—namely, that you have a reverential fear of the majesty, the holiness, and the power of God, in all his judgments: and without this, we shall not please God in any thing we do. These are the true sayings of God. If there be another frame in us, this dispensation will pierce to the very soul before it be over: that is the first thing.

2. Where faith hath filled the soul with a reverential fear of God, its first work will be, to put the soul upon preparing and providing an ark for itself: so it was in the great example of our faith before mentioned. Noah, being moved by fear, "prepared an ark," wherein he saved himself and his family. Let men pretend what they will, unless they are under a strange, careless stupidity and security (which, I fear, is upon the generality of professors), they cannot, in such a season as this, but be preparing some reserve for themselves. "What shall we do when this comes upon us?" They have some predominant reserve. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city," Proverbs 18:11;—he may lose a great deal, but he will save enough for himself: so the strong man trusts to his strength, the wise man to his wisdom: one thing or other men prepare for themselves, to be an ark against the storm comes; and those who do not so, they fluctuate up and down at uncertainties, hoping that by one way and means or another, that they know not of, they shall be carried above all, have a good issue,—that it shall not be as this or that prophet or minister foretells, but that some way they shall escape. This is not to prepare an ark; which is the work of faith to do. And here I shall inquire into two things:—(1.) What is this ark that is to be prepared; (2.) How we ought to enter into it, or how we are to make especial entrance into it, in reference to an approaching calamitous season. I say,—

(1.) This ark is Jesus Christ. Faith in him is necessary. In this chapter of my text, where inquiry is made what shall be answered unto God, and what course shall be taken upon the coming in of the overflowing flood of the Chaldeans; this is the course to be taken, "The just shall live by his faith." What is that? It is to seek for righteousness by Christ; to seek afresh for justification and life by Christ. There is no other way, no other ark; and he is described as this ark in that well known place, Isaiah 32:2, "And a man" (that is, Jesus Christ) "shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land:" that is the ark. I know not how to describe [better] what I intend by securing ourselves

in the ark, like the description the prophet here gives, though in terms metaphorical. Likewise in Micah 5:5, having given a promise of Christ, he adds, "And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land." To betake ourselves to the ark, is to betake ourselves to the fountain of our peace. And so Psalms 2:12, "If God's wrath be kindled but a little"—How then? "Blessed are all they that" betake themselves unto him—"trust in him." In whom? In the Son;—"Kiss the Son." And surely, my brethren, the wrath of God is now kindled, not a little, but a great deal, in all sorts and ways. The indications of the wrath of God are upon the spirits of men of all sorts,—of professors, of the world, in their own persons, in all societies and relations. Where are we, then, to betake ourselves, but unto Christ? "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

(2.) But now, it would not have advantaged either Noah or his sons to have an ark prepared for them, unless they had a door to the ark. "Make a door," saith God to them, "that ye may have entrance." To obtain an interest in Christ is the general work of faith all our days. But how shall we be able now to make an especial entrance into this ark, suitable unto the state and condition wherein we are, and to approach a calamitous season that is hastening upon us? I know but of one way for our making an especial entrance into this ark, Jesus Christ, in reference to such a season; which is, the solemn renovation of our covenant with God. This is the way that hath been used by the church from the foundation of the world, without any instance of the contrary;—that, when a storm was coming, if ever they were delivered from it, they entered into the ark, by the renovation of their" covenant with God. And seeing the end is certain, we are thus afresh to enter into this ark, Jesus Christ. It is no wisdom in civil things to remove a means, unless we have a better to substitute in the room of it; and it is so in spirituals. I desire all that fear God would stir up their hearts and thoughts, and offer to us (if they can) a better way for this church, or any church, to enter into the ark in the approach of a storm than this, and it shall be embraced. This church hath done so; though I begin to fear some look upon it as a very dead, sluggish commodity, they know not how to trade with. But do not mistake, you have no such thing lies by you in the sight of God this day. Do not despond, the day is approaching "when others shall come" (as in Zechariah 8:23) "and lay hold upon your skirts, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." Some,—blessed be God, and let his holy name be exalted!—have far outgone us already, both in zeal and warmth and courage, under a sense of engagements that are upon them. I look for no safety, no deliverance, in the trials and afflictions that are coming upon the earth, but what is had in the way of believing. I value not those that are otherwise minded. Bless God, who hath provided for you this door of entrance before the flood comes and the rain falls; bless God, I say, for it, and make use of it, and be able to plead it with God: and let the Lord know that you have made your choice to be his, and are under his care, and not under the protection of the world. I will not say you shall be saved temporally, but you shall be saved eternally; I cannot say you shall have peace with men, but you shall have peace with God; I cannot say you shall not lose your lives, but I will say you shall not lose your souls: and these are our principal concernments. Make good your entrance. A door made into the ark will do you no good, unless you enter in and make good your entrance at the door. How shall we make good our entrance into the ark, that we may have safety therein? If we are not at this work, we have no faith. Why, stand to your engagements,—stand to the performance of those duties God requires at your hands; not only as there is no one thing required but what is a special duty of the new covenant, but stand to them now as those that have been your entrance into the ark, where God will give you all that rest that in this world you can be partakers of. This is another work of faith in the approach of a calamitous

time.

3. If we live by faith in the approach of a calamitous season, this will put us upon the search and examination of our own hearts, what accession we have made to the sins that have procured these judgments. This is that which faith (where it is in any measure sincere) will assuredly put us upon; and it is that God doth now in an especial manner call for. Now, the sins which do and have procured these judgments are of two sorts:—(1.) The open and flagitious sins of the world. (2.) The sins of churches and professors.

(1.) The open and flagitious sins of the world. The apostle reckons them up together, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." He doth it again in Ephesians 5:5-6, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." He reckons them up also in Galatians 5:19, etc., "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such lik." There is a marvellous large copy written out of these texts in the nation at this day: every man may read an exposition of these things in the practice of multitudes. Some will say, they bless God they are free from these things; and so they hope they have had no hand in procuring the judgments of God that are coming upon the nation; let them fall upon them and their interest who are guilty of these provoking abominations, such as for which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against their ungodliness. Why, it is well if they are not guilty of any of these sins; but the seed and foundation, even of all these sins, lie in our nature, if not in our persons, and what eruptions they have made towards the provoking the eyes of God's glory I know not. But suppose you have escaped these pollutions that are in the world through lust,—

(2.) There are other sins—sins of churches, and of professors—that, in reference to Christ's mediatory kingdom, have as great influence for the procuring of judgments as the worst sins of the world have for the procuring of judgments in his providential kingdom. I know a time when there was a storm, wherein a whole vessel, and all that were in it, were like to have been cast away; but one Jonah, that was in the ship, was the cause of the storm.

I shall just mention the judgment-procuring sins of churches and professors, which are reduced in Scripture to these four heads:—

[1.] Lukewarmness; which was the judgment-procuring sin of Laodicea.

[2.] Contenting ourselves in outward order and freedom from scandal; which was the judgment-procuring sin of Sardis, and wil prove ruinous to the best churches in the world.

[3.] Want of love among ourselves, and division in churches.

[4.] Earthly-mindedness, and love of the world, and conformity to it, that is found among the generality of professors.

17. THE USE OF FAITH UNDER REPROACHES AND PERSECUTIONS

THE USE OF FAITH UNDER REPROACHES AND PERSECUTIONS "The just shall live by his faith."—Habakkuk 2:4.

YOU may remember, I spake occasionally from that of the psalmist, Psalms 97:2, "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne;" and from thence took occasion to consider what is our especial duty when clouds and darkness are round about us, as they are at this day. And some of you know I have had a great persuasion that the clouds that are gathering will, at least in their first storm, fall upon the people of God. I must repeat it again and again; I have been warning you for some years, and telling you it would be so. The present frame wherewith I have to conflict in my own spirit, and that frame of spirit which I have observed in others, the state and condition of all churches and professors, so far as I know, is,—they are gone into a dreadful security. I speak my heart, and what I know with reference unto our present state and the cause of God; we are gone, I say, into a dismal security: which still confirms me that the storm will come upon us, and that it will not be long ere we feel it. My design is, therefore, to show you how we ought to behave ourselves under the perplexities and difficulties we are to conflict withal in this world. And I have not sat studying for things to speak, but only tell you the experience of my own heart, and what I am labouring after. I have already showed you what our duty is under the approach of these distressing, calamitous times that are coming upon us, and what faith will do in such a season.

II. I am now, in the second place, to show you how faith will carry it under other perplexities, that either are present or are coming upon us. And here I shall show you,—1. How we may live by faith, under all the reproaches and persecutions that do or may befall us, upon the account of that order and fellowship of the gospel, of that way of God's worship, which we do profess. 2. How we may live by faith, with reference unto the returning upon us of antichristian darkness and cruelty, if God shall suffer it so to be. 3. How we may live by faith under an apprehension of great and woful decays in churches, in church members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual with-drawings of the glory of God from us upon that account.

1. How may we live by faith, with reference unto those reproaches, that scorn and contempt, which are cast upon the ways of God which we profess, that worship of God wherein we are engaged, and that order of the gospel that we do observe, with the persecutions that will attend us upon the account thereof? Truly, I may say of it as the Jews said to Paul about Christianity, Acts 28:22, "As for this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against." The whole world seems to be combined, that the name of Israel, in this way, may no more be had in remembrance. There are few that are concerned about these things while it is well with them, their families, their relations, estates, inheritances. Let the ways of God be reproached, what is that to them? they are not concerned in it. They cannot say, as the psalmist doth, when he speaks in the person of Christ, Psalms 69:9, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." Perhaps some of us are more sensible than others (or, at least, have reason so to be) of those reproaches that are

continually cast upon the ways of God, seeing they are more particularly upon us; but to those that are not concerned in this scorn and contempt, I would say three things:—

First. What evidence have you that you have a concern in God's glory? For these things are those whereby God is glorified in this world; and if you are not concerned when there are so many reflections thrown upon it, pray consider what evidence you have in yourselves of any concernment in the glory of God.

Secondly. What evidence have you that you have a love to these things, that can hear them reproached, scorned, contemned, and never be moved at it? An honest, good man, would find himself concerned if his wife or children were reproached with lies and shameful things, because of his interest in them; but for them that can hear the ways of God reproached every day, and, so long as it is well with them and theirs, are not concerned thereat,—they can have no evidence that they have a love unto them. Nehemiah cries out upon such an occasion, chap. 4:4, "Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity." God hath made special promises to such as are thus concerned: Zephaniah 3:18, "I will gather them," saith he. Whom will he gather? "Them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden." The solemn assemblies were reproached and mocked; and there were some of them (not all) to whom this reproach was a burden. "These," saith God, "I will gather;"—"gather them under my gracious protection."

Thirdly, To add one word more: If you are not concerned in the reproaches that are cast upon the ways of God, persecution shall awaken you, and either make you concerned or put an end unto all your profession.

Now, the inquiry is, how, under these difficulties that we have to conflict withal, we shall glorify God, and pass through them without loss,—unto our spiritual advantage? The apostle, in the 10th chapter to the Hebrews, where he describes this very condition I have been speaking of, doth fully direct us. "Ye endured," saith he, "a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods," etc., verses 32–34. But how shall we carry ourselves under this condition here described? "Now," saith he, verse 38, "the just shall live by faith."

What is the work of faith in this condition, that we may glorify God, and carry it through to a good and comfortable issue to ourselves? Call your own hearts to an account, and see how faith will work to give you support and supply. I will tell you what I am labouring after in my own heart; and the Lord direct you to find out what will be more useful! What will faith do in such a case? I answer,—

(1.) Faith will give us such an experience of the power, efficacy, sweetness, and benefit of gospel ordinances and gospel worship, as shall cause us to despise all that the world can do in opposition unto us. Here I would cast my anchor, and exhort you not to be confident of yourselves; for nothing else will keep and preserve you. An opinion, a well-grounded opinion and judgment, will not preserve you; love to this or that man's ministry, will not preserve you; that you are able to dispute for your ways, will not preserve you (I can give you instances wherein they have all failed);—resolutions that, if all men should leave them, you would not, are insufficient. Nothing can

preserve you but a sense and experience of the usefulness and sweetness of gospel administrations, according unto the mind of Jesus Christ. This faith alone can give you. "Desire," saith the apostle Peter, "the sincere milk of the word," 1 Epist. 2:2;—"Desire, and labour to continue in, the ordinances of the gospel, and the worship of God under the administration of the word." How? "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious," verse 3; otherwise you will never desire it. I should hope that, through the grace of God (and otherwise I do not hope it), I might yet continue (if, indeed, I could keep alive) an experience that, in the dispensation of the word, I find a constant exercise of faith in God, delight in him, love to him;—if I find that I come to the word as expecting to receive from God a sense of his love and supply of his grace; I should then, I say, have good hope, through grace, that ten thousand difficulties should never shake me in my continuance in this way. But if it be otherwise, there will be no continuance nor abiding. I mention these things, because, to the best observation such a poor worm as I am can make, there is a mighty coldness and indifferency grown upon the spirits of men in attending to the worship of God. There is not that life, spirit, courage, and delight in it as hath been in times past; and if so, where it may end God only knows. This, I say, is the first thing that faith will do in this state, if we set it on work. If we would but labour to stir up faith to find those supplies of spiritual life and strength in the ways of his worship and ordinances,—if we would labour to overcome prejudices, and set ourselves against sloth and negligence,—we should find ourselves as other men, and greatly set at liberty as to what the world can do unto us. This is that which faith can do for us in such a state of things; and this is that I would be labouring to bring my own heart unto.

(2.) Faith, in such a season, will bring the soul into such an experimental sense of the authority of Jesus Christ, as to make it despise all other things. I profess, if it were not for the authority of Christ, I would renounce all your meetings; they would have neither form nor comeliness in them why they should be desired. But a deep respect unto the authority of Christ (unless our evil hearts are betrayed by unbelief and weakness) is that which will carry us through all that may befall us. Faith will work this double respect unto the authority of Christ:—

[1.] As he is the great head and lawgiver of the church, who alone hath received all power from the Father to institute all worship; and whoever imposes herein usurps his crown and dignity. All power to institute spiritual worship is given unto Christ in heaven and in earth. What then? "Go, therefore," saith he, "and teach men to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," Matthew 28:18-20. Bring your souls to this exercise of faith, that those things we do are commanded us by Christ, who is the sovereign Lord of our consciences, who hath sovereign authority over our souls. We must all appear before his judgment-seat, who will require of us whether we have done and observed what he hath commanded us or no. Do not only say these things, but labour greatly by faith to affect your consciences with this authority of Christ, and you will find that all other authorities will come to nothing, however you may suffer for it.

[2.] Faith respects the authority of Christ, as he is "Lord of lords, and King of kings;" as he sits at the right hand of God, expecting all his enemies to become his footstool; as he hath not only a golden sceptre in his hand, "a sceptre of righteousness," wherewith he rules his church, but also an iron rod, to break all his enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel. If faith exercises itself upon this power and authority of Christ over his enemies, it will pour contempt upon all that the world can do. You cannot be earned before any magistrate, but Christ is there present, greater than them all,—who hath their breath in his hands, their lives and their ways at his disposal, and can do

what he pleases with them. Faith will bring in the presence of Christ in such a season; when otherwise your hearts would fail for fear, and you would be left unto your own wisdom, which is folly, and your own strength, which is but weakness. But if you have but faith working in the sense of this authority, it will make you like those well-composed persons in the 3d of Daniel. Do not wonder at the greatness of their answer and the composure of their spirits when they looked on the fiery furnace on the one hand, and the fiery countenance of terrible majesty on the other. "Know, that God," say they, "whom we serve, is able to deliver us out of thy hand; but if not,—if God will not give us this present deliverance, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image," verses 17, 18. Faith will give us the same composure of spirit, and the same resolution; and with these things should we relieve ourselves under the worst that can befall us.

(3.) Faith, in such a case and condition, will bring to mind, and make effectual upon our souls, the examples of them that have gone before us in giving the same testimony that we do, and in the sufferings that they underwent upon that account. When the apostle had told the believing Hebrews, that through all their trials, tribulations, and sufferings, they must live by faith, Hebrews 10, "What encouragement," might they say, "shall we receive by faith?" Why, saith he, "Faith will bring to mind all the examples of them that have gone before you, that have suffered, and been afflicted, and distressed as you now are;"—which account takes up the whole 11th chapter, and a good part of the beginning of the 12th. It is a great thing when faith revives an example. Let us, then, by faith, carry in our minds the examples that are recorded in the Scripture. There is the example of Moses, the apostle gives it us; and it is an eminent instance: "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." He, by the dark promise he had to live upon, endured the reproach of Christ. My brethren, take the prophets for an example of them that have suffered; and consider how the apostles have gone before us: but do not stop at them; for there is a greater than Moses, and the prophets, and apostles,—greater than even a cloud of witnesses; and that is no less a person than the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." He underwent the contradiction of sinners against himself, "and is now set down at the right hand of God." Faith, calling to mind these great examples, would give us great support under all the trials we may be brought unto, and conflict with. Whither are we going? what do we hope for? We would be where Moses is, and where the prophets are; but how got they thither? They did not get thither through the increase of riches, and multiplying to themselves lordships in the world; but by sufferings and the cross. Through many tribulations they entered into the kingdom of heaven.

(4.) Faith will receive in the supplies that Christ hath laid up for his people, in such a season. Christ hath made peculiar provision for suffering saints. And it consists in two things:—First, In his special presence with them. He will be with them in the fire, and in the water. Secondly, In the communication of the sense of God's love unto them. Their "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and then the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us," Romans 5:3-5. Faith will bring all these things into the soul. But your minds must be spiritual, or you cannot put forth one act of faith for the bringing in this special provision that is laid up for suffering saints;—and very few attain this spiritual frame,

where faith fetches in these spiritual consolations Christ hath prepared for such souls. This is one way whereby we may live by faith in such a season. Search, therefore, and make inquiry in your entrance into troubles, what sense faith gives you of the love of God, to carry you through these difficulties.

(5.) It is faith alone that can relieve us with respect unto the recompense of reward. Moses "suffered affliction with the people of God; for he had respect to the recompense of reward," Hebrews 11:25-26. The light and momentary affliction which we undergo in this world, "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Corinthians 4:17. "Who knows, but in a few days some of us may be taken into that incomprehensible glory, where we shall eternally admire that ever we did put any manner of weight on things here below? Faith will fix your eye on the eternal recompense of reward. We have, indeed, a faith now at work, that fixes the minds of men upon this and that way of deliverance, and this and that strange accident; but we shall find that true faith will burn up all this as stubble.

(6.) And lastly, faith will work by patience. The apostle tells us "we have need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we might receive the promise;" and we are to be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," Hebrews 10:36; Hebrews 6:12. This is something of what I had to offer unto you, and, I hope, both seasonable and useful. However, it is what I can attain unto in these times of reproach, scorn, and contempt, that are cast upon us, and persecutions approaching. I say, faith will discover to us that efficacy, sweetness, power, and advantage in spiritual ordinances, as to make us willing to undergo any thing for them. Faith will bring our souls into such subjection unto the authority of Christ, as Head of the church, and Lord over the whole creation, that we shall not be terrified with what man can do unto us. Faith will furnish us with examples of the saints of God, whom he hath helped and assisted to go through sufferings, and who are now crowned and at rest in heaven. Faith will help us to keep our eye fixed, not upon the things of this world, but upon the eternal recompense of another world, and glory therein. And faith will also work by patience, when difficulties shall be multiplied upon us.

18. THE USE OF FAITH, IF POPERY SHOULD RETURN UPON US

THE USE OF FAITH, IF POPERY SHOULD RETURN UPON US "The just shall live by his faith."—Habakkuk 2:4. OUR inquiry is, how we may live by faith, with reference unto those difficulties we have, or may have, to conflict with in the days wherein we live. The last head we spake to was, how we may live by faith in reference to all the reproaches and scornful contempt that are cast upon that way of worship, that order and fellowship of the gospel, which we cleave unto, and the persecutions which we may undergo upon that account. I now proceed:—

2. The second difficulty that we have, or may have, to conflict with, is, the return of Popery into this land. Half the talk of the world is upon this subject. I have nothing to say to some among ourselves; but I verily believe, that those who have the conduct of the papal, antichristian affairs throughout the world are endeavouring to bring it in upon us. I remember what holy Latimer said when he came to die, "Once I believed Popery would never return into England; but," said he, "I find it was not faith, but fancy." I wish it prove not so with many of us. Now, that which I am to speak unto is this,—how we should live by faith, both in the prospect of the danger of it, and if it should come upon us. I shall name unto you a few things which I exercise myself with. If you have more supporting thoughts, and a better guidance of light, I pray God confirm it unto you.

(1.) The first thing I would exercise my thoughts upon, and that my faith rests in, in this case, is this,—that there is a fixed, determinate time in the counsel of God, when Antichrist and Babylon, and idolatry and superstition, together with that profaneness of life which they have brought in, shall be destroyed. It is so fixed, that it shall not be altered: all the wisdom of men, all the sins of men, and all our unbelief, shall not hinder it a day; it shall assuredly come to pass in its appointed season. This time is reckoned up in Scripture by days, by months, by years;—not that we should know the time of it, but that we should know the certainty of it; for if it hath but so many days, but so many months and years, then it must have a certain period.

Under the Old Testament we see this all along. Saith God to Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation will I judge," Genesis 15:13-14. They knew not the beginning nor the ending of this four hundred years; but they knew that at the end of them it should be as God had said: and "the self-same day it came to pass," Exodus 12:41. Likewise God threatens the Jews with a seventy-years captivity in Babylon: "And it shall come to pass," saith God, "when the seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation for their iniquity," Jeremiah 25:11-12. The church knew not when they began, or when they would end; but this they knew, that the same day they were accomplished it should be as God had said. And so it was. The fixing and computing of the time of the Man of Sin, of Antichrist, by days, and months, and years, is to secure our faith in the punctual determination of the season, but not to satisfy our curiosity when the season should be. But the consideration of this, that there is such a time, or a determinate season, is a great foundation of faith and patience. Isaiah 60:22, "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time." But if

there be a fixed time for the accomplishment of this promise, you may ask, "How can it then be hastened?" Why, if you live in the exercise of faith and patience, it shall surprise you; it shall come when you do not think it will, nor expect it: "I will hasten it in his time;"—"I will not bring it before its time, be ye never so patient or impatient; but exercise faith and patience, and I will so order it, that it shall be a sweet surprisal unto you." And it is a means of patience, Habakkuk 2:3, "If the vision" seem to "tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come." When we know it will come, when we know there is such a determinate time, and that it will surely come, it is a great ground of patience to wait for it. This is a great consideration with me, and I leave it with you. Here I can exercise faith, without fancy or conjecture, that there is a certain determinate time in the counsel of God wherein he will pour out all his judgments and plagues upon the antichristian world, until Antichristianism be destroyed and rooted out.

(2.) Another thing that comforts my heart is this,—it is no less glorious to suffer under the beast and the false prophet than it was to suffer under the dragon. The book of the Revelation is chiefly made up of these two things,—of the persecutions of the church; one by the dragon, and he is conquered; the other by the beast and false prophet, and they shall be conquered. The dragon was the heathen power of the Roman empire; and it was a glorious thing to suffer under that power. They that did so are described, Revelation 7:14-15, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." And of those that suffered under the beast and the false prophet it is said, Revelation 12:11, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." We account them great and glorious persons who won the liberty of the gospel and the Christian religion by suffering against the pagan power, and who destroyed all idolatry by their blood, starving and "famishing all the gods of the earth," Zephaniah 2:11. Never were men more glorious than they. These made up the "Turba palmifera;" that is, the company who, with palms in their hands, and a new song in their mouths, give glory unto God, Revelation 7:9-12. I say, it is not less glorious to suffer under the beast and false prophet, the second persecuting power,—that is, the papal, antichristian power,—than it was before under the pagan. This the church hath for many ages conflicted withal, and must continue to do so, until the time is come when they shall have a perfect and complete conquest over this also. It is a glorious thing, and I would have you reckon upon it as such. If a time of going into Smithfield should again come,—if God shall call us to that fiery trial or any other, whatever it may be,—remember that to suffer against Antichrist is as great and glorious as to suffer against Paganism.

(3.) Though our persons fall, our cause shall be as truly, certainly, and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand of God. Among the heathens, men of courage did not value their own lives, so their cause was carried on. Now, however your persons or my person may fall in this trial, yet the cause in which we are engaged shall as surely conquer as Christ is alive and shall prevail at last. Upon the first rise of the beast, it is said, Revelation 13:7, "He made war with the saints, and overcame them." The poor Waldenses looked upon themselves to be the people there prophesied of; and said, when they were under the butcheries of the papal power, "We are the conquered people of God; but there shall come forth conquerors." When going to die, they knew and believed their cause would conquer. And so, after Antichrist hath conquered and prevailed over persons for a season, at length it will come to a final issue. "They shall make war with the

Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful," Revelation 17:14. The gospel shall be victorious. This is the third thing that greatly comforts and refreshes me,—that if God should give me the honour, the strength, and grace to die in this cause, my cause shall be victorious, as sure as if I had the crown in my hand.

(4.) The judgments of God shall come upon the antichristian world when they look not for them; when the kings of the earth do not look for them; yea, when believers themselves do not look for them;—they shall come so suddenly. The Holy Ghost saith so expressly, Revelation 18:8, "Her plagues shall come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire." How is it possible that one that is in the state and condition wherein she is, should have her plagues come upon her in one day? The reason is added, "For strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." Almighty strength shall be put forth for the accomplishing of it. And if this be not enough, the 17th verse tells you that it shall come in "one hour." And I do verily believe that the destruction of this cursed antichristian state (of the head of it) will be brought about by none of those means we see or know of; but that the strong Lord God shall break in upon her and destroy her by ways unknown to us. It may be to-morrow; it may be not these hundred years. She herself, when it is done, shall look for no such thing. Verses 7, 8, "She hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously; for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day." When she is boasting herself, destruction shall come;—when the kings of the earth shall have no expectation of it; for they shall cry, verse 16, "Alas, alas! that great city, Babylon, that mighty city; for in one hour so great riches is come to nought." And believers themselves will be such as the children of Israel in Egypt. When Moses came they could not believe, because of the cruel bondage they were under: it is like the day wherein God's judgments will come upon Antichrist, the old enemies of Jesus Christ.

(5.) I would consider very much with myself the greatness of the indignation of God against those that shall in the least comply with Antichristianism when it doth come upon us. In Revelation 13:11, there is mention of "a beast that had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (which, I think, is the pope), "and he exerciseth all the power of the first beast;" that is, he exercises a power answerable to the pagan power. And what then? Verse 16, "He caused all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark." No matter what the mark is; but to receive any thing of him, is to receive his mark; either in our foreheads, where we shall show it unto all the world; or in our right hands, more privately, where it may be shown when opportunity serves. What then? Why, in chap. 14:6, 7, "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." When Antichrist would bring his mark on the foreheads of the people and into their hands, God, by his gospel, calls men from their false worship and idolatry. But what if they do not obey? The 9th and 10th verses tell us a "third angel followed, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb," etc. Some will be apt to say, "Let us make a fair composition, and use

some compliance, to put an end to these disputes." No; do it at your peril. God saith you shall drink of the wine of his wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and that for ever and ever. And I believe with all my heart and soul that this will be the portion of all the men and women in this nation that shall comply with any return of antichristian idolatry among us;—God shall pour out his indignation upon them.

(6.) Remember that if the trial comes, it is a day of battle; and it is not for you, when you should just engage in a battle, to be considering of this or that way or contrivance to escape. No; it is courage, and constancy, and faith alone, must be set on work, or you will not be preserved. All your wisdom and contrivances will not preserve you; but it being come to the issue between Christ and Antichrist, "it is the girding up the loins of your mind," and a "resisting unto blood against sin," and abiding in it, that is your duty, and must preserve you. Nothing will save you but faith, courage, and constancy.

(7.) There are in the Scripture intimations, that those who, in an especial manner, cleave unto God and his worship, with faith, love and, delight, shall be preserved and saved. I do not propose this unto you as an object of your faith; all the rest I do: but I say, there are intimations that give me some satisfaction; that they who with quick and lively spirits do act faith, and love, and delight in God and his worship, or that are worshippers in the inner court of the temple, shall be peculiarly secured at such a time. But I am afraid few of us shall have it; because I see so much coldness and deadness grown generally upon us and the churches of Christ. It makes me think exercises will come upon us all; for we have need of them. To conclude,—

First. Let not your talk about strange things keep the thoughts of these things you have been hearing out of your hearts; for you will be tried with Antichristianism before you die. We talk of news, and great things we look for in the world, and that Antichrist shall be destroyed: and so he will; but I do believe he will try us sorely in the meantime.

Secondly. Take heed of computations. How wofully and wretchedly have we been mistaken by this! We know the time is determined,—its beginning and ending is known to God; and we must live by faith till the accomplishment.

Thirdly. So many of us as have afresh engaged ourselves in covenant unto God, let us remember that we have taken the "mark of God upon our foreheads;" and it will ill become us to set the mark of Antichrist by it. This is all I have to offer unto you as to living by faith under the apprehensions of those difficulties we have to conflict withal, in reference to the coming in of profaneness and idolatry, wherewith we are threatened by hell and the world, which are at this day combining together to bring them again upon this nation.

19. THE USE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF GENERAL DECLENSION IN RELIGION

THE USE OF FAITH IN A TIME OF GENERAL DECLENSION IN RELIGION "The just shall live by his faith."—Habakkuk 2:4.

I Am now come to the last thing that was proposed to be spoken to, and with which I shall shut up the subject, namely,—

3. How we may live by faith, under an apprehension of great and woful decays in churches, in church-members, in professors of all sorts, and in the gradual withdrawing of the glory of God from us all on that account.

I would speak unto three things:—(1.) That this is such a time of decay among us, among churches, among church-members, and professors of all sorts and ways throughout this nation; yea and other nations too, where there are any that fear God. (2.) That this is, and ought to be, a cause of great trouble and trial unto all that are true believers. And then,—(3.) I shall show you how we may live by faith in such a season,—what it is faith will do to support the soul at such a time.

(1.) That it is now such a time of decay, there are too many evidences of it. I will name a few things:—

[1.] A sense of it is impressed upon the minds of all the most judicious and diligent Christians, that do abound most in self-examination, or do take most notice of the ways of God. Multitudes have I heard testifying of it; complaints are received from many in this nation, and the neighbouring nations, that there is a great decay, as to the power of grace and life of faith, among all sorts of professors. And some of them will go farther in their evidence, and tell us that they find the effects of it in themselves; that they find it a matter of great difficulty, requiring great watchfulness and great diligence, in any measure to keep up themselves unto their former frames; and when they have done all, they do not attain their desire. And, to increase this evidence, we are all convinced of it, or else we are notorious hypocrites; for I know not how often I have heard it prayed over in this very place. So that there is sent forth from God a conviction upon the hearts and minds of spiritual, self-examining believers, that churches, church-members, professors, and themselves, are under spiritual decays. This is the first evidence; and therefore, in such a season, it was the best part of the church that made that sad complaint, Isaiah 63:17, "O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" They were sensible that there was a judgment of the hand of God upon them.

[2.] The open want of love that is among churches, among church-members, among professors, is another evidence of decay. I will not speak of the want of love among churches one to another; but as to love among church-members, we have scarce the shadow of it remaining among us. Where men have relations, where they have acquaintance, where they have been old friends, where they

agree in humour and converse,—there is an appearance of love; and where they agree in a party and faction, there is an appearance of love: but upon the pure spiritual account of Christianity and church-membership, we have, I say, scarce the shadow of it left among us. I remember how it was with us, when it was a joy of heart to behold the face of one another;—wherein there was love without dissimulation, in sincerity; love attended with pity, compassion, condescension; yea, love attended with delight. But it is dead in churches, dead among professors.

[3.] Another evidence of this decay is, want of delight and diligence in the ordinances of gospel worship. These ordinances were wont to be a joy of heart unto all that feared God; but now there is so much deadness, coldness, and indifferency,—so much undervaluing of the word, self-fulness, pride, and so much an apprehension that we know every thing,—so little endeavour to tremble at every truth, by what means soever it be brought unto us,—as gives a manifest evidence of woful decays that are fallen upon us. Dead preachers! dead hearers!—all things now go down among the churches of God and professors in these nations. And this is attended with two desperate evils; one of which I heard of but lately (but upon inquiry, I find it to be a far greater evil than I took it to be), namely, men—under an apprehension that they do not see others enlivened nor quickened as they were wont to be by the ordinances of divine worship, and finding no such thing in their own hearts neither (in all probability finding themselves to grow dead and useless)—are fallen into an opinion that there is an end of them, and that they ought to attend unto them no more. And this doth befall some that have long walked soberly and with great diligence in the use of ordinances: some in this city, and in other places, are led by foolish delusions to it, because they do not find the spirit, and life, and power of the word and ordinances in themselves and, as they think, in others. A godly and learned minister, that showed me a discourse written upon this subject, in defence of ordinances, did acquaint me with so great a number falling into this abomination, that I did not think it had been possible. This is one of the evils. The other evil that attends it is this,—that this deadness and indifferency unto ordinances, and want of bringing our necks to the yoke of Christ therein, against all disputings and arguings of flesh and blood, hath taken such place among us, and proceeded so far, that all ways of reformation are useless. Men may make divisions, and do I know not what; but this I know, there is no way of obtaining any reformation, but for men to engage their hearts to return unto God in more delight in his service than there hath been. Some utterly forsake the assemblies; some come with great indifferency,—using their liberty, off and on, at their pleasure. Are not these things evidences of great decays among us? To me they are. I speak not as to this congregation in particular, but as to the state of all churches that I know or can hear of in these nations.

[4.] The last evidence I shall mention of these decays among us, is our worldly-mindedness,—conformity to the world, and security. These things have been so often spoken to you, and no reformation hath ensued, that now they are looked upon as words of course; and I am discouraged from speaking of them any more. But assure yourselves, this conformity to the world, and this security that is yet found among us, is a great evidence that the glory of God is departing from us. Ministers preach against worldly-mindedness, security, etc., but it makes no impression upon the minds of men; for we can scarce give an instance of any, the least reformation. These things plainly demonstrate that we are all under great decays.

(2.) A sense of this general decay among churches, church-members, and professors, ought to be an exercise and concern unto our minds. If we think all is well with us, and are satisfied, while we

are free from outward troubles, and [do] not concern ourselves about our decays, I will not say we are hypocrites, but, truly, we are poor, low, dead, carnal, unspiritual Christians. I thought to have spoken to these three heads, to show you,—

[1.] How God is dishonoured by this general decay;

[2.] How the world is offended and scandalized at it;

[3.] How the ruin of churches is hastened by it;—which will befall them assuredly, unless God recover us out of this bad state: but I shall waive these things, and proceed:—

(3.) Suppose it be thus (and we do complain of it to one another, not knowing what the issue will be, nor what it may come unto),—how shall we live by faith under this consideration? what is the work of faith in this state? If things are so (and I wish any one could evidence they are not; but suppose, for once, that they are so), and our souls are burdened with an apprehension that they are so,—then what will faith do to enable us to pass through this exercise, and to live to God?

I will tell you something of what I find. And if God help you not to better things, make use of these, and improve them, that you may give glory to God by believing under this condition also:—

[1.] Faith will mind the soul that notwithstanding this also, yet Christ hath built his church upon that rock, that it shall not be utterly prevailed against. "The promise," saith faith, "extends itself as well to the inbred adversaries of our own souls, unbelief, deadness, and all these things, as to our outward enemies." Matthew 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Though we were all dead, helpless, lifeless, poor creatures,—though we had retained almost nothing but outward order, and had lost the very vigour and essence of faith and obedience,—yet Christ's church shall abide and stand, and those that belong to him shall be preserved. "Such and such are turned apostates," saith the apostle, 2 Timothy 2:19, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." Here is my ground of hope, notwithstanding all this, though one falls after another, though one decays after another,—"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure;" and it hath a seal upon it, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Every one whom he hath effectually called, and built upon the rock, Jesus Christ, shall be preserved, whatever befalls the residue of the world. To see such a confluence of all manner of dangerous evils from without as are coming this day upon the church of God; and to see, in the meantime, so many evidences of a decaying spiritual state in believers themselves; it will put faith to exercise itself upon this promise of Christ,—"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." If you find your spirits at any time pressed with these things, if nothing better occurs at hand, exercise faith upon this promise of Christ, and upon the firm standing of the foundation of God,—that he knoweth who are his, and will carry them through all these difficulties, and land them safe in eternity.

[2.] Faith will also mind the soul that God hath yet the fulness and residue of the Spirit, and can pour it out when he pleases, to recover us from this woful state and condition, and to renew us to holy obedience unto himself. There are more promises of God's giving supplies of his Spirit to deliver us from inward decays, than there are for the putting forth the acts of his power to deliver us from our outward enemies. And God is as able to do the inward work,—to revive and renew a spirit of faith, love, and holiness, of meekness, humility, self-denial, and readiness for the cross: he is able, with one word and act of his grace, to renew it; as he is able, by one act of his power, to

destroy all his enemies, and make them the footstool of Christ, when he pleases. Live in the faith of this. The psalmist saith, in Psalms 147:16-17, "He scattereth the hoarfrost;" and the issue is, the earth is frozen,—he brings a death upon it. But saith he, in Psalms 104:30, "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit; and thou renewest the face of the earth." In like manner there is deadness upon all churches and professors, in some measure, at this time;—but God, who hath the fulness of the Spirit, can send him forth and renew the face of the soul,—can give professors and profession another face; not to trim and trick, as now so often is done; not so high and haughty, not so earthly and worldly, as is now so much seen; but humble, meek, holy, broken-hearted, and self-denying. God can send forth his Spirit when he pleases, and give all our churches and professors a new face, in the verdure and flourishing of his grace in them. When God will do this I know not: but I believe God can do this; he is able to do it,—able to renew all his churches, by sending out supplies of the Spirit, whose fulness is with him, to recover them in the due and appointed time. And more; I believe truly, that when God hath accomplished some ends upon us, and hath stained the glory of all flesh, he will renew the power and glory of religion among us again, even in this nation. I believe it truly, but not as I believe the other things I have mentioned unto you: for those I believe absolutely,—namely, that Christ hath built his church upon a rock, and that nothing shall ever finally prevail against it; and that God hath the fulness and the residue of the Spirit to renew us again to all the glory of profession and holy obedience. These I propose as truths that are infallible, that will not fail you, and upon which you may venture your souls to eternity. And if your faith in these things will not give you support and comfort, I know not what else will.

[3.] When your souls are perplexed within you about these things, your faith will say unto you, "O my soul, why art thou cast down? Are not all these things foretold thee,—1 Timothy 4:1, 'That in the latter times some shall depart from the faith;' 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 'That in the last days perilous times shall come;' because men should have 'a form of godliness, but deny the power?' Hath it not been foretold that churches shall decay, and lose their first faith and love, in examples that have been set before you?" "Why are you surprised?" saith our Saviour, John 16:4, "These things have I told you, that, when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." I was never nearer a surprisal than by this one thing, how it could possibly be, that after so many instructions,—after so many mercies, trials, fears,—after so many years carrying our lives in our hands, and so many glorious deliverances, there should yet be decays found amongst us, and such going backward. It is a great surprisal to one that considers it aright. But seeing it is foretold that so it shall be, "let us live by faith:" God hath some great end to accomplish out of it; and then all will be well. "When I have performed my whole work upon mount Zion," saith God, "then," etc., Isaiah 10:12.

[4.] And lastly, faith, if it be in exercise, will put every soul in whom it is upon an especial attendance unto those duties God calls him unto in such a season. This accomplishes and completes our living by faith under such a trial as this is. If faith be in us, and in exercise, it will put us upon all these duties that God requires of us in such a season:—

1st. It will put us upon self-examination, how far we ourselves are engaged in these decays, and have contracted the guilt of them.

2dly. It will put us upon great mourning, by reason of God's withdrawing himself from us.

3dly. It will put us upon watchfulness over ourselves, and over one another, that we be not overtaken by the means and causes of these decays.

4thly. It will put us upon zeal for God and the honour of the gospel, that it may not suffer by reason of our miscarriages. In one word, faith will do something; but for our parts, we do little or nothing. Faith will do something, I say, wherever it is, when it is stirred up to exercise; but as to these special duties, in reference to these decays that all professors are fallen under,—O how little is it we do in any kind whatever! Would we might advise with one another what to do under these decays,—to further one another in recovering ourselves from them! This, then, is what we are called to, and is required of us,—namely, faith in the faithfulness of Christ, who hath built his church upon the rock, [so] that, be things never so bad, it shall not be prevailed against;—faith in the fulness of the Spirit, and his promise to send him to renew the face of the church; faith in apprehending the truth of God, who hath foretold these things; and faith putting us upon those especial duties that God requires at our hands in such a season.

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