

**A WORD
IN SEASON TO
SUFFERING
SAINTS**

**BY
THOMAS BROOKS**

A Word in Season to Suffering Saints

**The special presence of God with His people,
in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses,
and most deadly dangers.**

By Thomas Brooks, London, 1675

"At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But **the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength**, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth." [2 Timothy 4:16-17](#)

In my text you have three things which are most remarkable—

First, You have Paul's commemoration of that singular experience that he had of the favorable presence of Christ with him, and of his strengthening of him, "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength." [Acts 23:11](#); though I was deserted by men—yet I was aided and assisted by Christ, [2 Tim. 4:16](#); though all men left me to shift for myself—yet the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me with wisdom, prudence, courage, and constancy, in the lack of all outward encouragements, and in the face of all outward discouragements, [2 Tim. 1:15](#).

Secondly, Here is the end for which the Lord stood by him, assisted, strengthened, and delivered him, namely—that he might preach the gospel to the nations, [Romans 11:13](#); [Phil. 4:22](#), that he might have more time, and further opportunity, to spread abroad the everlasting gospel among the Gentiles. *Rome*, at this time, was the queen of the world, and in its most flourishing condition; people from all parts of the world flocked to Rome. Now when they would hear and see Paul's prudence, courage, constancy, and boldness, in professing of Christ, and in preaching and professing the gospel—before that grand tyrant, that monster of mankind, Nero—they could not but be wrought upon, and the fame of the glorious gospel could not but by this means be spread all the world over.

Thirdly, Here is the greatness of the danger from which he was delivered, namely, "I was delivered from the lion's mouth." Some authors conceive these words to be a proverbial speech, noting some eminent, present, devouring danger; "I was delivered from the extreme hazard of death," even as a man rescued out of a lion's mouth, and pulled from between his teeth. Others more genuinely and properly, by "the lion's mouth," do understand Nero's rage and cruelty, who, for his potency in preying on the flock of Christ, is here fitly compared to a lion, which devoured and destroyed the flock of Christ. This cruel lion *Nero*, put a multitude of Christians to death, and made a bloody decree, that whoever confessed himself a Christian, he would, without any deliberation, be put to death as a convicted enemy of mankind. This bloody monster, Nero, raised the first bloody persecution. To

pick a quarrel with the Christians he set the city of Rome on fire, and then charged it upon the Christians, under which pretense he exposed them to the fury of the people, who cruelly tormented them as if they had been common burners and destroyers of cities, and the deadly enemies of mankind! Yes, Nero himself caused them to be apprehended and clad in wild beasts' skins and torn in pieces with dogs; others were crucified; some he made bonfires of to light his night-sports. To be short, such horrid cruelty he used towards them as caused many of their enemies to pity them. But God found out this bloody persecutor at last, for being adjudged by the senate an enemy to mankind, he was condemned to be whipped to death, for the prevention whereof he cut his own throat.

The words being thus briefly opened, the main point I shall insist upon is this—namely, That **when the people of God are in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—then the Lord will be most favorably, most specially, and most eminently present with them.**

They learned say that God is five ways present—

- (1.) In the humanity of *Christ*, by hypostatical union;
- (2.) In the *saints*, by knowledge and love;
- (3.) In the church, by his essence and direction;
- (4.) In heaven, by his majesty and glory;
- (5.) In *hell*, by his vindictive justice.

Hemingius says, There is a fourfold presence of God—

- (1.) There is a presence of *power* in all men, even in the reprobates;
- (2.) A presence of *grace*, only in the elect;
- (3.) A presence of *glory*, in the angels, and saints departed;
- (4.) A *hypostatic* presence of the Father with the Son.

But, if you please, you may take notice that **there is a sixfold presence of the Lord—**

1. First, There is a GENERAL presence of God, and thus he is present with all creatures. "Where shall I flee from your presence?" [Psalm 139:7](#). Empedocles, the philosopher, said well, that "God is a circle, whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere." God is not bound by any place, and not excluded from any place. Says another: "God is the soul of the world; his eye is in every corner, etc." To which purpose they so portrayed their goddess Minerva, that whichever way one cast his eye, she always beheld him. Though heaven is God's *palace*—yet it is not his *prison*. Diana's temple was burned down when she was busy at Alexander's birth, and could not be at two places together

—but God is present both in paradise and in the wilderness at the same time. "God is higher than the heaven, deeper than hell, broader than the earth, and more diffuse than the sea!" — Bernard.

[1 Kings 8:27](#), "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built?" By the heaven of heavens is meant that which called the empyreal heaven, where the angels and the departed saints enjoy the glorious and beatific vision of God; and it is called the heaven of heavens, both because it is the highest and does contain the other heavens within its orb; and also by way of excellency, as the "most holy place" in the temple is called the "holy of holies," because it far surpasses all the rest in splendor and glory, [Isaiah 66:1](#); [Proverbs 5:21](#); [Heb. 4:13](#); [Job 26:6](#).

[Jer. 23:24](#), "Can any hide himself in secret places that I should not see him? says the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? says the Lord." [Proverbs 15:3](#), "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." God is all eye. The poor heathen could say, "God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves." Repletively he is everywhere, though inclusively nowhere. [Job 34:21](#), "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he sees all his goings;" verse 22, "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." Sinners shall never be able to shroud themselves nor their actions, from God's all-seeing eye.

The Rabbis called God *Place*, because he is in every place, though in the assemblies of his saints more eminently and gloriously. God is present with all his creatures—

(1.) *Via productionis*, by raising them up;

(2.) *Via sustentationis*, by sustaining and keeping of them up; they are his family, and he feeds and clothes them, [Mat. 5:45](#); [Acts 17:27-28](#); [Psalm 33:13-14](#);

(3.) *Vid inclinationis*, by giving unto them power of motion; man could neither live nor move unless the Lord were with him;

(4.) *Vid observationis*, by taking notice of them; he observes and marks both their persons and their actions—he sees who they are, and how they are employed;

(5.) *Vid ordinationis*, by governing and ruling of them and all their actions, to the service of his glory and the good of his poor people, [Acts 4:25-29](#).

But this is not that presence that we are to discourse of.

2. Secondly, There is a MIRACULOUS presence of Christ, and this some of the prophets of old had, and the apostles and others had in Christ's time; and by virtue of this miraculous presence of Christ with them, they cast out devils, healed diseases, and did

many wonderful things, [Mat. 7:22](#); [Mark 3:15](#). But this is not the presence that falls within the compass of that main point we purpose to speak to.

3. Thirdly, There is a RELATIVE presence of Christ, and that is his presence in his ordinances, and with his churches. [See [Psalm 46:4-5](#); [Cant. 7:5](#); [Joel 3:21](#); [Zech. 2:10-11](#), and [8:3](#); [Psalm 135:21](#).] Of this presence the Scripture speaks very largely. [Exod. 20:24](#), "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto you, and I will bless you." [Exod. 25:8](#), "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." [Exod. 29:45](#), "And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God." [Lev. 26:11, 12](#) "And I will set my tabernacle among you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." [Psalm 76:1, 2](#) "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion." [Isaiah 8:18](#), "From the Lord Almighty, who dwells in mount Zion." [Psalm 9:11](#), "Sing praises to the Lord who dwells in Zion."

The churches are said to be the temples in which the Lord dwells, and the house of the living God, and the golden candlesticks among which he walks. [[1 Cor. 3:16-17](#); [2 Cor. 6:16](#); [Heb. 3:6](#); [1 Pet. 2:5](#); [Rev. 2:1](#).] Oh, how much does it concern all the churches to prize their church state, and to keep close together, and to walk suitable to that gracious presence of God, which shines in the midst of them! But this is not that presence that falls under our present consideration. But,

4. Fourthly, There is a majestic and GLORIOUS presence of Christ, and thus he is said to be in **heaven**. [Psalm 2:4](#), "He who sits in the heavens will laugh." [Heb. 1:13](#), "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool?" chapter 9:24, "For Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figure of the true—but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Not that heaven is a place wherein Christ is shut up—but the court, as it were, where his majesty, in acts of wisdom, and power, and mercy, and grace and glory, does most of all appear. [[Job 16:19](#); [2 Thes. 1:9](#); [Psalm 16:11](#); 1 Tim. 6:14-16; [Rev. 3:21](#).]

As the soul of man, though it be in every part of man—yet it does principally appear and manifest itself in the heart and mind; so here, etc. Monica, Austin's mother, standing one day and seeing the sun shine, raised this meditation, "Oh, if the sun be so bright, what is the light of Christ's presence in glory!" But this is not the presence we design now to discourse of.

5. Fifthly, There is a JUDICIAL or WRATHFUL presence of the Lord; and thus he is present with wicked men, sometimes blinding them, sometimes hardening them, sometimes leaving them to their own heart's lusts, sometimes giving them up to their own heart's lusts, sometimes filling their faces with shame, and their consciences with terrors. [See [Exod. 9:14](#); [Isaiah 6:9-10](#),

and [64:1-4](#); [Psalm 81:12](#); [2 Thes. 2:11-12](#); [Psalm 68:2](#); [Jer. 4:26](#); [Ezek. 38:20](#); [Hab. 1:12](#).] He is judicially present with wicked men by a particular observation of their persons and ways, [Psalm 33:13-14](#); [Job 34:21-22](#). He sees who they are, and how they are employed against his honor, his interest, his saints, his ways. He is judicially present with wicked men by a special detestation of their persons and ways, etc. But this is not that presence that at this time falls under our consideration; and therefore,

6. Sixthly and lastly, There is a GRACIOUS, a favorable, a special, or eminent presence of the Lord with his faithful people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, as the Scriptures do everywhere evidence. [The compassionate parent is most with the sick child; so here.] Take a taste of some: [Gen. 39:20](#), "And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound, and he was there in the prison;" verse 21, "But *the Lord was with Joseph*, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison." A prison cannot keep God away from his people. Witness the apostles and martyrs, whose *prisons*, by God's presence, became *palaces*; and their chains, by God's presence, became a music-school, [Acts 16:25](#).

If men knew by experience the delight which is in suffering for Christ, they would desire with Chrysostom, if it were put to their choice, rather to be *Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ*, than *Paul enrapt up in the third heaven*. Basil, in his oration for Barlaam, that famous martyr, says, "He delighted in his vile prison, as in a pleasant green meadow, and he took pleasure in the several inventions of tortures, as in several sweet flowers." Luther reports of that martyr, Agatha, that as she went to her prisons and tortures, she said she went to banquets and weddings. "The sun enlightens the world," says Cyprian, "but he who made the sun is a greater light to you in prison, etc." "Fire, sword, prisons, famines, are pleasure, they are all delightful to me," says Basil. "Paul rattles his chain which he bears for the gospel, and was as proud of it as a woman of her jewelry," says Chrysostom. [[Eph. 6:20](#); [2 Tim. 1:16](#); [Acts 15:26, 29](#); [Phil. 1:7, 13-14, 16](#); [Col. 4:3, 18](#); [2 Tim. 2:9](#), etc.]

Paul and Silas in a prison found more pleasure than pain, more joy than sorrow; and when they were whipped, it was with rosemary branches, as I may say. Paul greatly rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ, and therefore often sings out, "I, Paul, *a prisoner of Jesus Christ*," not I, Paul, enrapt up in the third heaven. Christ showed his great love to him in bringing him up in the third heaven, and he showed his great love to Christ in a cheerful suffering for him.

Eusebius tells of one who wrote to his friend from a stinking dungeon, and dated his letter "From my beautiful orchard." Mr. Glover the martyr, rejoiced in his imprisonment. "God forgive me," said Mr. Bradford when a prisoner, "of my unthankfulness for this exceeding great mercy, that among so many thousands he chooses me to be one in whom he will suffer." Philip, landgrave of

Hesse, being a long time prisoner under Charles the Fifth, was asked what upheld him in his long imprisonment. He answered that he felt the divine consolations of the martyrs.

[Gen. 49:23](#), "The archers," or, as the Hebrew here has it, the arrow-masters, "have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." These arrow-masters were Joseph's barbarous brethren who sold him, his adulterous mistress that, harlot-like, "hunted for his precious life;" his injurious master who, without any desert of his, imprisoned him; the tumultuating Egyptians, who pined with hunger, perhaps spoke of stoning of him; and the envious courtiers and enchanters who spoke evil of him before Pharaoh, to bring him out of favor. But by divine assistance, and God's favorable preference, [1 Sam. 30:6](#), he proved too strong for them all. Verse 24, "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were *made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*," etc.

Joseph is likened to a strong archer, who, as his many enemies shot at him—so his bow was steadfast, and his arms strong by the special presence of God with him. Such an eminent presence of God had Joseph with him, that he never lacked courage, comfort, or counsel when he was at his worst. The divine presence will make a man stand fast and firm under the greatest pressures. It made Joseph use his bow against his adversaries, as David did his sling against Goliath. He slung, says one, as if he had wrapped up God in his sling.

[Psalm 23:4](#), "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for *you are with me*; your rod and your staff they comfort me." The presence of the Lord with his people in the most deadly dangers fills their souls full of courage, confidence, and comfort. That darkness which comes upon a dying man, a little before he gives up the life, is the greatest darkness; and yet let a Christian then have but God by the hand, and he will not fear the most hideous and horrid representations of death!

[Dan. 3:24](#), "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spoke and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast *three* men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king;" verse 25, "He answered and said, Lo, I see *four* men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." The presence of the Son of God turned the fiery furnace into a garden of delights, a gallery of pleasure. This divine presence in the midst of fire and flame kept them from fainting, sinning, and shrinking, and filled their souls with comfort, peace, ease, and heavenly refreshing. We may very safely understand this fourth person to be, as the words do literally bear, the very true Son of God, our Lord and Savior, who is specially present with his people in their greatest extremities and most deadly dangers.

[Zech. 1:8](#), "In a vision during the night, I saw a man sitting on a red horse that was standing among some myrtle trees in a small

valley. Behind him were red, speckled, and white horses, each with its own rider." The man riding upon the red horse is the man Christ Jesus; it is the captain of the Lord's army, and the captain of our salvation. [Tim. 2:5; [Josh. 4:14](#); [Heb. 2:10](#). Among the Romans the crown or garland of those who did shout for victory, or ride in triumph, was made of myrtle, Plin., lib. xv. c. 29.] Christ is here represented in his kingly state, under the type of a man riding on a red horse, and having his royal attendants; for under the type of the other horses behind him, is represented his having angels for ministers, and all creatures ready for every dispensation; whether sad, represented by *red*; or comfortable, represented by *white*; or mixed of mercy and judgment, represented by *speckled* horses.

Christ is here represented as a man on horseback, ready to sally forth for the good of his people when they are at the lowest. The low, afflicted, and suffering state of the church is fitly compared to myrtle-trees which grow in a shady grove, in valleys, and bottoms, and by water-sides. Now, when his people are in a very low condition, then Christ appears on horseback, for his people's protection, and their enemies' confusion.

Christ will be sure to lodge with his people when they are at lowest. When the church is in danger, Christ is not asleep; he is always ready upon his red horse, watching all opportunities and advantages, to show his zeal and courage for his people, and his severity and fury against their enemies. The man who stood among the myrtle-trees, verse 10, is Christ Jesus, whose special residence is with his people when they are in the most low, dangerous, and forlorn condition. No troubles, no distresses, no dangers, can banish Christ from his people, or make him seek another lodging.

"But now, O Israel, the Lord who created you says—Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." [Isaiah 43:1-3](#)

The Israelites went through the Red Sea, and were not drowned; and the three Hebrew children walked up and down in the fiery furnace, and were not so much as singed, [Dan. 3:27](#). By "fire and water" we may well understand the various troubles, distresses, and dangers which may attend the people of God. Now in all these various troubles, etc., the Lord will be specially present with them, to protect and defend, to secure and deliver them out of all their various troubles, their deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers.

[2 Cor. 4:9](#), "Persecuted—but not forsaken; cast down—but not destroyed." Persecuted by men—but not forsaken by God. The saints may be shaken—but not shattered; persecuted—but not conquered; cast down—but not cast off. Luther, speaking of his

enemies, says, "They may show their teeth—but not devour me; they may kill me—but not hurt me, because of that favorable and special presence of Christ which is with me." Now this is that presence of the Lord that falls under our present consideration.

But for the further opening of this important point, let us a little inquire— **HOW the Lord does manifest his favorable, his special, his eminent presence to his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers?** Now to this question I shall give these twelve answers—

(1.) First, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by raising their faith to more than an ordinary pitch at such a time.**

[Exodus 14:10-12](#) , "As Pharaoh and his army approached, the people of Israel could see them in the distance, marching toward them. The people began to panic, and they cried out to the Lord for help. Then they turned against Moses and complained, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? Why did you make us leave? Didn't we tell you to leave us alone while we were still in Egypt? Our Egyptian slavery was far better than dying out here in the wilderness!" Thus you see their great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, they having a Red Sea before them, and a cruel, bloody, and enraged enemy just at the heels of them. Now in this extremity, see to what a high pitch Moses his faith rises: verse 13, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again." He says they shall never see the Egyptians again, that is, in that manner as they saw those who day insulting against them and pursuing after them—for they saw them afterward—but drowned, and lying dead upon the shore, [Exod. 14:14](#), "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." A strong faith will help a Christian in difficult circumstances. Though Moses had received no particular promise how the Israelites should be delivered—yet he rested upon God's general promise before, that he would get himself honor upon Pharaoh and his army: "The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall be still." As if he had said, You shall be merely passive, and do nothing at all towards the subduing of your enemies, neither in words nor deeds; the Lord shall fight against your enemies, and defeat them himself by a strong hand and an outstretched arm; compose yourselves, act faith and hope in God, without doubting, murmuring, grudging, fainting, or fretting; for God defers his chief aid—until man's greatest need. When the enemy is highest, salvation is nearest; when the danger is greatest, the help of God is readiest, as at this time they found it.

[2 Chron. 13:3](#), "Abijah went into battle with a force of four hundred thousand able fighting men, and Jeroboam drew up a battle line against him with eight hundred thousand able troops." Jeroboam was outnumbered, two to one. Verse 7, "Some

worthless scoundrels gathered around him and opposed Rehoboam son of Solomon when he was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them." Rehoboam was no warrior, he was no expert prince in the use of arms; he was but young, not in age—but in experience, policy, and valor; he was chicken-hearted, he had no courage, no mettle. [2 Chron. 12:13. He was forty-one years old when he came to the crown.] Jeroboam takes hold of these advantages, and gathers eight hundred thousand *Racas*—brainless fellows, light and empty; men of no piety, civility, ingenuity, or common honesty.

Now see what a mighty spirit of faith God raised in the children of Judah: verse 17, "Abijah and his men inflicted heavy losses on them, so that there were five hundred thousand casualties among Israel's able men." A monstrous and matchless slaughter, the greatest number that ever we read slain in any battle; far beyond that of Tamerlane when he took Bajazet, or Atius the Roman prefect, when he fought with Attila and his Huns in the fields of Catalonia, where were slain on both sides one hundred sixty-five thousand: verse 18, "The men of Israel were subdued on that occasion, and the men of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers," because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers. Strong faith never miscarries. God never has, nor never will, fail those who place their confidence upon him in their greatest dangers.

[Esther 4:14](#), "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Their great trouble, their deep distress, and their most deadly danger you have in [Esther 3:13](#), "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods." [Here are great aggravations of his cruelty, in that neither gender nor age are spared. Rage and malice knows no bounds.] Haman, that grand informer, with his wicked crew, would have robbed them of their lives and goods— but that they were prevented by a miraculous providence, as you know. Now in this deep distress and most deadly danger, at what rate does Mordecai believe? "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews *will* arise from another place." This Mordecai speaks not by a spirit of prophecy—but by the power and force of his faith, grounded upon the precious promises of God's defending his church, hearing the cries of his people, arising for their relief and support, and grounded upon all the glorious attributes of God, namely, his power, love, wisdom, goodness, and all-sufficiency, etc., all which are engaged in the covenant of grace, to save, protect, and secure his people in their greatest troubles and most deadly dangers.

Mordecai's faith in this black, dark, dismal day, was a notable faith indeed, and worthy of highest commendation. Faith can look through the perspective of the promises, and see deliverance at a

great distance, salvation at the door. What though sense says, "Deliverance will not come;" and what though reason says, "Deliverance cannot come;" yet a raised faith gets above all fears, and disputes, and says, "Deliverance will certainly come, redemption is at hand."

[Num. 13:30](#), "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said—We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." chapter 14:9, "Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." The spies by their lies did what they could to daunt and discourage the people, by crying up the strength of the Anakims, and the impossibility of the conquest, [Num. 13:32-33](#). These hollow-hearted hypocritical spies blow hot and cold almost in a breath, [Num. 13:23-28](#). First, they make a narrative of the fruitfulness of the land, and presently they conclude that it was a land that was not sufficient to nourish the inhabitants, yes, a land which devoured the inhabitants, verse 32. Liars have no iron memories.

But now behold to what a mighty pitch Caleb's faith is raised. "Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are able to overcome it." Or, nearer the Hebrew, "Marching up, march up, subduing, subdue." Let us, says believing Caleb, march up to the land of Canaan courageously, resolutely, undauntedly, for the day is our own, the land is our own, all is our own. "They are bread for us," we shall make but a breakfast of them, we shall as easily and as surely root them out, and cut them down with our swords—as we cut the bread we eat. "Their defense is departed from them." In the Hebrew it is, "Their shadow is departed from them." The shadow you know guards a man from the scorching heat of the sun, [Psalm 91:1](#), and [121:5-6](#). Caleb, by faith, saw God withdrawn from them; by the eye of his faith he looked upon them as a people without a fence, a shadow, a guard, a covert, a protection; and therefore, as a people that might easily be subdued and destroyed. His faith told him that it was not their strong cities, nor their high walls, nor their sons of Anak, that could preserve, shelter, secure, or defend them, seeing the Lord had forsaken them, and would be no longer as a shadow or a shelter to them. "And the Lord is with us," to make us victorious, to tread down our enemies, and to give us a quiet possession of the good land.

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king—O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king." [Daniel 3:16-17](#). In the fiery furnace they are protected by a divine providence, they escape death beyond all men's expectations, for the fire touched them not, neither could it burn during their abode in the furnace, for God so fortified their bodies that they could not be consumed by fire, which miracle made them in great estimation with the king, for that he saw that they were virtuous, and beloved of God, and for that cause they were highly honored by him.

Here is a fiery furnace before them, and a proud, boasting, tyrannical, enraged prince domineering over them, for not obeying his idolatrous will. Now to what a mighty pitch is their faith raised! "The God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king!" Their faith was bottomed upon their propriety in God: "Our God;" and upon the power, providence, and all-sufficiency of God: "Is able to save us;" and upon the gracious readiness and willingness of God: "And he will rescue us from your hand, O king." When dangers are greatest, then God commonly raises the faith of his people highest; faith does most and best for us, when we are in impossible circumstances. Faith quenches the violence of fire, [Heb. 11:34](#); as the apostle speaks, pointing at the faith of these three Hebrew *children*, or rather *champions*. Though now the fiery furnace was heated seven times hotter than it used to be at other times—yet such was the strength, and might, and power of their faith, that it so quenched the flames, that they had not one hair of their heads singed, nor their coats burned, nor the smell of fire found upon them, [Dan. 3:27](#). And thus the blessed martyrs may be said by their faith, patience, and constancy to quench the violence of the fire, though their bodies were consumed to ashes in the fire.

Just so, in [Dan. 6:16](#). Daniel is cast into the den of hungry, enraged lions; innocent Daniel is exposed to the cruel paws and hungry jaws of lions. This kind of capital punishment was not unusual among the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, and among the Romans also, with whom it was a common saying in Tertullian's time, "Let the Christians be cast to the lions!" The faces of the lions are stern, and their voices are terrible, [Amos 3:8](#); they are roaring and ravenous, they are greedy for their prey. They are vigilant and subtle. Lying in wait to get their prey, they sleep little, and when they sleep, it is with open eyes. They mind their prey much, and are cunning to catch it, [Psalm 17:12](#). The lion hides himself, and when the prey comes near he suddenly surprises it. They are proud and stately, they go alone, they eat not with the lioness, much less with other creatures, they will not stoop to any, or turn away from any, they do what they will; they are most cruel, bloody, devouring creatures; they have terrible claws, sharp teeth, and are strong and mighty to crush and break the bones; and it is very dangerous to meddle with lions. [[Proverbs 30:3](#); [Neh. 2:12](#); [2 Kings 17:6](#); [Proverbs 28:15](#); [1 Pet. 5:8](#).]

[Num. 24:9](#), "Like a lion they crouch and lie down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse them?" Lions if offended and provoked are very revengeful. In the hunting or taking of lions, the lion observes who wounds him, and on him if possible he will be revenged. By these hints we may guess at the deadly danger that Daniel was in.

Josephus, to illustrate the history, says, that these informers pleaded before the king, saying that the lions were full and gorged, and therefore they would not touch Daniel; which the king hearing, being displeased with their injurious malice, cast them in to the lions den, to see whether they could likewise escape: but

this being done, they were suddenly destroyed, before they came to the bottom of the den, [Dan. 6:24](#). To what a fatal end came these informers! As to their wives and children that were cast into the den of lions, it is most probable that they were accessory to that wicked conspiracy against Daniel, by stirring up and provoking their husbands and fathers, to engage all their power, interest, and policy against him, and never to allow a poor captive to be advanced in honor and dignity above them. How just and righteous a thing was it with God, that those who had plotted together, and contrived together, the ruin and destruction of a holy innocent person, that these should suffer together, and go to the lion's den together, and be torn in pieces together. Sinners, look to yourselves; if you will sin with others, you must expect to suffer with others!

God secured Daniel in the midst of these dreadful dangers by the ministry of an angel. "My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me," [Dan. 6:22](#). Others say, that God secured Daniel, by taking away the lions' hunger from them at that time, and by causing in them a satiety. And some tell us, that God secured him, by raising such a fantasy in the lions that they looked upon Daniel, not as a prey—but as on one who was a friend unto them. But now in the midst of this dreadful danger, how does Daniel's faith sparkle and shine: verse 23, "The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God." Daniel in a fiery furnace looks upon God as his God, in the midst of the flames he acts faith upon the power of God, the promises of God, etc. Of all living creatures lions are most fierce, cruel, and irresistible—and yet such was the strength and force of Daniel's faith, that it stopped their mouths, see [Heb. 11:33](#); [Judges 14:6](#); [1 Sam. 17:34](#).

Though Daniel was but one man—yet such was the power of his faith, that it stopped the mouths of many lions. As Luther says of prayer, so may I say of faith; it has a kind of *omnipotency* in it; it is able to do all things. Thus you see by these famous instances to what a mighty pitch the Lord has raised the faith of his people, when they have been in the greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers; and this is the first way wherein the Lord does manifest his favorable, his special, his eminent presence with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. But,

(2.) Secondly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, his special, his eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by his teaching and instructing of them.** [Psalm 94:12](#), "Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, and teach him out of your law." This divine presence turns every lash into a happy lesson. In this psalm the Holy Spirit uses six arguments to prove that a man is blessed who is chastened.

[1.] Because he is instructed by being afflicted, as here.

[2.] Because the end why God lays affliction on his people is to give them rest from the days of adversity, verse 13.

[3.] Until the pit is dug for the wicked, in verse 13, until the cold grave holds his body, and hot hell holds his soul.

[4.] Because God will support them under all their afflictions. When God casts his people into the furnace of afflictions, his everlasting arms shall be underneath them. Though God may cast *down* his people—yet he will never cast *off* his people.

[5.] Because there shall be a glorious restoration: verse 15, "Judgment shall return unto righteousness."

[6.] Because all the upright in heart shall follow it, in verse 15, namely, in their affections they are carried out after it, earnestly desiring that dear day when God will unriddle his providences, and clear up his proceedings with the sons of men.

Jerome, writing to a sick friend, has this expression: "I account it a part of unhappiness not to know adversity; I judge you to be miserable, because you have not been miserable." Demetrius says, "Nothing seems more unhappy to me than he to whom no adversity has happened." "Freedom from punishment is the mother of security, the stepmother of virtue, the poison of religion, the moth of holiness," says Bernard. It was a speech of Gaspar Olevianus, in his sickness: "In this disease," says he, "I have learned how great God is, and what the evil of sin is. I never knew who God was before, nor what sin meant before." God's corrections are our instructions, his lashes our lessons, his scourges are our schoolmasters, his chastisements are our admonishments. [[Isaiah 26:9](#); [Proverbs 3:12-13](#), and [6:23](#).] And to note this, the Hebrews and Greeks both express *chastening* and *teaching* by one and the same word; because the latter is the true end of the former, according to that in the proverb, "Smart makes wit, and vexation gives understanding."

[Job 36:8-10](#), "But if men are bound in chains, held fast by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done—that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil." Sanctified afflictions open men's ears to discipline, and turn them from iniquity, which is a piece of learning that a Christian can never pay too dearly for. Affliction is an excellent comment upon the Scriptures. Afflictions make way for the word of the Lord to come to the heart. Sanctified affliction is practical teaching.

Bernard had a brother of his, who was a riotous and profane soldier; Bernard gives him many good instructions and admonitions, etc.—but his brother slighted them, and made nothing of them. Bernard comes to him, and says, "God will make way to that hard heart of yours by some spear or lance." And so it fell out; for, going into the wars, he was wounded, and then he remembers his brother's instructions and admonitions, and then they got to his heart, and turned him from his sinful ways.

[Job 33:16](#), "Then he opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction." "The eye that sin shuts, afflictions open," says Gregory. Troubles open men's eyes, as the tasting of honey did Jonathan's. By correction God seals up instruction; God sets on the one by the other; as when a schoolmaster would have a lesson learned indeed, he sets it on with a whipping. As Gideon taught the elders of the city and the men of Succoth with the thorns and briars of the wilderness, so God teaches his people by affliction many a holy and happy lesson, [Judges 8:16](#).

By afflictions, troubles, distresses, and dangers—the Lord teaches his people to look upon sin as the most loathsome thing in the world, and to look upon holiness as the most lovely thing in the world. Sin is never so bitter, and holiness is never so sweet, as when our troubles are greatest and our dangers highest. By afflictions the Lord teaches his people to sit loose from this world, and to make sure the great things of that other world. By affliction God shows his people the vanity, vexation, emptiness, weakness, and nothingness of all created

things—and the choiceness, preciousness, and sweetness of communion with himself, and of interest in himself. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." [Psalms 119:67](#). "I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me." [Psalms 119:75](#)

Christ, though he knew, "yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered," [Heb. 5:8](#); that is, he showed obedience more than before; not as if Christ were to go to school to learn, or as if by certain acts he were to fit himself for obedience; he did not *learn* that which he knew not before—but *did* that which he did not before. He who was put upon the trial of his obedience, he came to know by experience what a hard matter it was thus to obey God.

By God's favorable presence a man comes to learn many lessons in a time of adversity which he never learned in a day of prosperity; for we are like idle boys and bad scholars—who learn best when the rod is over us. *Hezekiah* was better upon his sick-bed than when he was showing of his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, [Isaiah 39:1-5](#); and *David* was a better man when he was in his wilderness-condition than when he sat upon his royal throne, [Psalm 30:6-7](#). The *Jews* are ever best when in the worst condition; the *Athenians* would never mend until they were in mourning. When *Munster* lay sick, and his friends asked him how he did, and how he felt; he pointed to his sores and ulcers, whereof he was full, and said, "These are God's gems and jewels with which he decks his best friends, and to me they are more precious than all the gold and silver in the world." "Here," as that martyr phrased it, "we are but learning our A B Cs, and our lesson is never past Christ's cross, and our walking is still home by Weeping-Cross."

Usually men are worst in a prosperous condition. In a prosperous condition God speaks to us, and we mind him not: "I spoke to you

in your prosperity—but you would not hear: and this has been your manner from your youth upwards," [Jer. 2:21](#). Pope Martin reported of himself that, while he was a monk and lived in the cloister, he had some evidences for heaven; when he was a cardinal, he began to fear and doubt; but after he came to be pope, he utterly despaired. The Lord never shows more of his favorable, special, and eminent presence, than by teaching of his people many gracious and gospel lessons by their great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers. But

(3.) Thirdly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, his special, his eminent presence with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by raising, strengthening, and actuating their suffering graces—namely, their faith, hope, love, patience, prudence, courage, boldness, zeal, constancy.** Thus in the text, "The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me." He put new life, and strength, and vigor into all my graces. Although there are habits of grace always resident in the hearts of the saints—yet those habits are not always in exercise. The habits of grace cannot act of themselves, there must be renewed strength imparted to set them on work. "Make me to go in the path of your commandments, for therein do I delight," [Psalm 119:35](#). Though David had a spirit of new life within him—yet he could not actually walk in the path of God's precepts, until by an additional force he was set agoing.

[Cant. 4:16](#), "Awake, O north wind, and come you south wind, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." [Christ is the different winds, both cold and hot, moist and dry, binding and opening, north and south; and therefore whatever wind blows, it shall blow good to his people.] By the garden we may safely understand a sanctified soul, and by the spices in this garden we may understand the several graces planted in the soul. Now these spices can never flow out, and send forth their fragrant smell, until the north and south wind blows upon them. Habitual grace cannot operate, and function, and put forth itself into exercise, until by the concurrent presence and assistance of Christ it is empowered into act.

No saint can act that grace he has received, by his own strength, without the presence and assistance of Christ: [1 Cor. 15:10](#), "But by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain—but I labor more abundantly than they all—yet not I—but the grace of God, which was with me." He does not say, the grace of God which was *in* me, that habitual grace which I had; but the grace of God which was *with* me. So then it is not the strength of habitual grace, which will carry a man through doing or suffering work—but the auxiliary, the assisting, the conquering grace of Jesus Christ. It is his grace *with* us, more than his grace *in* us.

Just so, [John 15:5](#), "Without me you can do nothing." You who are my disciples, you who have the Spirit of Jesus Christ, "Without me you can do nothing." The habits of grace, the actings of grace, and the perfecting of grace—are all from Jesus Christ. It is more

emphatic in the original, for there you have two negatives, "cannot do nothing." He does not say, "Without me you cannot do *many* things," but, "Without me you can do *nothing*." Nor he does not say, "Without me you can do no *great* thing," but, "Without me you can do *nothing*." Nor he does not say, "Without me you can do no *difficult* thing," but, "Without me you can do *nothing*." Nor he does not say, "Without me you can do no *spiritual* thing," but, "Without me you can do *nothing*."

Whatever a saint may do by the power of gifts, or habits of grace received—yet he can do nothing in a lively spiritual acceptable way without the presence of Christ, without a constant dependence upon Christ, without a sweet and special communion and fellowship with Christ. If we cannot put forth a *natural* action without him—for in him we live, move, and have our being, [Acts 17:28](#)—how much less can we perform a *spiritual* action, in a spiritual manner—without his presence and assistance?

"While the King was at His table, my perfume spread its fragrance." [Song of Songs 1:12](#). That is, let Jesus Christ be but present with us, and then our graces, which are compared to perfume, will send forth its fragrance. Sitting at the table with King Jesus intimates the sweetest friendship and fellowship with Him. It was held a great honor and happiness to stand before Solomon, [1 Kings 10:8](#); what is it then to sit with Christ at his table? "My spikenard sends forth the smell thereof;" that is, My faith is actuated, and all my other graces are exercised and increased. Christ's presence puts life into all our graces: [Isaiah 41:10](#).

[Luke 21:14-15](#), "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." [2 Cor. 12:10](#), "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I am weak in myself, then am I strong in Christ. If the sun shines upon the flower, how soon does the flower open. Just so, when the Sun of righteousness does but shine upon a Christian's graces, how do they open and act! [Mal. 4:2](#). To show how the presence of Christ has acted the faith, love, courage, boldness, and patience, etc., of the saints in the Old and New Testament, the primitive Christians and the martyrs, in the latter ages of the world, when they have been in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, would take up more than a little time; besides, in my other writings I have opened these things more fully to you, and to them I must refer you. And therefore,

(4.) Fourthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by laying a law of restraint upon every wicked man, and by bridling and checking their fury and insolency, that they shall not add afflictions to the afflicted**, as otherwise they would; as he did upon *Laban*: [Gen. 31:24](#), "And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that you speak not to Jacob, either good or bad." Verse 29, "It is in the power of my

hand to do you hurt; but the God of your fathers spoke unto me last night, saying, Take you heed that you speak not to Jacob, either good or bad." See what a law of restraint God laid upon Esau, [Gen. 33:1-4](#); and upon *Abimelech*, [Gen. 20:6-8, 17-18](#); and upon *Benhadad*, [1 Kings 20:1, 10, 29-30](#); and upon *Haman*, as you may see by comparing the 3rd and 6th chapters of Esther together; and upon *Pharaoh*, [Exod. 15:9-10](#); and upon *Sennacherib*, [Isaiah 37:28-29, 33-36](#); and upon *Herod*, Acts 12.

Maximinus set forth a proclamation engraved in brass for the utter abolishing of Christ and his religion: but he was eaten up by lice. *Valens*, about to sign an order for the banishment of godly Basil, was smitten with a sudden trembling of his hand that he could not sign the order; afterwards he was burned to death by the Goths.

Domitian, the author of the second persecution against the Christians, having drawn a catalogue of the names of such as he was to kill, in which was the name of his own wife and other friends; upon which he was, by the consent of his wife, slain by his own household servants with daggers in his privy-chamber. His body was buried without honor, his memory cursed to posterity, and his ensigns were thrown down and defaced. *Julian* vowed to make a sacrifice of the Christians upon his return from the wars; but, in a battle against the Persians, he was mortally wounded, and throwing his blood in the air, in a high contempt of Christ, he died with that desperate blasphemous expression in his mouth, "Galilean, you have overcome me!"

Felix, Earl of Wurttemberg, was a great persecutor of the saints, and did swear that before he died he would ride up to the spurs in the blood of the Lutherans; but the very same night, wherein he had thus sworn and vowed, he was choked in his own blood.

The judgments of God were so famous and frequent upon the persecutors of the saints in Bohemia, that it was used as a proverb among the adversaries themselves, that if any man were weary of his life, let him but attempt harm against the Christians—and he would not live a year to an end.

By these short hints you may see that all along God has made good that word that is more worth than a world, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; and the remainder of wrath shall you restrain" Hebrew, "Shall you gird," that is, curb, and keep within compass, as with a girdle. "The remainder of wrath shall you restrain," that is, those who are left alive of your wrathful enemies, that have still any malice against your people, you will curb and restrain, and not allow their wrath to be so great as formerly; or if they go about to recruit their forces, and to set again upon your people, you will set such bounds to their wrath that they shall not accomplish their desires, nor shall they proceed one step further than shall make specially for your glory and your people's good. The more eager and furious the enemies are against God's people, the more honor and glory will God get in protecting and securing his people, and in girding, binding, and tying up their enemies. Were it not for this favorable, special, and

eminent presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—wicked men would still be a-multiplying of their sorrows, increasing their troubles, and adding of burden to burden. It is this favorable presence of God, which binds wicked men over to their good behavior, and that chains them up from doing that mischief that they design and intend. But,

(5.) Fifthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by guiding and leading them into those paths and waves which make most for their own peace and quiet, safety and security, contentment and satisfaction, happiness here, and blessedness hereafter.** [Exod. 12:21-22](#); [Isaiah 63:12-14](#); [Psalm 5:8](#). [Deut. 32:10](#), "He found me in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." [The apple of the eye, or the pupil, is the tenderest piece of the tenderest part. God esteems his people above all the world, [Heb. 11:38](#).] A wilderness-condition is, you know, a condition of straits, needs, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers. Now when his people were in this condition, God instructs them by his words and works, and he takes them by the hand, as I may say, and leads them with all care, tenderness, gentleness, and sweetness, as a man would do a poor helpless infant, which he should find in a desert, in a waste howling wilderness. God never left leading of his people until he had brought them at last through the wilderness to the land of Canaan.

Ah! this leading *presence of God* turns a wilderness into a paradise, a desert into a Canaan. Let a Christian's troubles, distresses, and dangers, be ever so many and ever so great—yet as long as he has the guiding presence of God with him, he is safe from dangers in the midst of dangers. "The fire shall not burn him, nor the waters overflow him," [Isaiah 43:2](#): [Psalm 107:4](#), "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." verse 5, "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." verse 6, "Then they cried unto the Lord in their troubles, and he delivered them out of their distresses." Here you see their great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers; and now God gives them his hand, verse 7, "And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation;" that is, to a state of settlement, say some, to Jerusalem, say others, or to that "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," says another, [Heb. 11:10](#).

In that 32nd Psalm you may see David's great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers: verse 3, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long." verse 4, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." But will God be his guide now? Oh yes, verse 8, "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way which you shall go: I will guide you with my eye." Let the hand of the Lord be ever so heavy upon a person—yet the

presence of God guiding and instructing of him will keep him from utter fainting and sinking under that hand, [Isaiah 30:21](#); [Psalm 73:24](#). When the people of God are in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—he leads and guides them, [Psalm 25:9](#), [12](#), and [5:8](#).

[1.] Into **SUPERNATURAL** ways: [Proverbs 15:24](#), "The way of life is above to the wise." He has his feet where other men's heads are; and, like a heavenly eagle, delights himself in flying high.

[2.] Into **GOOD** ways, [Jer. 6:16](#).

[3.] Into **STRAIT** and **STRICT** ways, [Mat. 7:14](#). Hence they are called right or straight paths which lie between two extremes; or, if you will, which directly lead you to the view of heaven. They are paths which lie level with the rule and with the end. A man may see salvation and heaven at the end of them.

[4.] Into **PLEASANT** ways: [Proverbs 3:17](#), "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Such as were those of Adam before his fall, strowed with roses and paved with peace. Some degree of comfort, pleasantness, and peace, follows every good action—as heat accompanies fire, as warm beams and influences issue from the sun.

[5.] Into **RIGHT** paths: [Proverbs 4:11](#), "I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths." [Hosea 1:9](#), "The ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous shall walk in them." The ways of his will, the ways of his word, and the ways of his worship—are all right ways, they carry us on in a straight line unto a right end.

[6.] into **OLD** and **ANCIENT** ways: [Jer. 6:16](#), "Ask for the *old* paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest to your souls." [Jer. 18:15](#), "They have caused them to stumble in their way from the ancient paths." The ways of holiness are of the greatest, highest, and ancientest antiquity. The first ways of Adam were ways of holiness. The ways of sin are of a later edition than the ways of holiness. God stamped his image of holiness upon man before ever Satan tried to tempt him. Holiness is of the ancientest house, of the greatest antiquity. Sin is but an upstart, holiness is the firstborn. The way of holiness is the oldest way, the way of holiness is gray-headed and of ancientest institution. All other ways are but of yesterday, they are but new ways, compared to the ways of holiness. The stamp of antiquity upon many things is a praise and an honor to them, as old gold, old friends, old manuscripts, old monuments, old scars, and old holiness. The stamp of antiquity upon the ways of holiness is the praise and honor of the ways of holiness.

[7.] Into paths of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**: [Psalm 23:3](#), "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake;" or in plain, smooth, easy paths, or in sheep-tracks, wherein I may walk unweariedly and unblamably. Herein he alludes to the shepherd's care in leading his sheep gently in fair and plain ways, and not through deep mire, brambles, and briars, or over craggy ways—

which would be hard and troublesome for them to go in. The word here used is metaphorical; sometimes respecting the *blind*—who cannot walk without a guide; sometimes *little or weak children*—who cannot go without a leader; and here the *weak and wandering sheep*—which stand in need of the shepherd to go in and out before them.

[8.] Into paths of **SALVATION**: [Acts 16:17](#), "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation."

[9.] Into ways of **TRUTH**: [2 Pet. 2:2](#), "And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." "The way of truth," that is, the true Christian religion revealed from heaven, which shows the way to true happiness, to eternal salvation.

[10.] Into ways of **UPRIGHTNESS**: [Proverbs 2:13](#), "Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness."

Now when the people of God are in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, the Lord by leading them

[1.] into supernatural ways,

[2.] into good ways,

[3.] into strict and straight ways,

[4.] into pleasant ways,

[5.] into right ways,

[6.] into old and ancient ways,[7.]

into righteous ways,

[8.] into ways of salvation,

[9.] into ways of truth, and

[10.] into ways of uprightness,

does gloriously manifest his favorable, his special, and his eminent presence with them.

There is nothing below a mighty presence of God, which can enable a Christian—especially when he is under great troubles, and in deep distresses, and most deadly dangers—to do these five things:

[1.] To approve of the ways of God;[2.]

To choose the ways of the Lord;[3.] To

highly prize them;

[4.] To delight and take pleasure in them;

[5.] To walk in them and to keep close to them.

And yet in all these five things the Lord does greatly and graciously help his poor people, when they are, as it were, in the very mouth of the lion. But,

(6.) Sixthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable presence, his special and eminent presence with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by encouraging, emboldening, animating and heartening up his people in the midst of all their troubles, distresses, and dangers, and by putting new life, spirit, and mettle into them, when they are even in the very mouth of the lion.** [Josh. 1:6](#), "Be strong and of a good courage." Verse 7, "Only be strong and very courageous." Verse 9, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be dismayed: for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." [2 Chron. 13:12](#); [Num. 13:32-33](#), compared with 14:9. Joshua was a sword-man as well as a book-man; he had his name changed from *Oshea* to *Joshua*, from *Let God save*, to *God shall save*, [Num. 13:16](#). Christ will never lack a champion to stand up for his church. If Moses dies, Joshua shall stand up. There shall be a succession of *sword-men* and *book-men*, of *rulers* and *teachers*—to carry on Christ's work in the world until the top-stone is laid with grace unto it, [Zech. 4:7](#); [Mal. 2:15](#).

The giving of the Spirit is with the Lord, and therefore he can and will put such an anointing of his Spirit upon one and another as shall fit them to carry on his works in the world. Joshua was very valiant, and a man of singular good mettle—yet because he was sure to meet with such troubles, deep distresses, and deadly dangers, as would sink him, therefore he is pressed so frequently to be courageous: verse 6, "Be strong and of good courage." Verse 7, "Only be strong and very courageous." Verse 9, "Be strong and of good courage. Verse 18, "Only be strong and of good courage." [Deut. 31:7](#), "And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of good courage," etc. [Moses had a special command from God to charge Joshua to be courageous, [Deut. 1:38](#), and [3:28](#). God himself also lays the same command upon him, [Deut. 31:23](#).] And why all this? Not because Joshua had revealed any faintheartedness or cowardice—but because the work he was to undertake was so weighty and perilous, in regard of those many and mighty nations whom he was to destroy, and plant the Israelites in their place. The work that Joshua was to undertake, was attended with many great difficulties and dangers, in respect of the *enemies* he was to encounter, as being men of giant-like statures and strength, and dwelling in cities with high walls and strongly fortified.

Now the main argument to raise his courage and mettle is drawn from God's special presence and assistance: [Josh. 1:9](#), "For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." We are not to understand it of God's general presence in all places—but of his

special, favorable, special, and eminent presence—which God would manifest in his preservation, and protection, notwithstanding all the difficulties, schemes, dangers, and enemies which he was to encounter.

Just so, [2 Chron. 32:7](#), "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there are more with us than with him." Verse 8, "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles," etc. At this time the king of Assyria was the greatest monarch in the world, and the most formidable enemy Israel had. He had a mighty army, for there were a hundred eighty-five thousand of them slain in one night, verse 21. Now the great thing they were to mind and attend, was the favorable, special, and eminent presence of God with them, which raised all their hearts above all discouragements, fears, and dismayedness. What is the chaff, compared to the whirlwind? What are thorns and briars, compared to a consuming fire? What is an arm of flesh, compared to the arm, strength, and power of a God? What is weakness, compared to strength; and the nothing-creature, compared to the Lord Almighty

Now if the special special presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles and most deadly dangers won't put singular courage, life, and mettle into them—what will? [Acts 23:10-11](#), "The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks. The following night *the Lord stood near Paul* and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." The favorable, special presence of the Lord with him turned his prison into a palace.

Mr. Philpot, being a prisoner for the testimony of Jesus, writes thus to his friends: "Though I tell you that I am in hell in the judgment of this world—yet assuredly I feel in the same, the consolation of heaven. I praise God; and this loathsome and horrible prison is as pleasant to me as the walks in the king's garden." When Paul was in great danger the Lord stood by him, to cheer, comfort, and encourage him, see [Acts 27:23-24](#). Now God claps him on the back, and puts new life and mettle into him.

When Dionysius was given up by the executioner to be beheaded, he remained constant and courageous, saying, "Come life, come death, I will worship none but the God of heaven and earth."

When Chrysostom had told Eudoxia the empress that for her covetousness she would be called a second Jezebel, she thereupon sent him a threatening message, to which he gave this stout and resolute answer, "Go tell her, I fear nothing but sin."

When the executioner had kindled the fire behind Jerome of Prague, he bade him kindle it before his face; "For," said he, "if I had been afraid of it, I would not have come to this place, having had so many opportunities offered me to escape it." At the giving

up of the life, he said, "This soul of mine, in flames of fire, O Christ, I offer you!"

The emperor, coming into Germany, sent for Luther to come to the city of Worms; but many of his friends, from the danger they apprehended hanging over his head, dissuaded him from going; to whom he gave this prudent, courageous, and resolute answer, "That these discouragements were cast in his way by Satan, who knew that by his profession of the truth in so illustrious a place, his kingdom would be shaken; and that, therefore, if he knew that there were as many devils in Worms as there were tiles on the houses—yet he would go."

The German knight, in his letter for Luther against the pontifical clergy, says, "I will go through with what I have undertaken against you, and will stir up men to seek their freedom. I neither care nor fear what may befall me, being prepared for either event, either to ruin you to the great benefit of my country, or myself to fall with a good conscience," etc.

William Flower the martyr said, "That the heavens should as soon fall as I will forsake my profession, or budge in the least degree from it."

Apollonius being asked, if he did not tremble at the sight of the tyrant, made this answer, "God, who gave him a dreadful countenance, has given also unto me an undaunted heart."

When Gardiner asked Rowland Taylor if he did not know him, etc., to whom he answered, "Yes, I know you, and all your greatness—yet you are but a mortal man; and if I should be afraid of your lordly looks, why don't you fear God, the Lord of us all?"

Basil affirms of the primitive Christians, that they had so much courage and magnanimity of spirit in their sufferings, that many heathens, seeing their heroic zeal, resoluteness, and undauntedness, turned Christians.

When one of the ancient martyrs was terrified with the threatenings of his persecutors, he replied, "There is nothing of visible things, nor anything of invisible things, that I fear; I will stand to my profession of the name of Christ, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, come of it what will."

By these instances, which may be of great use in this trying day, you may clearly see how the Lord has manifested his favorable, special, and eminent presence to his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—by raising up in them a spirit of courage, magnanimity, and holy gallantry. But,

(7.) Seventhly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence to his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by preserving them from troubles in the midst of troubles; from dangers in the midst**

of dangers. [Dan. 3:25](#), "He answered, and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." The presence of the Son of God preserves these three valiant champions from dangers in the midst of dangers. But give me permission to say, that these words, "One like the Son of God," does not argue that in this vision there was not a representation of the Son of God to come afterwards in the flesh—but rather that this great mystery was here showed for the greater comfort of the faithful, that they might courageously bear all their sufferings, having the Prince and Head both of angels and men present with them, herein to mitigate their pains, and carry them through with joy; this being a greater wonder of grace and love than to have the protection of a mere angel, concerning whose power also, whether he can change the nature of fire, that it shall not burn, is very doubtful and questionable, seeing this argues omnipotency, which is in God alone, and not communicable to any creature.

Where, by the way, you may observe a strong and solid argument to prove that Jesus is the Son of God against all gainsayers, thus: he whom Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fiery furnace was the Son of God in a human shape; but he was typically Jesus. The major is proved, because he did that which none but God could do, namely, he nullified the most fierce and raging fire, which burned up some coming but near it, and had no power, at the same instant of time, so much as to singe a hair of the heads of others. The minor is proved also, because God, appearing in a glorious human shape at any time, was not God the Father or Holy Spirit—but God the Son; for "no man has seen God at any time," [John 1:18](#); [1 Tim. 6:16](#); [1 John 4:12](#); but the Son has revealed him, both when in him appearing in a human shape under the law, and when, under the Gospel, showing himself in the man Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, and hypostatically united unto him: [Exod. 3:2](#), "And the angel of the Lord," that is, Christ, the angel of the covenant, "appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed;" verse 3, "And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." [Christ is called the Messenger or Angel of the Covenant, [Mal. 3:1](#).] The Hebrew word *Seneh* which is here used signifies a dry bush, a bramble bush, whence the mount and wilderness is called *Sinai*, because of the great store of brambles which grew there. Now for a bush, a dry bush, a bramble bush, to be all on fire and yet not consumed, this must be a wonder of wonders; but all this is from the good will "of him who dwelt in the bush." Out of these two verses we may briefly observe these few things—

[1.] First, The low, and weak, and brittle estate of the church, represented by a bush, a dry bush, a bramble bush.

What more brittle, weak, base, low, and despicable than a dry bush, a bramble bush? What is such a bush good for but the fire, or to stop a gap, or some such inferior use? A bush is a black, deformed, and unlovely thing. Corruption and affliction, sin and suffering, renders the saints very unlovely. The church is *not* compared to a strong, sturdy oak—but to a weak, brittle bush;

and elsewhere to a vine, a dove, a lamb, a sheep, etc.—all frail, weak creatures. It is good for all saints to have low and humble thoughts of themselves, for here they are resembled to a dry bush, a bramble bush. But,

[2.] Secondly, A dry bush, a bramble bush, pricks, wounds, and vexes those who handle it roughly. This bush is in Hebrew called Seneh, as I have hinted before, which the Hebrews describe to be a shrub full of prickles, and without fruit, and so thick that a bird cannot enter without the ruffling and pulling off her feathers. Let the proud enemies of the church look to themselves, for this bramble bush will vex, prick, wound, tear, and conquer, when they have done their worst. In all the ages of the world this bramble bush, the church, has been a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, and a burdensome stone; so that all who burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it, [Zech. 12:2-3](#). But,

[3.] Thirdly, Consider the cruelties of the church's enemies is signified and represented by a fire. The bush burns with fire. In this resemblance is shadowed out the oppressed, afflicted, and persecuted estate of the Israelites in the Egyptian furnace; and by fire here is meant the most painful, terrifying, and tormenting afflictions and miseries which attended them. Great afflictions and persecutions are in Scripture commonly set out by fire, as the fiery trial, the fire of affliction, [1 Pet. 4:12](#); [Lam. 2:3-4](#); [Hab. 2:13](#). Fire is very painful and tormenting, in which respects hell torments are compared to fire; so are great afflictions, miseries, and sufferings; they are very painful and tormenting; they put people into sore pain and travail. Next to the pangs of conscience, and the pains of hell, there are none compared to these pains and pangs which are bred and fed by sore afflictions, by terrible trials.

It has been the lot and portion of God's dearest children, to be exercised with very great and grievous afflictions; and that in order to the *discovery* of sin, to the *embittering* of sin, to the *preventing* of sin, and to the *purging* away of sin; and in order to the *trial* of grace, the *discovery* of grace, the *exercise* of grace, and the *increase* of grace; and in order to the weaning of them from this world, and to the completing their conformity to Christ, the captain of their salvation, "who was made perfect through sufferings," [Heb. 2:10](#); and to ripen them for heaven, and to work in them more affections of pity and compassion to those who are in misery, and who sigh and groan under their Egyptian taskmasters.

[4.] Fourthly, Consider the eminence of their preservation, though in the fire—yet unconsumed. The church of God was hot, yes, all in flames—and yet not consumed. This fire was a supernatural fire,

(1.) It continued without fuel to feed upon.

(2.) It kept below and ascended not.

(3.) It burned and consumed not.

All which shows it to be a supernatural work. Let the fire be ever so hot, so fierce, so furious, so spreading—the church shall have a being, and live and bear up in the midst of the flames. If the church like the sea loses in one place, it gains ground in another. When the worst of men and devils have done their worst, the Lord will have a name among his people on earth. The church, with the lamp in the story, laughs at all those winds, which would blow it out. Well may we stand amazed and wonder, that so flaming and terrible a fire, falling upon so contemptible a bush, and so dry and despicable a shrub, should not presently turn it into ashes; for why, is *the* fire too weak? Oh no! Is the *bush* so strong, as to defend and secure itself against devouring flames? Oh no! Or is the bush not apt to burn and consume by so fierce a fire? Oh no. It is not from the impotency of the fire, nor from the strength or constitution of the bush; for a dry bramble bush, in the matter of it is as combustible as any chaff, and as easily destroyed as any stubble; but because the natural force thereof was restrained by the glorious power of God!

There are two inseparable qualities of fire:

(1.) To give light.

(2.) To burn; and yet divine power divides and separates these two: for this fire gives light—but burns not. Oh, what a mighty, what an astonishing preservation is here! The afflictions and sufferings of the church are not a consuming fire—but a trying fire, as the fire in a furnace consumes the dross—but tries the gold, and puts a new luster, beauty, and glory upon it.

Hesiod speaks of thirty thousand demigods, which were keepers of men; but what are so many thousand gods, compared to that one God who neither slumbers nor sleeps—but day and night keeps his people as his jewels, as the apple of his eye; who keeps them in his pavilion, as a prince his favorite? [[Psalm 121:4](#); [Isaiah 27:3](#); [Mal. 3:17](#); [Zech. 2:8](#); [Psalm 31:20](#).]

There was a dialogue between a heathen and a Jew; after the Jews returned from captivity—all nations round about them being enemies unto them—the heathen asked the Jew, "how he and his countrymen could hope for any safety, because," says he, "everyone of you is as a silly sheep compassed about with fifty wolves!" "Yes—but," says the Jew, "we are kept by such a shepherd, as can kill all these wolves when he pleases, and by that means preserve his sheep." But,

[5.] Fifthly, Consider how this eminent preservation of his people from dangers in the midst of dangers is effected and brought about, and that is by the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great angel of the covenant; for Moses says expressly of this vision, that "The Lord appeared unto Moses, and God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses," etc., verse 4. This calling of Moses by his name, and the doubling of his name, in such a familiar and loving manner—was a

sign of God's singular favor to Moses. Choice favorites God frequently called by name, as you may see in those instances of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, etc., and so our Lord Jesus Christ called Peter by his name, and Nathanael by his name, and Mary by her name, etc. [Scipio by way of favor called his citizens by their names; and so Cyrus upon the same ground called his soldiers by their names.] The same presence of the Son of God, which preserved the three Hebrew *children*, or rather *champions*, in that furious furnace of Nebuchadnezzar from burning or singeing, preserved the bush, though not from burning—yet from consuming, by restraining the natural force of the fire, and strengthening the bush against it. The bush, the church in the fire, came forth from the hottest furnace that ever was kindled, not blacker nor worsen—but brighter and better, and more glorious than the sun in his strength; and all this from the presence of the angel of the covenant who dwelt in the bush. Divine presence can preserve a flaming bush from being consumed.

Witness our preservation to this day, though we have been as a burning bush. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, God shall help her, and that right early," [Psalm 46:5](#). Heb., "When the morning appears," that is, in the nick of time, when help shall be most seasonable and best welcome. The presence of the Lord in the midst of his church, will secure her from being greatly moved in the midst of all those great dreadful confusions which are abroad in the world.

Hence the church is called, *Jehovah shammah*, "The Lord is there," [Ezek. 48:35](#). His presence in heaven, makes it heaven; and his presence in the church, makes it happy and safe. Nothing shall disturb or harm those who have the presence of God in the midst of them. [*Persecution* is, as Calvin writes, *the black angel which dogs the gospel at the heels.*] The church is built upon a rock, she is invincible, [Mat. 16:18](#). [Jer. 1:8](#), "Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you, to deliver you, says the Lord." Verse 17-19, "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you—declares the LORD." God's presence with his messengers is a guard, and a safeguard, all-sufficient against all opposition whatever.

Earthly princes and sovereigns are not accustomed to go with those whom they send on embassy—but God always goes along with those whom he sends, and will, by his powerful presence, protect and defend them against opposers, at all times and in all places, when all others fail and forsake us. Christ's presence is security sufficient, for "if he is with us, who can be against us?" They must first prevail against him, before they can prevail against those who withstand and oppose those whom he protects.

How does this come to pass—that Jeremiah, a man, a man alone, should bear up so stoutly, and stand so strong against kings, princes, priests, and people? It is from the special presence of God with him. "I am with you." And what can all the great ones of the world, and all the wicked ones of the world, do against one messenger of the Lord, who is armed with his glorious power? The ambassadors of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, must not be terrified with the multitude of opposers, nor with the grandeur or greatness of opposers; but set the presence of the Lord against them all, and say, "The number of opposers makes the Christian conquers the more illustrious." The more the Pharisees of old, and their successors of late time, have opposed the truth, the more it has prevailed; and it is observable that the reformation in Germany was much furthered by the papists' opposition, yes, when two kings, among many others, wrote against Luther, namely, Henry the Eighth of England, and Ludovicus of Hungary; this kingly title being entered into the controversy, making men more curious to examine the matter, stirred up a general inclination towards Luther's opinion.

Just so, [Jer. 15:20](#), "And I will make you unto this people a fenced brazen wall; and they shall fight against you—but they shall not prevail against you: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you, says the Lord." When the messengers of the Lord go on constantly and courageously in the faithful discharge of their duties, not relenting, or yielding, or complying with their greatest opposers, then they shall have such a special presence of the Lord with them, as shall sufficiently protect them against all their enemies' might and malice, wrath and rage. Verse 21, "And I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible or violent ones." Though you should fall into the hand of the wicked's power, and into the hand of the terrible and violent ones—yet they shall not hurt you, nor harm you; they shall not have their wills upon you. When you are in their hands, I will lay a law of restraint upon their hearts, that they shall not harm you, nor triumph over you; I will be sure to secure you, and rescue you from dangers in the midst of dangers. "A gracious messenger of the Lord in the midst of all oppositions," as Chrysostom said of Peter, "is a man made all of fire walking in stubble—he overcomes and consumes all opposition; all difficulties are but whetstones to his fortitude." The moon will run her course though the dogs bark at it. Just so, will the faithful messengers of the Lord hold on in their way and work, let men and devils bark and do their worst.

Moulin, speaking of the French Protestants, said, "When papists hurt us for reading the Scriptures, we burn with zeal to be reading of them." He is a fool, we say, who will be laughed out of his coat—but he is a fool in folio, who will be laughed out of his skin, out of his profession, out of his religion, out of his principles, out of the ways of God, nay, out of his soul, out of his salvation, because he can't endure to be opposed, derided, or laughed at by lewd and wicked men. The divine presence will make a man set light by such *paper-shot*.

A gracious spirit is raised by opposition. The more opposition it meets with in a way of duty, the more resolute he is for it. So far is he from being afraid of the threatenings of men, of the frowns of men, or of losing this man's favor, or of incurring such a man's displeasure—that his spirit rises far more because of it. It is with such a man as it is with the fire in winter. The fire burns the hotter because of the coldness of the air; so it is with all the messengers of the Lord, who are inflamed in the way of their duty. Come to David, and tell him, Oh, there is a Goliath, and he has come out with a spear like a weaver's beam, and there is one who bears his shield goes before him! "Where is he?" says David. "I will fight with him," says he, [[1 Sam. 17:41](#)], compared with verse 26-27.] Difficulties and dangers do but whet and raise his spirit; he is not afraid of any uncircumcised Philistine.

Ah, my friends, this is a true noble spirit! Holy greatness of mind lies in this, when a man's spirit is borne up upon the greatness of his God, and the goodness of his cause; "and if that will not bear me up," says such a soul, "let me sink in it, I am content to perish." That is a good word, more worth than a world in a faithful minister's eye: [Ezek. 3:8-9](#), "I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house." The flint is the hardest of stones; it preserves itself by its hardness from all injuries; no weather, no violence of hammer or fire will break it or conquer it. God engages himself to give the prophet such undaunted boldness, and invincible courage and constancy, as neither shame nor fear should prevail against.

Divine presence, divine assistance, does always accompany a divine call. Such whom God sends he assists, such whom he calls he encourages against all difficulties and discouragements; such as are called by Christ, and sent by Christ, shall never lack the strengthening, comforting, assisting, animating, and preserving presence of Christ. It is this divine presence which makes them persevere, and show themselves like men—like men of courage, like men of God, and which secures them from dangers in the midst of dangers. In the greatest storms the flint shrinks not, it fears not, it changes not its hue, no, not in the least. Divine presence will keep gracious men from shrinking, fearing, and changing their way, their work, their Lord, and Master—in the worst of storms that can beat upon them. In all winds and weather the flint is still the same, and so will all the faithful messengers of the Lord be, whatever wind may blow upon them. The special presence of God with them will keep them from fearing, fainting, flying, and preserve them from dangers in the midst of dangers! But,

(8.) Eighthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by frustrating and disappointing the plots, designs, counsels, and contrivances of their powerful, subtle, secret, and malicious adversaries, who would gladly be multiplying of their**

troubles, sorrows, sufferings, and miseries upon them. [Neh. 4:8](#), "They all conspired together, to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." Verse 11, "And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, until we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease." Verse 15, "And it came to pass, when our enemies knew that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsels to nothing," etc. The craft of the church's enemies is always accompanied with cruelty; and their cruelty is seldom without craft. The devil lends them his *seven heads* to plot with, and his seven horns to harm with. But in the things wherein they intend to harm God's people, God is above them, and by his presence with his people he brings all their plots, counsels, and enterprises to nothing.

The enemies of the Jews, in Nehemiah's time, made great brags at first what they would do; but when they saw their plots discovered, and their purposes defeated, they are presently crestfallen, and have no mind nor courage to advance at all. So that to these plotters may be fitly applied that which Guicciardini says of Charles the Eighth, king of France, in his expedition against Naples, "That he came into the field like thunder and lightning—but went out like a snuff; more than a man at first, and less than a woman at last."

In all the ages of the world—the heads, the minds, the hands, the hearts, and the tongues of the wicked have been engaged against the godly; they have been still a-plotting and devising mischief against the favorites of heaven—and yet God's special presence with his people, in point of affection and protection, has blasted all their designs, and frustrated all their counsels. As the rage of wicked men against the saints have been *endless*, so it has been *fruitless*, because God has been in the midst of them. *Haman* plots against the lives, liberties, and estates of the Jews, [Esther 3:8](#), seq.—but his plot was timely discovered and seasonably prevented, and the *grand plotter* and informer is detected, debased, condemned, and executed! [Esther 7:10](#), "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." The kings of Persia had absolute and unquestionable power to do whatever they desired. "Whom they would, they slew; and whom they would, they kept alive; whom they would, they set up; and whom they would, they put down," [Dan. 5:19](#); [Esther 7:9](#). So Haman is here, at the king's command, adjudged to be hanged. The truth is, it was a clear case, and the malefactor was self-condemned. "Hang him, therefore," says the king; a short and a just sentence, and soon executed. Ah, how soon is Haman fallen from the *palace*—to the *gallows*; from the highest stage of honor—to the lowest stair of disgrace; from feasting with the king—to be made a feast for crows; and so lies wrapped up in the sheet of perpetual infamy. "So let all your enemies perish, O Lord."

It is a good observation of Josephus upon [Esther 7:10](#): "I cannot," says he, "but admire the Lord's wisdom, and acknowledge his justice, in that he not only punished him for his malice to the church—but, by turning his own mischief upon himself, has made

him an example to all posterity; hanging him up in gibbets that others may take warning." Let all plotters and harmers beware of making a match with mischief—for they will have enough of it in the end. Haman was an agent for the devil, who paid him his wages at last, if you will, with a halter. Let all the enemies of the saints tremble at such ends, and be careful to avoid them by flying such like foul and heinous practices.

The bloody plot being thus laid by Haman, the king's minion, behold the footsteps of God's favorable, special, and eminent presence *for* his people and *with* his people in their deadly dangers, and that in raising up in them a very great spirit of faith, prayer, and mourning; and by raising an undaunted courage and resolution in Esther: "And so I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish," [Esther 4:16](#). This she speaks not rashly or desperately, as wasteful of her life—but as one willing to sacrifice her life for the honor of God, his cause and people. Esther had rather die than shrink from her duty. She thought it better to do worthily and perish *for* a kingdom, than unworthily and perish *with* a kingdom. Here was a mighty preference of God in raising Esther's heroic courage and resolution above all those visible dangers which attended her attempt of going in to the king against the known law of the land. And the king held out to Esther the golden scepter, chapter 5:2. He did not kick her out of his presence, as some Cambyses would have done; neither did he command her to the guillotine, as Henry the Eighth did his Anne Boleyn, upon a mere misapprehension of disloyalty; neither yet did he dismiss her, as he had Vashti for a less offence—but by holding out his scepter, shows his gracious respects unto her. This was the Lord's own work, and a great demonstration of his special presence with her, in giving her favor in the eyes of the great king. "So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter" with her hand, says the Chaldee, with her mouth, says the common translation. This she did either in token of submission, or as a sign of reverence and subjection, or for the avoiding of danger; for, as Josephus says, "He who touched the king's scepter was out of the reach of evil," or, according to the custom of the times. God's favorable presence is transparent, in the king's extended favor to her. "On that night could not the king sleep," Heb., "the king's sleep fled away," [Esther 6:1](#); and like a shadow it fled away so much the faster, as it was more followed. Crowns have their cares. Lo! he who commanded one hundred and twenty-seven provinces cannot command one hour's sleep. Herein appeared the special presence of God in keeping the king awake; for Mordecai might have been hanged before Esther had known anything of it—Haman being come early the next morning, verse 4, to beg this of the king—had not God kept him from sleep, and directed him to read in that place of the Chronicles where Mordecai's service was recorded, and so made way to his advancement and Haman's ruin. God's favorable presence shined upon his people in keeping the king from sleep, for excellent ends, and in putting small thoughts into his heart for great purposes.

God will appear for his poor people, in the nick and opportunity of time, when there is but a step between them and death. And

further, the power, providence, presence, and goodness of God was made evident, in the behalf of his people, in directing the king to that very place where Mordecai's singular service, in discovering the barbarous and murderous plot which was laid against the king's life and crown, was recorded, [Esther 6:2](#). That Mordecai should have no reward at the time of the occurrence—but that it should be deferred until a fitter opportunity, when God might be more glorified in the special preservation of his people, and in the famous overthrow of their enemies—was from that mighty hand of God, which was stretched out for the good of his people.

In this great story we may, as in a mirror, see how the **Lord**, by his wisdom, providence, presence, and grace—brings about and overrules the *wills* of men, the *affairs* of men, the *counsels* of men, the *designs* of men, the *words* and *speeches* of men—to the fulfilling of his own will and decree, and the promoting of his own honor and glory, and the good of his people—when vain men think least of doing his will, or serving his providence.

Here you may see the wisdom, prudence, and courage of **Esther**, striking while the iron was hot, charging the bloody decree upon Haman to his face, and that before the king, that things might the better stick and work, and painting him out in his own proper colors. "This adversary and enemy," that is, the cruel enemy, the bloody enemy, the utter enemy, the worst enemy, this sworn swordman of Satan, from whom Haman has drawn his ancient enmity, [Gen. 3:15](#). "Is this wicked Haman," that is—as wicked a wretch as goes on two legs, a man of blood, a man made up of mischief and malice, a sink of wickedness, a very mystery of iniquity, a breathing devil. And now Queen Esther is plain with him, and calls a spade a spade. Though others styled him noble, great, serene, magnificent, etc., Esther gives him his own picture. "This adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" But what a mighty courage had Esther to speak at this rate before the king, and of his grand favorite, and before his face. Surely all this was from the special presence of God with her soul. This was a great work of faith, and a singular fruit of prayer.

"And now Haman stood up to make request for his life." Oh, what a strange turn of events, is here so suddenly! He who a little before was bowed unto by all men—is now upon his knees before a woman! He who was, the very day before, a professed enemy of the Jews, is now suppliant to a Jewess! He who a few weeks before had contrived the death and ruin of the Jews, is now begging hard for his own life! He who had provided a gallows for Mordecai, fears nothing more now, than that he himself should be hanged on it! Yesterday, oh the praise and bows that Haman had; and now the same man covers his face, in token of his irrecoverable ruin, [Esther 7:8](#).

The king's indignation being up, the courtiers point at the gallows seventy-five feet high, that Haman had set up for Mordecai. All are now for Mordecai, there is not a courtier that has one good word for Haman. Ah, what a rare hand of God was there in all these things, for the good of his people, and the utter overthrow of their

grand enemy! "Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, 'A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.' The king said, 'Hang him on it!' So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided." [Esther 7:9-10](#)

To sum all up in a little room, the breaking of the king's sleep, was the breaking of one of the most bloody designs that ever was laid against the people of God. Well, what though the king could not sleep, could he not lie still in his bed? No, he must have a book, and that book must be the Book of Chronicles, and that book must be opened where *accidentally*—not by turning to that place purposely—yet surely by God's providence directing him who read, to that very story concerning Mordecai, where was registered his faithfulness, in discovering and baffling the murder intended against the king; whereupon God sets this act of faithfulness so close upon the king's heart, that he could not rest until Mordecai was nobly rewarded for it! And Mordecai's reward must be Haman's ruin! Mordecai's advancement must be Haman's punishment!

In this famous instance you may run and read the favorable, special, and eminent presence of the Lord, in the miraculous preservation of his church from a total ruin and destruction, and in the disappointing the plots, designs, and counsels of their greatest enemies, and in taking of them in the very snares that they had laid for others; suitable to that of the psalmist, "They dig a pit to trap others and then fall into it themselves. They make trouble, but it backfires on them. They plan violence for others, but it falls on their own heads," [Psalm 7:16-17](#).

Henry the Third of France was stabbed in the same chamber where he had helped to contrive the French massacre; and his brother, Charles the Ninth, had blood given him to drink, for he was worthy. There are no end of stories of this nature. Just so, [Psalm 9:15](#), "The nations have fallen into the pit they dug for others. They have been caught in their own trap." The wicked are compared to *hunters* for their cruelty, and to *fowlers* for their craft; but see their success, they are sunk down in their own pit, caught in their own net. Thus it befell Pharaoh, Jabin, and Sisera, Sennacherib, Antiochus Epiphanes, Maxentius the tyrant, who fell into the Tiber, from his own false bridge laid for Constantine; the Spanish armada, etc. [[Exod. 9:15](#); [Judges 10:4](#); [2 Chron. 32](#); Euseb., lib. ix. c. 9.] verse 16, "The wicked have trapped themselves in their own snares." Goliath was killed with his own sword.

I have been the longer a-glancing at this famous story of Esther, because of its seasonableness and suitability to the days and times wherein we live. The like is not found in all the Scripture, as worthy of present admiration, and of deep and perpetual meditation.

A further proof of this eighth particular, that is under our present consideration, you have in [Isaiah 8:9](#), "Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered!" Heb.— "And be shattered! And be shattered! And be shattered!" It is thrice repeated, to work it the deeper into the minds and hearts of those, who would either hear or read it; and to give the stronger assurance of the certainty of their being inevitably broken in pieces, who were adversaries and conspirators against the people of God. This speech is directed to the kings of Assyria, and other nations which combined with him against the people of God; but especially against the city of Jerusalem. It is a holy irony, or laughing to scorn the associating enemies of the church. Well says the prophet, Proceed as unanimously, as politically, and as powerfully in your combinations, consultations, and preparations as you can—yet be assured that all your associations shall be dissolved, and your counsels frustrated, and your attempts returned back upon yourselves to your own ruin and confusion: verse 10, "Take counsel together," (namely, about invading Judah, and surprising Jerusalem,) "and it shall come to nothing; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us." [Isaiah 7:5-6](#).

"The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance." [Psalms 33:10-12](#). Consult, conclude, determine, resolve upon what you please, you shall never be able, by all your power and policy, to prevail against the people of God! For his favorable, special, and eminent presence is constantly with them—to assist, counsel, and protect them against all oppositions and assaults. God brings to nothing the counsel of the nations. Neither the devil nor his imps, nor any of their counsels, or enchantments, shall ever be able to stand before the presence of the Lord with his people! Let men and devils conspire, let them plot, consult, and determine—all shall be in vain, because there is no counsel against the Lord, there is no possibility of prevailing against the presence of the Lord with his people. His special presence will be their greatest safety and security in the midst of all plots, designs, dangers, etc. The special presence of God with his people mars and frustrates all the plots, counsels, and intricate contrivances of the world's wizards, as might be showed in those instances of Balaam, Pharaoh, Saul, Herod, with many others. But I must hasten, and therefore,

(9.) Ninthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by his sympathizing with them in all their troubles, trials, distresses, dangers**, as you may clearly see by consulting these choice scriptures. [[Exod. 2:23-25](#), and [3:7-10](#); [Isaiah 37:28-29](#); [Ezek. 35:7-10](#); [Mat. 25:4](#), seq.; [Deut. 32:9-11](#); [John 14:9-10](#); [Col. 1:15](#); [Heb. 9:24](#); [Romans 8:34](#).]

[Isaiah 63:9](#), "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and *the angel of his presence* saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old." Christ is here in the Hebrew called "the angel of his face," either because he does exactly resemble God his Father, or because he appears before the face or in the presence of God for us. This angel took to heart their afflictions, he was himself grieved for them and with them. This angel secured and safeguarded them all the way through the wilderness, from Egypt to Canaan. This angel did not only lead them—but he also lifted them up and took them in his arms, as parents or nurses are accustomed to do with young and weakly children who are in danger. And this angel carried them, as the eagle does her young ones, that are unable yet to fly—on her wings. Oh the pity, the mercifulness, the sympathy, and admirable compassion of Christ to his people in their suffering state!

[Zech. 2:8](#), "Whoever touches you, touches the apple of his eye." The eye is the tenderest piece of the tenderest part. The eye is kept most diligently, and strongly guarded by nature. A man can better bear a *thump* on the back, the *biting* of his finger, the *cutting* of his hand, the *pricking* of his leg, or a *blow* upon his arm—than a *touch* on the eye. Oh, that persecutors would be quiet, and let God's people alone, and take heed how they meddle with *God's eyes*. [It is here called *the daughter of the eye*, because it is as dear to a man as an only daughter. The eye and the good name will endure no jests.] There is no touching of them, to wrong or injure them—but you wrong and injure the Holy One of Israel, who will certainly revenge himself upon you. Those who strike at God's eyes, do through them strike at God himself, which he will never put up with. It is a dangerous thing to molest and trouble, to afflict or annoy the people of God; for God himself is very sensible of it, and accordingly he will certainly requite it. [Acts 9:4](#), "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute **me**?" Those who persecute the servants of Christ—they persecute Christ himself, who lives in them, and is mystically united to them.

Look! as there is by virtue of the natural union a mutual sympathy between the head and the members, the husband and the wife, so it is here between Christ and his saints, for he is a most sympathizing, compassionate, tender-hearted Savior, [Heb. 4:15](#), and [5:2](#); [Col. 1:24](#); [Heb. 13:13](#); [Isaiah 53:4](#). Those who shoot at the saints, hit Christ; their sufferings are held his, and their reproaches are counted his. He who bore the saints' griefs when he was on earth, really and properly, he bears them still now he is in heaven, in a way of sympathy. Christ in his glorified state, has a very tender sense of all the evil that is done to his children, his members, his spouse, and looks upon it as done to himself!

A great Lord said to another great Lord of the council, in king Henry the Eighth's days, concerning Cranmer, "Let him alone, for the king will not allow his finger to ache." So I say to the persecutors of the day, "Let the people of God alone, for if you do but make their finger ache, God will make your heads and hearts ache for it before he has done with you!" But,

(10.) Tenthly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by pouring out upon them a greater spirit of prayer and supplication in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, than formerly they have had.** [Isaiah 26:16](#), "Lord, in trouble have they visited you; they poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them." "They *poured* out their still prayer." *Before* they would say a prayer—but *now* they *poured* out a prayer. The Hebrew word signifies a soft or low kind of muttering which can hardly be heard. The prophet hereby would intimate to us, that in their great troubles and deepest distresses—they sighed or groaned unto God, and prayed in a still and silent manner. Saints never visit God more with their prayers—than when he visits them most with his rod. Saints never pray with that seriousness, that spiritualness, that heavenliness, that humbleness, that brokenness, that fervency, that frequency—as they do when they are under the mighty chastening hand of God; and all this is from that special presence of God, that it is with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, etc.

When it was a day of great trouble, of great distress, of great danger to the people of God in Germany, God poured out a very great spirit of prayer upon Luther; at length he comes out of his closet triumphantly, saying to his fellow-laborers and friends, "We have overcome, we have overcome!" at which time it is observed that there came out a proclamation from Charles the Fifth that none should be further molested for the profession of the gospel. In days of troubles and distress Luther was so warm, zealous, and powerful in prayer, that made one of his best friends say, "That man could have from God whatever he pleased." Being once very warm in prayer, he let fall this transcendent rapture of a daring faith, "Let my will be done;" and then falls off sweetly, "My will, Lord, because it is your will." It is reported in the life of Luther, that when he prayed it was with so much *reverence* as if he were praying to God, and with so much *boldness* as if he had been speaking to his friend.

I have read of a fountain that at noonday is cold, and at midnight it grows warm; so many Christians are cold in praying, in hearing, etc., in the day of prosperity—but yet are warm and lively in praying and wrestling with God in the day of adversity. [[2 Chron. 33:11-13](#) , Jonah 2; [Dan. 6](#); [Psalm 8:4](#); [Luke 23:42](#); [2 Chron 20:1-13](#); [Isaiah 37:14-22](#); [Gen. 32:6-13](#), and verse 24-31. Now, under affliction, he oils the key of prayers with tears, [Hosea 12:4](#).] Manasseh got more by prayer in his iron chains, than ever he got by his golden crown. Afflictions are like the pick at the nightingale's bosom—which awakens her, and which puts her upon her sweet and delightful singing. A sincere Christian never prays so sweetly—as when under God's rod.

One reports of Joachim, the father of the Virgin Mary, that he would often say, Prayer is my food and drink. When a Christian is in trouble, then prayer is his food and drink. Oh, what a spirit of

prayer was upon Jonah—when he was in the whale's belly; and upon Daniel—when he was among the lions; and upon David—when fleeing in the wilderness; and upon the dying thief—when he was on the cross; and upon Jehoshaphat, when Moab and Ammon and others came against him to battle; and upon Hezekiah, when Sennacherib had invaded Judah; and upon Jacob, when his brother Esau came to meet him with four hundred bloody cut-throats at his heels! As there are two kinds of antidotes against poison—namely, hot and cold; so there are two kinds of antidotes against all the troubles of this life—namely, fervent prayer and holy patience, the one hot, the other cold; the one quenching, the other quickening. When a Christian under great troubles, deep distresses, and most extreme dangers, prays more for the sanctification of affliction than the removal of affliction; when he prays more to get off his sins than to get off his chains; when he prays more to get good by the rod than to get free from the rod; when he prays more that his afflictions may be a refining fire than a consuming fire, and that his heart may be low and his graces high, and that all his troubles may wean him more from this world, and ripen him the more for the glory of that upper world—it is a great demonstration of the special presence of God with him in all his troubles and deep distresses. But,

(11.) Eleventhly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by drawing the hearts of his people nearer and closer to himself, by all the afflictions, troubles, distresses, and dangers which attend them in this world.** [Psalm 119:67](#), "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." God brought David nearer to himself by *Weeping-Cross*, (Chrysostom.) Affliction is a fire to purge out our dross, and to make our graces shine. Affliction is the remedy which cures all our spiritual diseases.

By afflictions God humbles the hearts of his people, and betters the hearts of his people, and draws the hearts of his people nearer and closer to himself verse 71, "It was good for me to be afflicted." The saints gain by their crosses, troubles, and distresses. Their graces are more raised, their experiences are more multiplied, and their comforts are more augmented, and their communion with God is more heightened, [Romans 5:3-4](#); [2 Cor. 1:3-5](#); [Hosea 2:14](#). The waves did but lift Noah's ark nearer to heaven, and the higher the waters grew the more the ark was lifted up to heaven. The troubles and distresses which the saints meet with do but raise them in their fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit, [Psalm 73:13-14](#), [28](#).

When Tiribazus, a noble Persian, was arrested, at first he drew out his sword to defend himself; but when they charged him in the king's name, and informed him that they came from the king to carry him to the king, he yielded willingly. So when afflictions arrest a noble Christian, he may murmur and struggle at the first; but when he considers it is sent from God, to bring him to the sight of God, the King of glory, he willingly and readily submits to the rod, and kisses the rod. All the stones that came thick about

Stephen's ears did but knock him the closer to Christ the corner-stone, [Acts 7:55, 60](#). Tiburtius saw paradise when he walked upon burning coals. "If there be any way to heaven on horseback, it is by the cross," said Bradford.

[Hosea 2:6](#), "Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way." By afflictions, difficulties, and distresses, God hedges up his people's way. Well, what then? Mark, verse 7, "Then she will say—I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now." That is, I will go back to to God: I have run away from him by my sins, and now I will return to him again by repentance. The grand design of God in all the afflictions which befall his people, is to bring them nearer and closer to himself. The church could have no rest at home, nor no comfort abroad, until by affliction she was brought into the presence and company of her first husband: [Hosea 6:1](#), "Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up."

The great design of God in playing the lion's part with his people, [Hosea 5:14](#), is to bring them nearer and closer to himself. And, behold, how sweetly this blessed design of God did take: "Come and let us return unto the Lord," etc. The power of God, the love of God, and the grace of God, are most gloriously manifested by bringing the hearts of his people nearer and closer to himself by all the troubles, distresses, and dangers which attend them. In the *winter* season all the sap of the tree runs down to the root, and when a man is sick all the blood goes to the heart; so in the winter of affliction, when the soul is running out more and more to God, and a-getting closer and nearer to God, it is a most sure evidence of the special presence of God with that soul. But,

(12.) Twelfthly and lastly, The Lord does manifest his favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—**by rendering them invincible and unconquerable under all their troubles, distresses, and dangers.** [Rev. 12:11](#), "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death." [Rev. 14:1-4](#); 2 Chron. 32:7, 8, 21-22. By virtue of Christ's blood the saints are made victorious both over Satan and all his instruments; they little value their lives—in respect of Christ and his truth; yes, they despised them in comparison of God's glory and the great things of the gospel. They made so little account of them, that they exposed them to all hazards and dangers for the cause of Christ. In the days of that bloody persecutor, Diocletian, the Christians showed glorious power in the faith of *martyrdom*. [Rupertus says that God did more gloriously triumph in Lawrence's patience and constancy, when he was broiled on the gridiron, than if he had saved his body from burning by a miracle. His faith and patience made him invincible.]

The valor of the martyrs, and the savageness of the persecutors, striving together, until both exceeding nature and belief, bred wonder and astonishment in beholders and readers. It was a good

saying of Cyprian, speaking of the saints and martyrs in those days, They may kill them—but they cannot overcome them. [Rev. 17:14](#), "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is the Lord of lords, and King of kings; and those who are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." The presence of the Lamb has and will make the saints victorious in all the ages of the world. Modestus, lieutenant to Julian the emperor, said to Julian, "While they suffer they deride us," says he; "and the torments are more fearful to those who stand by, than to the tormented." There is no end in instances of this nature. There is nothing more clear in Scripture and in history than this—that the special presence of the Lord with his people, in all their great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, has made them invincible and unconquerable.

But now others, who have been destitute of this favorable, special, and eminent presence of the Lord, in times of great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, how have they fled when none have pursued them! How faint-hearted, how greatly daunted, and how sadly discouraged have they been! How have they turned their backs, and left the field, and run from their colors, without striking one stroke! Many in Cyprian's time were overcome before the encounter, for they revolted to idolatry before any persecution once assailed them. In the Palatinate, when there was a hot persecution, scarcely one professor of twenty stood out—but fell to popery as fast as leaves fall from the trees in autumn. And so in the persecution under Decius many professors that were rich and great in the world, they soon shrunk from Christ, and turned their backs upon his ways.

It is God's favorable, special, and eminent presence with his people, which makes them persevere in an evil day: [Romans 8:31](#), "If God is for us, who can be against us?" that is, none; but this is a more forcible denying, "Who can?" Do you Paul ask, "Who can?" I will tell you. The devil can, and tyrants can, and persecutors can, and the whole world can; but they are as nothing, and can do nothing against us. Wicked men may set themselves against the saints—but they shall not prevail against the saints. What if all the world should strive to hinder the sun from rising or shining, or the wind from blowing, or the rain from falling; or, like those pygmies who went with their arrows and bows to repress the flowing of the sea. Ridiculous acts! Mere follies! All that wicked men can do against the people of God will be but as throwing stones against the wind. "If God is with us, who can be against us?" Methinks these are words of great resolution; as if he should say, "We have *many* enemies, and *powerful* enemies, and *daring* enemies, and *malicious* enemies, and *designing* enemies, and *enraged* enemies—yet let the proudest of them show their faces, and lift up their banners, I fear them not, I regard them not: Who can?" who dare be against us? Let me give a little light into this precious scripture, "If God be for us—who can be against us?" That is, none!

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[1.] First, None can be so against us—so as to HURT us or HARM us. Therefore Aquinas well expounds that "Who can be against us—so as to *hurt* us?" [Dan. 25, 27](#), and [6:22](#). [Justin Martyr said to his murderers in the behalf of himself and his fellow-martyrs, "You may kill us—but you can never hurt us!"]

[Acts 18:9-10](#), "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision—Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and *no one is going to attack and harm you*, because I have many people in this city." God had many souls in this city to convert and to bring in to Christ, and therefore he animates and encourages Paul to preach boldly, and to go on in his work undauntedly. "Ay—but, Lord, there are many in the city, who will set themselves against me!" "Ay—but I am with you!" "Ay—but, Lord, there are many in the city who hate me!" "Ay—but there is no man who shall set on you to hurt you!"

Though there were many in the city of Corinth that would be *ready* furiously to harm Paul—yet there would not be a man who would be *able* to hurt Paul. God would be his lifeguard to protect him, and he would make void all the mischievous designs and endeavors of his adversaries against him. When in a city the Lord has those who are ordained to salvation, he will bless the labors of his faithful servants with happy success; so that faithful ministers may not, yes, must not, for fear of the invincible malice of some,

neglect the salvation of others. All the arrows that men of might and malice should shoot at Paul in the city of Corinth, would never reach him, they would never hurt him, nor harm him!

[1 Pet. 3:13](#), "And who is he who will harm you, if you are followers of that which is good?" They may *oppose* you—but they cannot harm you; they may *hate* you—but they cannot harm you; they may *plot* and devise mischief against you—but they cannot harm you; they may *persecute* you—but they cannot harm you. Caesar told Metellus that he could as easily take away his life; but this was only bravado, for death is a royal prerogative which belongs to God alone, "to whom belong the issues of death," [Psalm 68:20](#), or the goings out from death; that is, deliverances from death and deadly dangers. It is an allusion to one who keeps a passage or a door; that is, God has all the ways which lead out from death in his own keeping. Christ has the *keys of death*, the sole dominion and disposal of it, [Rev. 1:18](#); [2 Pet. 2:9](#). The Lord knows how to deliver his people from the most desperate and deadly dangers; he can deliver them out of the mouth of the lion, he can pull them out of the jaws of death, and so secure them from all harm or hurt. None can be so against the people of God as to harm their souls, as to hurt their happiness. But, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" I answer,

[2.] Secondly, None can be so against us—so as to PREVAIL over us. The gates of hell may *fight* against us—but the gates of hell cannot *prevail* against us. Christ is the captain of your salvation, God has made him general of the field, and therefore you may be sure that he will stand by you and bring you off with honor, [Mat 16:18](#); [Heb. 2:10](#); [Jer. 1:19](#), and [20:11](#). You need never fear winning the day, who have Christ as your captain. Though your persecutors are as so many roaring lions—yet Christ, who is the lion of the tribe of Judah, will make you victorious over them all, [Rev. 5:5](#). In all storms and tempests the church will stand fast, because it stands upon a rock, [Psalm 129:2](#). God is on Zion's side, and the enemies of Zion must first prevail against Zion's God—before they can prevail over Zion herself. Zion's God will be a wall of fire about her, and therefore Zion's enemies shall never prevail over her, [Zech. 2:5](#); [Deut. 33:26-29](#). Were Zion's shelter stones, these might be battered; were it walls of lead, these might be melted; were it a defense of waters, these might be dried up; were it garrisons of mighty men, these might be scattered; were it engines of war, these might be defeated; were it trenches, these might be stopped; were it bulwarks, these might be overthrown; but Zion is guarded with a wall of fire round about her, and therefore all her opposers can never prevail over her.

The enemies of Zion are *weak* enemies, they are *smitten* enemies, they are *conquered* enemies, they are *limited* enemies, they are *chained* enemies, they are *cursed* enemies, and they are *naked* enemies—and therefore they shall never be prevalent enemies over Zion, [2 Chron. 32:7-8](#); [Romans 8:37](#); [Gen. 3:12](#); [Num. 14:9](#). Pharaoh followed the Israelites—but he and his mighty men were drowned, and Israel delivered—for God was with them, [Exod. 14](#). Saul hunted David as a partridge in the mountains, [1 Sam. 26:20](#)

—but Saul perishes, and David was crowned—for God was with him. *Haman* hated Mordecai and plotted against Mordecai—but *Haman* is hanged and Mordecai advanced—for God was with him, [Esther 6:7](#). The *Babylonian princes* inform against Daniel and plot against Daniel—but they themselves are torn and devoured by the lions, and Daniel is delivered and exalted—for God was with him, [Dan. 6](#). *Herod* kills James with the sword and imprisons Peter—but *Herod* is devoured by worms, and Peter is delivered out of prison by an angel—for God was with him, Acts 12.

Let atheists, papists, and persecutors cease from plotting against Zion, from persecuting of Zion, for it is utterly impossible to prevail against Zion. Let all Zion's adversaries remember once for all, what if any policy, counsel, lying, cursing, strength, or cruelty could have prevailed against Zion; Zion would have been rooted out of the world long ago. If Balaam was at our enemies' elbows he would tell them roundly and plainly, that it is "in vain to curse those whom God blesses," [Num. 23:8](#). "It is hard to kick against the goads," [Acts 9:5](#). It is high madness for men to run their naked bodies against a sword's point. Let Zion's enemies remember that God, who takes pleasure in Zion, sits upon the circle of the earth, and all the inhabitants are as grasshoppers; yes, all the nations as a drop of a bucket, and less than the dust of the balance, [Isaiah 40:12](#), [15](#), [17](#), and therefore he can easily revenge all the wrongs and injuries which are done to Zion by those who would gladly prevail over her, and triumph in her ruin. [Some observe that Paul's style is so beautified with wonderful eloquence and rhetoric, that not Tully nor Demosthenes could ever have so spoken. Some report of Augustine that he wished for three things: (1.) To see Christ in the flesh; (2.) To see Rome in the pride of it; (3.) To have heard Paul preach. But,

[3.] Thirdly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None can be so against us—so as to be able to separate us from the love of God and the love of Christ.** "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." [Romans 8:35-39](#).

It is neither the pleasures of life, nor the pains of death; it is neither evils felt, nor evils feared; it is neither the height of prosperity, nor the depth of adversity; it is neither bonds, nor banishment; it is neither power, nor policy; it is neither honor, nor baseness; it is neither violent persecutions, nor multiplied tribulations; it is neither the scorns of men, nor reproaches of men, nor revilings of men, nor designs of men, nor anything else—which can separate us from the love of the Father or the love of the Son!

In the 35th verse Paul states that neither crosses nor creatures can deprive us of the love of God, which is set down in a double interrogation, that he might add the more force and life to it and ravish the readers: "Who shall separate us?" That is, none can. But he speaks with contempt; "Who shall? shall tribulation?" as if he should say, I scorn it. As Goliath defied David, saying, "Do you come to me with a stick?" just so, Paul defies all crosses, sufferings, trials, etc., as things not able to deprive sincere Christians of Christ's love! "Shall tribulation," etc. He had before spoken of *people*, now here he speaks of *things*, because Satan and his sworn slaves think by such things to separate between God and his people. Chrysostom observes Paul's wisdom in three things.

(1.) That he says not, Shall the love of riches, pleasures, honors, etc., which have a mighty force in them to bewitch us; but "shall tribulation, distress," etc.

(2.) That he begins with the lighter, and so rises to greater troubles, placing them in this order, not casually—but by design.

(3.) That though these which he here rehearses consist of a certain number—yet every one as a general has special troops under it: as when he says tribulation, he says imprisonments, bonds, slanders, banishments, etc. "Shall tribulation, distress, persecution," etc.? No! They are "blessed, who endure these things," [Mat. 5:10-11](#). Shall famine? He who feeds on Christ shall never perish for hunger. Shall nakedness? Christ's righteousness is my clothing; I shall willingly follow him even naked; who when he was clothed with infinite glory as with a garment was content to be born naked and to be stripped on the cross for my sake. Shall peril? I know the hardest. Shall the sword? Christ is to me in life and death advantage. But,

[4.] Fourthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None can be against us so—so as to bring us under submission to their beck, their will, their desires, their lusts.** [1 Kings 19:18](#), "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." [1 Kings 19:18](#). That is, I have many thousands who have not worshiped Baal. Here a set number is put for an indefinite number; he means a very great number. Idolaters used not only to bow and kneel before their idols—but also to kiss them, according to that [Hosea 13:2](#), "Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves." *Kissing* was an outward token—

(1.) Of great and entire affection;

(2.) Of submissive reverence;

(3.) Of willing and ready subjection. Cicero says that the chin of the statue of Hercules was much worn with the kisses of those who adored him. Now God had several thousands of true Israelites indeed that had not in the least kind polluted themselves with the idolatry of Baal. The denial of bowing the knee and kissing with the mouth shows that God's faithful servants were so far from

setting their hearts upon Baal, as that they would not make the least show of any affection or subjection to him. These good souls had too great spirits to be conformable to the idolatry of the times. Jeroboam with his eight hundred thousand chosen men, his popish priests, and his golden calves, could not bring Judah to bow to him, [2 Chron. 13:3, 20](#). Nebuchadnezzar, nor his fiery furnace, could never bring the three Hebrew children to bow to him; the three champions would be Nonconformists, though court, city, and country were violent for conformity, [Dan. 3](#). Neither Darius, his presidents, nor princes, could ever bring Daniel to bow, [Dan. 6](#); Daniel would keep off from idolatry, and keep close to his God, and close to his duty, let all his enemies do their worst.

The rulers and elders of Israel *charged* the apostles, and *threatened* the apostles, and *beat* the apostles, and *commanded* the apostles, that they should not speak in the name of Jesus; but they could never bring them to bow to them, Acts 3, 4, 5. For "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and daily in the temple, and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ," [Acts 5:41-42](#). Pharaoh by all his oppressions could never bring Israel to submit; nor Saul by all his persecutions could never bring David to bow to him; nor could Haman by all his plots and designs ever bring Mordecai to bow to him; and Paul will rather die upon the spot than be brought bow to his enemies', [Acts 20:21-24](#), and [21:13](#). The ten persecuting emperors could never bring the primitive Christians to bow to them; nor could the bloody, fierce, and fiery papists ever bring the martyrs to bow to them, as you may see throughout the books of martyrs. Among the many hundred instances that are there, I shall only refresh your memory with this one: There were endeavors to bring Hawkes to bow to them—but all in vain. At last some of his Christian friends desired him, for their encouragement and confirmation, to give some token when he was in the flames; a strange time one would think to attend upon signs by friends, whether the pains were tolerable or not. He was bound to the stake, fire put to the wood, it burns, it flames, it consumes his flesh, his eyes start out of his head, his fingers are consumed with the fire; and when everyone thought him dead, expecting the fall of his body—lo, suddenly he lifts up his stumps, and thrice as a famous conqueror he claps them over his head. In this he was more than conqueror.

In former times the sense of the love of God made the martyrs esteem tyrants as gnats and fleas; and torments as flea-bitings. Tertullian, speaking of his times, says, That to be accused was the wish of Christians, and punishment for Christ they counted felicity. A certain woman, running in all haste with her child in her arms, being asked the cause, "Oh," says she, "I hear a great sort of Christians are appointed to be martyred, and I am afraid lest I and my little one will come too late." When the Emperor Valens banished Basil, and the tribune threatened his death, "I wish," said Basil, "I had anything of worth, I would bestow it on him who should cut Basil's windpipe." And when he had that night given him to deliberate, he answered, that "he would be the same man

tomorrow, and wished that the punishment should not be changed."

Chrysostom, being in banishment by the means of Eudoxia the empress, wrote and tells of his resolution before he was banished: "I thought with myself," says he, "that if she banishes me—the earth is the Lord's; if she will saw me asunder—I remembered the prophet Isaiah; if she drowns me—Jonah came to my mind; if she stones me—I thought of Stephen; if she beheads me, John Baptist came to my mind; if she takes away my goods, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb." By all which you may clearly see, that let the wicked do their worst, they can never bring the saints to bow to them. But,

[5.] Fifthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer—None, so as to hinder the operation of all things for our good.** When men and devils have done their worst, all the great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, which attend the saints, shall work for their good: [Romans 8:28](#), "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." In this verse there are two things observable:

First, A proposition, or a glorious privilege. "All things work together for good." This word, "work together," is a physical expression. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skillful apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. They work together, not between themselves—but together with God; not of their own nature, for so they do not co-operate—but contra-operate. But being sanctified by God, they work together for our good. Indeed, take away God, and afflictions work for our hurt; but all God's providences, being divinely tempered and sanctified, do work together for the best, to the people of God. When the worst of men have done their worst against the saints, all things shall sweetly concur, yes, conspire for their good.

Second, The proof, which is double.

(1.) From the experience of all saints, "We know;" it is not a doubtful matter. The apostle does not say, "We *think*," but "We *know*." Nor does he say, "We *hope*," but "We *know*." Nor does he say, "We *guess*," "we *conjecture*," but "We *know*." Nor does he say, "We *desire* that all things may work together for good," but "We *know* all things work together for good." Nor does he say, "We *pray*" that all things may work together for good—but "We *know* all things work together for good." The wicked do not know this secret, as the Philistines did not understand Samson's riddles, [Judg. 14:12-14](#); but we know that all the world shall not hinder the cross from working for our good.

(2.) From a description of those who love God, they are "called according to God's purpose;" that is, God has purposed the salvation of his people, he has chosen them to salvation, and called them to it; and therefore it must needs be, that all these afflictions which befall his people, must work together for their

spiritual and eternal good, otherwise God should do that which should cross his own purpose, which wise men will not do; and oh, how much less will the most wise God act counter-cross to his own purpose! So [Jer. 24:5-6](#), "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. *My eyes will watch over them for their good*, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.'" To be carried captive to Babylon was doubtless a very sore and matchless affliction: [Dan. 9:12](#), "You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem."

This may be the abridgment of Jeremiah's Lamentations: [Lam. 1:12](#), "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see if there is any suffering like mine, which the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger." Chapter 4:16, "The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her." Sodom sustained not any siege from foreign forces, they were not vexed and plagued with the armies of the Chaldeans; there was no hand of man in the destruction of Sodom—but a hand of heaven only. Sodom was not kept long in pains and misery as I and my people have been—but was suddenly overwhelmed, and in an instant despatched; all which shows that their miseries and sufferings were incomparable and matchless; and that they were so indeed will evidently appear, if you please but seriously to consider either the antecedents of it, or the consequences of it. The **antecedents** of it—what went *before* their captivity—namely, blood, and slaughter, and dreadful devastations. Or if you consider the **consequences** of it—what went *after* their captivity—namely:

- (1.) The enslaving of their persons under a fierce and most cruel enemy;
- (2.) The loss of their estates;
- (3.) The leaving of their country and the land of their nativity;
- (4.) A deprivation of the ordinances and worship of God;
- (5.) The scorns and reproaches, the exultations and triumphs of their adversaries, who pleased and delighted themselves in their captivity and misery. [See [Psalm 137:7](#); [Obad. 12:13-16](#); [Ezek. 25:6](#); [Psalm 44:13-14](#).] These were the woeful consequences of that captivity—and yet all the power and malice of men in the world could not hinder these amazing and astonishing trials from working together for the spiritual and everlasting good of his captive people. That God will do his people good by the most terrible dispensations that they are under, you may see more and more evident by comparing these scriptures together. [[Deut. 8:15-16](#); [Psalm 119:71, 75](#); [Heb. 12:10](#).]

As the apothecary makes one poison to drive out another poison, so can God make the poison of afflictions, which in themselves are the curse of the law, to drive out the poison of sin. All the world can never hinder the affliction, troubles, and evils which befall the people of God, from working for their good; for God does and will by these means,

- (1.) Discover sin;
- (2.) Prevent sin;
- (3.) Embitter sin;
- (4.) Mortify sin.

And God will by afflictions, troubles, etc.,

- (1.) Revive, quicken, and recover his children's decayed graces;
- (2.) Exercise his children's graces;
- (3.) Increase his children's graces;
- (4.) Make a further trial and discovery of his children's graces.

Let the enemies of Zion storm and rage, plot and combine, etc.—yet they shall never be able to hinder the greatest troubles, the deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—from working for the spiritual and eternal good of all the sincere lovers of God. I have read a story of Pereus, who, attempting to kill another with a thrust of a sword; only pierced and opened his abscess; and so he was instrumental to save him, whom he designed to have killed! Just so, all the afflictions and troubles which the righteous meet with, they do but serve to cure them of the abscess of pride, or of the abscess of earthly-mindedness, or of the abscess of self-love, or of the abscess of hypocrisy.

The people of God have many enemies in the world, whose course and scope, whose aims and ends and actions are not the same, yes diverse, nay adverse, one thwarting and crossing the other—yet the overruling providence so sways all subordinate and inferior instruments and enemies, that in the midst of their mutual jars they conspire in a sacred harmony, as if they were entered into a holy league, or some sacred combination for the good of his chosen people. *Wherever* our enemies be in respect of their places, *whoever* they be in regard of their persons, and *however* they are disjoined in regard of their affections—yet all their projects and practices shall tend and end in the good of those who love God. But,

[6] Sixthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None—so as to hinder our communion and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Spirit.** 1 John 1:3, "That which we have seen and heard, we declare unto you, that you may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Man's *summum bonum* stands in his

communion with God, as Scripture and experience both evidence. A man whose soul is conversant with God, shall find more pleasure in a desert, in a den, in a dungeon, in a fiery furnace, yes, and in the valley of the shadow of death—than in the palace of a prince! [Never less alone than when alone, said the heathen; and may not a saint say so much more, who has communion with Father, Son, and Spirit? "My God and I are good company," said famous Dr. Sibbes.]

There is a sweet and intimate communion which believers have with **God the Father**; hence they are said to "*walk* with God," [Gen. 5:24](#), and [6:9](#); and to "*talk* with God," as Moses frequently did; and to " *dwell* in God," [1 John 4:15](#); and to "*sup* with God," [Rev. 3:20](#); and to "*lodge* with God," [Cant. 7:11](#). The nearness of this fellowship which we have with the Father, is represented by a gradation of allusions in Scripture, all which excellently illustrate this truth. There is some kind of participation that a *servant* has with his master; yet greater is that which one *friend* has with another; but yet greater is that which a *son* has with the father; but greatest of all is that which the *bride* has with the bridegroom. Now in all these relations we stand to the Father; we are his *servants* and he is our Lord, [Exod. 12:7](#); we are his *friends*, [John 15:14-15](#); [James 2:23](#); and he is our friend, [Cant. 5:1](#); an able friend, a sure friend, a faithful friend, a close friend, a constant friend. Plutarch's reasoning is good, "Friends have all things in common." But God is our friend: consequently we cannot lack! He is our Father, [Isaiah 63:16](#), and [64:8](#); and we are his *children*, [Isaiah 63:8](#). He is our bridegroom, and we are his *bride*, [Isaiah 61:10](#); [Hosea 2:19-20](#); [Isaiah 62:5](#). And therefore it is no pride nor presumption for believers to say, "Our fellowship is with the Father."

Our fellowship with **Jesus Christ** is set forth by the parable of the wedding-feast, and by the entertainment of the prodigal son; and by such relations or various similitudes, as carry communion in their bosoms, as of the head and the members, root and branches, foundation and building, husband and wife, [Mat. 22:1-3](#); Luke 15. The *head* has communion with the body by sense, influence, motion. The *root* has communion with the branches, by leaf, sap, and juice. The *foundation* has communion with the building, by support and strength. The *husband* has communion with the wife, by love and consent. Thus it is between Christ and the believers: [1 Cor. 1:9](#), "God is faithful, by whom you are called to the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ." All believers have fellowship with Christ, whether they are strong—or weak, rich—or poor, high—or low, ripe and well grown—or new-born babes, and very tender, [Gal. 3:28](#); [1 Pet. 2:2](#); [John 17:20-23](#).

The *head* has conjunction with all the members, and an influence into all the members, even the little toes, as well as into the strongest arms. The *root*, in the virtue of it, extends to the weakest branches, as well as to the strongest limbs of the tree. *Communion* with Christ is as large as *union* with Christ. All believers are *united* to Christ, and all believers have *communion* with Christ. Though one star exceeds another in magnitude—yet

all are alike seated in the heavenly orb; and though one member is larger in the body than another—yet each one has an equal conjunction with the head.

And as believers have fellowship with the Father and the Son, so they have fellowship with the **Spirit** also. Every believer's communion extends to all the persons in the Trinity: [2 Cor. 13:14](#), "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." Now no men, no devils, no wrath, no rage, no malice, no enmity, no afflictions, no oppositions, no persecutions, no troubles, no trials, no bonds, no banishment—can interrupt or hinder a believer's communion with the three persons in Trinity. But,

[7.] Seventhly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None—so as to hinder our private trade to heaven.**

All the world can never hinder a sincere Christian from driving a secret trade with heaven, as you may see by comparing these scriptures together. [[Psalm 3:2-4](#); [Psalm 6:8-10](#); [Psalm 138:3](#); [Lam. 3:55-59](#).] A Christian can as well *hear* without ears, and *live* without food, and *fight* without hands, and *walk* without feet—as he is able to live without secret prayer. Secret prayer is the life of our lives, the soul, the sweet, the heaven of all our earthly enjoyments. Of all the duties of piety, secret prayer is the most soul-sweetening, soul-strengthening, soul-nourishing, soul-fattening, soul-refreshing, soul-satisfying, and soul-encouraging duty. In all the ages of the world, the saints have kept the trade. In spite of all opposers and persecutors, in prisons, in dungeons, in dens, in bonds, in banishments, on racks, and in the very flames, the saints have still kept up this secret trade; as you may see at large in my treatise on closet prayer, called "The Privy Key of Heaven," to which I refer you. But,

[8.] Eighthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None—so as to deprive us of the sweet testimony of our renewed consciences.** [2 Cor. 1:12](#),

"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace." They were in great and pressing troubles in Asia, verse 8—and yet they boasted in the testimony of their consciences; they were under a sentence of death in themselves, verse 9—and yet gloried in the testimony of their consciences. *Joy* of conscience is the greatest joy, as *trouble* of conscience is the greatest trouble! When conscience bears its testimony with us, and for us, how full of joy is the soul, even in the midst of the deepest sorrows and greatest sufferings! A good conscience has sure confidence, and he who has it, sits Noah-like—quiet in the greatest upheavals; freed, if not from the common destruction—yet from the common distraction.

A good conscience is an impregnable fort. It fears no opponent; it will enable a man to stand against the fiercest batteries of men and devils. A good conscience will fill a man with courage and comfort in the midst of all his troubles and distresses. Paul had

enough to say for himself when standing before the council; he could say, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day," [Acts 23:1-2](#). And though as soon as he had said so, Ananias commanded to smite him on the mouth—yet he bears up bravely, because his conscience did not smite him—but acquit him. That man can never lack music, whose conscience speaks in consort, and is harmonious with himself. A good conscience is a paradise in a wilderness, it is riches in poverty, and health in sickness, and strength in weakness, and liberty in bonds, and life in death, [Isaiah 38:3](#). A good conscience will enable a man to triumph over innumerable evils, yes, over death itself. Death to such a person is not the king of *terrors*—but the king of *desires*, [Phil. 1:23](#).

A good conscience will be a Christian's best friend in the worst times; it will be a sword to defend him, a staff to support him, a pillar of fire to lead him, a Joseph to nourish him, a Dorcas to clothe him, a Canaan to refresh him, and a feast to delight him: "He who is of a merry heart has a continual feast," [Proverbs 15:15](#). Now there is nothing which can make a man divinely merry, below a good conscience. "A good conscience," says one, "is the bed of God, the palace of Christ, the habitation of the Holy Spirit, the paradise of delights, and wherein every tree yields a feast."

The tranquility of conscience, and the security of innocence, excel all the things which the world counts good. He who has a good conscience enjoys a continual serenity, and sits continually at that blessed feast, whereat the blessed angels are cooks and butlers, as Luther has it, and the three persons in Trinity glad guests. All other feasts, compared to this of a good conscience, are stark hunger. The feast of a good conscience is a full feast, a noble feast, a lasting feast; not for a day, as that of Nabal's; nor for seven days, as that of Samson's; nor of nine score days, as that of Ahasuerus; but a durable, continual feast, without intermission of solace, or interruption of society. The best way in this world for a man to turn his whole life into a merry festival, is to get and keep a good conscience. "A godly man keeps holiday all the year around." It was the testimony of a good conscience which made the apostles rejoice when they were beaten and abused by the council. It was the testimony of a good conscience which made Paul and Silas to sing in the prison, [Acts 5:40-42](#), and 16:25-26. It was the testimony of a good conscience which made Moses prefer Christ's cross before Egypt's crown, and Christ's reproaches before Egypt's treasures. It was the testimony of a good conscience which made those worthies in that 11th chapter of the Hebrews more willing to die than to live, to die than to dine, [Heb. 11:35](#). It was the testimony of a good conscience which made the martyrs to kiss the stake, to hug their executioners, to clap their hands in the flames, and to tread upon burning coals as upon beds of roses! Now it is not in the power or policy of men or devils to deprive a Christian of the testimony of his conscience; and as long as that *bird in the bosom* sings—no troubles, no trials, no oppositions, no persecutions, no dangers, no death can make a Christian miserable. The testimony of a good conscience will make

a man triumph over the worst of men, and the worst of sufferings. But,

[9.] Ninthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None—so as to hinder the help, assistance, and support of God.** [Heb. 13:5](#), "Let your way of life be without covetousness,"—or "without the love of silver," as the Greek word signifies—"and be content with such things as you have." So Beza, "Be content with present things." These Hebrew Christians had been plundered of all they had; though they had nothing they must be content, [Heb. 10:34](#). If men cannot bring their means to their minds, let them bring their minds to their means; **a little will serve our turn until we get to heaven, until we come to our Father's house:** "For he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you." There are five negatives in the Greek; I read not the like throughout the New Testament. In that this promise is set down negatively, "I will never leave you," this makes the promise to be of a larger extent; for it includes all times, all places, all estates, all dangers, all needs, all distresses whatever; as if he had more largely said, you shall never stand in need of any of my help and protection—but you shall be sure to find it. *Affirmative* promises are not of that extent as *negative* promises are; for if a man should promise to assist, help, support, or counsel me, if he does it now and then, or upon some special occasions, he has kept his promise; but negatively for a man to say, "I will not fail you, I will *never* leave you," though he should help, assist, support, or stand by me, a hundred, yes, a thousand times—and yet fail me but once, that negative promise is not punctually kept, it is not perfectly kept.

It is further considerable that there is a great emphasis in doubling and trebling a negative particle in Greek. Doubling and trebling negatives in Greek makes them much the stronger. The doubling of the negative particle does in this place carry the greater emphasis, because, in setting down the same thing, it is not only twice doubled—but in the latter place it is trebled; so as there are in all five negatives, as I have already hinted. These two phrases, "Never leave nor forsake," are so general as they include all the needs, all dangers, all distresses, all necessities, all calamities, all miseries, which can befall us in this world. [A general promise comprises all particulars of that kind.]

These two phrases, "God's not leaving, God's not forsaking," imply all needful assistance. It is more than if he had said, I will supply all your needs, I will heal all your diseases, I will secure you against all sorts of dangers, I will ease you of all your pains, I will free you of all your oppressors, I will break all your bonds, I will bring you out of prison, I will vanquish all your enemies, I will knock off all your chains, and I will make you triumph over all your sufferings; for these generals comprise all manner of particulars under them.

[Heb. 13:6](#), "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." In this verse there is an inference made upon the former promise of God's not leaving

nor forsaking his people; the conjunction, "so that," implies an inference, and such an inference in this place as teaches us to make a good use of the forenamed promise. The use here set down is double: the first is **confidence in God**, "The Lord is my helper;" secondly, **courage against man**, "I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Assurance of God's presence to help at all times and circumstances, should raise us up above all base and slavish fears of the power of men, of the harmings of men, of the evil designs of men, etc. God being with us, and for us, and on our side, we may boldly, safely, and confidently, rest upon it, that he will freely, readily, graciously, afford all needful help, assistance, and support, when we are in the greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers.

The Greek word "helper," according to the notation of it, signifies one who is ready to run at the cry of another. This notation implies a willing readiness, and a ready willingness in God, to help and support his people when they are in deep distress. You know the tender father, the indulgent mother--they immediately run when they hear the child cry, or see the child in any danger or distress. Just so, when God sees his poor children in any danger or distress, when he hears them complain and cry out of their sufferings, their bonds, their burdens, their oppressions, their dangers, etc., he immediately runs to their relief and support, [Exod. 2:23-25](#), and [3:7-10](#). [Psalm 33:20](#), "Our soul waits for the Lord: he is our help and our shield." [Psalm 49:17](#), "You are my deliverer: God is the Lord Almighty, with him alone is strength and power to deliver Israel out of all his troubles." He *may* do it, he *can* do it, he *will* do it—he is wise in heart and mighty in strength; besides him there is no Savior, no deliverer; he is a shield to the righteous, strength to the weak, a refuge to the oppressed; he is *Instar omnium*, all in all. [[Psalm 9:7, 8](#); [Isaiah 43:11](#); [Psalm 5:12](#), and [22:12](#); [2 Kings 6:26-27](#).]

Who is like him in all the world—to help his people in each and every direful circumstance? When friends cannot help, when power cannot help, when human wisdom cannot help, when riches cannot help, when princes cannot help, when governments cannot help—yet then God can and will help his people—when all human help fails. "The LORD will judge his people and have compassion on his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left," [Deut. 32:36](#). When God's people are at the very brink of ruin, then God will come in seasonably to their help; their extremity shall be his opportunity, to support his people, and to judge their enemies. No men, no devils, no power, no policy, can hinder God from helping, aiding, assisting, and supporting of his people in any needful circumstance. But,

[10.] Tenthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None—so as to hinder the springs of joy and comfort from rising and flowing in their souls.** [Psalm 71:20-21](#), "Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again." The psalmist was in those desperate dangers, that he

seemed to be as a man who was dead and buried—and yet he had faith enough to believe that God would surround him with cordials, and supply him with comforts from all sides. There is no true comfort to be drawn out of *the stagnant pools of creature sufficiencies*—but only out of the living fountains of the all-sufficiencies of the Lord Almighty.

"You shall comfort me on every side." [Psalm 94:19](#), "In the multitude of my thoughts within me," or of my careful, troubled, perplexed thoughts, as the word properly signifies, "your comforts delight my soul." As the psalmist always found God a present *help*, so he always found him a present *comfort* in the day of troubles. God never did, nor ever will lack a cordial to revive and keep up the spirits of his people from fainting and sinking in an evil day. When the psalmist was under many griefs, cares, fears, and perplexities of spirit, God came in with those comforts which delighted his soul, and cheered up his spirits, [Psalm 119:49-50](#). The word of the Lord is never more a word of comfort, nor the Spirit of the Lord is never more a Spirit of comfort—than when the saints are in their deepest distresses and sorest perplexities.

[John 14:16](#), "And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever;" verse 26, "But the comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name." Hudson, the martyr, being at the stake, he went from under his chain, and having prayed earnestly, he was so comforted and refreshed by the Holy Spirit, that he suffered valiantly and cheerfully. The Holy Spirit is called again and again *the comforter*, because his office is to work consolation in the hearts of God's people in all their troubles and distresses. Spiritual comfort is therefore called "joy in the Holy Spirit," because the Holy Spirit creates it in the soul, [Romans 14:17](#). When a man suffers for righteousness' sake, God comes with his cordials in the very nick of time, [1 Pet. 4:13](#). When a man's suffering is upon the account of Christ, God seldom fails to send the Comforter for the refreshing and relieving of his heart. When a man is under bodily confinement for the cause of Christ, God will never fail to be a spring of life, a well of salvation, and breast of consolation to him, [Isaiah 12:3](#), and [66:11](#). When a Christian is brought down to his last "piece of bread," then is the season for God to feed him with heavenly manna.

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior." [Habakkuk 3:17-18](#). In these words you have these two parts:

- (1.) A sad supposition, "Though the fig tree does not bud," etc.;
- (2.) A noble and comfortable resolution, "Yet I will be joyful in God my Savior."

Let me first hint a little at **the sad supposition**, "Though the fig tree does not bud," etc.

[1.] **First**, Though there should be a famine in that land, that of all lands was the most plentiful and fruitful land—yet Habakkuk "will be joyful in God my Savior." The land of Canaan, of all lands, was the most fruitful. It was as the garden of God. It was a land which "flowed with milk and honey," a land of vineyards, the best of all lands, as Moses describes it; a land that brought forth to Isaac no less than a hundredfold. It was so rich a land that it was the granary of other neighboring cities and countries. It had not only plenty for itself—but bounty for others. Yet now, when God shall turn a paradise into a wilderness, Habakkuk will rejoice in the God of his salvation, [Deut. 8:7-9](#), and 32:13-14; [Gen. 26:12](#); [1 Kings 5:11](#); [Acts 12:20](#). But,

[2.] **Secondly**, When the anger and wrath of God shall cause a dearth in those fruits which naturally are most yielding and pleasant—yet then Habakkuk would rejoice in the God of his salvation. The fig-tree, of all trees, is most fruitful, bringing forth of its own accord, with the least care and culture, fructifying in the most barren and stony places, bearing twice a year, soonest ripening, and rarely failing. Just so, the vine, that is a fruitful plant, is made the emblem of plenty and fruitfulness. Now when there shall be a dearth upon these pleasant fruits—yet then Habakkuk will "rejoice in the God of his salvation." But,

[3.] **Thirdly**, Another print of divine displeasure in the scarcity threatened is, that it is a national famine, a general famine, an overspreading famine. Usually, if one part of the land suffers scarcity, other parts abound with plenty; but when God calls for a famine, he turns a whole land into a desert, into a barren wilderness. "Bashan languishes, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languishes," [Psalm 107:33-34](#); [Nah. 1:4](#). These were the richest soil of all the country—yet these were parched up and fruitless by God's displeasure. And yet for all this Habakkuk "will rejoice in the God of his salvation." But,

[4.] **Fourthly**, Another print of divine displeasure is this, that the Lord makes it a universal scarcity upon all kind of foods and supports of life. Here is the "staff of bread" broken, and "the herds and flocks fail," and the refreshing of the wine-press, "the seed and the vine, and the fig-tree and the olive-tree," all become fruitless. Such a desolation is more than ordinary. Usually, when one commodity fails, another abounds. If corn be costly, cattle will be cheap. That weather which oftentimes hinders one kind of grain, helps another; but here God blasts all the helps of nature. Therefore God compares his judgments to a fire which burns all before it: [Joel 2:3](#), "The land is as the garden of Eden before it, and behind it a desolate wilderness," and this the Lord points at as a wonder: [Joel 1:2](#), "Hear this, you old men"—who can talk of many years—"has this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? that which the palmer-worm has left, has the caterpillars eaten." When God begins in a way of judgment, he makes an end, he makes the decays of nature excessive and violent; and yet Habakkuk will "rejoice in the God of his salvation."

In his resolution you have the first particle, "although," verse 17. Now this particle is an act of forecast; these miseries may befall us; and in the 18th verse you have the particle "yet," and that is an act of preparation against these miseries. That particle "although" forecasts the misery, and that particle "yet" foresees the remedy. He foresees sorrows in the first, and he provides against them in the second, "Yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

Just so, Paul comes with a benediction in his mouth—and surely it was in his heart before it was in his mouth: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](#). The apostle begins here with praise and thanksgiving, according to his accustomed manner in all his epistles; but contrary to his custom does he apply this thanksgiving wholly to himself. "The reason was," says Beza, "because the Corinthians began to despise him for his afflictions—it being the common course of the world to despise the people of God when they are under sufferings;" therefore he answered confidently for himself, that though he had been much afflicted—yet he had been much comforted; and rejoiced the more in his comforts, because God had comforted him for that very cause, that he might be able and willing to comfort others.

God is the God of all sorts and degrees of comfort. He has all comforts at his disposal. This phrase, "The God of all comforts," intimates to us;

(1.) That no comfort can be found anywhere else; God has the sole gift of comfort.

(2.) Not only some—but all comfort; no imaginable comfort is lacking in him, nor to be found outside of him. Look! as the air lights not without the sun, and as fuel heats not without fire, so neither can anything soundly comfort us without God.

(3.) All degrees of comfort are to be found in him, in our greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. The lower the ebb—the higher the tide; the deeper the distress—the greater the comforts. Though the apostle was greatly afflicted—yet his comforts did exceed his afflictions: [2 Cor. 7:6](#), "God, who comforts the downcast." When the Corinthians were in a very low condition, when they were even spent with grief and swallowed up in sorrows, when they were destitute of all relief and comfort, then the God of all comforts did comfort them. *The comfort of God is his most sweet attribute; it is a breast which we should be always sucking at.* No tribulations, no persecutions, no grievances, no prison doors, no bolts, no bars, can keep out the consolations of God from flowing in upon his people. God loves to comfort his people when all their outward comforts fail them. God's comforts

are not only *sweet*—but *seasonable*; he never comes too soon, nor ever stays too long.

"If one drop of the joy of the Holy Spirit should fall into hell, it would swallow up all the torments of hell," says Austin. "The joy of the Holy Spirit" will certainly swallow up all the troubles and sufferings that we meet with in a way of righteousness. None have been more divinely cheerful and merry than the saints have been under their greatest sufferings, [1 Pet. 4:12-14](#). John Noyes took up a faggot at the fire and kissed it, saying, "Blessed be the time that ever I was born to come to this preferment." When they fastened Alice Driver to the stake to be burnt, "Never did any necklace," said she, with a cheerful countenance, "suit me so well as this chain." Mr. Bradford took off his cap and thanked God when he was brought word that he was to be burnt on the morrow. Mr. Taylor began to dance when he had come near the place where he was to suffer. Thus you see that it is not the greatest troubles, nor the deepest distresses, nor the most deadly dangers, that can hinder the joy of the Lord from overflowing the soul. But,

[11.] Eleventhly," "If God is for us—who can be against us? **I answer, None—so as to deprive us of our graces, which next to Christ are our choicest jewels.** [1 John 3:9](#), "No one who is born of God will continue to sin." That is, he does not give himself over to a voluntary serving of sin; he does not make a trade of sin; he sins not totally, finally, maliciously, habitually, studiously, resolutely, willfully, delightfully, deadly. "He does not make it his work to sin," he cannot follow his lusts, as a workman follows his trade, "because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." "God's seed," the seed of grace, is an abiding seed. Grace in itself is certain and unchangeable, though the *feeling* of grace, is uncertain. Grace has an abiding excellency in it; grace has eternity stamped upon it. It is durable riches. Other riches "make themselves wings, and fly from us," [Proverbs 8:18](#), and [27:24](#); but grace will keep us company until we get to heaven. Our last step in holiness, will be into happiness. Grace is a blossom of eternity.

Grace is an anointing which abides, [1 John 2:27](#); [John 4:14](#), and [7:38](#). That is, the principle of grace infused into you, which was typified by the unctions or anointings in the ceremonial law, which was signified by the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that ran down to the skirts of his garments—this principle will prove durable and lasting. Grace is "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Grace is a river of living water. Now this river can never be dried up, because the Spirit of God is the constant spring that feeds it and maintains it. Grace is not a *stream* or a pond which may run dry—but a *well*, yes, a springing well of inexhaustible fullness, sweetness, virtue, and refreshment.

Grace will still be springing up and flowing out in all the departments of a Christian. Grace will be flowing out in all a Christian's duties and services, in his outward calling and employments, in his trials and sufferings. Grace will break out at a Christian's eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet. Where grace is a well

of water, a river of living water, there that Christian will see for Christ, and *hear* for Christ, and *talk* for Christ, and *do* for Christ, and *walk* with Christ. Grace is a well, a river, which will be springing up to everlasting life.

Grace and *glory* differ in degree, not in kind. Grace differs very little from glory. The one is the seed, the other the flower. Grace is glory militant, and glory is grace triumphant. Grace is a beginning of glory. It may be compared to the golden chain in Homer, whose top was fastened to the chair of Jupiter. Grace and glory are individual, yet inseparable. The psalmist joins them together, "The Lord will give grace and glory," [Psalm 84:11](#). Grace is a living spring which never fails, a seed which never dies, a jewel which never consumes, a sun which never sets. All other gifts of whatever kind, worth, or excellency, are but like a cloud soon dispelled, a vessel of clay soon broken, a sandy foundation soon sunk. Grace is more excellent than gold. Gold draws the heart from God, grace draws the heart to God; gold does but enrich the mortal part, the ignoble part—but grace enriches the angelical part, the noble part; gold perishes—but grace perseveres, [1 Peter 1:7](#). If grace were not permanent, it could not be excellent; if grace were not durable, it could not be pleasurable; if grace were not lasting, yes everlasting, it could not be a Christian's comfort in life, his support in death, and his glorious crown in the great day of account. Grace in itself is permanent, incorruptible; it never fades away; it is a birth which shall never die; it is a plant of renown which shall never wither—but grow up more and more until grace is turned into glory. Upon which account, Jerome would rather have Paul's poor coat with his heavenly graces—than the purple of kings with their kingdoms. No troubles, no distresses, no dangers can deprive us of our graces, can rob us of our spiritual treasure. But,

[12.] Twelfthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer, None, so as to deprive us of our inward peace, rest, and quiet.** Though it thunders, and lightnings, and rains, and blows abroad—yet a man may be at peace and rest and quiet at home. A man may have much trouble in the world—and yet rest and quiet in his own spirit: [John 14:27](#), "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives give I unto you," "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." No men nor devils, no troubles nor distresses, can deprive a Christian of that inward and blessed peace which Christ has purchased and paid so dear for. Peace with God, and peace of conscience, are rare jewels, which none can strip us of.

The world may *wish* you peace—but it is only Christ, who can *give* you peace, [Romans 5:1](#), and [2 Cor. 1:12](#). The world's peace is commonly a dearly-bought peace; but Christ's peace is a cheap peace, a free peace. "My peace I *give* unto you." The world's peace is commonly a *sinful* peace—but Christ's peace is a *holy* peace. The world's peace is a *cursed* peace—but Christ's peace is a *blessed* peace. The world's peace is but an *earthly* peace—but Christ's peace is a *heavenly* peace, [Romans 14:17](#); [Heb. 12:14](#), and [Psalm 29:11](#). The kingdom of God consists not in food or

drink—but "in righteousness, and peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit." The world's peace is but an *imaginary* peace—but Christ's peace is a *real* peace. The world's peace is but a *superficial* peace—but Christ's peace is a *solid* and *substantial* peace. The world's peace is but a *transient* peace—but Christ's peace is a *permanent* peace. The world's peace is but a *temporary* peace—but Christ's peace is an *eternal* peace. It is a peace which all the world can't *give* to a Christian, and it is a peace which all the world can't *take* from a Christian, [1 Thes. 5:3](#); [1 Pet. 3:11](#); [James 3:21](#); [Isaiah 9:6-7](#); Psalm 37; [Isaiah 26:3](#), and [27:5](#).

When the tyrant threatened one of the ancients that he would "take away his house," he answered, "But you cannot take away my peace." "I will break up your school;" "But I shall I keep whole my peace." "I will confiscate all your goods;" "But you cannot take away my peace." "I will banish you your country." "Yet I shall carry my peace with me."

All *above* a believer is at peace; the controversy between God and him is ended. Christ takes up the quarrel between God and a believer. "We have peace with God," [Romans 5:1](#).

All *within* a believer is at peace. A peaceable God makes all at peace. When our peace is made in the court of heaven, which is upon the first act of believing, then follows peace in the court of conscience, "peace which passes all understanding," [Phil. 4:7](#).

And all *below* a believer is at peace with him. He has peace with all the creatures. When we are friends with God, then all the creatures are our friends. "The stones of the field shall be at league with you, the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you," etc., [Job 5:23](#).

The peace which Christ gives is the inheritance of saints only. It was all the legacy which the *Prince of peace* left to his subjects, and this legacy none can take from them. Persecutors may take away my *goods*—but they cannot take away my peace; they may take away my *estate*—but they cannot take away my peace; they may take away my *liberty*—but they cannot take away my peace; they may take away my *good name*—but they cannot take away my peace; they may take away my *family*—but they cannot take away my peace; they may take away my *life*—but they cannot take away my peace.

I grant that the best Christians have no *perfection* of peace, because they have no perfection of grace. If there were a perfection of grace, then there might be a perfection of peace; but the perfection of both is reserved for the eternal world; and it must be granted that though sometimes a believer may lack the sense of peace, the sweet of peace—yet the grounds of his peace are still fixed, certain, and constant; they are "like mount Zion, which cannot be moved."

Now the **grounds** of a Christian's peace are these—namely, a saving interest in Christ, reconciliation with God, justification, remission of sin, adoption, the covenant of grace and peace, etc.

Now these are always sure and everlasting, though the *sense* of peace may ebb and flow, rise and fall, in a believer's bosom, especially when he is a-combating with strong corruptions, or high temptations, or under sad desertions, or when unbelief has got the throne, or when their hearts are quarrelsome—for commonly a quarrelsome heart is a troublesome heart, or when they have blotted their evidences for heaven, or when they are fallen from their first love, or when they have contracted eminent guilt upon their souls, or when they are declined in their communion with God, etc.

Now in these cases, though a believer may lose the *sense* of peace—yet the *grounds* of his peace remain firm and sure. And though he may lose the sense of his peace—yet in all these sad and dark conditions, his soul is day and night in the pursuit of peace, and he will never leave the chase until he has recovered his peace, knowing that God will sooner or later speak peace to his soul. Yes, though he has lost the sense of peace—yet he has that abiding seed of grace in his soul, which will in time recover his peace, [Psalm 85:8](#).

Do your enemies threaten to take away this or that from you? You may bid them do their worst, for they can never take that peace from you, which Christ has given as a legacy to you, [1 John 3:9](#). When there are ever so great storms within or without—yet then a believer may find peace in the prince of peace, [Isaiah 9:6](#). When his imperfections are many, a perfect Savior can keep him in perfect peace in the midst of them all, [Isaiah 26:3-4](#). Though his sacrifices are imperfect—yet Christ a perfect priest can speak peace to his soul, [Heb. 7](#).

Peace is that never-fading garland which Christ will so set and settle upon the heads of the upright, that none shall be able to take it off. A Christian can never lose his inward peace—either totally or finally. It is true by sin, Satan, and the world—a Christian's peace may be somewhat *interrupted*—but it can never be *finally lost*. The greatest storms in this world which beat upon a believer will in time blow over, and the Sun of righteousness, the prince of peace, will shine as gloriously upon him as ever.

Under this word *Shalom*, the Jews comprehend all peace, prosperity, and happy success. When the worst of men have done their worst against the people of God—yet the outcome shall be peace, prosperity, and happy success. "My peace I give unto you;" that is, that "peace with God, and peace with conscience, which I have purchased with my blood—I give unto you." And what power or policy is there, which can deprive us of this legacy? surely none! The peace which Christ gives is founded upon his blood, upon his righteousness, upon his atoning sacrifice, upon his intercession, and upon a covenant of peace—and therefore it must needs be a lasting peace, an abiding peace. But,

[13.] Thirteenthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" I answer—None, so as to hinder us from being hidden, secured, guarded, and protected by God in an evil day, or in

a day of greatest trouble, distress, or danger. "Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard—Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks." [Jeremiah 39:11-12](#). Here you shall see the admirable power, wisdom, and goodness of God, in inclining the heart of this great monarch and conqueror to provide for the prophet's safety and security. He who was a dreadful scourge to punish the wicked—is made by God the deliverer and preserver of the prophet. In the 12th verse you have the king's royal commission to the captain of his guard to be as kind to him, as tender of him, and to behave as courteously to him even as the prophet himself should desire: "Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks." Let him have all the contentment, all the satisfaction, and all the accommodations which he himself shall require.

[Jer. 15:11](#), "The Lord said—All will be well with you, Jeremiah." A speech in the nature of an oath, as if God had said, "Let me not be deemed a God of my word, let me not be accounted true, let none reckon me faithful in my promise—if I don't turn his sufferings into his advantage, and save him from danger in the midst of danger." If in the time of the enemies' invasion, I be not "a wall of fire about him," [Zech. 2:5](#), if in the time of public calamity I don't secure him—never more trust me for a God. If he doesn't find more favor at the hand of his enemies than he has formerly found among his own people, never more own me for a God. Verse 20, "I am with you to save you, and to deliver you—says the Lord;" verse 21. "And I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible," [Jer. 40:1-5](#), [26:23-24](#), and [45:4](#). God engages himself to protect him against all the might and malice of his most terrible enemies; and though he should fall into their hands—yet he would deliver him out of their hands.

[Psalm 33:3](#), "They have consulted against your hidden ones." The saints are:

- (1.) hidden in God's decree,
- (2.) hidden in Christ's wounds,
- (3.) hidden in the chambers of divine providence,
- (4.) hidden in common dangers, as Noah was hid in his ark, and as Lot was hid in Zoar, and as Daniel was hid in the lions' den, and as the three Hebrew children were hidden in the fiery furnace, and as Jonah was hidden in the whale's belly, [Isaiah 26:20](#);
- (5.) hidden "with Christ in God," [Col. 3:3](#).

In times of greatest trouble the saints are hidden under the hollow of God's hand, under the shadow of God's wing, [Psalm 91:1](#), [4. Psalm 27:5](#), "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion." A little pavilion or cottage where God is—shall be sufficient to safeguard the saints in the day of adversity. "He shall

hide me in his hut, as a shepherd does his sheep in a stormy day." In the secret of his tabernacle, shall he hide me. I shall be as safe as if I were shut up in his holy ark, tabernacle, or temple—where they use to flee for shelter to the horns of the altar, yes, as if a man were hidden in the most holy place, where none might enter but only the high-priest once a year, which is therefore called "God's secret place." A *shepherd* could not be more careful to shelter his sheep in a tent or tabernacle from the heat of the sun, nor could a *king* not be more ready to protect a favorite in his pavilion, whence none dared venture to take him—than God would be careful and ready to shroud and shelter his people from the rage, madness, and malice of their enemies, [Ezek. 7:22](#).

How did God hide his church in Egypt? the bush was still burning—and yet was not consumed, [Exod. 3:2-3](#). And how did he hide seven thousand in Elijah's time, who had not bowed their knees to Baal? [1 Kings 19:18](#). Though "the woman," the church, "is driven to flee into the wilderness—yet there she is hidden, and there she had a place prepared of God, that they give her care for 1,260 days," [Rev. 12:6](#). Let our enemies do their worst, they shall not hinder us of divine protection. No power nor policy can hinder our being preserved and secured by God in the greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers which can attend us. But,

[14.] Fourteenthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer—None, so as to deprive us of our union with Christ, as to dissolve that blessed union which is between Christ and our souls,** [John 15:1-5](#). When men and devils have done their worst, our marriage-union with Christ holds good. This union is indissoluble. This union between Christ and believers is not capable of any separation. They are so *one*, that all the violence of the world, nor all the power of darkness, can never be able to make them *two* again. Hence the apostle's triumphant challenge, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" [Romans 8:35](#). If the question did not imply a strong negation, the apostle himself does give us a negation in words at length, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." verse 38-39.

Here you have a long catalogue, consisting of a large induction of various particulars; but none of all these can dissolve the union between Christ and believers. None can untie that knot which is tied by the Spirit on Christ's part, and by faith on ours. Christ and believers are so firmly joined together, that all the powers on earth, and all the united strength of hell—shall never be able to put them asunder, or to separate them one from another! Look! as no distance of place can hinder this union, so no force or violence from devils or men shall ever be able to dissolve this union; and herein lies the peculiar transcendent blessedness of this union above all other unions. They all may cease, be broken, and come to nothing; everyone of them must be broken. The head must be separated from the members, and the members from the head;

the husband must be separated from the wife, and the wife from the husband; the parents must be separated from the children, and the children from the parents, and bosom friends must be separated one from another. The foundation and the house may be separated, and the branches may be cut off from the vine—yes, the soul and body must be disunited by death—but the mystical union stands fast forever. Christ and a gracious soul can never be separated; God has joined them together, and no mortal shall ever be able to put them asunder, [Mat. 19:6](#).

There is not only a continuation of our union with Christ all our life—but also in death itself. Our very bodies sleeping in the dust are even then in union with Christ. There are two abiding things in the saints, their *unction* and their *union*. Their unction abides, "But the anointing which you have received of him abides in you," [1 John 2:27](#); and their union abides, for it follows, "and you shall abide in him." Christ earnestly prays that we might be one, as he and his Father are one, [John 17:20-23](#); not essentially, nor personally—but spiritually, so as no other creature is united to Christ. There can be no divorce between Christ and the believing soul. Christ hates divorce, [Mal. 2:16](#). Sin may for a time seemingly separate between Christ and the believer—but it can never finally separate between Christ and the believer. Look! as it is impossible for the leaven that is in the dough to be separated from the dough after it is once mixed, for it turns the nature of the dough into itself; so it is impossible for the saints ever to be separated from Christ: for Christ is in the saints as nearly and as really as the leaven is in the dough. Christ and believers are so incorporated, as if Christ and they were one lump, [Romans 8:10](#); [Col. 1:27](#); [1 John 3:21](#); [John 17:23](#).

Our nature is now joined to God by the indissoluble tie of the hypostatic union in the second person; and we in our persons are joined to God by the mystical indissoluble bond of the Spirit, the third person. Our union with the Lord Jesus is so near, so close, and so glorious—that it makes us one spirit with him. In this blessed union the saints are not only joined to the *graces* and *benefits* which flow from Christ—but to the *person* of Christ, to Christ *himself*! [1 Cor. 6:17](#). All the powers on earth, and all the powers in hell, can never separate Christ from the believer, nor the believer from Christ. When all other unions are dissolved, this union holds good, [John 1:16](#); [Romans 8:32](#); 1 Cor. 3:21-23.

I readily grant that the *sense* and *apprehension* of this union may in this life be much interrupted, and many times greatly darkened—but the *substance* of the union still remains. And I readily grant that a believer may be much assaulted and tempted to doubt of his union with Christ, and to question his union with Christ—and yet nevertheless a believer's union with Christ continues and abides forever. And I readily grant that the *influences* of it for some time may be suspended—but yet the union itself *is* not—nay, *cannot* be dissolved! As it was in the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ; for a time there was a suspending of the comforting influences of the divine nature in the human, insomuch that our Savior cried out, "My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" [Mat. 27:46](#); yet for all this the union between the two natures was not in the least abolished. Just so, here in the mystical union the sensible effects, comforts, and benefits of our union with Christ may sometimes be kept hidden and not appear—but yet the union itself abides, and shall abide firm and inviolable forever; it is an inseparable and insuperable union.

Look! as no power on earth is sufficient to overpower the Spirit of Christ, which on Christ's part makes the union, so no power on earth shall be able to conquer faith, which on our part also makes the union, [John 10:27-31](#); [1 John 4:4](#); [1 Pet. 1:5](#); [Luke 22:31-32](#). Satan and the world may make attempts upon this union—but they will never be able to break this union, to dissolve this union; yes, though *death* is the bane of all natural unions—yet death can never be the bane of this mystical union. Though death puts an end to all other unions—yet death can never put a period to this union. When the believer is in his grave, his union with Christ holds good. But,

[15.] Fifteenthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer—None, so as to deprive us of our crowns.** There is no power nor policy on earth or in hell, which can deprive a Christian of his eternal crowns.

First, Of his crown of RIGHTEOUSNESS. [2 Tim. 4:8](#), "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." It is a metaphor, say several commentators, from the custom in war, that the conquerors were crowned with honor, etc. It is a similitude taken from fighters or combatants, who for a prize received a crown when they had conquered their opponent. The reward of eternal life here is called "a crown of **righteousness**":

(1.) Because it is purchased for us by the righteousness of Christ. By his perfect and complete righteousness and obedience, dear Jesus has merited this for us; and so in *Christ*—it is due to us by way of merit; though in respect of *us*—it is of mere grace, of rich grace, of sovereign grace, of infinite grace, of glorious grace!

(2.) Because he is righteous, who has promised this crown. Though every promise that God makes is of free and rich grace—yet when once they are made, the truth and justice of God obliges him to keep his promise; for as he cannot deny himself, so he cannot do anything unworthy of himself, [Rev. 2:10](#), and [21](#); [1 John 2:25](#); [2 Thes. 1:5-7](#), [10](#). Men say and unsay, they promise one thing and mean another. Men many times eat their words as soon as they have spoken them; but God never *can*, and God never *will* break any of his promises. God can never repent of his promises; he can never waver, he can never go back from his word: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: "has he said, and shall he not do it? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" [Num. 23:19](#).

All the promises of God are sure, firm, faithful, unchangeable, immutable. All the promises are the word of a God, and given

upon the honor of a God, that they shall be made good. O my friends, the all-sufficiency of God, the omniscience of God, the omnipotence of God, the loving-kindness and faithfulness of God, yes, and the oath of God—may fully, yes, abundantly, satisfy us, and secure us—that God will certainly make good all his precious promises to us. We commonly say, when an honest man pledges his word to give us some money, "Oh, it is as sure as if it were in our purse!" But God's word of promise is abundantly more sure, for as his nature is eternal, so his word of promise is unchangeable. The promises are a firm foundation to build our hopes and happiness upon; they are an anchor both sure and steadfast, [Hab. 2:3](#); [Jer. 32:41](#); [Psalm 89:34](#). Memorable is that saying of David, [Psalm 138:2](#), "For you have magnified your word above all your name;" which is to be understood—that you have by your word, that is, by performing your word and promises, magnified your name above all things.

(3.) Because it is a just and righteous thing with God to crown them with glory at last—who have been crowned with shame, reproach, and dishonor for his name and interest in this world; so that eternal life is a crown of righteousness. God has promised it to such as overcome; and it is just with God to give unto his suffering servants rest and peace.

(4.) Because it is given only to righteous men. All who wear this crown come to it in a way of righteousness. A righteous crown cannot be had but in the use of righteous means. The Chaldean, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman princes commonly gained their crowns by fraud, flattery, policy, blood, etc.; so that their crowns were bloody crowns, and not righteous crowns.

(5.) And lastly, the apostle calls it "a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give him," the more fitly to follow the metaphor taken from runners and wrestlers for prizes at their solemn exercises or games in Greece, in which there were certain judges appointed to observe the games, and gave just sentence on the conqueror's side, if he strove lawfully, and fairly won the prize.

Now this crown is "laid up;" or "in store". The Greek word imports two things:

(1.) A designation of that which is laid up, is for some peculiar person;

(2.) A reservation and safe keeping of it, to the use of those it is designed for. Earthly crowns have been often pulled off from princes' heads—but this crown of righteousness is so safely laid up, that none can reach it, none can touch it, none can pull it from a believer's head. Xerxes crowned his steersman in the morning, and beheaded him in the evening of the same day. And Andronicus the Greek emperor crowned his admiral in the morning, and then took off his head in the afternoon. Roffensis had a cardinal's hat sent him—but his head was cut off before it came to him. "Does the crown," says Solomon, "endure to every generation?" [Proverbs 27:24](#). It is a question which implies a strong negation: oh, no!

there is nothing more uncertain than earthly crowns. Henry the Sixth was honored with the crowns of two kingdoms, France and England; the first was lost by the faction of his nobles, the other was twice pulled from his head. Princes' crowns are withering things. Earthly crowns may be soon put on, and as soon be pulled off. Most princes' crowns do but hang on one side of their heads.

But neither all the powers on earth, nor all the devils in hell, can ever reach this crown of righteousness. Though wicked men have long reaches—yet they can never reach a believer's crown, which is his joy and comfort in the midst of all his sorrows and sufferings. Thus Basil speaks of some martyrs who were cast out all night naked in a bitter cold frosty season, and were to be burned the next day, how they comforted themselves in this manner: "The winter is sharp—but paradise is sweet; here we shiver for cold—but the bosom of Abraham will make amends for all." One said to the tyrant's face: "You may kill me—but you cannot hurt me; you may take away my head—but you cannot take away my crown." O Christians! let this be your joy and triumph—that the crown of righteousness is laid up safe for you; no tyrant's arm is long enough to reach that crown. But,

Secondly, There is no power nor policy on earth or in hell, which can deprive a Christian of his **crown of LIFE**: [James 1:12](#), "Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him." "The crown of life," that is eternal life, whereby after the fight and conquest, he shall be glorified as with a crown; just as there was a crown for him who overcame in their games among the Grecians, (Piscator.) Blessedness is the *general* reward, the crown of life is the *particular* reward. In these words, as Chrysostom observes, there is a great emphasis, they are both emphatic; for *life* is the best of all natural things, and a *crown* is the best of all civil things. Here is the best and the best. Words are too weak to express what a rare blessing a crown of life is. "The crown of life is for the eternal world," says Gregory. This life is the life of conflict; eternity is for crowns and wreaths. But you will say, What does this crown of life signify? I answer,

(1.) First, **The crown of life signifies solid and substantial honor and glory**; as a crown is a solid and substantial thing. Heaven admits of no honor and glory, but what is solid and substantial. The crown of life is a massive crown, a ponderous crown—to show that the glory above is a massive glory, substantial glory. That you may see it is massive and substantial, observe how the apostle describes: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all!" [2 Cor. 4:17](#). Such a weight as infinitely over-weighs all afflictions. The apostle alludes to words, which signify both weight and glory. The Arabic version renders it, "Works for us a weight of glory in the most eminent and largest degree and measure." The Syriac reads it, "An infinite glory." Haymo reads it, "A greatness of glory, beyond all bounds and measure." Beza reads it, "Exceedingly excellent." Yet none of these reach the height of the apostle's rhetoric, neither is any translation able to express it.

Glory is so great a weight that if the saints were not upheld by the infinite power and strength of God—it would be impossible they should be able to bear it.

To gold and precious things, the weight adds to the value; as the more massive and weighty a crown is, the more it is worth. The glory of heaven is not only eternal glory—but it is "an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Yes, such a weight as exceeds all expressions, all comparisons. The honor and glory of this present world is but like the crackling of thorns under a pot; it is but like a blaze, a shadow, a dream, a vapor; it is but like a fading flower, or the picture of a prince drawn upon the ice, with his purple robes and his glorious crown, etc., which melts away as soon as the sun rises! The consideration of which made one prince say of his crown: "O crown more noble than happy!"

A crown is the choicest and chief of all human rewards. Among all earthly gifts, none more honorable and glorious than a crown. This is the height of human excellencies, and for the attainment of which many have made most sad, desperate, and dangerous adventures. But, alas what are all earthly crowns, for honor and dignity, compared to the crown of life? No more than shadows compared to substances; pebbles compared to pearls; or dross compared to gold! But,

(2.) Secondly, **The crown of life signifies the greatest honor and glory.** There is nothing higher in the estimation and in the admiration of men, than a crown. A crown is the highest emblem of majesty, and so it notes that imperial and kingly dignity to which believers are advanced by Christ, [Psalm 8:7](#). There is nothing that men esteem of above a crown, or admire than a crown, or are ambitious of than a crown, [Eph. 1:3](#). The crown is the top of royalty. All earthly crowns have *crosses* hanging upon them; all earthly crowns are stuffed with *thorns*. Which made the great Xerxes say, "You look upon my crown and my purple robes—but did you but know how they are lined with thorns, you would not stoop to take them up!" Queen Elizabeth is said to swim to her crown through a sea of sorrow. And so many of the princes of this world have swam to their crowns through a sea of *sin*, a sea of *trouble*, a sea of *sorrow*, and a sea of *blood*.

But the crown of life is an *honorable* crown, and that is the reason why the heavenly glory is expressed by a crown, [Rev. 3:21](#). The saints are heirs, not only of Christ's *cross* in this life—but also of his *eternal crown*; that is, of his honor and glory. The honor and glory of all earthly crowns are greatly darkened and obscured by the cares and troubles, the temptations and dangers which are inseparably annexed to them; but no cares, no troubles, attend the crown of life, the crown of glory! Eternal life is a coronation day! But,

(3.) Thirdly, **The crown of life signifies the reward of victory.** A crown is the honor of those who strive; crowns were always the rewards of conquerors: [Rev. 2:10](#), "Be faithful to the death, and I will give you a crown of life." That is, a crown without cares,

rivals, competition, envy, or end—a crown not of gold, silver, pearls, laurels, or such like fading, perishing, corruptible things—but a crown of life, an ever-living crown, an everlasting crown, a never-fading crown. It is an allusion to a custom that was among the Grecians, for such as got the mastery in their games of wrestling, or running, or the like, were crowned with a garland in token of victory. It is not he who *fights*—but he who *conquers*, who carries the crown. The crown of life is for that man, and that man is for the crown of life—who holds on conquering and to conquer, as Christ his head has done before him.

The heathens in their Olympics had their cups, and garments, and crowns which were the rewards of the conquerors; yes, if a horse did but run a race and won, he had a cup or a crown; and thereupon Theocritus says, "See what poor things the world glories in—when conquerors are crowned—so are their horses!" But what were all their cups, garments, and crowns of ivy and laurel, etc., compared to this *crown of life* which is promised to the overcoming Christian? You must first be *conquering* Christians before you shall be *crowned* Christians!

Says Ambrose, "Why would you preposterously have the crown, *before* you overcome? While we are in our warring state, fighting against the world, the flesh and the devil—a crown does not befit us." I have read how that upon a triumph of Emperor Severus, all his soldiers, for the greater pomp, were to put on crowns of ivy. But there was one Christian among them who wore it on his arm, and being asked the reason why, he boldly answered, "It befits not a Christian to wear his crown in this life!" That crown which is made out of the tree of life is a wreath of laurel which never withers—a crown which never fades—a crown which will sit fast on no head but the conqueror's! But,

(4.) Fourthly, **The crown of life signifies a lasting crown, a living crown.** To say *the crown of life*, is to say *a living crown*; and living crowns are only to be found in heaven, [Proverbs 27:24](#); [Ezek. 21:25-27](#). The word crown notes *the perpetuity of glory*. A crown is round, and has neither beginning nor ending; and therefore the glory of the saints in heaven is called an immortal, incorruptible, and never-fading crown, [2 Pet. 1:4](#); 1 Cor. 9:24. The crown of life signifies the lasting honor and glory of the saints in heaven. I have read of an emperor who had three crowns—one on his sword; another on his head; and says he, "The third is in heaven. My hope shall be in the everlasting crown."

The life to come is only the *true* life, the *happy* life, the *safe* life, the *honorable* life, the *lasting*, yes, the *everlasting* life; and therefore the crown of life is reserved for that life. King William the Conqueror was crowned different three *times* every year of his reign, at three different *places*—namely, Gloucester, Winchester, and Westminster—but death has long since put an end to his crown. The crowns of the greatest monarchs in the world, though they last long—yet are corruptible, subject to wearing, cracking, stealing. Their crowns will either be taken away from them—or they will be taken away from their crowns, suddenly. Witness that

pile of crowns, as the historian speaks, which was piled up, as it were, at Alexander's gates, when he sat down and wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. All scripture and histories do abundantly tell us, that there is nothing more fading than princes' crowns! But,

(5.) Fifthly, **The crown of life notes a well-entitled crown;** a crown which comes by a true and noble title. A Christian has the best title imaginable to the crown of life.

(1.) He has a title by Christ's blood;

(2.) He has a title by the new birth;

(3.) He has a title by free and precious promises;

(4.) He has a title by donation;

(5.) He has a title by marriage union and communion with Christ, who is heir-apparent to all the glory of heaven;

(6.) He has a title by a sure and everlasting covenant. [[Eph. 1:7](#); [1 Pet. 1:3-4](#); [2 Pet. 1:4](#); [Luke 12:32](#); [2 Cor. 11:2](#); [Heb. 1:2](#); [2 Sam. 23:5](#) [Jer. 32:40, 41.](#)]

King Henry the Seventh of England pretended a sixfold title to the crown;

(1.) By conquest;

(2.) By the election of the soldiers in the field;

(3.) By parliament;

(4.) By birth;

(5.) By donation;

(6.) By marriage. But what was his pretended title, compared to that real and full title which a believer has to the crown of life? But,

(6.) Sixthly, and lastly, **The crown of life notes the perfection of the glory of the saints in heaven.** "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." [Psalm 16:11](#). "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him!" [1 Corinthians 2:9](#). As the crown compasses the head, so in heaven there is an aggregation of all spiritual and eternal good. One of the ancients, speaking concerning what we can conceive of the glory of heaven, says, "Our conception of heaven, is but a little drop of the sea, and a little spark of the great furnace. For those glorious things of heaven are so **many** that they exceed number, so **great** that they exceed measure, so **precious** that they are above all estimation!" **Neither Christ nor heaven can be hyperbolised!**

Says one of the fathers, "What will that life be, or rather, what will that life not be, since all good is in such a life? Light which place cannot comprehend, voices and music which time cannot ravish away, odors which are never dissipated, a feast which is never consumed, a blessing which eternity bestows—but eternity shall never see at an end!"

Says another, "Do you ask me what heaven is? When I meet you there I will tell you!" "The world to come," say the Rabbis, "is the world where all is well." I have read of one who would willingly swim through a sea of brimstone to get to heaven; for there, and only there, is perfection of happiness. What are the silks of Persia, the spices of Egypt, the gold of Ophir, and the treasures of both Indies, compared to the glory of the eternal world?

Says Jerome, "Are you able to put the whole earth, and all the waters of the sea--into a little pot? Can you hold the oceans in your hand? Can you measure the heavens with your fingers--or weight the hills and mountains with a scale? Just so, it is not possible that you can comprehend the least of the joys of heaven! Certainly, the least of the joys of heaven are inconceivable and inexpressible!"

Thirdly, There is no power nor policy on earth or in hell, that can deprive a believer of an INCORRUPTIBLE crown: [Psalm 21:3](#); [1 Cor. 9:25](#), "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." He alludes to the Olympic games—of which *running* and *wrestling* were two of the games. Now in these Olympic games the reward was only a corruptible crown, a crown made up of laurels, or olive-branches, or oak-leaves, or of flowers and herbs, or at the highest of silver and gold, which soon faded. But we run for an incorruptible crown of glory! "A man," says Chrysostom, "would dwell in contemplation of heaven—and be reluctant to come out of it." Nay, says Augustine, a man might age himself in it, and sooner grow old than weary! [1 Peter 1:4](#), "To an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, and which does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Here are superexcellent properties of the heavenly inheritance.

(1.) First, It is "**an incorruptible inheritance.**" [[Gen. 3:18](#); [Isaiah 23:9](#).] All earthly inheritances are liable to corruption; they are true *gardens of Adonis*, where we can gather nothing but *trivial flowers*, surrounded with many briars, thorns, and thistles. Oh, the hands, the hearts, the thoughts, the lives—which have been corrupted by earthly inheritances! Oh, the impure love, the carnal confidence, the vain boastings, the sensual joys—which have been the products of earthly inheritances. If a man's estate lies in money, that may rust, or the thieves may break through and steal it. If a man's estate lies cattle, they may die, or fall into the hands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans. If a man's estate lies in houses, they may be burnt. Witness the late dreadful fire that turned London into a ruinous heap. If a man's estate lies in lands, a foreign enemy may invade them and conquer them. [[James 5:2-](#)

5; [Mat. 6:19-20](#); [Job 1:14-15](#), [17](#).] All earthly inheritances are no better than the cities which Solomon gave to Hiram, which he called **Cabul**, that is—'worthless, good-for-nothing, displeasing or dirty.' "But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. 'What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?' he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul, a name they have to this day." [1 Kings 9:12-13](#). Earthly inheritances do but dirt, daub, and dust people; it is only the heavenly inheritance which is incorruptible.

(2.) Secondly, It is "**an undefiled inheritance.**" There are few earthly inheritances—but some defilement or other sticks close to them. Many times they are gotten by fraud, oppression, violence, injustice, etc., and as they are often wickedly *gotten*—so they are as often wickedly *kept*. The heavenly inheritance is the only undefiled inheritance. No sin, no sinner, no devil—can enter to defile or pollute the heavenly inheritance, the incorruptible crown. The Greek word signifies a precious stone, which though it be ever so much soiled—yet it cannot be blemished nor defiled; yes the oftener you cast it into the fire and take it out, the more clear, bright, and shining it is! The apostle may probably allude to this stone: and it is as if he should say, The incorruptible crown that you shall receive, shall be studded with these precious stones, which cannot be defiled. No unclean thing shall enter into heaven to defile this crown, this inheritance! The serpent got into the earthly paradise, and defiled Adam's crown, yes he robbed him of his crown! But the subtle serpent can never enter into the heavenly paradise! "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." [Revelation 21:27](#). But,

(3.) Thirdly, It is an "**inheritance which does not fade away.**" This is a metaphor taken from flowers. The beauty of flowers, and the sweetness of flowers, withers in a moment, and is quickly gone, and then they are good for nothing but to be cast upon the ash-heap. So it is with all earthly inheritances, they soon lose their glory and fragrancy. Where is the glory of the Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, and Roman kingdoms? [Dan. 7:3-8](#). "*Fading glory*" has been long since written upon them all! Yes, all the glory of the world is like the flower of the field, which soon fades away! [Isaiah 40:6](#); [1 Pet. 1:24](#). How many great men and great kingdoms have for a time shined in great glory, even like so many suns in the sky—but are now vanished away like so many blazing comets! How has the *moon* of great men's honors been eclipsed; and the *sun* of their pomp gone down at noon! How soon is the courtier's glory eclipsed if his prince does but frown upon him! And how soon does the prince become a peasant—if God does but frown upon him!

The Greek word *amarantos*, say some, is the proper name of a flower which is still fresh and green after it has hung up in the house a long time. It is as if the apostle had said, "Your incorruptible crown shall be garnished or adorned with the precious flower *amarantos*, which is always fresh and green and

flourishing. And indeed this is the excellency of the heavenly inheritance, that it fades not away, that it is a flower that never withers. All the glory of heaven is like God himself—lasting, yes, everlasting! This never-fading crown is always fresh and resplendent. The glory of believers shall never fade nor wither, it shall never grow old nor rusty. Thrice happy are those souls that have a share in this incorruptible crown! When Alexander heard the philosopher's discourse of the eternal world in which he had no part, he wept, to speak with the apostle, as "one without hope," [1 Thes. 4:13](#). None on earth have such cause to weep, as those who have no interest in that inheritance that fades not away. But,

(4.) Fourthly and lastly, **There is no power nor policy on earth or in hell, which can deprive a sincere Christian of a crown of glory.** [1 Pet. 5:4](#), "And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory which fades not away,"—as the garlands faded, with which the conquerors at games, races, and combats were crowned, which were made of herbs, leaves, and flowers. A crown imports perpetuity, plenty, dignity. A crown is the height of human ambition. The Greek word comes from *marrantus*, which is a flower that fades not, of which garlands were made in former times, and with which they crowned the images of the heathen gods. A believer's crown, his inheritance, his glory, his happiness, his blessedness—shall be as fresh and flourishing after he has been many millions of years in heaven—as it was at his first entrance into it. Earthly crowns are like tennis-balls, which are bandied up and down from one to another, and in time wear out. When time shall be no more, when earthly crowns and kingdoms shall be no more, yes, when the world shall be no more—a Christian's crown of glory shall be fresh, flourishing, and continuing. All the devils in hell shall never wrangle a believer out of his heavenly inheritance, nor deprive him of his crown of glory. The least thing in—heaven is better than the greatest things in this world. All things on earth are fading—but the crown of glory never fades away.

Thus you see why heaven and the glory above is expressed by a crown. Sometimes it is called a crown of *righteousness*, to note the grounds and rise of it; sometimes it is called a crown of *life*, because it is only to be enjoyed in everlasting life; sometimes it is called an *incorruptible* crown, to note the duration and continuance of it; and sometimes it is called a crown of *glory*, to note the honor, splendor, and eternity of it. Now let devils, let oppressors, let persecutors do their worst—they shall never be able to deprive the saints of their blessed and glorious crowns. But,

[16.] Sixteenthly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer—None, so as to make void our covenant-relation, or our covenant-interest;** as you may see by comparing these scriptures together. [[Psalm 89:30, 35](#); [Jer. 31:31](#), and [31:38-41](#); [Isaiah 54:10](#); [Heb. 8:8, 10](#).]

The covenant of grace is founded upon God's *free* **LOVE**, upon God's *everlasting* love, upon God's *special* and *peculiar* love, upon

God's *unchangeable* love—so that God can as soon cease to be, as he can cease to love those whom he has taken into covenant with himself, or cease to keep covenant with them. Those whom free grace has brought into covenant, shall continue in covenant forever and ever. Once in covenant—forever in covenant.

The covenant of grace is also founded upon **God's immutable counsel and purpose**. "The foundation of God stands sure," [Heb. 6:17](#); [2 Tim. 2:19](#), that is, the degree and purpose of God's election stands firm and sure. Now the purpose of God's election is compared to a foundation, because it is that upon which all our happiness and blessedness is built and bottomed, and because as a foundation it abides firm and sure, [John 10:28-32](#); [1 Pet. 1:5](#); [Jude 1](#).

The covenant of grace is also founded upon God's *glorious POWER*, upon God's *infinite* power, upon God's *supreme* power, upon God's *invincible* power, upon God's *independent* power, upon God's *incomparable* power; and until you can find a power that can overmatch this divine power, the saints' covenant-relation holds good.

The covenant of grace is also founded upon **the OATH of God**; "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our fathers," [Luke 1:72-73](#). Now to think that God will break his oath, or be perjured, is an intolerable blasphemy.

The covenant of grace is bottomed upon **the precious blood of Christ**. The blood of Christ is called "The blood of the everlasting covenant." "Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant," [Mat. 26:28](#); [Heb. 9:15](#), and [13:20](#).

Now by these hints it is most evident that the saints' covenant-relation, their covenant-interest, holds good at all times, in all cases, and in all conditions. It is not the indwelling power of sin, nor spiritual desertions, nor violent temptations, nor heavy afflictions, nor divine delays, which can dissolve our covenant-relation. Though sin may work, and Satan may tempt, and fears may be high, and God may hide his face from his people, and stop his ears at the prayers of his people, [Isaiah 8:17](#); [Lam. 3:44](#)—yet God will still maintain his interest in his people, and his people's relation to himself. "God has not cast away his people, whom he foreknew," [Romans 11:2](#); "I am the Lord, I change not," [Mal. 3:6](#); "I will betroth you unto me for ever," [Hosea 2:19](#); "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," [Heb. 13:5](#). It is not all the powers of hell, nor all the powers on earth, that can make null or void our covenant-relation, our covenant-interest. But,

(17.) Seventeenthly and lastly, "If God is for us—who can be against us?" **I answer—None, so as to hinder our growth in grace, or the thriving and flourishing estate of our precious and immortal souls.** The troubles, afflictions, persecutions, and sufferings that the saints meet with in a way of holiness, shall but

further the increase and growth of their graces. Grace never rises to so great a height as it does in times of persecution. Suffering times are a Christian's harvest times, [Ps. 60:7-9](#), [12](#).

Let me instance in that grace of **zeal**: I remember Moulin, speaking of the French Protestants, says, "When papists hurt us, and persecute us for reading the Scripture, we burn with zeal to be reading of them. But now that persecution is over, our Bibles are like old almanacs." Michal's scoffing at David did but inflame and raise his zeal; "If this is vile—I will be more vile," [2 Sam. 6:20-22](#). Look! as fire in the winter burns the hotter, because of the coldness of the air; just so, in the winter of persecution, that divine fire, the zeal of a Christian, burns so much the hotter, and flames forth so much the more vehemently and strongly.

Hot persecutions will but set Christians all on fire for God, as you may see among the apostles, primitive Christians, and the martyrs of a later date. Grace usually is in the greatest flourish, when the saints are under the greatest trials. The trimming of the candle makes it burn the brighter. God allows wicked men to beat and bruise his people, to make them burn the brighter; and to pound and bruise his spices, to make them send forth the greater aromatic flavor. Fiery trials are like the teazle, which though it be sharp and scratching, it is to make the cloth more pure and fine. Stars shine brightest in the darkest nights; just so, do the graces of the saints shine brightest in the darkest nights of affliction and tribulation. God does sometimes more carry on the growth of grace by a *cross* than by an *ordinance*. Yes, the Lord will sooner or later turn all fiery trials into ordinances, for the helping on the growth of grace in his people's souls.

Commonly the saints' spiritual growth in grace, is carried on by such divine methods, and in such ways as might seem to deaden grace, and weaken it—rather than any ways to augment and increase it. We know that winter is as necessary to bring on harvest as the spring, and so fiery trials are as necessary to bring on the harvest of grace as the spring of mercy is. Though fiery trials are *grievous*—yet they shall make the saints more *gracious*. God usually, by sharp sufferings, turns his people's *sparks* of grace into a *mighty flame*; their *mites* into *millions*; their *drops* into *seas*. All the devils in hell, and all the sinners on earth, cannot hinder the Lord from carrying on the growth of grace in his people's souls. When men and devils have done their worst, God will, by all sorts of ordinances, and by all sorts of providences, and all sorts of changes—make his people more and more holy, and more and more humble, and more and more meek and lowly, and more and more heavenly, wise, faithful, fruitful, sincere, courageous, etc.

Though the church of *Smyrna* was outwardly poor—yet she was inwardly rich, rich in grace, and rich towards God, [Rev. 2:9](#). I think he hit the mark on the head, who said, "It is far better to be a poor man—and a rich Christian; than to be a rich man—and a poor Christian." Though the *Corinthians* were under great trials and sufferings—yet they abounded in everything, in faith, and

utterance, and knowledge, and diligence, and in their love to gospel ministers, [2 Cor. 8:7](#). The storm beat hard upon the *Romans*—and yet you see what a singular testimony the apostle gives of them, "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another," [Romans 15:14](#). The *Thessalonians* were under great persecutions and troubles—and yet were strong in the grace that was in Christ Jesus; they were very growing and flourishing Christians.

Singular prophecies speak out the saints' growth and flourishing in grace. "The Lord is exalted; for he dwells on high: he has filled Zion with judgment and righteousness." "The Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness shall be a fruitful field." [[2 Thes. 1:3, 8](#); [Isaiah 33:5, 32:15, 35:1](#).] "The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose: it shall blossom abundantly." "The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon." "They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God."

And as singular prophecies, so choice and precious promises, speak out the saints' growth in grace. Take a taste of some of them. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day." "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." "They shall go from strength to strength; everyone of them in Zion appears before God." "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." "Those who be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; in old age they shall be fat and flourishing," [Proverbs 4:18](#); [Job 17:9](#); [Psalm 84:7](#), and [92:12-14](#).

I have read of an old man who, being asked whether he grew in grace? answered, "I believe I do, for God has promised that in old age his children should be fat and flourishing." Just so, [Isaiah 46:3](#), "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth." verse 4, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you." [Zech. 12:8](#), "And he who is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." [Hosea 14:5](#), "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." verse 6, "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon." verse 7, "Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." [Mal. 4:2](#), "But unto you who fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing under his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as the calves of the stall." [Psalm 1:3](#), "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth it's fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." [John 4:14](#), "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never

thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

The light and glory of the church rises by degrees;

(1.) Looking forth as the morning; with a little light;

(2.) Fair as the moon; more light;

(3.) Clear as the sun; that is, come up to a higher degree of spiritual light, life, and glory, [Cant. 6:10](#). By all which it is most evident that all the powers of hell, nor all the powers on earth—can hinder the saints' growth in grace, nor the thriving and flourishing estate of their precious and immortal souls.

But you will say, **What are the reasons why God will be favorably, specially, and eminently present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers?** I answer there are these ten great reasons for it—

[1.] First, To awaken and convince the enemies of his people, and to render his suffering children glorious in the very eyes and consciences both of sinners and saints.

[Ponder upon these scriptures, [Micah 7:8-10](#), [16-17](#); [Psalm 126:1-2](#); [Exod. 8:19](#); [Isaiah 60:13-14](#); [Rev. 3:8-9](#); [Acts 4:13](#), and [6:15](#); [John 7:44-46](#), etc.] [Dan. 3:24](#), "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spoke and said unto his counselors, Did we not cast three men into the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king." Verse 25, "He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Now see what a majesty there is in this presence of Christ with his people in the fire, to convince Nebuchadnezzar, and to render the three champions very glorious in his eyes. Verse 28, "Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any God except their own God." Verse 29, "Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a ash-heap, because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." Verse 30, "Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

The presence of the Lord with the three children commanded favor, respect, reverence, and honor from this great monarch, *Nebuchadnezzar*. The presence of God with his people is very majestic; the greatest monarchs have fallen down before it; not only Nebuchadnezzar—but also *Darius*, falls down before the special presence of God with Daniel when he was in the lions' den, [Dan. 6:20](#) seq. And *Herod* falls down before the presence of God with John, [Mark 6:20](#). And King *Joash* falls down before the presence of God with Jehoiada, 2 Kings 11:1-2. And *Saul* falls down before the presence of God with David: "You are more righteous than I," [1 Sam. 24:17](#), etc.

In the special presence of God with his people in their affliction there is such a sparkling luster, that none can behold it but must admire it, and bow before the graceful majesty of it. Such has been the special presence of God with the martyrs in their fiery trials, that many have been convinced and converted. I have read of a martyr of Paris who was burned for his faith, how the presence of God did so shine in his courage and constancy, that many did curiously inquire into that religion for which he so stoutly and resolutely suffered, so that the number of sufferers was much increased thereby. I read that Cecilia, a poor virgin, by her gracious behavior in her martyrdom, was the means of converting four hundred to Christ. It was the observation of Mr. John Lindsay, that the very smoke of Patrick Hamilton converted as many as it blew upon. And the very Hittites could say of Abraham, who had a very special presence of God with him, "You are a prince of God among us!" [Gen. 23:6](#). Some say, he is called Prince of God, because God prospered him, and made him famous for his virtue and godliness. But the Hebrews commonly speak so of all things that are notable and excellent, because all excellency comes from God; as the angel of God, the mount of God, the city of God, the wrestlings of God, [Exod. 3:2](#), and [4:37](#); [Psalm 26:4](#); [Gen. 30:8](#), etc. "You are a prince of God;" that is, You are a most excellent person. Seneca saw so much excellency that morality put upon a man, that he could say, "The very looks of a godly man delights one." And why then may not the sons of Heth call him a prince of God, from that majesty and glory that they saw shine forth in his graces, and in his gracious behavior and conversation, and because they did observe a special presence of God with him in all he did, it being no higher observation than what Abimelech had made before them? [Gen. 21:22](#).

In Queen Mary's days, not of *blessed* but of *abhorred* memory—the people of God met—sometimes forty, sometimes a hundred, sometimes two hundred—together. The fiery persecutors of that day sent in one among them to spy out their practices and to give information of their names, that they might be brought to Smithfield shambles; but there was such a presence of God in the assembly of his people, that this informer was convinced and converted, and begged mercy for them all. [1 Cor. 14:24](#), "But if all prophesy, and there comes in one who believes not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all;" verse 25, "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." It may be before they came to the assembly of the saints, they had hard thoughts of the people of God: they thought that folly was in them, or that disloyalty was in them, or that madness and rebellion was in them, or that plots and designs against the government was in them, or that the devil was in them. Oh—but now such a majestic presence of God appears in the midst of his people, that the unbeliever is convinced, and confesses "that God is in them of a truth."

Blessed Bradford had such a special presence of God with him in his sufferings, as begot great reverence and admiration, not only in the hearts of his friends—but in the very hearts of very many

papists also. Henry the Second, king of France, being present at the martyrdom of a poor tailor, who was burnt by him for his religion; the poor man had such a special presence of God with him in his sufferings, that his courage and boldness, his holy and gracious behavior, did so amaze and terrify the king, that he swore, at his going away, that he never more would be present at such a sight.

As the presence of God is the greatest ornament of the church triumphant, so the presence of God is the greatest ornament of the church militant. The redness of the rose, the whiteness of the lily, and all the beauties of sun, moon, and stars, are but deformities, compared to that beauty and glory which the presence of God puts upon his people, in all their troubles and trials. There is nothing in the world that will render the saints so amiable and lovely, so eminent and excellent in the eyes of their enemies—as the special presence of God with them in their greatest trials. Demetrius was so handsome of face and countenance, that no painter was able to draw him. The presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—puts so rare a beauty and glory upon them, that no painter can ever be able to draw them. But,

[2.] A second reason why God will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—is drawn from the covenant of grace, and those precious promises which God has made—to be with his people. God's covenant is, that he will be with his people forever, and that he will never turn away from them to do them good, [Jer. 32:40-41](#). That is a branch of the covenant: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," [Heb. 13:5](#). And that is a branch of the covenant: "I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward," [Gen. 15:1](#); see [Psalm 115:9-11](#). The *shield* is between the body and the thrust. Just so, says God, I will put myself in between you and harm. Though those kings whom you have even now vanquished, may rant high and threaten revenge—yet I will shield off all dangers that you may be incident to. Though God's people be in the waters and in the fires—yet his promise is to be with them; so the psalmist, "I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honor him," [Isaiah 43:2](#); [Psalm 91:15](#), and [50:15](#); [Job 5:19](#); [Hosea 2:14](#).

God will not fail to keep his people company in all their troubles. No storm, no danger, no distress, no fiery trial, can keep God and his people asunder. God is immutable in his *nature*, in his *counsels*, in his *covenant*, and in all his *promises*, [Mal. 3:6](#). Though all creatures are subject to change—yet God is unchangeable; though angels and men, and all inferior creatures are *dependent*—yet God is *independent*. He is as the schoolmen say, *altogether immutable*, and therefore he will be sure to keep touch with his people. **The precious promises of Scripture are the food of faith, and the very soul of faith.** They are a mine of rich treasures, a garden full of choice flowers, able to enrich a suffering Christian with all celestial contentments, and to sweeten

the deepest distresses. God has deeply engaged himself, both by covenant and promises, that he will be with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers; and therefore he will not fail them: [Deut. 7:9](#), "Know therefore that the Lord your God, he is God, the faithful God, who keeps covenant," etc. God will never allow his faithfulness to fail, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his mouth, [Psalm 89:33](#). All his precepts, threatenings, predictions, and promises are the issue of a most wise, holy, faithful, and righteous will—and therefore they shall certainly be made good to his people. But,

[3.] Thirdly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because it makes most eminently for the advancement of his own honor and glory in the world.

God never gets more honor than by helping his people when they are in severe distress. God's special presence with Israel at the Red Sea, makes Moses sing a song of praise, [Exod. 15](#). A great part of the revenue of divine glory arises from the special presence of God with his people in their deepest distresses and most deadly dangers, as you may see by comparing these scriptures together. [[Exod. 15](#); Judges 5; [Psalm 23:4, 6](#); [Isaiah 43:2, 5, 7](#).] It is the honor of a husband to be most present with his wife in her greatest troubles, and the honor of a father to be most present with his children in their deepest distresses, and the honor of commanders to be present with their soldiers in the heat of battle, when many fall on their right hand and on their left. [Exod. 15:3](#), "The Lord is a man of war," that is, an excellent warrior, "the Lord is his name;" according to the Septuagint, "He breaks battles, and subdues war." God, like a brave commander, stands upon his honor, and therefore he will stand by his soldiers in the greatest dangers. The word *ish*, here used for man, signifies an eminent man, a mighty man, a famous warrior, or, as the Chaldee has it, *An overcomer of battles*. Now eminent warriors, mighty warriors, famous warriors, they always stick closest to their soldiers in their greatest dangers, as all know, who have read either Scripture or history. Now the Lord is such a man of wars, such a famous warrior, as that he will be sure to stick closest to his people in the greatest dangers. God is both in the vanguard and in the rear guard, [Isaiah 52:12](#). And as there is nothing which more raises the honor, fame, and renown of great warriors in the world—than their presence with their soldiers when the bullets fly thickest; just so, there is nothing by which God gets himself a greater name, fame, and honor in the world—than by his special presence with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. But,

[4.] Fourthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because then his people stand in most need of his presence.

A believer needs the presence of God at all times—but never so much as in great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers. For now Satan will be stirring—he loves to fish in *troubled* waters. When earthly friends and earthly comforts and earthly succours will commonly fail us;

when cares and fears will be multiplied upon us; when unbelief, which is virtually all evil, will be raising doubts and cavils and objections in the soul, [[Job 2:9](#), and [19:13-17](#); Pa 88:18; [Isaiah 41:17-18](#).] so that if God does not stand by us now, what could we do? how can we bear up? how can we stand fast? What was Samson, that man of strength, when his hair was gone—but as weak as water? [Judges 16:19-20](#); and what is the strongest Christian when his God is gone—but as weak as weakness itself?

All our *doing* strength, and all our *suffering* strength, and all our *bearing* strength, and all our *witnessing* strength—lies in the special presence of God with our souls. All our comforts, and all our supports, and all our ease, and all our refreshments—flow from the presence of God with our souls in our greatest troubles and deepest distresses; and therefore, if God should leave us in a day of trouble—what would become of us? and where should we go? and where should we find rest? When does a man need a brother or friend—but in a day of adversity? "A brother is born for adversity," [Proverbs 17:17](#). Though at other times brethren may jar and jangle and quarrel—yet in a day of adversity, in a strait, in a stress—brothers will stand together to help each other. Adversity breeds love and unity. Ridley and Hooper differed very much about ceremonies in the day of their liberty; but when they were both prisoners in the Tower, then they could agree well enough, and then they could be mutual comforts one to another. And when does a Christian most need the strength of God, the consolations of God, the supports of God, the teachings and quickenings of God, and the special singular presence of God—but when they are in the greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? When the people of God are in a low and afflicted condition, then the Lord knows that that is the season of seasons for him to grace them with his gracious presence, [Isaiah 33:9-10](#). When calamities and dangers break in upon us, and when all heads and hands and hearts and counsels are set against us—now is the time for God to help us, for God to support us, for God to stand by us. But,

[5.] Fifthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because he dearly loves them. God entirely loves his people, and therefore he will not leave his people. People whom we entirely love we cannot leave, especially when they are in a distressed condition. "A friend loves at all times," says Solomon, and God is such a friend, [Proverbs 17:17](#). God loves not by fits and starts, as many people do—but his love is like himself, sincere and steadfast. Because he loves them, he won't forsake them when they are in the greatest troubles and most terrible dangers, [1 Sam. 12:22](#), "For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it has pleased the Lord to make you his people." He chose you for his love, and he still loves you for his choice, and therefore he won't forsake you. *Discipline* you he may—but *forsake* you he won't; for it will not stand with the glory of God to leave his people, to forsake the people of his love. Should I cast you off whom I love—then the heathen nations would say that I was mutable in my

purposes, or unfaithful in my promises. Though David's parents forsook him—yet God did not forsake him—but took him up into his care and keeping, [Psalm 27:10](#). It is the deriding question which the enemies of the saints put to them in the time of their greatest troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers—Where is now your God? [Psalm 79:10](#). But they may safely and groundedly return this answer when they are at lowest—our God is here; he is near unto us, he is round about us, and he is in the midst of us, [Isaiah 52:12](#).

Witness that golden promise, that is more worth than a world, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," [Heb. 13:5](#), [11](#). God is a God of affections, a God of great pity, a God of tender compassion, and therefore he will not leave his people in a time of distress, [Hosea 8:9](#); [Mic. 7:19](#); [Jer. 31:18-20](#). Parents' affections do most yearn towards their children when they are sick, and weak, and most in danger. It goes to the very heart of a man to leave a friend in misery. But what are the affections of men, compared to the affections of God! or the compassions of men, compared to the compassions of God! There is an ocean of love in the hearts of parents towards their children when they are in distress, [2 Sam. 19:6](#); and this love makes them sit by their children, and sit up with their children, and not stir from their children. God's love does so link his heart to his people in their deep distresses, that he cannot leave them, he cannot stir from them, [Psalm 91:15](#).

[Isaiah 43:4](#), "Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you." Well, and what then? This love so endears and unites God to his people, that he cannot leave them, he cannot stir one foot from them: "But now, O Israel, the LORD who created you says—Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." [Isaiah 43:1-3](#)

The Lord dearly loves his people, and he highly prizes his people, and he greatly delights in his people, and therefore he will be specially present with his people, both in the fire and in the water—both in the fire of persecution, and in the waters of affliction. God loves the *persons* of his people, and he loves the *presence* of his people, and he loves the *graces* of his people, and he loves the *services* of his people, and he loves the *fellowship* of his people; and therefore he will never leave his people—but stand by them, and be specially present with them, in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses.

Such is God's singular love to his covenant-people, that he will neither *forsake* them nor *forget* them—in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. The Jews were low—yes, very low, in Babylon; their distresses were great, and their dangers many; they looked upon themselves as so many dead

men, "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we are cut off for our parts," [Ezek. 37:1-15](#). They looked upon themselves both as forsaken and forgotten by God. Behold, captive Zion lamentingly says, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me!" [Isaiah 49:13-18](#); [Psalm 84:7](#); [Isaiah 1:27](#); [Heb. 12:22](#).

Zion is taken several ways in Scripture:

(1.) For the place properly so called, where they were accustomed to meet to worship the Lord; but this place was long ago destroyed.

(2.) For the blessed angels, "You are come to mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels.

(3.) For the congregation of saints, of believers, of which it is said, "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob," [Psalm 87:2](#).

The believing Jews being sorely oppressed and afflicted by a long captivity, [Dan. 9:22](#); [Lam. 4:6](#), and by many great and matchless miseries that did befall them in their captive state, they look upon God as one who had quite forsaken them and forgotten them; but they were under a very high mistake, and very erroneous in their complaint, as appears by God's answer to Zion: verse 15, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yes, they may forget—yet will I not forget you." Verse 16, "Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of my hands, your walls are continually before me." In these words, as in a crystal glass, you may see how dearly, how sweetly, how graciously, how readily, how resolutely God does engage himself that he will neither forsake Zion, nor yet forget Zion in her captive state. Now let us a little observe how this singular promise is amplified, and that, by an emphatic illustration; God's compassionate remembering of Zion far transcends the most compassionate remembrance of the tenderest mother to her dear nursing babe. Now this is laid down—

First, **Interrogatively**, "Can a woman," the most affectionate gender, "forget a nursing child, for having compassion on the son of her womb?" Can a woman, can a mother so forget as not to compassionate a child, which she naturally inclines to pity? A nursing child that hangs on her bosom, such as mothers are accustomed to be most watchful of, and to be most tenderly affected towards? her nursing child, which, together with the milk from the breast, draws love from her heart? her nursing child of her own womb, which her affections do more yearn over than they do over any other child in the world? And this is the "son of her womb," which the mother usually embraces with more warm affections than the daughter of her womb. Can a woman, yes, can a mother forget to exercise love, pity, and compassion to such a poor babe? Surely, very rarely.

Second, **Affirmatively**, "Yes, they may forget." It is possible that a woman may be so unwomanly, and that a mother may be so unmotherly in some cases, and in some extremities, as to forget

her nursing child, yes, as to eat the fruit of her womb, as the pitiful women did boil and eat their own children in the siege of Samaria and Jerusalem, [2 Kings 6:24-30](#); [Lam. 4:10](#). Extremity of hunger overmastered natural affections, and made the pitiful mothers require of their children those lives which not long before, they had given them.

Thirdly, **Negatively**, "Yet will I not forget you." God will be more constantly, immovably, and unchangeably *mindful* of Zion, and *tender* of Zion, and *compassionate* of Zion, and *watchful* over Zion—than any mother could be over her youngling; yes, he would be more motherly to his poor captives in Babylon, than any mother could be to her sucking babe. This precious promise is amplified by a convincing argumentation, and that partly from his "engraving of them upon the palms of his hands." This is an allusion, say some, to those who carry about with them, engraved on some tablet, or on the stone of some ring which they wear on their finger, the mark, name, or picture of some person they entirely love. Their portraiture, their memorial, was like a signet engraved upon his hand. God will as soon blot out of mind, and forget his own hands, as his Zion; and partly from his placing their walls still in his sight. The ruined demolished walls of Jerusalem were still before him as to their commiseration, and to their reparation, God being fully resolved in the fittest season to raise and rebuild them. Look! as the workman has his model or pattern constantly either before his eye, or in his thoughts, or in his brain, that he is to work by. "Just so," says God, "Zion is continually in my eye, Zion is still in my thoughts; I shall never forsake her, I shall never forget her." But,

[6.] Sixthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because of his propriety and interest in them, and his near and dear relation to them. "But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. [Isaiah 43:1](#) " "You are mine—for I have *made* you. You are mine—for I have *chosen* you. You are mine—for I have *bought* you, I have *purchased* you. You are mine—for I have *called* you. You are mine—for I have *redeemed* you. You are mine—for I have *stamped my image* upon you. You are mine—for I have *put my Spirit* into you!" [Isaiah 15:16](#); [1 Cor. 6:20](#); [1 Pet. 1:18](#); [Phil. 4:23-24](#).

Now mark what follows: verse 2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." God will certainly keep his own people, his own children, company, both in the fire and in the water; that is, in those various trials and troubles that they are incident to in this world, [Isaiah 55:5](#); [Psalm 103:13-14](#); [Exod. 15:3](#); [Mal. 4:2](#); [Mat. 9:12](#); [Psalm 23:1](#). When should a *husband* be with his wife—but when she is in greatest troubles? and a *father* with his child—but when he is in deep distresses? and a *general* with his army—but when they are in

greatest dangers? When should the *physician* be most with his patient—but when he is most desperately sick? and when should the *shepherd* be nearest his sheep—but when they are sick, and the wolf is at hand? Now God, you know, stands in all these relations to his people, and therefore he will not fail to be near them when troubles, distresses, and dangers are growing upon them. But,

[7.] Seventhly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because such times are commonly times of great and sore temptations. When God's hand is heaviest, then Satan will be busiest, [Job 2:7-8](#); [Mat. 9:4](#); [Heb. 2:18](#). The devil is never more violent in his temptations, than when the saints are under afflictions: [James 1:2](#), "My brethren, count it all joy, when you fall into various afflictions." verse 12, "Blessed is the man who endures affliction." [2 Pet. 2:9](#), "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of affliction." Thus God is said to tempt Abraham, [Gen. 22:1](#), that is, he did test and prove the faith, the fear, the love, the obedience of Abraham. *Afflictions* are sometimes called *temptations*, partly because as afflictions will try what mettle we are made off, so will temptations; and partly because as afflictions are burdensome and grievous to us, so are temptations. But mainly afflictions are called temptations, because in time of affliction Satan will be sifting and winnowing of the saints. Now he will make use of all his devices, methods, depths, darts—yes, fiery darts—that he may vex, afflict, trouble, grieve, wound, torture, and torment those dear hearts that God would not have grieved and wounded. Therefore the Lord now steps in and stands by his people, and by his favorable, special, and refreshing presence, he bears up their heads above water, and keeps their hearts from fainting and sinking under Satan's most dangerous and desperate temptations, [Luke 22:31](#); [2 Cor. 12:7](#); [2 Cor. 2:11](#); [Eph. 6:11](#); [Rev. 2:24](#); [Eph. 6:16](#).

When a city is besieged, and the enemies have raised their batteries, and have made breaches upon their walls, and their provisions grow low, oh, then, if ever, there is need of support and relief! So here. But,

[8.] Eighthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—because he highly prizes them, and sets an honorable value and esteem upon them. [Isaiah 43:4](#), "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life," that is, for your preservation and protection. God sets such a mighty price upon his people, that to preserve them from ruin and destruction, he makes nothing of giving up to the sword and destruction, the most rich, strong, populous, and warlike nations in the world. Now the high price and value that he sets upon them, engages him to be present with them: verse 2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze." Those we highly prize—we won't leave in a day of distress; no more will God. God prizes his people as his peculiar treasure: [Exod. 19:5](#), as his "portion;" [Deut. 32:9](#), as his "pleasant portion;" [Jer. 12:10](#), as his "jewels;" [Mal. 3:17](#), as his "glory;" [Isaiah 4:5](#), as his "crown and royal diadem." Yes, he prizes the poorest, the lowest, and the weakest saint in the world, above a multitude, yes, above a world of unforgiven sinners.

[Heb. 11:37-38](#), "Of whom the world was not worthy." Though they were not adorned in silks and velvets—but were clad "in sheepskins and goat-skins;" yet they had that inward excellency, as that the world was not worthy of their company: and though they did not dwell in expensive houses, nor in stately palaces—but "in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth;" yet the vile sinful persecuting world was not worthy of their presence, or prayers, or of their prudent counsels, or pious examples, etc. God sets a higher value upon a Job, though on a ash-heap—than upon an Ahab, though on his royal throne, [Job 1:1](#), and [2:3](#). God values men by their inward excellencies, and not by their outward dignities and worldly glories. He sets a higher price upon a Lazarus in his tattered rags—than upon a rich Dives in his purple robes. Such people have most of our company whom we prize most, [Job 2:11-13](#). Job's three friends did highly value him, and therefore in his deepest distresses, they own him, they pity him, they weep over him, they accompany him, and they keep close unto him. Because God highly prizes his people, he will be specially present with them in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. But,

[9.] Ninthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, because they won't leave him—but stick close to him, and to his interest, gospel, and glory; and will cleave fast to his word, worship, and ways, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, come what will of it, [Josh. 24](#); [Jer. 13:11](#); [Acts 11:23](#). "You may take away my life," said Basil, "but you cannot take away my comfort. You may take my head—but not my crown; yes, had I a thousand lives, I would lay them all down for my Savior's sake, who has done abundantly more for me!"

John Ardley professed to Bonner, when he told him of his soon burning, and how badly he could endure it, that "if he had as many lives as he had hairs on his head, he would lose them all in the fire before he would lose his Christ or part with his Christ." It was a common thing among the martyrs to make all haste to the fire, lest they should miss of that *noble treatment*. Gordius the martyr said, "It is to my loss if you abate me anything of my sufferings." "The sooner I die," said another, "the sooner I shall be happy."

[Psalm 63:1](#), "O God, you are my God, early will I seek you; my soul thirsts for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water;" verse 8, "My soul follows hard after you," etc. This notes,

- (1.) The strength of his *intention*;
- (2.) The strength of his *affection*;
- (3.) The constancy of his *pursuit*.

And all this in a dry and barren wilderness, and in the face of all discouragements, and in the lack of all outward encouragements, [Dan. 9:3](#); [Psalm 119:20](#). Whatever the danger or distress is—the psalmist is peremptorily resolved to cleave close to the Lord, and to follow hard after the Lord. "All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness." [Psalms 44:17-19](#). See [2 Tim. 1:11-12](#), and [2:8-10](#); [Eph. 6:19-20](#); [Col. 4:3, 18](#), [Romans 8:36](#). In the face of all dangers, deaths, distresses, miseries, etc., God's faithful servants will own the Lord, and cleave to his ways, and keep close to his worship and service, let persecutors do their worst.

"Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." [Psalms 44:22](#). It is probable that this psalm was penned upon the occasion of the horrible persecution of the church under Antiochus Epiphanes, unto which I guess Paul has reference towards the latter end of that 11th chapter to the Hebrews. In this 22d verse you have three things observable,

- (1.) The greatness of their sufferings: "they were killed," amplified by a similitude, as sheep to the slaughter."
- (2.) The cause: not for their sin—but "for your sake."
- (3.) The continuance: how long, even "all the day long."

Their sufferings are great and long. That tyrant Antiochus made no more thought of taking away of their lives, than a butcher does of cutting the throats of the poor sheep, [Dan. 11](#); and as butchers kill the sheep without making conscience of the effusion of their blood, even so did that tyrant Antiochus destroy the saints of the Most High, without making the least conscience of shedding innocent blood. And as butchers think well of their work, and are glad when they have butchered the poor sheep, so did this tyrant Antiochus; he thought he did God good service in butchering of the holy people, and rejoiced in that bloody service; and yet notwithstanding all the dreadful things that these blessed souls suffered, they still kept close to God, and close to his covenant, and close to his ways, and close to his worship. And Austin observes, "that though the heathen sought to suppress the growth of Christianity by binding—butchering, racking, stoning, burning, etc.—yet still they increased and multiplied, [Exod. 1:12](#), and still they kept close to God and his ways."

The church was at first *founded* in blood, and it has *thrived* best when it has been moistened with blood. It was at first founded in the blood of Christ, and ever since it has been moistened or watered, as it were, with the blood of the martyrs. The church of

Christ in all ages has been like the oak, which lives by its own wounds; and the more limbs are cut off, the more new sprouts. Oh, how close to God, his ways and worship—did the saints keep in the ten persecutions! "They have followed the Lamb wherever he went," [Rev. 14:4-5](#). If they would have complied with the ways of the world, and the *worship* of the world, and the *customs* of the world—they might have had ease, honor, riches, preferments, etc., [Heb. 11:35](#); but nothing could work them off from God or his ways; and therefore he will certainly stand by them, and cleave to them, and be specially present with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. But,

[10.] Tenthly, The Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—that they may be joyful and cheerful under all their troubles, and that they may glory in all their tribulations. [Mat. 5:12](#); [Luke 6:23](#). It is good to have a *patient* spirit—but it is better to have a *joyful* spirit in all our sufferings, troubles, distresses, etc., that we meet with in a way of well-doing, [2 Cor. 12:10](#). "His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing (Greek, "rejoice and leaping for joy,") because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." [Acts 5:40-41](#). They looked upon it as a high honor to be dishonored for Christ; and as a grace to be disgraced for Christ. It was the divine presence that made Paul and Silas to sing when they were beaten with many stripes, and cast into prison, into the inner prison. "After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God," [Acts 16:23-25](#). The divine presence made Paul and Silas to glory in all their stripes, sores, and wounds, as old soldiers glory in their scars and wounds which they receive in battle for their prince and country, [Eph. 6:17](#); [Romans 5:3](#). The divine presence might well make Paul and Silas to say of their stripes and sores, as Munster once said of his ulcers, "These are the jewels and the precious ornaments with which God adorns his dearest servants."

It was the divine presence that made Ignatius say in the midst of all his sufferings, "I bear my bonds as so many spiritual pearls." Just so, [2 Cor. 7:4](#), "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulations." Greek, "I do overabound with joy." Verse 5, "For, when we had come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest—but we were troubled on every side: without were fightings, within were fears;" verse 6, "Nevertheless God, who comforts those who are cast down, comforted us." It was the divine presence which filled the Corinthians with exceeding comfort and joy when their flesh had no rest, and when they were troubled on every side. This special presence of God with them in all their tribulations filled their souls with such an exuberancy of joy, that no good could match it nor no evil overmatch it. It was the divine presence that made the martyrs, both ancient and modern, so comfortable and

cheerful under all their hideous sufferings. It was the divine presence that made Francisco Soyit say to his adversaries, "You deprive me of this life—and promote me to a heavenly life; which is as if you should rob me of pennies and furnish me with gold."

"Oh, how my heart leaps for joy," said one, "that I am so near the apprehension of eternal bliss! God forgive me my unthankfulness and unworthiness of so great glory. In all the days of my life I was never so merry as now I am in this dark dungeon." "Believe me, there is no such joy in the world as the people of Christ have under the cross," said blessed Philpot, who went to heaven in flames of fire. Let God but withdraw this special presence from his people in their sufferings, and you will quickly find their hearts to droop, their spirits to fail, and they overwhelmed in a sea of sorrows. It was this divine presence that made the primitive Christians to rejoice more when they were condemned, and to kiss the stake, and to thank the executioner, and to sing in the flames, and to desire to be with Christ. Just so, Justin Martyr, "We thank you for delivering us from hard taskmasters, that we may more sweetly enjoy the bosom of Jesus Christ."

The bee gathers the best honey of the bitterest herbs, and Christ made the best wine from water. Certainly the best, the purest, the strongest, and the sweetest joys, spring from the special presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Only remember this—that that joy that flows from the divine presence in times of troubles and distress, is an inward joy, a spiritual joy, a joy which lies remote from a carnal eye. "The heart knows his own bitterness; and a stranger does not intermeddle with his joy," [Proverbs 14:10](#). The joy of the saints in sufferings is a jewel that falls not under a stranger's eye. The joy of a Christian lies deep, it cannot be expressed, it cannot be painted. Look! as no man can paint the sweetness of the honeycomb, nor the sweetness of a cluster of grapes, nor the fragranciness of the rose of Sharon; so no man can paint out the sweetness and spiritualness of that joy that the divine presence raises in the soul—when a Christian is under the greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers.

Holy joy is a treasure which lies deep; and it is not every man who has a golden key to search into this treasury. Look! as a man standing on the sea-shore sees a great heap of waters, one wave riding upon the back of another, and making a dreadful noise—but all this while, though he sees the water rolling, and hears it raging and roaring—yet he sees not the wealth, the gold, the silver, the jewels, and incredible treasures which lie buried there; just so, wicked men they see the needs of the saints—but not their wealth; they see their poverty—but not their riches; they see their miseries—but not their mercies; they see their conflicts—but not their comforts; they see their sorrows—but not their joys. Oh, this blind world cannot see the joys, the comforts, the consolations that the divine presence raises in the souls of the saints, when they are at worst! Holy joy and cheerfulness under great troubles and deep distresses, is an honor to God, a glory to Christ, and a credit to religion; it stops the mouths of sinners, and it encourages

and strengthens weak saints; and therefore the Lord will be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, etc., that they may grace their suffering condition with joy and cheerfulness. And let thus much suffice for the reasons of the point.

But before I come to the useful application, to prevent the objections, and to allay the fears and doubts and disputes that may arise in the hearts of weak Christians concerning this special presence of God, I shall briefly lay down these following **PROPOSITIONS**—

1. First, That Christ is many times *really* present, when he is *seemingly* absent. [Gen. 28:16](#), "And **Jacob** said, Surely the Lord is in this place—and I knew it not." Choice Christians may have the presence of Christ really with them, when yet they may not be sensible of his presence, nor yet affected with it, Psalm 139. God is present everywhere—but especially with his saints; and not only then when they are apprehend him—but when they perceive no evidence of his presence. Being awakened, he perceived that God had very graciously and gloriously appeared to him; and therefore he falls admiring and extolling the singular goodness and the special kindness of God towards him: as if he had said, I thought that such strange and blessed apparitions were peculiar to the family of the faithful; I thought that God had only in this manner revealed himself in my father's house: I did not in the least think or imagine that such a divine revelation would happen to me in such a place; but now I find that that God, who is everywhere in respect of his general presence, he has, by the special testimonies of his presence, manifested himself to me also in this place.

Just so, **Job**, "Lo, he goes by me, and I see him not: he passes on also—but I perceive him not," [Consult these scriptures, [Luke 24:32](#); [John 20:13-15](#); [Psalm 31:22](#); [Cant. 3:1-5](#), and [5:6-8](#).] [Job 9:11](#). Just so, Jonah, chapter 2:4, "Then I said, I am cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple." In times of sore afflictions God's children are very prone to have hard thoughts of God, and heavy thoughts of themselves. Unbelief raises fears, doubts, despondency, despair, and works a Christian many times, when he is under deep distresses, to draw very sad conclusions against his own soul, "I am cast out of your sight." But this was but an hour of temptation, and therefore he soon recollects and recovers himself again: "yet I will look again toward your holy temple." Here now faith has got the upper hand of unbelief. In the former part of the verse you have Jonah doubting and despairing, "I am cast out of your sight;" but in the latter part of the verse you have Jonah conquering and triumphing, "yet I will look again toward your holy temple."

When *sense* says a thing will never be, and when *reason* says such a thing can never be, *faith* gets above sense and reason, and says, "yes—but it *shall* be!" What do you tell me of a roaring, raging sea, of the belly of hell, of the weeds about my head, of the

billows and waves passing over my head; for yet as low as I am, and as forlorn as I am, "I will yet look towards God's holy temple," I will eye God in the covenant of grace; though I am in the sea, though I am in the belly of hell—yet by faith "I will look toward your holy temple,"—toward which they were to pray, 1 Kings 8—and triumph over all those difficulties which formerly I looked upon as insuperable; I will pray and look, and look and pray; all which does clearly evidence a singular presence of God with him, even then when he peremptorily concludes that he was cast out of God's presence, out of his sight, out of his favor, out of his care, out of his heart.

The Lord is many times *really present* with his people when he is not *sensibly present* with his people: [Judges 6:12,13](#) "When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said—"The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." "But sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." [God may sometimes appear terribly to those whom he loves entirely, [Job 9:34](#).] God may be really present with his people, they may have his favorable presence with their inward man, when it goes very ill with their outward man. Certainly we must frame a new Bible before we can prove that he does not love us when he afflicts us, or that he has withdrawn his presence from us.

Christ had never more of the real presence of his Father than when he had least of his sensible presence, of his comfortable presence: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [Mat. 27:46](#). Here is first a compellation or invocation of God twice repeated: "My God, my God." Secondly, the complaint itself, or matter complained of, concerning God's forsaking of him. Christ was forsaken of God in some sort, and he was very sensible of his Father's withdrawing, though it was but in part and for a time, "Why have you forsaken me?" This forsaking is not to be understood of his whole person—but of his human nature only, according to which and in the which he now suffered on the cross. Though the person of Christ suffered, and was forsaken—yet he was not forsaken in, or according to his whole person—but in respect of his human nature only. The godhead of Christ could not be forsaken, for then God should have forsaken himself, which is impossible. The personal union of the godhead with the manhood of Christ continued all the time of his passion and death, it was never dissolved, nor ever shall be. Yes, the godhead did uphold the manhood all the time of Christ's sufferings, so that he was not forsaken when he was forsaken; he was not forsaken wholly when he was forsaken in part. The love and favor of God the Father towards Jesus Christ did not ebb and flow, rise and fall; for God never loved Jesus Christ more or better than at the time of his sufferings, when he was most obedient to his Father's will. "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life for my sheep," [John 10:17](#). Christ had never more of the supporting presence of his Father than when he had least of his comfortable presence. When Christ was in his grievous agony and distress of

body and mind, the godhead did withdraw the comforting presence from the manhood; and so far, and so far only, was Christ forsaken. Though the union was not dissolved—yet there was a suspension of vision for the time, so as the human nature did neither see nor feel any present comfort from God. Now so far as the godhead did withdraw its comfortable presence, so far our Savior was forsaken, and no further; that was but in part, and therefore he was but in part forsaken. God was really present with Christ when in respect of his comfortable presence he was withdrawn from him. Just so, here. The husband may be in the house and the wife not know it; the sun may shine and I not see it; there may be fire in the room and I not feel it; so God may be really present with his people when he is not sensibly present with his people. But,

2. The second proposition is this—That the favorable, special, and eminent presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—is only to be extended to his covenant-people, to those who are his people by special grace. "They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me... I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me." [Jeremiah 32:38-40](#).

There are many precious promises of the divine presence, as I have already showed; but they are all given to God's covenant-people. We are all the people of God by creation, both good and bad, sinners and saints, bond and free, rich and poor, high and low; and we are all the people of God by outward profession. All who do make an outward profession of God, and perform external worship to God, they are all the people of God in this sense. All the carnal Israelites are frequently called the people of God—as well as the spiritual seed. Thus Cain was one of God's people as well as Abel, and Esau as well as Jacob. Now such as are only the people of God by creation, or by profession, these are strangers to God, these are enemies to God, [Eph. 2:12](#); and will he be favorably present with these? Such as are only the people of God by creation and outward profession—they are dead in trespasses and sins—and can the living God take pleasure in being among the dead? [Eph. 2:1](#); [Col. 2:13](#). Such are under all the threatenings of the law, and under all the curses of the law, [Gal. 3:10](#), even to the uttermost extent of them; such are not one moment secure; the threatenings of God and the curses of the law may light upon them, when in the house, when in the field, when waking, when sleeping, when alone, when in company, when rejoicing, when lamenting, when sick, when well, when boasting, when despairing, when upon the throne, when upon a sick-bed; and will God grace these with his gracious presence? [Lev. 26](#); [Deut. 28](#). Surely not! Such say to God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit would we have, if we pray unto him?" [Job 21:14-15](#). Such queryings as this carry greatest contempt in them, and would lay the Almighty quite below the required duty as

if *Almighty* were but an empty title; and will God ever honor such with his favorable presence, who bid him be packing, who reject his acquaintance, and are willing to be rid of his company? Surely not! Such as are only his people by creation, and an outward profession, such are under the wrath and displeasure of God. "God is angry with the wicked every day," [Psalm 7:11](#); not with a paternal anger—but with a judicial anger, even to hatred and abhorment. "The wicked is an abomination to him, and he hates all workers of iniquity," [Proverbs 3:32](#), and [15:9](#). And therefore to these he will never give his special presence. Such may well expect that God will pour on them the fierceness of that wrath and indignation, that they can neither decline nor withstand. Such wrath is like the tempest and whirlwind which breaks down all before it. It is like burning fire, and devouring flames, which consumes all. This wrath will break down all the sinner's arrogancies, and strangle all his vain hopes, and mar all his sensual joys, and fill him with amazing horrors, and make him drunk with the wine of astonishment. And will God dwell with these? will he keep house with these? Surely not!

By these short hints it is most evident that the special presence of God is entailed upon none outside of covenant, [John 14:21](#), [23](#). God loves to keep house with none but his covenant-people. He will grace none with his gracious presence—but those who are his people by special grace, [1 Cor. 16-18](#). When wicked men are in great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers—God either leaves them, as he did Saul, [1 Sam. 28:15-16](#), etc.; or else pursues them to an utter overthrow, as he did Pharaoh, [Exod. 14](#); or else cuts them off by an invisible hand, as he did Sennacherib's mighty army, [Isaiah 37:36](#), and proud king Herod, [Acts 12:23](#); or else he leaves them to be their own executioners, as he did Ahithophel and Judas, etc. But,

3. The third proposition is this, That a sincere Christian may enjoy the presence of the Lord in great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, supporting and upholding of him—when he has not the presence of God quickening, comforting, and joying of him. [Psalm 119:117](#): [Psalm 37:24](#), "Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand," "upholding with his hand." There is not one moment wherein the Lord does not uphold his people by the hand. The root word signifies to sustain and bear up, as the tender mother does the little child, the weak child, the sick child. God's hand is still under his people, so that they can never fall below supporting grace. [Psalm 63:8](#), "Your right hand upholds me;" or, "Your right hand underprops me." God never did, nor never will, lack a hand to uphold, a hand to underprop his poor people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Though the saints have not always the *comforting* presence of God in their afflictions—yet they have always the *supporting* presence of God in their afflictions.

Christ in his bitter and bloody agony had much of the *supporting* presence of his Father, when he had none of the *comforting* presence of his Father with him. [Mat. 27:46](#), "My God, my God,"

etc. Just so, the saints in their deep distresses have many times much of the supporting presence of God. His left hand is under their heads, and his right hand does embrace them, [Cant. 2:6](#), when, in respect of his comforting presence, they may say with the weeping prophet, "The comforter who should relieve my soul, is far from me," [Lam. 1:16](#).

When the love-sick spouse was ready to faint, Christ circles her with amiable embracements; "His left hand is under her head, and his right hand does embrace her." This is a posture and sign of the greatest love, which the sick fainting spouse here glories in. Christ's two hands are testimonies and witnesses of his great power and might, who is able to preserve his people, though lame cripples, from falling, and also to lift them up again when they are fallen ever so low, and likewise to support and uphold them, that they shall never finally and utterly be cast down. When the hearts of the saints are ready to faint and sink, then the Lord will employ all his power for their support, bearing them up as it were with both hands. He has put his left hand under my head, as a pillow to rest upon, and with his right hand he has embraced me, as a loving husband cherishes his sick wife, and does her all the help he can, [Eph. 5:29](#). The best of saints would fail and faint in a day of trouble, if Christ did not put both his hands to keep them up. In days of sorrow, God's people stand in need of a whole Christ to support them and uphold them. "My head sinks, O my beloved, put your left hand, softer than pillows of roses, firmer than pillars of marble, under it; my heart fails and dies—oh let your right hand embrace me." But,

4. The fourth proposition is this—That all saints have not a like measure of the presence of the Lord in their troubles and trials, in their sorrows and sufferings. Some have more, and others have less of this presence of God in an evil day.

- (1.) All saints have not alike work to do in an evil day.
- (2.) All saints have not alike temptations to withstand in an evil day.
- (3.) All saints have not alike testimony to give on an evil day.
- (4.) All saints have not alike burdens to bear in an evil day.
- (5.) All saints have not alike things to suffer in an evil day.

There are *greater* and there are *lesser* troubles, distresses, and dangers; and there are *ordinary* troubles, distresses, and dangers; and there are *extraordinary* troubles, distresses, and dangers. [[Lam. 1:12](#), and [4:6](#); [Dan. 9:12-13](#); [2 Cor. 11:21](#) to the end; [Heb. 11:25](#) to the end.] Now, where the trouble, the distress, the danger, is ordinary—there an ordinary presence of God may suffice. But where the trouble, the distress, the danger, is extraordinary—there the people of God shall have an extraordinary presence of God with them, as you may see in the three Hebrew children, Daniel, the apostles, the primitive Christians, and the Book of Martyrs.

Some troubles, distresses, and dangers, are but of a *short continuance*, as Athanasius said of his banishment, "It is but a little cloud, and will quickly be gone." Others are of a longer continuance, and accordingly God suits his presence.

All saints have not alike *secondary* succours, supplies, reliefs, comforts, etc., in their troubles, distresses, and dangers. Some have a shelter, a friend at hand—others have not. Some have many friends—and others may have never a friend. Some are surrounded with outward comforts—and others have not one, not one penny, not one friend, not one day's work, etc. In a storm some have good harbors at hand—others are near the rocks, and in danger of being swallowed up in the sands. Just so here, and accordingly God lets out more or less of his presence among his people; some need more of his presence than others do—and accordingly God dispenses it among his saints. But,

5. The fifth proposition is this—That none of the saints have at all times, in all afflictions, distresses, and dangers, the same measure and degree of the presence of the Lord; but in one affliction they have more, in another less, of the divine presence. [Some scores of Psalms do evidence the truth of this proposition.] In one affliction, a Christian may have more of the *enlightening* presence of God than in another. And in another affliction, a Christian may have more of the *comforting* presence of God than in another. In this trouble a Christian may have more of the awakening presence of God than in another, and in that trouble a Christian may have more of the sanctifying presence of God than in another; and in this distress a Christian may have more of the supporting presence of God than in that. No one saint does at all times, nor in all troubles, need a like measure of the divine presence. The primitive Christians and the martyrs had sometimes more and sometimes less of the divine presence with them, as their condition did require. God, who is infinitely wise, does always suit the measures and degrees of his gracious, favorable, special presence to the necessities of his saints. This is so clear and great a truth, that there are many thousands that can seal to it from their own experience; and therefore I need not enlarge upon it. But,

6. The sixth and the last proposition is this—That many precious Christians, in their great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, may have this favorable, special, and eminent presence of God with them—and yet fear and doubt, yes, peremptorily conclude that they have not this presence of God with them. [[Jonah 2:4](#); [Cant. 5:6-10](#); Psalm 88.] [Psalm 77:7-10](#). These sad interrogatories argues much fear and doubt; but let me evidence the truth of this proposition, by an induction of particulars.

Thus, first: If Christ is not specially with you, why is it, that in your troubles, you so fearful of offending of him, and so careful and studious in pleasing of him? [Gen. 39:9-10](#); [Psalm 17:3-5](#); [Dan. 3:16-17](#), and [6:10-13](#).

Secondly, If Christ is not specially with you, why is it, that under all your troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers—you are still a-justifying of God, a-clearing of God, a-speaking well of God, a-giving a good report of God? [Psalm 119:75](#); [Ezra 9:13](#); [Neh. 9:32-33](#); [Dan. 9:12, 14](#).

Thirdly, If God is not specially with you, why is it, that you bear up so believingly, sweetly, stoutly, cheerfully, and patiently under your troubles, deep distresses, and greatest dangers? [Gen. 49:23-24](#); 1 Sam. 30:6; [Hab. 3:17-18](#); [Acts 5:40-42](#), [16:25-26](#), and [27:22-26](#); [Heb. 10:34](#).

Fourthly, If Christ is not specially present with you, why is it, that your thoughts, desires, hearts, thirstings and longings of soul, are so earnestly, so seriously, so frequently, and so constantly carried out after more and more of Christ, and after more and more of the presence of Christ, and after more and more communion with Christ? [Psalm 139:17-18](#), [63:1](#), [8](#), [27:4](#), and [42:1-3](#); [Exod. 33:13-16](#); [Cant. 1:2](#).

Fifthly, If Christ is not specially present with you, why is it, that you are so affected and afflicted with the dishonors and indignities, wrongs and injuries, which are done to the Lord by others? [Psalm 69:9](#), and [119:53](#), [136](#), [158](#); [Jer. 9:1-2](#); [Ezek. 9:4, 6](#); [2 Pet. 2:7-8](#). None but such that have the presence of the Lord specially with them can seriously and sincerely lament over the high dishonors that are done to the Lord by others.

Sixthly, If the Lord is not specially present with you under all your troubles and deep distresses, why do you not cast off prayer, and neglect hearing, and forsake the assembling of yourselves together, and turn your backs upon the table of the Lord, and take leave of closet duties? [Job 15:4](#); [Heb. 10:25](#).

Seventhly, If the Lord is not specially present with you under your great troubles and deep distresses, why don't you say with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" And with the king of Israel, "Behold, this evil is from the Lord—why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Or with that pagan, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" Or like Saul—why don't you run to a witch? Or with Ahab, Why don't you sell yourselves to work evil in the sight of the Lord? Or like Ahaz—trespass most when you are distressed most? [[Exod. 5:2](#); 2 Kings 6:32, and 7:2; [1 Sam. 28:15-16](#); [1 Kings 21:20](#); [2 Chron. 28:22](#); [Isaiah 51:20](#), and [59:10-11](#).]

Why don't you fret, and faint, and act like a wild bull, full of fury? Why don't you grope for the wall, and stumble at noonday, and roar like bears?

Eighthly, If the Lord is not specially present with you in your greatest troubles and deepest distresses, why do you, with Moses, prefer suffering before sinning, and Christ's reproaches before Egypt's treasures? [Heb. 11:25-26](#). Why do you scruple the sinning of yourselves out of your sorrows? [Psalm 38:4](#); [Gen. 39:9-10](#). Why do you look upon sin as your greatest burden? Why are you

so tender in the point of transgression, and so stout in resistance of the most pleasing temptation?

Ninthly, If the Lord is not specially with you in your great troubles and deep distresses, why do you set so high a price upon those who have much of the presence of God with them in their troubles and trials? [Psalm 16:3-4](#); [Proverbs 12:26](#); [Heb. 11:38](#). Why do you look upon them as more excellent than their neighbors? yes, as such worthies of whom this world is not worthy?

Tenthly and lastly, If the Lord is not specially present with you in your greatest troubles and deepest distresses, why is it, that you are somewhat bettered, somewhat amended, somewhat reformed by the rod—by the afflictions that have been, and still are, upon you? [Psalm 119:67, 71](#); [Hosea 5:14-15](#), and [6:1-2](#); [Hosea 2:6-7](#). When the *heart* is more awakened, humbled, and softened by the rod, when the *will* is more compliant with the will of God in doing or suffering, when the *mind* is more raised and spiritualized, when the *conscience* is more quick and tender, and when the *life* is more strict and circumspect; then we may safely and roundly conclude that such people do undoubtedly enjoy the special and singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, [Eph. 5:15](#).

And thus I have laid down these six propositions; which, if well weighed and improved—may many ways be of singular use to sincere Christians.

TEN INFERENCES

We shall now come to the **application** or useful **improvement** of this great and seasonable truth. *Explanation* is the drawing of the bow—but *application* is the hitting of the mark, the bulls-eye. Is it so, that when the people of the Lord are in great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, that then the Lord will be favorably, specially, and eminently present with them? **Then let me briefly give these ten INFERENCES.**

[1.] First, That the saints are a people of Christ's special care. 2 Chron. 16:9, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him." The words contain,

(1.) The UNIVERSALITY of God's providence. His eyes walk the rounds, they run to and fro through the whole earth, to defend and secure the sincere in heart. Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busied at Alexander's birth, and could not be at two places together; but God is present at all times, in all places, and among all people, and therefore his church, which is his temple, can never suffer because of his absence, 1 Cor. 3:16, and 6:19. The Egyptians had an idol called *Baal-Zephon*, which is by interpretation, *Lord of the watch-tower*, Exod. 14:2; his office was to frighten such fugitive Jews as should offer to steal out of the country; but when Moses and the people of Israel passed that way, and pitched their camp there, this drowsy god was surely fast asleep, for they all marched on their way without hindrance or molestation. Whereas he who keeps Israel "neither slumbers nor sleeps;" he kept his Israel then, and he has kept his Israel ever since: he made good his title then, and will make good his title still; he ever was, and he ever will be, watchful over his people for their good, Psalm 121:3-5; Isaiah 27:3-4.

(2.) The EFFICACY of God's providence. To show himself strong. God fights with his eyes as well as his hands; he does not only see his people's dangers—but saves them from dangers in the midst of dangers, Zech. 2:5. When the philosopher in a starry night was in danger of drowning, he cried out, "Surely I shall not perish; there are so many eyes of providence over me!" King Philip said he could sleep safely, because his friend Antipater watched over him. Oh, how much more may the saints sleep safely, who have always a God who keeps watch and ward about them Psalm 3:5-6. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10. God is so strong a tower that no cannon can pierce it, and he is so high a tower that no ladder can scale it, and he is so deep a tower that no

subverter can undermine it; and therefore they must needs be safe and secure—who lodge within a tower so impregnable, so indomitable. Now this is the case of all the saints.

The **fatherly care and providence of God** is still exercised for the good of his people. "In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him." Deuteronomy 32:10-12. [Isaiah 49:16, 31:5, and 32:1-2.] The eagle carries her young ones upon her wings, and not between her talons, as other birds do, but safely and swiftly; and so did God his Israel, being protective and watchful of them all the way, securing them also from their enemies, who could do them as little hurt as any do the eagle's young, which cannot be shot but through the body of the mother eagle, Isaiah 63:4-6, and 59:15.

See at what a rate God speaks in Isaiah 40:27-29, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? *Do you not know? Have you not heard?* The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." Observe how God comes on with his piercing interrogatories, "Have you not known?" What an *ignorant* people! "Have you not heard?" What a *deaf* people!

1 Pet. 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you." "I will now with you sing away care," said John *Careless*, martyr, in his letter to Mr. Philpot, "for now my soul is turned to her old rest again, and has taken a sweet nap in Christ's lap. I have cast my care upon the Lord, which cares for me, and will be careless according to my name."

God's providence extends to all his creatures; it is like the sun, of universal influence—but in a special manner it is operative for the safety of his saints. In common dangers men take special care of their jewels, and will not God; will not God take special care of his jewels? Mal. 3:17; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5. Surely, yes! The church of God is the house of God, and will not God take care of his house? Surely that shall be well guarded, whatever be neglected. His house is every moment within the view of his favorable eye, and under the guard of his almighty arm; his thoughts and heart is much upon his house. God has a peculiar and paternal care over his saints.

A God there is, whose providence does take
Care for his saints, whom he will not forsake.

"His eyes run," implying the celerity and swiftness of God in hastening relief to his people; "His eyes run through the whole earth," implying the universality of help. There is not a saint in any dark corner of the world, under any straits or troubles—but God eyes him, and will take singular care of him. God will always suit his care to his people's conditions, to which his eminent

appearances for them in days of distress and trouble give special testimony. It is our work to *cast* care; it is God's work to *take* care. Let not us, then, take the Lord's work out of his hand. But,

[2.] Secondly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then here you may see the true reason why the saints are so comfortable, cheerful, and joyful in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers.** It is because of that special presence of God with them. [Acts 5:40-41, and 16:25; Romans 5:3; 2 Cor. 7:4, and 12:10; 1 Pet. 4:12-14. These scriptures are already opened and improved.] It was this special presence of God with the martyrs, which made them rejoice in the midst of their greatest sufferings, and which made them endure great sufferings without any sensible feeling of their sufferings: as that young child in Josephus, who, when his flesh was pulled in pieces with pincers, by the command of Antiochus, said, with a smiling countenance, "Tyrant, you are wasting your time. Where are those sharp pains with which you threatened me? make me to shrink back and cry out if you can!" And Bainham, an English martyr, when the fire was flaming about him, said, "You papists talk of miracles; behold here a miracle. I feel no more pain than if I were in a bed of down; it is as sweet to me as a bed of roses." Surely their strength was not the strength of stones, nor their flesh of brass, Job 6:12, that they should not be sensible of so great sufferings; but this was only from that special presence of God, who made them endure grievous pains without pain, and most exquisite torments without torment, and sore sufferings without feeling of their sufferings, Heb. 11:33-39. And other choice souls there were, who, though they were sensible of their sufferings—yet by the divine presence, they were filled with unspeakable courage, comfort, and alacrity.

Laurence, when his body was roasted upon a burning gridiron, cried out, "This side is roasted enough; turn the other!" Marcus of Arethusa, a worthy minister, when his body was cut and lanced and coated with honey, and hung up aloft in a basket to be stung to death by wasps and bees; he, looking down cheerfully upon the spectators, said, "I am advanced, despising you who are below." And when we shall see poor, weak, feeble creatures like ourselves defying their tormentors and their torments, conquering in the midst of their greatest sufferings, and rejoicing and triumphing in the midst of their fiery trials; singing in prison, as Paul and Silas did; kissing the stake, as Henry Voes did; clapping their hands when they were half consumed in the flames, as John Noyes did; calling their *execution-day* their *wedding-day*, as Ridley did; we cannot but conclude that they had a singular presence of God with them, which made all their sufferings seem so easy and so light unto them.

Caesar cheered up his drooping mariners in a storm by reminding them of his presence; but, alas! alas! what was Caesar's presence, compared to this divine, this special presence that the saints have

enjoyed in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses? But,

[3.] Thirdly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then from hence you may see the weakness, madness, sottishness, and folly of all such as make opposition against the saints; who affront and injure those who have the presence of the great God in the midst of them.** Isaiah 8:9-10, and 27:4; 1 Cor. 1:25. O sirs! the *weakness* of God is stronger than men. What then is the strength of God? 1 Cor. 10:22, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" Ah, who knows the power of his anger! Psalm 90:11. It is such that none of the potentates of the world, who set themselves against the saints, can avert or avoid, avoid or abide. That God is a mighty God, the Scriptures do abundantly evidence, and it appears also in the epithet, that is added unto *El-*, which imports that he is a God of prevailing might. By Daniel he is called *El-Elim*, "the mighty of mighties." Now what folly and madness is it for dust and ashes, for crawling worms, to make war against a mighty God; yes, an Almighty God, who can curse them, and crush them with a word of his mouth!

2 Chron. 32:7,8 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." Gen. 49:25; Num. 24:4, 16; Ruth 1:20-21. The king of Assyria was at that time the greatest monarch in the world, and the most formidable enemy the church had—yet the divine presence was a sovereign antidote to expel all base slavish fears, which might arise in any of their hearts concerning his greatness, power, or multitude. What was that great multitude that was with the king of Assyria, compared to that innumerable company of angels which was with Hezekiah? [2 Kings 6:17; Pa. 34:7, etc., and 91:11; Heb. 12:22, and 1:14; Isaiah 37:29, 36-38.]

And what was an arm of flesh, compared to God's supreme sovereignty, that had this proud prince in chains, and that put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his lips, and cut off his great army by the hand of an angel in one night, and left him to fall by the sword of his own sons? The Lord Almighty can crush the greatest armies in the world into atoms, at his pleasure. When the divine presence is armed against the great ones of the world—they must certainly fall. In Diocletian's time, under whom was the last and worst of the ten persecutions, though then Christian religion was more desperately opposed than ever—yet such was the presence of God with his people in those times, that Christianity prospered and prevailed more than ever; so that Dioclesian himself, observing that the more he sought to blot out the name of Christ—the more legible it became; and the more he sought to block up the way of Christ—the more passable it became; and whatever of Christ he thought to root out—the deeper it rooted, and the higher it rose; thereupon he resolved to engage himself no further—but

retired to a private life. This is a good copy for the persecutors of the day to write after.

O sirs! what folly and madness is it for weakness to engage against strength, the creature against the Creator, an arm of flesh against the Rock of Ages! What is the chaff, compared to the whirlwind; stubble and straw, compared to the devouring flames? No more are all the enemies of Zion, compared to the great and glorious God, who is specially present with his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses, etc., Acts 5:38-40; Psalm 76:12, and 110:5-6; Rev. 6:14-16. There was not one of those persecuting emperors that carried on the ten bloody persecutions against the saints—but came to miserable ends; yes, histories tell us of forty-three persecuting emperors who fell by the hand of revenging justice; sooner or later, the presence of God with his people will undo all the persecutors in the world! But,

[4.] Fourthly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then from hence you may see the Lord's singular love and admirable kindness to his people in gracing them with his presence in their greatest troubles.** "But now, O Israel, the Lord who created you says—Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3.

That is a friend indeed, who will stick close to a man in the day of his troubles, as Job's friend stuck close to him in the day of his troubles, and as Jonathan stuck close to David in his greatest dangers, and as the primitive Christians stuck close one to another, though with the hazard of their lives, and to the amazement of their enemies, Job 2:11-13; 1 Sam. 20:30-33. "Behold," said they, "how the Christians love one another," and stand by one another.

The people of God, in their greatest troubles, are a people of God's special love. When they are in distress, he lays them in his very bosom, and his "banner over them is love," Cant. 2:4. The love of God to his people is engraved upon the most afflictive dispensation they are under. When he smartly rebukes them, even then he dearly loves them, Rev. 3:19. "Hear you the rod," Mic. 6:9. Oh, God's rod speaks love. Many of the saints have read much of the Lord's love, written in letters of their own blood. They have read love in prisons, and love in flames, and love in banishment, and love in the cruelest torments their enemies could invent! When a Christian's wounds are bleeding—then God comes in with a healing plaster, Mal. 4:2. When a Christian is in a storm—then the presence of the Lord makes all calm and quiet within, Mat. 8:26. The presence of the Lord with his people in their troubles and distresses—speaks out the *reality* of his love, the

cordialness of his love, the *greatness* of his love, and the *transcendancy* of his love.

The truth and strength of relations' love one to another does best appear by their presence one with another, when any of them are in the iron furnace, or in bonds, or in great straits or needs, or deep distresses. The parents show most of their love to their sick and weak children by their daily presence with them; and the husband shows most of his dear and tender love by keeping his wife company when she is in greatest straits and dangers. Just so, here. But,

[5.] Fifthly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then this may serve to justify the saints, and to encourage the saints to write after this fair copy, which Christ has set them.** Oh visit your distressed brethren! oh stand by them! oh stick close to them in all their troubles, distresses, and dangers. Let the same mind be in you, one towards another, as is in Christ towards you all. Are there any Jobs upon the ash-heap? Visit them! Are there any Pauls in chains? Find them out, and be not ashamed of their chains! "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus." 2 Timothy 1:16-18. "He often refreshed me." Greek, "*Poured cold water upon me.*" It is a metaphor taken from those who, being almost overcome with heat, are refreshed by cooling. "And was not ashamed of my chains." Learned antiquaries observe that the apostle at this time was not in prison with fetters—but in the custody of a soldier, with whom he might go abroad, having a chain on his right arm, which was tied to the soldier's left arm. Paul at this time was not in prison, for then Onesiphorus needed not to have made any great search to find him; but was a prisoner at large, going up and down with his keeper to despatch his affairs; and therefore he speaks not of chains in the plural number—but of a chain in the singular, with which he was tied to the soldier that kept him. It noways becomes the saints to be ashamed of the chains which may be found upon the ambassadors of Christ in an evil day. The primitive Christians were not ashamed of the martyrs' chains—but owned them in their chains, and stood by them in their chains, and frequently visited them in their chains, and freely and nobly relieved them and refreshed them in their chains: and will you, will you be ashamed to visit the saints in bonds? "Oh let not this be told in Gath, nor published in the streets of Askelon," 2 Sam. 1:20, that the high-flown professors and Christians of these times are ashamed to own, relieve, and stand by the saints in chains.

Just so, Mat. 25:36, "I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me." [See Exod. 2:11-12, compared with Acts 7:23-29, only remember the case was extraordinary,

and his call was extraordinary.] It is very remarkable that the last definitive sentence shall pass upon men, according to those acts of favor and kindness that have been showed to the saints in their suffering state; and that the sentence of absolution shall contain a manifestation of all their good works. In this great day Christ sees no iniquity in his people, he objects nothing against them, and he only makes honorable mention of the good that has been done by them. O sirs, all the visits you give to sick saints, and all the visits you give to imprisoned saints—Christ takes as visits given to himself! Suffering saints and you are brethren; and will you not visit your own brethren? suffering saints and Christ are brethren; and will you not visit Christ's brethren? suffering saints and you are companions; and will you not visit your own companions? suffering saints and you are traveling heaven-wards; and will you not visit your fellow-travelers? suffering saints and you are fellow-citizens; and will you not visit your fellow-citizens? suffering saints and you are fellow-soldiers; and will you not visit your fellow-soldiers? suffering saints and you are fellow-heirs; and will you not visit your fellow-heirs? [Mat. 25:40; John 20:17; Psalm 119:63; 2 Cor. 8:19; Eph. 2:19; Phil. 2:25; Romans 8:17.] Oh, never be ashamed of those whom Christ is not ashamed of! Oh, never fail to visit those whom Christ daily visits in their suffering state! Oh, never turn your backs upon those to whom Christ has given the right hand of fellowship! Oh, be not shy of them, nor strange to them whom Christ lays daily in his bosom! Oh, be not unkind to those, with whom one day you must live forever! But,

[6.] Sixthly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then never give way to base slavish fears!** Psalm 51:12-13, and 46:1-3; Mat. 10:28, etc. There are as many *fear nots* in Scripture as there are *fears*. Take a taste of some of them—Heb. 13:5, "He has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Verse 6, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." This text is taken out of Psalm 118:6, "The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me." Some read it by way of interrogation, "What can man do unto me?" [The Earl of Murray, speaking of Mr. John Knox, said, Here lies the body of him who in his lifetime never feared the face of any man.] There is some difference in the apostle's quoting the text between the Hebrew and the Greek. The Hebrew thus reads it, "The Lord is with me," or for me; or as our English has translated it, "The Lord is on my side." The Greek thus, "The Lord is my helper." But the sense being the same with the Hebrew, the apostle would not alter that translation. The alteration which is in the Greek serves for an exposition of the mind and meaning of the psalmist; for God being with us, or for us, or on our side, presupposes that he is our helper. Just so, as there is no contradiction between the psalmist and the apostle—but a clear interpretation of the psalmist's mind; and a choice instruction thence arises—namely, that God's special presence with us, for us, or on our side, may abundantly satisfy us, and assure us that he will afford all needful help and support to us.

The consideration of which should abundantly arm us against all base slavish fears.

God is not present with his saints in their troubles and distresses as a stranger—but as a father; and therefore he cannot but take such special care of them, as to help them, as to support them, and as to secure them from dangers in the midst of dangers, and therefore why should they be afraid? Isaiah 43:2. The Greek word that is translated helper in Heb. 13:6, signifies one who is ready to run at the cry of another. Now this notation implies a willing readiness and a ready willingness in God to afford all support and relief to his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Herein God shows himself like a tender father or mother, who immediately run when they hear the child cry, or see danger near.

Isaiah 8:10, "God is with us." Verse 12, "Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it." The divine presence should arm us against all base slavish fears of men's power, policy, wrath, or rage. Kings and princes, compared with God, or with the special presence of God, are but as so many grasshoppers, skipping and hopping up and down the field; and does it befit Christians who enjoy this divine presence to be afraid of grasshoppers? Isaiah 40:22.

Isaiah 41:10, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." God expects that his special presence with us should arm us against all base fear and dismayedness. Psalm 23:4, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me." The divine presence raised David above all his fears; Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Who is the enemy that I should be afraid of? where is the enemy that I should be afraid of? by what name or title is the enemy dignified or distinguished that I should be afraid of? I look before me and behind me, I look round about me and I look at a distance from me, and I cannot see the man, the devil, the persecutor that I should fear or be afraid of—for God is with me.

We may safely, readily, and cheerfully set the divine presence against all our enemies in the world. Ah, Christians, Christians, look about you, look about you, and see who is specially present with you—and then be afraid if you can! But,

[7.] Seventhly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then certainly there is no such great evil in troubles, distresses, sufferings, etc., as many conceive, fear, dream, think, judge.** Many men look upon troubles, afflictions, sufferings, in a *magnifying* glass, and then they cry out, "There is a lion in the way! There is a lion in the streets!" Proverbs 22:13, and 26:13. But, sirs, the lion is not always so

fierce as he is painted, nor are afflictions always so grievous as men apprehend. There are many who have been very fearful of prisons, and have looked upon a prison as a hell on this side hell, who when they have been there for righteousness' sake, and the gospel's sake—they have found prisons to be palaces, and the imaginary hell to be a little heaven unto them.

Many *fear* afflictions, and *flee* from afflictions as from toads and serpents, as from enemies and devils; and yet certainly there is no such great evil in affliction as they apprehend, for the Lord is specially present with his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Now what evil can there be in that condition wherein a man enjoys the divine presence—which makes every bitter sweet, and every burden light, and which turns winter nights into summer days, etc.? Yes, many times the saints enjoy more of the singular presence of God in their afflictions, in their day of adversity—than ever they did in the day of prosperity, or in the day of their worldly glory. What bride is afraid to meet her bridegroom in a dark entry, or in a dirty lane, or in a narrow passage, or in a secret forest? And why then should a Christian be afraid of this or that afflicted condition, who is sure to meet his blessed bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, in every state, in every condition, who is sure to enjoy the presence of Christ with him in every turn or change that may pass upon him?

How many martyrs have ventured into the very flames to meet with Christ, Heb. 11:34, and who have many other ways made a sacrifice of their dearest lives, and all to meet with Christ! Oh the cruel mockings, the scourgings, the bonds, the imprisonments, the stoning, the sawing asunder—which many of the Lord's worthies have ventured upon, and all to meet with the presence of the Lord! And why then should any of you be afraid to enter into an afflicted condition, where you shall be sure to meet the singular presence of the Lord, which will certainly turn your afflicted condition into a comfortable condition? Rev. 12:11, and Heb. 11:36-38.

The great design of the Lord in afflicting his people—is to meet with them, and to draw them into a nearer communion with himself. It is that they may *see* more of him than ever, and *taste* more of him than ever, and *enjoy* more of him than ever; in order to which he subdues their corruptions by afflictions, and strengthens their graces, and heightens their holiness by all their troubles and trials, Isaiah 1:25, 27:8-9; Heb. 12:10-11; Hosea 2:14. Whenever he leads his spouse into a wilderness, it is that he may speak friendly and comfortably to her, or that he may speak to her heart, as the Hebrew runs. The great design of the Lord in bringing her into a wilderness was that he might make such discoveries of himself, of his love, and of his sovereign grace, as might cheer up her heart, yes, as might even make her heart leap and dance within her. Or, as some sense it, "I will take her alone for the purpose, even into a solitary wilderness, where I may more freely impart my mind to her," that she having her whole desire she may come up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved, Cant. 8:5, and so be brought into the bride-house with all

solemnity. By all which it is most evident, that there is no such evil in a wilderness estate, in an afflicted condition, as many imagine. But,

[8.] Eighthly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then what a high encouragement should this be to poor sinners to study Christ, to acquaint themselves with Christ,** to embrace Christ, to choose Christ, to close with Christ, to submit to Christ, and to make a resignation of themselves to Christ, and to secure their saving interest in Christ, that so they may enjoy his special presence in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, John 1:12; Psalm 112:2-3, and 2:12; 2 Cor. 8:5.

Oh, how many mercies are enrap't up in this mercy of enjoying the singular presence of the Lord in all the troubles and trials of this life! Psalm 23:4. It is a mercy to have the presence of a friend, it is a greater mercy to have the presence of a near and dear relation with us in a day of distress, in a day of darkness; but what a mercy is it then to have the presence of the Lord with one in a dark day! That is excellent counsel that the wisest prince who ever swayed a scepter gives, in Eccles. 11:8, "*Remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.*" When light shall be turned into darkness, pleasure into pain, delights into wearisomeness, calms into storms, summer days into winter nights, and the lightsome days of life into the dark days of old age and death; oh, now the singular presence of the Lord with a man in these days of darkness will be a mercy more worth than ten thousand worlds!

To have a wise, a loving, a powerful, a faithful friend to own us in the dark, to stand by us in the dark, to uphold us in the dark, to refresh us in the dark, to encourage us in the dark, etc., is a very choice and singular mercy, Psalm 71:20-21. Oh then, what is it to have the presence of God Almighty with us in all those dark days which are to pass over our heads! What David said of the sword of Goliath in another case, "There is none like it!" 1 Sam. 21:8-9, that I may say of the divine presence with a man in the dark, "There is none like it!" The psalmist hit the mark, the bulls-eye, when he said, "My flesh and my heart fails: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." When his "flesh," that is his outward man, and when his "heart," his courage, that is his inward man, failed him, then God was "the strength of his heart," or "the rock of his heart," as the Hebrew runs. At the very last gasp God came in with his sovereign cordial, and revived him and recovered him, and brought new life and strength into him. When a saint is at worst, when he is at lowest, when he is even overwhelmed with troubles and sorrows, and when the days of darkness so multiply upon him that he seems past all hope of recovery, then the divine presence does most gloriously manifest itself and display itself in supporting, strengthening, comforting, and encouraging of him!

In Rev. 4:6, you read that the world is like a sea of glass, "I saw before the throne a sea of glass." The world is transitory, very frail and brittle as glass, and it is unstable, tumultuous, and troublesome as the sea. Here the world is shadowed out to us by a sea of glass; and how can we stand on this sea, how can we live on this sea, how can we walk on this sea—if Christ doesn't take us by the hand, and lead us and support us and secure us? O sirs, we cannot uphold ourselves on this sea of glass, nor can others uphold us on this sea of glass; it is none but dear Jesus, it is no presence but his singular presence, which can make us to stand or go on this sea of glass. And if this world be a sea of glass, oh what infinite cause have we to secure our saving interest in Christ, who alone can pilot us safely over this troublesome, dangerous, and tempestuous sea!

Oh, that I could prevail with poor sinners to take Christ into the ship of their souls, that so he may pilot them safely into the heavenly harbor, the heavenly Canaan. No pilot in heaven or earth can land you on the shore of a happy eternity, from off this sea of glass—but Jesus. When on this sea of glass the winds blow high, storms arise, and the huge waves beat into the ship, oh then the sinner cries, "A kingdom for a Christ," a world for a pilot to save us from eternal drowning! Oh, that before eternal storms and tempests beat upon poor sinners, they would be prevailed with to close with Christ, to accept of Christ, and to enter into a marriage-covenant, a marriage-union with Christ; that so they may enjoy his singular presence with them while they are on this sea of glass, Psalm 11:6, and 9:17; Hosea 2:19-20; 2 Cor. 11:2.

There is no presence so greatly desirable, so absolutely necessary, and so exceeding sweet and comfortable, as the presence of Christ; and therefore, before all and above all, secure this presence of Christ by matching with the person of Christ, and then you will be safe and happy on a sea of glass. But,

[9.] Ninthly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then let me infer that unbelief, infidelity, and despondency of spirit in an evil day, does very ill befit the people of God.** Is the Lord present with you in your greatest troubles, and will you waver in your faith, and be crestfallen in your courage, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall? Isaiah 25:4. What is this but to tell all the world that there is more power in your troubles to sink and daunt you, than there is in the presence of the Lord to support and encourage you? When a Christian is upon the very banks of the Red Sea—yet then the divine presence should encourage him "to stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord," Exod. 14:13. It would be good for timorous Christians in an evil day to dwell much upon the prophet's commission: Isaiah 35:3, "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart—Be strong, fear not!" Ah—but how shall weak hands be strong, and a timorous heart cease to fear and faint? Why, Behold, your "God will come with vengeance, even God with a

recompense; he will come and save you!" He is on his way, he will be suddenly with you; yes, he is already in the midst of you, and he will save you.

If you cast but your eye upon precious promises, if you cast but your eye upon the new covenant, which is God's great storehouse, there you will find all supports, all supplies, all helps, and all comforts, laid up, and laid in for you; and therefore never despond, never faint, never be discouraged in an evil day, in a dark time. [Isaiah 41:10, and 13:2; Heb. 13:5; Jer. 32:40-41, 31:31-38; Gen. 41:35-36, 48-49; Col. 1:19, and 2:8.] As Joseph had his storehouses to give a full supply to the Egyptians in time of famine, so dear Jesus, of whom Joseph was but a type, has his storehouses of mercy, of goodness, of power, of plenty, of bounty, out of which in the worst of times he is able to give his people a full supply according to all their needs; and therefore be not discouraged, do not despond in a day of trouble.

O my friends, how often has the Lord hid you in the secret of his presence, from the pride of men, and kept you secretly in his pavilion from the strife of tongues! Psalm 27:5, and 31:20. "And therefore be strong, and lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees," Heb. 12:12. When **David** was in a very great distress, he neither desponds nor gives way to unbelief—but encourages himself in the Lord his God, 1 Sam. 30:6. The Hebrew word is derived from *Chazack*, which notes a laying hold on God with all his strength, as men do when they are in danger of drowning, who will suffer anything rather than let go their hold. When David was almost under water, when he was in danger of drowning, then, by a hand of faith, he lays hold on the Rock of Ages, and encourages himself in the Lord his God.

What heavenly gallantry of spirit did good **Nehemiah** show from that divine presence which was with him in that great day of trouble and distress, when "the remnant of the captivity were in great affliction and reproach: and the wall of Jerusalem broken down, and the gates thereof burnt with fire!" Neh. 1:3. You know Shemaiah advises him to take refuge in the temple, because the enemy had designed to fall upon him by night and slay him, and cause the work to cease; but Nehemiah, having a special presence of God with him, gives this heroic and resolute answer, "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life?" Neh. 6:10-11. I will not go in. Should I flee into the temple like a malefactor to take sanctuary there, how would God be dishonored, religion reproached, the people discouraged, the weak scandalised, and the wicked emboldened to insult and triumph over me! saying, "Is this the man who is called by God, and qualified by God, for this work and service? Is this the man who is blessed and encouraged by the king to build the walls, and gates, and city of Jerusalem? Neh. 2:5-10. Is this the man who is the chief magistrate and governor of the city? Is this the man who is sent and set for the defense of the people, and that should encourage them in their work? Oh what a mouth of blasphemy would be opened, should I make a base retreat into the temple to save my life! I have found the face

of God, the presence of God, in bowing the heart of king Artaxerxes, to contribute his royal aid, and commission me to the work; and in the bending of the hearts of the elders of the Jews to own my authority, and to rise up as one man to build; and therefore I will rather die upon the spot than go into the temple to save my life"

O my friends, it does not befit those who have the presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—to sink so low in their faith and confidence, as to cry out with the prophet's servant, "Alas, master! what shall we do?" or, with the disciples when in a storm, "We perish!" or, with the whole house of Israel, "Our our hope is lost!" or, with weeping Jeremiah, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord!" or, with Zion, "The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me!" 2 Kings 6:15; Mat. 8:25; Ezek. 37:11; Lam. 3:18; Isaiah 49:14. Oh, it is for a lamentation when God's dearest children shall manifest unbelief by a fainting, sinking, discouraged spirit in an evil day. But,

[10.] Tenthly and lastly, Will the Lord be specially present with his people in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers? **Then let the people of the Lord be very thankful for his presence with them in their greatest troubles,** etc., Exod. 33:13-16; 2 Tim. 4:22; Psalm 16:11. O Sirs! this divine presence is a great mercy. It is a peculiar mercy, it is a distinguishing mercy, it is a big-bellied mercy, it is a mercy that has many mercies in its womb. It is a mercy-greatening mercy; it greatens all the mercies we enjoy. It is a mercy-sweetening mercy; it sweetens health, strength, riches, honors, trade, relations, liberty, etc. It is a soul-mercy, a mercy that reaches the soul, that cheers the soul, that lifts up the soul, that quiets the soul, that satisfies the soul, and that will go to heaven with the soul, Eph. 1:3. And will you not be thankful for such a mercy? Will you be thankful for temporal mercies, and will you not be thankful for spiritual mercies? Will you be thankful for left-handed mercies, and will you not be thankful for right-handed mercies? Will you be thankful for the mercies of the footstool, and will you not be thankful for the mercies of the throne? Will you be thankful for the mercies of this lower world, and will you not be thankful for the mercies of the upper world? Psalm 103:1-4. To enjoy the presence of God when we most need it, is a mercy that deserves perpetual praises.

Oh, it is infinite mercy not to be left alone in a day of trouble. It is very uncomfortable to be left alone: "Woe to him who is alone," Eccles. 4:10-11. If a man falls, and is left alone, who shall help him up? If a man is in danger and alone, how miserable is his case! But this is the support and comfort of a Christian in all his difficulties, that he is never left alone; but his God is with him when he is at the lowest ebb, Heb. 13:5; Psalm 37:24, 31:3, 73:24; Exod. 33:2, 14-16. For God to afford us the presence of our friends in a day of trouble is a very great mercy; but what is it, then, to enjoy the presence of God in a day of trouble? What is

the presence of a friend, a favorite, in a day of distress, compared to the presence of a prince? yes, what is the presence of an angel, compared to the presence of God in an evil day? To enjoy the presence of God in an afflicted condition is a more transcendent mercy than to enjoy the presence of twelve legions of angels in an afflicted condition. *The divine presence is the greatest good in the world.* It is life eternal; it is the bosom of God, the gate of glory, the beginning of heaven, the suburbs of happiness; and therefore be much in blessing of God, in admiring of God, for his presence with you in a dark and trying day.

There is no gall, no wormwood, no affliction, no judgment, compared to that of God's departing from a people, Lam. 3:19-20: Jer. 6:8, "Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from you, lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited." When God departs, nothing follows but desolation upon desolation; desolation of persons, desolation of peace, of prosperity, of trade, and of all which is near and dear unto us: Hosea 9:12, "Though they bring up their children—yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left; yes, woe also to them when I depart from them." All terrible threatenings are summed up in this, "Woe unto them—when I depart from them." Surely every woe to them; he put a sureness upon this "woe to them when I depart from them." As if the Holy Spirit should say, "What, do I threaten this or the other evil? The great evil of all, the rise of all evils—is God's forsaking of them." Hell itself is nothing else but a separation from God's presence, with the dreadful consequences thereof. And were hell as full of tears as the sea is full of water—yet all would not be sufficient to bewail the loss of that beatifical vision!

How miserable was Cain when cast off by God! Gen. 4; and Saul, when the Lord departed from him! It was a most dreadful speech of Saul, "I am greatly distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me," 1 Sam. 28:15-16. [Those who are out of God's care, are under his curse.] When God left the Israelites, though for a little while, the Holy Spirit says they were naked, Exod. 32:25. How naked? Not for lack of raiment, or weapons of war—but for lack of God's presence and protection. When God departs from a people, that people lies naked; that is, they lie open for all storms, tempests, and dangers. Now if it is the greatest *evil* in the world to be shut out from the gracious presence of Christ—then it must be the greatest *mercy* in this world, to enjoy the gracious presence of God in our great troubles and desperate dangers. And therefore let all sincere Christians be much in thankfulness to the Lord, and in blessing and praising the Lord, for his special presence with them in their low and afflicted estate.

Oh, the light, the life, the love, the holiness, the peace, the grace, the comforts, the supports—which always attend the gracious presence of the Lord with his people in their deep distresses, etc. Therefore let the high praises of God forever be in their mouths, who enjoy this special presence of God.

The *46th Psalm* is called by some *Luther's psalm*; that is a psalm that Luther was accustomed to call to his friends to sing when any danger, trouble, or distress was near. When the clouds began to gather, "Come, says Luther, let us sing the 46th Psalm, and then let our enemies do their worst!" Observe the confidence and triumph of the church in the face of the greatest dangers, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. **The Lord Almighty is with us**; the God of Jacob is our fortress." Psalm 46:1-3, 7. Now mark, by the change of the earth and removing of the mountains, are often meant the greatest alterations and convulsions of states and polities, Hag. 2:22-23; Jer. 51:25; Rev. 6:14. Now, says the psalmist, all these dreadful turns, changes, shakings, and convulsions of states and kingdoms shall never trouble us, nor daunt us; they shall never make us fret, faint, or fear. Why, what is the ground? "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!" And also in verse 11, the same words are repeated again. "God is not gone, God is not withdrawn, God is not departed from us." Oh no! "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!" Therefore we are divinely fearless and divinely careless. Though hell and earth should combine against us—yet we will bear up, and be bold to believe that all shall go well with us; for God is in the midst of us, "The Lord Almighty is with us," even the Lord, who commands far greater armies than any enemy has. The God of Jacob is our fortress;" Heb., "Our high tower." God is a tower, so high, so strong, so inaccessible, so invincible, that all our enemies, yes, all the powers of darkness, can never hurt, reach, storm, or take; and therefore we who are sheltered in this high tower may well cast the gauntlet to our proudest, strongest, and subtlest enemies. And let thus much suffice for the **inferences**.

Ten Exhortations

The next use is a use of **exhortation**, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, as to keep the divine presence—as to keep the special, the singular presence of God, with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers. Now that this may stick in power upon your souls, consider seriously of these following **motives**:

[1.] First, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that the special presence of God with his people, puts the greatest imaginable honor, dignity, and glory upon them.** Isaiah 43:2, 4; Jer. 13:11; Ezek. 48:35. There are many titles of honor among men; but this, above all, is the truly honorable title—that we have God so near unto us. Deut. 4:7, "What nation is there so great, who has God so near unto them, as the Lord our God is to us?" While his presence was among them—how honorable, how renowned were they all the world over! But when he departed from them they became the scorn and contempt of all nations. It may be said of some men, they have large estates—but not the presence of God with them; they are highly honored and dignified in the world—but no presence of God with them; they have great trades and vast riches—but no presence of God with them; they are nobly related—but no presence of God with them; they have singular abilities and accomplishments—but no presence of God with them. The lack of the divine presence gives a stain, casts a blot upon all their grandeurs and worldly glory; and turns all their wine, be it ever so rich—into ink and blackness.

What a deal of honor and glory did the presence of God cast upon *Joseph* in prison, Gen. 39:19-20; and upon *Daniel* in the den; and upon the *three Hebrew children* in the fiery furnace; and upon *David*, when a persecuting Saul could cry out, "You are more righteous than I," 1 Sam. 24:17; and upon John, when a bloody Herod feared him and observed him, Mark 6:20; and upon *Paul*, when a tyrannical Felix trembled before him, Acts 24:25; as if Paul had been the judge, and Felix the prisoner at the bar.

Some write of the *crystal*, that whatever stone it touches, it puts a luster and loveliness upon it. The presence of God puts the greatest luster, beauty, glory, and loveliness—which can be put upon a person. Now because the witness of an adversary is a double testimony, let Balaam—who, as some write of a toad, had a pearl in his head, though his heart was vile, very vile, stark vile—

give in his evidence. "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel," Num. 24:5. He speaks both by way of interrogation and admiration: their tents are so lovely, and their tabernacles so lovely, that their grand enemy was affected and ravished with them. But whence is it that Israel is so formidable and dreadful in his eye? How does this come about—that he who came to fight against them thinks them beyond all comparison; more—that he himself admires their great glory and brave gallantry? Why, all is from the presence of their Lord-General with them: "The Lord their God is with them!" Num. 23:21.

It is the highest honor, renown, and dignity of a people to have God in the midst of them, to have God near unto them. Thus Moses sets out the honor and dignity of the Jews: "The LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised." Deuteronomy 26:18-19. When God reckons up the dignities of his people, this is the main, the top, of all: Psalm 87:5, "Indeed, of Zion it will be said—This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her." If you would keep your honor and dignity, keep the presence of God in the midst of you. When God is departed from Israel, then you may write *Ichabod* upon Israel; "The glory is departed from Israel," 1 Sam. 4:21-22. But,

[2.] Secondly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that nothing can make up the lack of this special presence of God.** It is not the presence of friends, of relations, of ministers, of ordinances, of outward comforts—which can make up the lack of God's presence. It is neither candlelight, nor torchlight, nor starlight, nor moonlight, which can make up the light of the sun. When the sun is set behind a thick cloud, all the world cannot make it day; and when the presence of God is withdrawn, nothing can make up that dismal loss. "You hid your face—and I was troubled," Psalm 30:6-7, that is, you suspended the actual influence and communication of your grace and favor. The Chaldee has it, "You hid your *Shechinah*, your divine presence—and I was all—amort, dead, stunned, confused." It was not David's crown, his kingdom, his riches, his dignities, his royal attendance, etc., which could make up the loss of the face of God; neither is it the presence of an angel that can make up the lack of the presence of God.

Exod. 33:2, "I will send an *angel* before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites." God here promises Moses that he would send an angel before them—but he adds that he himself would not go up in the midst of them. Yes—but such a guide, such a guardian, such a companion, such a captain-general would not satisfy Moses.

"Moses said unto God--If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here!" Exod. 33:15. Nothing would satisfy Moses, below the presence of God, because he knew that it would be better that they should never move a foot farther--as to go on without God's favorable presence. God promises that His *angel* will drive all their enemies out of the land. "Oh, but if Your Presence does not go with us--do not send us up from here!"

"Yes, but, I will bring the necks of all your proud, stout, strong, and subtle enemies under your feet." "Oh, but if Your Presence does not go with us--do not send us up from here!"

"Yes, but, I will bring you to a land flowing with milk and honey. I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth, and I will make you to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; and you shall drink the finest wine." "Oh, but if Your Presence does not go with us--do not send us up from here!"

"Yes, but, I will bring you to the paradise of the world, to a place of pleasure and delight, to Canaan, a type of heaven!" "Oh, but if Your Presence does not go with us--do not send us up from here! O Lord, if I might have my wish, my desire, my choice, I had infinitely rather to live in a barren, howling wilderness with Your Presence, than in Canaan without it! It is a mercy to have an angel to guard us, it is a mercy to have our enemies sprawling under our feet, it is a mercy to be brought into a pleasant land. Oh, but if Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here! Lord, nothing will please us, nothing will profit us, nothing will secure us, nothing will satisfy us--without your presence!

I have read of the Tyrians, that they bound their gods with chains, that they might have them in their greatest need--and not be conquered by their enemies. And among the rest, they chained and nailed their god Apollo to a post--that they might be sure to keep their idol, because they thought their safety was in it.

I am sure--that our safety, our comfort, our all--lies in the special Presence of God with us! Therefore let us, by faith and prayer--chain God to ourself! If we let Him go, a thousand worlds cannot make up His absence!

You may have heard of the heathens in Troy; they imagined that so long as that idol was kept safe, they were unconquerable; all the strength and power of Greece would never be able to prevail against them. Therefore the Grecians sought by all the means they could, to get this idol from them. O my friends, so long as you keep the Presence of God with you—I am sure you are unconquerable! But if God withdraws His special presence—the weakest enemy will be too hard for you; yes, wounded men will prevail over you! Jer. 37:10, "Even if you were to destroy the entire Babylonian army, leaving only a handful of wounded survivors, they would still stagger from their tents and burn this city to the ground!"

The burning bush, which was a type of the church, was not consumed while it burned with fire—because God was in the midst of it. Oh, do but keep God's special Presence with you—and nothing shall hurt you, nothing shall burn you! But if God's special Presence departs—nothing can secure you! Nothing can make up his withdrawing from you. But,

[3.] Thirdly, if you do not labor to live and conduct yourselves so that you may enjoy the favorable, special, and eminent presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—you have high reason to question whether you have ever really enjoyed this favorable, this special presence of God with you or not; for there are always four things to be found in him who has really tasted, and in good earnest experienced, the sweet, the life, the power, the virtue—which is in the favorable special presence of God—

(1.) Such a person sets the highest price and value imaginable upon it, he prizes it above all the honors, riches, dignities, delights, comforts, and contentments of this world, Psalm 4:6-7; yes, he prizes it above life itself: Psalm 63:3, "Your loving-kindness is better than life." The Hebrew is plural, *lives*. The loving-kindness of God, the presence of God in a wilderness, is better than lives, than many lives, than all lives with all their contentments. There is a greater excellency in the favor of God, in the presence of God—than in all lives put together. There have been many people that have been weary of their lives—but there never was any man who has been weary of the favor of God, of the presence of God, 1 Kings 19:4; Job 7:15; Jonah 4:8; Proverbs 33:14.

(2.) Such a person keeps up in his soul a humble fear of losing of it. The divine presence is a jewel more worth than all the world, and he who has experienced the sweetness of it had rather lose all he has in this world than lose the divine presence. I have read of a pious woman, that having born nine children, professed that she had rather endure all the pains of those nine travails at once, than endure the misery of the loss of God's presence.

(3.) Such a person keeps up in his soul a diligent care to maintain this presence; his head, his heart is still a-contriving how he may keep his God with him: Jer. 14:9, "Why should you be as a man astonished, as a mighty man who cannot save? yet you, O Lord, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name; leave us not." This person had rather that his dearest friends should leave him, that his nearest relations should leave him, yes, that all the world should leave him—than that his God should leave him. The daily, yes, the hourly language of the soul is, Lord, "leave me not; though all the world should leave me—yet don't you leave me!"

(4.) Such a person will do all he can, that all who are under his care and charge may partake of this special presence of God; he will do his utmost that children, spouse, relatives, may taste the

sweetness of the divine presence, John 1:40 to the end, and 4:28-43; Acts 10:24-36. When Samson had found honey in the carcass of the lion, he did not only eat himself—but he gave of the honey to his father and mother, and they did eat also, Judg. 14:8-9. Of all sweets, the presence of God is the greatest sweet; and whenever a poor soul comes to taste of this heavenly honey, he will do his best that all others, especially those who are near and dear to him, may taste of the same honey. But,

[4.] Fourthly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**the excellent properties or qualities of this favorable, this special presence of God with his people.** This I can but hint at, because I must hasten all I can to a close.

(1.) It is the BEST presence. Psalm 63:3. It is better than the presence of friends, of relations, of saints, of angels, etc.

(2.) It is the GREATEST presence. It is the presence of the great King, it is the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, it is the presence not only of a mighty but of an almighty God, 1 Kings 8:27; Rev. 17:14, and 19:16; Num. 24:4, 16; Ruth 1:20, 24.

(3.) It is the HAPPIEST presence. It is a presence that makes a man really happy, presently happy, totally happy, eminently happy, and eternally happy, Psalm 144:15; 1 Kings 10:8; Deut. 33:29; Proverbs 3:18. He can never be truly happy, who lacks this presence; he can never be truly miserable, who enjoys this presence. True happiness is too great a thing to be found in anything below this favorable, this special presence of God. He who enjoys this presence enjoys all; he who lacks this presence enjoys nothing at all; he who lacks this presence may write *nothing* upon his honors, riches, pleasures, dignities, offices, relations, friends, etc., Amos 6:13. All a man has, are but ciphers without a number, if he is not blessed with this divine presence. This divine presence was Jacob's "enough," yes, Jacob's "all." Gen. 33:11, "I have all." Esau had much, "I have much, my brother;" verse 9, "But Jacob had all." "He has all, who has him who is all in all." "All good is in the chief good," (Augustine.) Secure this divine presence, and you secure all, Col. 3:11.

(4.) It is the MOST DESIRABLE presence. Consult these scriptures. [Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1-2, 8, and 27:4; Gen. 8:20; Psalm 84.] Job 23:3, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat." Exod. 33:15, "If your presence does not go with us, carry us not up hence;" verse 16, "For wherein shall it be known here, that I and my people have found grace in your sight, is it not in that you go with us?" Cant. 3:1, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves, I sought him—but I found him not." The presence of bad men is never desirable; the presence of godly men is not always desirable, for there are cases wherein their presence may be a burden to us, as Job and others

have experienced, Jer. 9:1-2; Job 16:1-4, and 19:3-5. Job 16:2, "Miserable comforters are you all;" chapter 19:2, "How long will you vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?"

But the presence of the Lord is very desirable, most desirable, and always desirable, and the more any man has of this divine presence, the more his heart will be inflamed after more and more of it. A sound sincere Christian can never have enough power against sin, nor ever enough strength against temptation, nor ever enough weanedness from this world, nor ever enough ripeness for heaven, nor ever enough of the presence of the Lord. Enough of the divine presence he may have to quiet him, and cheer him, and encourage him—but while he is out of heaven he can never have enough of the divine presence to satisfy him, so as not to cry out, "Lord, more of your presence! oh, a little more of your presence!" Proverbs 30:15-16.

(5.) It is the most JOYFUL, REFRESHING, and DELIGHTFUL presence. Psalm 16:11; Acts 5:40-41, and 16:25. This Vincentius and many thousand martyrs and suffering Christians have experienced in all the ages of the world—but of this before, Isaiah 60:1-2; Psalm 46:7.

(6.) It is a SPECIAL and DISTINGUISHING presence. Exod. 33:16. This favorable special presence of God is a choice jewel that he hangs on no *breasts*, a bracelet that he puts upon no *arms*, a crown that he sets upon no *heads*—but such whom he loves with a special love, with an everlasting love. The *general* presence of God extends and reaches to all sinners and saints, angels and devils; to all, both in that upper and this lower world; but this *favorable special* presence of God is peculiar to those who are the purchase of Christ's blood, and the travail of his soul, Jer. 31:3; John 13:1; Psalm 139:7-10; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Isaiah 53:11; Ruth 1:4-18.

(7.) It is an INFLAMING presence.

[1.] Oh, how does it, inflame the heart to duty! Psalm 63:1-3.

[2.] How does it inflame the heart against sin! Job 31:4-7; Gen. 39:9-10; Romans 8:10.

[3.] Oh, how does it, inflame the heart to long for the majestic and glorious presence of God in heaven, Cant. 8:14; Luke 2:28-30; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 22:20.

[4.] How does it inflame their love to the Lord, his ways, his worship, his interest, his glory! Cant. 1:3-4, 2:3-6, and 8:1-3, 5-7.

[5.] It inflames against temptations, verse 10-11. It was this divine presence, which did steel and strengthen Basil, Luther, and a world of others, against the worst of temptations, Heb. 11.

[6.] It inflames the hearts of the saints into great freeness, readiness, and willingness to suffer many things, to suffer great

things, to suffer anything—for Christ, his gospel, his interest, etc. Oh, how did this divine presence make many martyrs hasten to the flames! etc.

(8.) It is a SOUL-QUIETING, a soul-silencing, and a soul-stilling presence. Psalm 3:5, 4:8; Cant. 2:3, 3:4-5. When friends can't quiet us, when relations can't quiet us, when ministers can't quiet us, when duties can't quiet us, when ordinances can't quiet us, when outward comforts can't quiet us—yet then this divine presence will quiet us. When dolls and rattles can't quiet the child—yet then the breasts can. Just so, here.

(9.) This divine presence is a SWEETENING presence.

(1.) It sweetens all duties and services, public and private, ordinary and extraordinary.

(2.) It sweetens all personal afflictions and trials.

(3.) It sweetens all our sufferings for righteousness' sake.

(4.) It sweetens all gospel ordinances, Exod. 20:24.

(5.) It sweetens all a man's outward mercies and blessings; it sweetens health, strength, riches, trade, etc.

(6.) It sweetens all changeable providences. Here providence smiles, and there it frowns; here it lifts up, and there it casts down; this providence is sweet, and that is bitter; this providence kills, and that providence makes alive. Oh—but this divine presence sweetens every providence!

(7.) It sweetens all other presences; it sweetens the presence of friends, it sweetens the presence of relations, it sweetens the presence of strangers, it sweetens all civil societies, it sweetens all pious societies.

(8.) It sweetens the thoughts of death, and the arrests of death; it turns the king of *terrors* into the king of *desires*, Job 14:5, 14, 30:23, and 17:13-14. How does Job court the worms, as if he were of a family with them, and near of kin to them! How does he look upon the grave as his bed, and makes no more to die than to go to bed! It was this divine presence that made the martyrs as willing to die as to dine. But,

[5.] Fifthly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that in great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, you will most need the favorable special presence of God with you.** We always stand in need of the divine presence—but never so much as when we are under great troubles and deep distresses. For,

(1.) In days of trouble and distress, men's affections are most apt to be greatly disordered, and their hearts discomposed, as you see in Job and Jonah, Job 3; Jonah 4.

(2.) Now their fears, doubts, and disputes are apt to rise highest. When the wind rises high, and the sea roars, men are most apt to be afraid, Jonah 2:2-7.

(3.) Now Satan commonly is busiest. Satan loves to fish in *troubled* waters. When the hand of God is heaviest upon us, then Satan will shoot his most deadly darts at us, Job 2:9; James 1:12. The sons of Jacob fell upon the Shechemites when they were sore, Gen. 34:25; and Amalek fell upon God's Israel and smote them, when they were weak, and feeble, and faint, and weary, Deut. 25:17-19. Just so, Satan falls foul upon Christ, when he was in the wilderness, and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, and was a-hungry, Mat. 4:1-11. As Satan has dealt with Christ, the head—so he still deals with the members.

(4.) Now unbelief is most turbulent, strong, and mighty in operation, as you may see in the spies, Num. 13:31-33, "But the other men who had explored the land with him answered, "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!" So they spread discouraging reports about the land among the Israelites: "The land we explored will swallow up any who go to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. We felt like grasshoppers next to them, and that's what we looked like to them!" Just so, 2 Kings 6:33, "This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Also, 2 Kings 7:1-2, 19-20. Just so, David, in Psalm 116:11, "I said in my haste, all men are liars." The prophets have all deceived me, and Samuel has deluded me, they have told me of a kingdom, a crown—but I shall never wear the one, nor possess the other: so 1 Sam. 27:1, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." Thus his *fear* is got above his *faith*, and his soul wherried about with unbelief—to the scandal of the weak, and the scorn of the wicked, besides his own particular disadvantage.

(5.) Now fainting-fits will be most strengthened, increased, and multiplied. Now fainting-fits, like Job's messengers, or like the rolling waves, will come thick one upon another, Proverbs 24:10; Job 4:5; Lam. 1:12-13.

(6.) Now conscience will be most startled and disquieted, Gen. 42:21, and 50:15; 1 Kings 17:18. Great troubles and deep distresses are many times like strong medicine, which stirs the humours and makes the patient sick, very sick, yes, heart-sick. Conscience commonly never reads the soul such sad and serious lectures, as when the rod lies heaviest upon the back.

By all which you see, what high cause the people of God have so to live and conduct themselves, as that they may find the gracious presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, and deepest distresses, for then they will certainly need most of the divine presence. But,

[6.] Sixthly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider— **this divine presence will make you divinely fearless in the midst of your greatest troubles and deepest distresses.** Psalm 23:4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil—for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me." Psalm 46:2, "We will not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." verse 3, "Though the waters thereof roar," etc. Why? "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early," verse 5; "The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." verse 7. Num. 14:9, "Neither fear the people, for they are bread for us, their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not." Deut. 7:21, "You shall not be affrighted at them, for the Lord your God is among you, a mighty God and dreadful." Heb. 13:5, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." verse 6, "I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

There is no such way to keep down all base slavish fears of men, as to keep up the presence of God in the midst of you. You will not fear the *power* of men, nor the *policy* of men, nor the *threats* of men, nor the *wrath* of men—if you do but enjoy this gracious, this special presence of God, which is under our present consideration. Men's fears are never so rampant as when God withdraws his presence from them, 1 Sam. 28:15, 20. But,

[7.] Seventhly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that there is in God a very great unwillingness to withdraw his presence from his people when they are in great troubles and deep distresses.** Ezek. 8:6, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing? Do you see the great sins the people of Israel are doing to drive me from my Temple?" Isaiah 1:2-4, 16, 18; Ezek. 18:31, and 33:11; Jer. 3:13-14. Of all sins, the sin of idolatry drives God farthest off from his sanctuary. When

God goes off from a people, he goes not off rashly, he goes not off suddenly—but he goes off gradually; he removes not at once—but by degrees; now a step, and then a step, as Lot did when he lingered in Sodom, Gen. 19:16. Lot was not more reluctant to depart out of Sodom, than God is loath to leave his people. [1 Sam, 4:4; Psalm 8:20; Isaiah 37:16.] He goes first to the threshold: Ezek. 9:3, "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was to the threshold of the house." Then over the threshold: 10:4, "Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house." Here is a second step. This is the second time of resting, before God departs. The Lord had his ordinary dwelling-place in the holy of holies. Now God's first remove was from the most holy place; his second remove was from the holy place; his third remove was higher towards heaven: verse 19, "And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight, then to the door of the east gate," or foremost gate, "of the Lord's house," to note God's total remove from his house. Then to the midst of the city: Ezek. 11:23, "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and then he stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." This is God's last stop in his departure, by which is signified that he was willing to make one trial more, to see if the people would, in this present danger, call him back by invitation and lively repentance.

God is greatly troubled when it comes to parting: Hosea 11:8,9 "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah and Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows! No, I will not punish you as much as my burning anger tells me to. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy." This is spoken *anthropomorphically* and not *properly*, because thoughts and repentance are not incident to God, "who is without all variableness, or shadow of change," James 1:17. The Lord seems here to be at a stand-still, or at strife with himself, about the destruction of this people. Howbeit God, in the affections of his mercy, yearning, and taking pity of his elect among them, spares to lay upon them the extremity of his wrath, and is ready to save them for his mercy's sake. Observe how fatherlike he melts and mourns over them, and how mercy interposes her four several "hows!" Here are four such heart-felt interrogations as the like are not to be found in the whole book of God, and not to be answered by any but God himself, as indeed he does to each particular in the following words: "My heart is torn within me;" that is the first answer. The second is, "My compassion overflows." The third is, "I will not carry out my fierce anger." The fourth is, "I will not destroy Ephraim." *And why?* First, "I am God and not a mere mortal;" secondly, "I am the Holy One living among you."

God is very unwilling to break up house, and to leave his people desolate. Now is God so unwilling to withdraw his presence; and shall not we do all what we can to retain him in the midst of us? When dear friends are unwilling to leave us, we are the more earnest in pressing them to stay and abide with us. God is

marvelously unwilling to go, and therefore let us, with the church, cry out, "Leave us not!" Jer. 14:9. But,

[8.] Eighthly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that troubles will be no troubles, distresses will be no distresses, dangers will be no dangers—if you can but secure the presence of God with you.** Mountains will be molehills, stabs at the heart will be but as scratches upon the hand—if the divine presence is with you. God's special presence will turn—storms into calms, winter nights into summer days, prisons into palaces, banishments into enlargements. The favorable presence of God will turn—sickness into health, weakness into strength, poverty into plenty, and death into life. It can never be *night* so long as the *sun* shines. No afflictions, no trials, can make it night with a Christian—so long as he enjoys the presence of God with his spirit, 2 Tim. 4:22. That courtier need not complain that this man slights him, and that the other neglects him—who enjoys the delightful presence of his prince. When Samson had the presence of God with him, he made nothing of carrying the gates of the city, with the posts and bars, to the top of a hill, Judges 16:3. Just so, while a Christian enjoys the singular presence of God with him, he will make nothing of this affliction and that affliction, of this trouble and that trouble, of this loss and that loss. This presence makes *heavy* afflictions light, and *long* afflictions short, and *bitter* afflictions sweet, 2 Cor. 4:16-17.

It was this presence that made the martyrs all the great and grievous things that they suffered for Christ's sake and the gospel's sake—to be but light, Heb. 11:33-39. A man in misery, without this gracious presence of God, is in a very hell on this side hell. God's gracious presence makes every condition to be a little heaven to the believing soul. There is nothing, there can be nothing—but heaven, where God is specially present. But,

[9.] Ninthly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that the worst of men cannot curse or harm you, while you keep the presence of God with you.** Num. 23:21, "The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." There could be no enchantment against them, for the Lord their God was with them, and the shout of a king was among them, that is, God reigns as a king among them. Hereby also is meant the faith, joy, boldness, courage, and confidence of God's people in their king. As when a king comes among the armies of his people, he is received with joyful shoutings and acclamations, and when he goes forth to battle with them, he goes accompanied with the sound of trumpets and shouts of the people, signs of their

joy and courage; so it fared with the Israelites, because of that special presence of God that was among them, which was evident by his protecting and defending of them: 1 Sam. 4:5, "And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." Here is a valorous shout of a powerful people, encouraging each other to the battle, and a victorious shout as having obtained the victory in the battle.

Just so, 2 Chron. 13:12, "And behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you, O children of Israel." Num. 23:23, "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel;" that is, there is none against Israel that shall be of force, or that shall take any effect to do the posterity of Jacob or Israel any hurt, any harm, any damage. But why? Because the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. The presence of God with his Israel blasts all Balaam's enchantments, and makes null and void all his divinations.

God is with his people to counsel them in all doubtful and difficult cases, and to defend them, and secure them against all their enemies and opposers. Balaam had a mind to curse the people of God, as his unwearied endeavors to that purpose do abundantly evidence, Num. 23:1, 13, 28-29, and 24:1; but the presence of God with his people prevented all his mischievous designs. Shimei curses David—but his curses could not hurt him, for God was with him, 2 Sam. 16:7, 9, 11-12. The people generally cursed Jeremiah, chapter 15:10, and 1:17-19; but all their curses could not harm him, for God was with him. The Jews in their prayers daily curse the Christian churches—but all their curses can't prejudice them, because God is in the midst of them, Exod. 20:24. And who will say that the reformed churches are one pin the worse for all the pope's excommunications and execrations?

The special presence of God with his people is a most sovereign antidote against all the curses and cursings of cursed men, and therefore whatever you part with—be sure that you don't part with your God; let him be but in the midst of you, and then no curses shall be prevalent against you.

This age abounds with such monsters, whose mouths are full of curses; but if every curse should stick a visible blister on the curser's tongue, as it does insensible ones on the curser's soul, their tongues would quickly be too big for their mouths, and they would soon grow weary of cursing the people of God, the things of God, the ways of God, the providences of God, and the faithful dispensers of the mysteries of God. But the best of it is, when they have done their worst, and spat out all their curses, "the curse causeless will not come," Proverbs 26:2, for the ever-blessed God is *in* his people, and *with* his people, and *among* his people, and "a wall of fire always *around* his people," Zech. 2:5, and therefore they are safe and secure enough when men and devils have done their worst. But,

[10.] Tenthly and lastly, to exhort all the people of God so to live and conduct themselves, so as to keep the divine presence—so as to keep the special, the singular presence of God with them in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, consider—**that the divine presence will make up the absence of all outward comforts.** This gracious presence will supply and fill up the place of a friend, a child, a father, a husband. Some of the rabbis write that manna had all sorts of tastes and all sorts of sweets in it. Be that as it may, I am sure that the favorable presence of God has all sorts of sweets in it, Psalm 4:6-7; Proverbs 4:23. It has the sweet of all ordinances in it, it has the sweet of all duties in it, it has the sweet of all church privileges in it, it has the sweet of all relations in it, it has the sweet of all your outward comforts in it; and therefore, above all keeping, keep the presence of God with you.

Many in their distresses and miseries are full of complaints. One cries out, he lacks a faithful friend; another cries out, he lacks a helpful family member; a third cries out that he lacks necessaries both for back and belly; a fourth cries out he lacks the means which others enjoy; but he who enjoys the gracious presence of God finds all these lacks made up to him—yes, he finds the divine presence to be infinitely better than the presence of all outward comforts. As Elkanah said to Hannah, "Am not I better than ten sons?" 1 Sam. 1:8, so assuredly the presence of the Lord is wonderfully better than all other things, to every soul that has tasted the sweetness of it.

You know that one sun is more glorious, delightful, useful, and comfortable than ten thousand stars; just so here. Seneca tells a courtier that had lost his son, that he had no cause to mourn, either for that or anything else, so long as his king was in safety, and he in favor with his king; he had all things in him, and he would be unthankful to his good fortune if he were not cheerful both in heart and look, so long as things stood so with him as they did.

How much more may we say to every sincere Christian who enjoys the gracious presence of God with him, let your needs and your crosses be ever so great, your afflictions ever so pressing, your necessities ever so biting—you have no just cause to be troubled or dejected, so long as you are in favor with God, and enjoy the presence of God. All mercies, all comforts, all contentments, all enjoyments—they meet and center in the gracious presence of God, as all lights meet in the sun, and as all waters meet in the sea; and therefore let not that soul mourn or complain of the lack of anything, who enjoys that gracious presence of God—which is better than every earthly thing. Thus much for the **motives.**

MEANS

But some may say, "O sir, **what MEANS should we use that we may enjoy the gracious presence of the Lord with us in our greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers?**" I answer,

1. First, There are some things that you must carefully SHUN and take heed of.

[1.] First, Take heed of high sinnings, take heed of scandalous sins. High sinnings do greatly dishonor God, wound conscience, reproach religion, stagger the weak, grieve the strong, open the mouths of the wicked, and provoke God to withdraw his gracious presence, Psalm 51:11-12; Exod. 32:8, and 33:3; Isaiah 63:10. Turn to these scriptures, and seriously ponder upon them. Great transgressions eclipse the favor of God as well as the honor of God. In great transgressions we turn our backs upon God, and God turns away his face from us. Gross sins will provoke God to withdraw his presence, both in respect of vigor and strength, as also in respect of peace and comfort. But,

[2.] Secondly, Take heed of impenitency. Next to our being preserved from sin, it is the greatest mercy in the world, when we have fallen by our transgressions, to make a quick and speedy return to God. When by your sins you have made work for repentance, for hell, or for the physician of souls—immediately make up the breach, take up the controversy between God and your souls, humble yourselves, judge yourselves, and speedily return to the Most High, Hosea 6:1; Exod. 32:9-15. Thus Peter did, and recovered the favorable presence of God immediately, Mat. 26:75; Mark 16:7.

But if men will commit sin and lie in it, if they will fall and have no mind to rise—God will certainly withdraw his favorable presence from them, as you see in David and Solomon, Psalm 51:11-12; 1 Kings 11:9; Josh. 7:1-5. This is further evident in that case of Achan, Josh. 7, "The Israelites they came to fight with the men of Ai, and fled before them, for the Lord was not with them." Why, what was the cause of God's withdrawing himself? See verse 11, "Israel has sinned." And verse 12, "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies—but turned their backs." Their sins having betrayed them into the hand of divine justice, and into their enemies' hands also; mark what follows, "Neither will I be with you any more, except you destroy the accursed thing from among you." If we will not stone our Achans, our sins, by the lively exercise of faith and repentance; if we will keep up our lusts

in despite of all who God does against us—we must never expect to retain the gracious presence of God with us. But,

[3.] Thirdly, Take heed either of neglecting gospel-worship, or of corrupting gospel-worship. *Omissions* will damn as well as *commissions*; and omissions will provoke God to withdraw his presence, as well as commissions. When people are careless in their attendance on gospel ordinances, no wonder if God withdraws his presence from them in their distresses, Cant. 5:2-3, 6, and 4:1-3. Cain went off from ordinances, and the Lord set a mark upon him, Gen. 4:15-16. Oh, the black and dismal marks of misery, which God has set upon many who have neglected gospel-worship; and for profit's sake, and for Diana's sake, are fallen roundly in with the worship of the world! 2 Tim. 4:10; Acts 19:24, 36.

O sirs, the great God stands upon nothing more in all the world than upon purity in his worship. There is nothing which does so provoke and exasperate God against a people, as corrupt worship. Corrupt worship sadly reflects upon the *name* of God, the *honor* of God, the *truth* of God, and the *wisdom* of God; and therefore his heart rises against such worship and worshipers, and he will certainly withdraw from them, and be a swift and terrible witness against them, as you may see by comparing these scriptures together. [Psalm 106:39-43; Psalm 78:58-64; 2 Chron. 7:19-22, and 32:16-21; Deut. 29:22-29.] Corrupt worship is contrary to the *unity* of God. Now deny his unity, and you deny his deity, "For the Lord is one, and his name is one," Zech. 14:9. It is contrary to the *sovereignty* of God, "He is the only ruler, the only potentate," 1 Tim. 6:15. It is contrary to the *all-sufficiency* of God. The heathen worshiped several gods, as thinking that several gods did bestow several blessings. They begged health of one God, wealth of another God, and victory of a third God, thus imagining to themselves several deities for several supplies. Their God was but a Jupiter, a partial helper, an auxiliary God—but "our God is Jehovah," who is abundantly able to supply all our needs, Eph. 3:20.

Now, if either we neglect his true instituted worship, or fall in with a false worship, with a devised worship, with a human worship, with a worldly worship—God will certainly withdraw his gracious presence from us. Will-worship accuses and charges God with weakness and folly—as if God were not *careful* enough, nor *faithful* enough, nor *mindful* enough, nor *wise* enough—to order, direct, and guide his people in the matters of his worship—but must be indebted to the wisdom, prudence, and care of man—of vain man, of sinful man, of vile and unworthy man, of weak and foolish man—to complete, perfect, and make up something that was lacking in his worship! Heb. 3:4-6; John 4:23-24. Now assuredly God will never keep house with those who give in such severe accusations and charges against him. But,

[4.] Fourthly, Take heed of a willing, willful, and presumptuous sinning against divine commands and divine warnings. The disobedient child is turned out of doors; the

disobedient servant shall have none of his master's smiles, the disobedient wife has little of her husband's company. A willing, wilful, presumptuous running cross to divine commands speaks out much pride, atheism, hardness, blindness, carnal security, and contempt of the great God. It speaks out the greatest insincerity, stoutness, and stubbornness that is imaginable; and therefore no wonder if God turns his back upon such, and if he disdains to be in the midst of such.

Numbers 14:42, 43 "Do not go into the land now. You will only be crushed by your enemies because the Lord is not with you. When you face the Amalekites and Canaanites in battle, you will be slaughtered. *The Lord will abandon you because you have abandoned the Lord.*" See Deut. 1:42-46. But they presumed to go up to the hill-top, though they had not the presence of God with them, nor the signs of his grace and favor with them, nor the company of Moses with them; but mark, they paid dearly for their presumption. Verse 45, "Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah."

When men are without God's presence, they are outside of God's precincts, and so out of his protection. To act or run cross to God's express command, though under pretense of revelation from God, is as much as a man's life is worth, as you may see in that sad story, 1 Kings 13:24. We frequently deny our presence unto disobedient people, and so does God his. Disobedience to divine commands shuts the door against the divine presence, and will not allow God to come in to support us, comfort us, or support us, under our greatest troubles and deepest distresses. But,

[5.] Fifthly, Take heed of carnal confidence, of resting upon an arm of flesh. Psalm 30:6, "And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved;" that is, when I was prosperously settled in the kingdom, I began to conclude within myself that now there was an end of all my troubles, I would now live all my days in a prosperous estate. [Adam in paradise was overcome, when Job on the ash-heap was a conqueror.] David having taken the strong fort of Zion, and having vanquished his enemies round about, and all the tribes having submitted themselves to him, and having built a beautiful palace, and being quietly settled in his throne, he began to be puffed up with carnal confidence. Oh the hazard of honor! Oh the damage of dignity! how soon are we broken upon the soft pillow of ease! Flies settle upon the sweetest perfumes when cold; and so does sin on the best hearts, when they are dissolved and dispirited by prosperity. Oh how apt are the holiest of men to be proud and secure, and promise themselves more than ever God promised them—namely, immunity from the cross.

David thought that his kingdom and all prosperity was tied unto him with adamant cords; he sitting quietly at Jerusalem, and free from fear of all his enemies, 2 Sam. 11:1; but God quickly confutes his carnal confidence by making him know that he could as easily blast the strongest oak as he could trample the smallest worm under his feet. Verse 7, "You hid your face—and I was

troubled." God will quickly suspend his favor and withdraw his presence when his children begin to be proud and carnally confident. Look! as at the eclipse of the sun—the whole frame of nature droops; so when God hides his face, when he withdraws his presence—the best of saints cannot but droop and hang down their heads. Just so, Jer. 17:5, "Cursed be the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord." Verse 6, "For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes." But,

[6.] Sixthly, Take heed of barrenness and unfruitfulness under gospel ordinances. Turn to these scriptures, Isaiah 5:1-8; Mat. 31:34-42; 2 Chron. 32:16, to the end. Of all spiritual judgments, barrenness is the greatest; and when men are given up to this judgment, God withdraws; he has no pleasure to dwell in a barren soil. What are barren *grounds* and barren *wombs*, compared to barren *hearts*? He who remains wholly barren under gospel ordinances, may well question his marriage-union with Christ, Ezek. 47:11; Mat. 13:19; Hosea 9:14; John 15:3; Heb. 2:6-8; Jude 12: for, Romans 7:4, We are said to be "married to Christ, that we may bring forth fruit to God." There is a double end of marriage—namely, *cohabitation* and *propagation*; and therefore there cannot be a greater and clearer evidence that you are not yet taken into a married union with Christ, than a total barrenness under gospel enjoyments. Christ's spouse is fruitful: Cant. 1:16, "Our bed is verdant."

Christ has no further delight in his people, nor will he further grace his people with his special presence, than they make conscience of weeping over their barrenness, and of bringing forth fruit to him, Cant. 7:11-13. "Now my husband will love me, now he will be joined to me, now I have born him this son also," Gen. 29:34, said Leah. Just so, may the fruit-bearing soul reason it out with Christ: Now I know dear Jesus will *love* me, now I know he will *delight* in me, now I know he will *dwell* with me, now I know he will *honor* me with his presence—for now I bring forth fruit unto him. Barrenness under the means of grace drives God from us, and the gospel from us, and communion, and peace, and spiritual prosperity from us.

Ursinus observes, that the sins and barrenness of the Protestants under the gospel in king Edward's days, brought in the persecution in queen Mary's days. He tells us, that those who fled out of England in queen Mary's days acknowledged that that calamity befell them for their great unprofitableness under the means of grace in king Edward's days. Ah, England! England! I look upon nothing to be so ominous to you as the barrenness of the professors of the day! No wonder if God leaves his house, when the trees that are planted in it are all barren. The nutmeg-tree makes barren all the ground about it; so does the *spice of worldly love*, make the hearts of Christians barren under the means of grace. But I must hasten.

[7.] Seventhly, Take heed of pride and haughtiness of spirit. Hosea 5:5, 6 "Israel's *arrogance* testifies against them; the

Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them. When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them." Pride is the great *master-scar* of the soul; it will bud and blossom, it cannot be hidden. Pride is the *leprosy* of the soul, which breaks forth in the very forehead, and so testifies to his face, Ezek. 7:10; Isaiah 3:16-25. Some have called Rome, *Epitomen universi, An epitome of the whole world*. Just so, it may be said of pride, that it is the sum of all vileness, a sea of sin, a complicated sin, a mother sin, a breeding sin, a sin which has all sorts of sin in the womb of it. Consult these scriptures. [Hab. 1:16; Isaiah 48:9, and 26:12; Hab.2:5, etc.] "I hate pride and arrogance!" Proverbs 8:13.

Aristotle, speaking of justice, says, That in *justice* all virtues are couched, summarily. Just so, it may be truly said of *pride*—that in it all vices are as it were in a bundle wrapped up together! Therefore it is no wonder, if God withdraws his presence from proud people, "He has withdrawn himself from them"—Heb., "Has snatched away himself;" he has thrown himself out of their company, as Peter threw himself out from the crude soldiers into a by-corner to weep bitterly, Mark 14:72. God will have nothing to do with proud people, he will never dwell with them, he will never keep communion with them. He who dwells in the highest heavens will never dwell in a haughty heart. The proud he knows afar off," Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 138:6. He won't come near such loathsome lepers; he stands off from such as are odious and abominable; he cannot abide the sight of them, yes, his very heart rises against them! Proverbs 15:25. "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished!" Proverbs 16:5. James 4:6, "God resists the proud," that is, "He sets himself in battle array against him," as the Greek emphatically signifies. Above all sorts of sinners, God sets himself against proud people, as invaders of his territories and foragers or plunderers of his chief treasures. God defies such as deify themselves. God will arm himself against them, he will never give his gracious presence to them; and therefore as ever you would enjoy the divine presence, arm yourself against pride, watch against pride, and pray hard against pride. But,

[8.] Eighthly, Take heed of a slothful, lazy, trifling spirit in the things of God. Cant. 5:2, 3 "I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night." "I have taken off my robe—must I put it on again? I have washed my feet—must I soil them again?" Christ's head is drenched with dew; that is, Christ came to his spouse full of the dew of spiritual and heavenly blessings. Christ always brings spiritual and heavenly blessings in his hand, Eph. 1:3-4; Rev. 22:12. Christ never visits his people empty handed. He is no beggarly or niggardly guest. When he comes, he brings everything that heart can *wish*, or *need*, *require*. And now stand and wonder at the silly excuse that the spouse makes for herself: verse 3, "Do not trouble—for I am in bed; my clothes are off, my feet are washed, and I am composed to a settled rest!" "But are you so indeed?" might Christ have replied. "Is this your

kindness to your friend? 2 Sam. 16:17. Is this the part and posture of a vigilant Christian? Would it not have been much better for you to be dressed and ready, your lamp burning, and you waiting for your Lord's return? Is it so great a trouble? Is it such a mighty business for you to rise out of your bed, to put on your clothes, and to let in such a guest, as comes not to take anything from you—but to enrich you with the best and noblest of favors?"

Now mark how severely Christ punishes his spouse's sluggishness, laziness, slothfulness, and delays to entertain him when he knocked: verse 6, "I opened for my lover, but *my lover had left; he was gone*. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer." Or *He was gone! he was gone!* a most passionate complaint for his departure; or my best-beloved was departed, he was gone away! By the iteration or doubling of this sentence, wherein the spouse complains of the departure of her bridegroom, is signified her great trouble, her hearty sorrow, her inexpressible grief—which lay as a heavy load upon her spirit; because, by her unworthy usage of him, she had foolishly caused him to withdraw his presence from her.

Spiritual desertions are of three sorts:

(1.) *Cautional*, for preventing of sin, as Paul's seems to be, 1 Cor. 1:2, 8-9;

(2.) *Probational*, for trial and exercise of grace;

(3.) *Penal*, for chastisement of spiritual sloth and sluggishness, as here in the spouse. Now this last is far the saddest and heaviest; and therefore as ever you would enjoy the gracious presence of the Lord, take heed of a lazy, slothful, sluggish spirit in the things of God, in the concernments of your souls. That man must needs be miserable, who is lazy and slothful—and had rather go *sleeping to hell* than *sweating to heaven!* But,

[9.] Ninthly, Take heed of a covetous worldly spirit under the smarting rod, under the severe rebukes of God. Isaiah 57:17, "I was enraged by his sinful *greed*; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways." Covetousness or greed, was the common sin of the Jews. This disease had infected all sorts and ranks of men; this leprosy did spread itself over princes, prophets, and people, as you may see in comparing these scriptures. [Isaiah 56:11; Jer. 6:13, and 8:10.] "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." 1 Timothy 6:8-10

Now "covetousness being the root of all evil," as the apostle speaks, and the darling sin of our nation—God is so provoked by it that he first smites, and then hides himself, as one who in

displeasure, having left one to the evil and harsh usage of some other, withdraws himself out of the way, and having shut himself up in his closet, will not be seen or spoken with. A worldly man makes the world his God. Covetousness is explicit idolatry: Col. 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Now though it is true, that whatever a man loves most and best, that is his god—be it his belly or his back—yet, in a special manner, covetousness is idolatry—as no other sin is, Phil. 3:19; Isaiah 3:16-25.

Three things especially, make a god:

First, our **judgment**, when we esteem it in our serious thoughts to be our chief good, and that in which we place our happiness. Now the covetous man looks upon the riches of the world as his heaven, his happiness, his great all. Pope Sylvester placed so much happiness in riches, that, to enjoy the popedom for seven years, he sold his soul to the devil. The people of Constantinople placed so much of their happiness in riches, and were so excessively covetous, that they were buying and selling in their shops, even three days after the Turks were within the walls of the city, and that was the reason that the streets run down with the blood of them, their wives, and children.

Secondly, our **confidence**. That is an homage which makes a god, when we place our trust in anything, make it our rock, our fortress, our all-sufficient good. This the covetous man does, "He says to the wedge of gold, you are my confidence," Job 21:34. The rich man's heart dances about his golden calf, saying to his wedge of gold, "you are my confidence!" And yet his wedge of gold shall prove but as Achan's wedge, a wedge to cleave his soul in sunder, and, as that Babylonish garment, to be his shroud, Josh. 7:21 to end. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city," Proverbs 10:15; 1 Tim. 6:27. Covetous people do really think themselves simply the better and the safer for their hoards and heaps of riches; but they may one day find themselves greatly mistaken.

Famous is that story of *Croesus* among the heathens. He was a rich king, who tumbled up and down in his gold and silver; and Solon, that wise man of Greece, coming into his country, he desired to speak with him, and after Solon had seen and viewed all his wealth and glory, *Croesus* asked him whom he thought to be the happiest man in the world, imagining that Solon would have said *Croesus*. But Solon answered, "I think *Tellus* was the most happy man." "*Tellus!*" says *Croesus*; "why *Tellus*?" "Because," said Solon, "though he was poor—yet he was a godly man, and content with that which he had; and having brought up his child honestly and piously, he died honorably."

"Well, then," said *Croesus*—"who do you think the *second* most happy man in the world?" "I think," said he, "those two brothers who carried their mother to the temple." Whereupon, said *Croesus*, "what think you of me?" "I think," says he, "you are a

very rich man; but a man may be happy though he be poor, and a man may be unhappy though he be rich, for he may lose all his riches before he dies; and therefore, I think none truly happy but he who lives well and dies well." Whereupon that wise man Solon was dismissed. But afterward this Croesus, making war against Cyrus, he was conquered by Cyrus; and being taken captive, he was laid upon a pile of wood to be burned to death, then lying on the pile of wood he cried out and said, "O Solon! Solon! Solon!" Cyrus inquiring what he meant, he answered, "This Solon was a wise man of Greece, who told me that happiness did not consist in riches, for they might all be lost, and a rich man might die miserable; whose words, said he, I then neglected—but now I find true; and therefore now I cry out, O Solon, Solon, Solon!"

Let us now tell the covetous man, the worldly man, that his happiness lies not in riches, though he looks upon his riches as his strong city; he won't mind us, he won't regard. Oh but there is a time a-coming wherein the worldling will cry out, "O Solon, Solon, Solon!"

Thirdly, Our service, Mat. 6:24. That is an homage, which makes a god. When we devote all our pains, labor, and service to it—be it this or that—that makes a god. Now the covetous man, his *heart* is most upon the world, his *thoughts* are most upon the world, his *affections* are most upon the world, and his *discourse* is most about the world. He who has his mind taken up with the world, and chiefly delighted with the world's music, he has also his tongue tuned to the same key, and takes his joy and comfort in speaking of nothing else but the world and worldly things. If the world is in the heart—it will break out at the lips. A worldly-minded man speaks of nothing but worldly things. "They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world," John 4:5. The water rises not above the fountain. Out of the warehouse the shop is furnished.

The love of this world makes men forget God, neglect Christ, slight ordinances, refuse heaven, despise holiness, and oils the tongue for worldly discourses, Mat. 19:21-22. Ah the time, the thoughts, the strength, the efforts, the words—which are spent upon the world, and the things of the world, while sinners' souls lie a-bleeding, and eternity is hastening on upon them!

I have read of a greedy banker, who was always best when he was most in talking of money and the world. Being near his death, he was much pressed to make his will. Finally he dictates:

First, I bequeath **my own soul** to the devil—for being so greedy of the muck of this world!

Secondly, I bequeath **my wife's soul** to the devil—for persuading me to this worldly course of life.

Thirdly, I bequeath my **pastor's soul** to the devil—because he did not show me the danger I lived in, nor reprove me for it.

Oh, the danger of making the world our god, when we come to die and to make up our accounts with God! Now when men make the world their god, and set up their riches, pleasures, and profits in the place of God, no wonder if God withdraws his presence from them; and therefore, as ever you would retain the gracious presence of God with you, take heed of a covetous spirit, a worldly spirit. "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." 1 Timothy 6:9.

[10.] Tenthly and lastly, As ever you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—take heed of a petulant, willful, and inflexible spirit under the rod. When the child is willful under the rod, the father withdraws; so here, Isaiah 57:17, "I was angry and punished these greedy people. I withdrew myself from them, but they went right on sinning." Isaiah 47:6. Though I manifested my displeasure by giving them up to their enemies, and by laying them under the tokens of my anger, they persisted in their own willful, crooked, and rebellious courses, refusing to repent and turn to the Most High; and therefore God changes his countenance, hides his face, and withdraws his presence from them: Deut. 32:20, "I will hide my face from them—for they are a perverse generation." Hebrew, *A generation of perversenesses.*

When the sick man is froward, friends withdraw and leave him alone: Psalm 18:26, "With the froward you will show yourself froward." God will meet with froward people in their own way, and make them reap the fruits of their own doings. God will walk cross and contrary to the froward, opposing and crossing them in all they do. God has no delight to grace froward people with his presence. When men begin to be froward under a divine hand, God commonly hides his face, and turns his back upon them. Men filled with impatience are no fit company for the God of all patience. Men who are peevish and petulant under the rod, will always see a cloud upon the face of God.

Thus you see that there are ten things that you must carefully take heed of—if you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, Romans 15:5; Proverbs 11:20. But,

2. Secondly, As there are many things to be avoided, **just so, there are several things to be put in PRACTICE, as you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you, in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers.** Let me glance at a few—

[1.] First, Be sure that you are brought under the bond of the covenant. This gracious special presence of God with his people, under their greatest troubles, and deepest distresses—is peculiar to those who are in covenant with God. [Ezek. 20:37; Psalm 25:14, and 50:5; Jer. 32:40-41; Gen. 6:8, 18, 19:20-26

and 39:20-22; Jer. 1:17-19, and 37:15, seq.; Dan. 3:23-25, and 6:22-23.] *Noah* was in covenant with God—and God was with him, providing an ark for him, and preserving of him from drowning in the midst of drowning. *Lot* was in covenant with God—and God was with him, and secures him in Zoar, when he rained hell out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. *Joseph* was in covenant with God—and God was with Joseph in prison. *Jeremiah* was in covenant with God—and God kept him company in the dungeon. The *three Hebrew children*, or rather champions, were in covenant with God—and God was specially present with them in the fiery furnace. *Daniel* was in covenant with God—and God was wonderfully with him in the lions' den. *Job* was in covenant with God—and God was with him in six troubles, and in seven, Job 3:18-19. *David* was in covenant with God—and God was with him in the valley of the shadow of death, Psalm 89:33-34, and 23:4.

Do not rest your salvation—in a name to live, nor in a form of godliness, nor in common convictions, nor in an outward reformation. Do not rest anything below a covenant-relationship with God, if you would enjoy the precious presence of the Lord with you in your greatest troubles, and deepest distresses, Deut. 26:17-19. If you choose him for your God—you shall then assuredly find him to be your God. If he is the God of our love and fear—he will be the God of our comfort and safety. If God is your God in covenant—then in distress the cities of refuge are open to you. He will stick close to you, he will never leave you nor forsake you, Heb. 13:5-7; you have a Father to go to, a God to flee to, a God who will take care of you: "Come my people, enter into your chambers, and shut your doors about you, hide yourself, as it were for a little moment, until the indignation is over and passed." Here are chambers, with drawing-rooms provided, not open chambers—but with doors, and doors shut round about, intimating that guard of protection, which the people of God shall find from him, even in a common inundation. But,

[2.] Secondly, If you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you, in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—then look to the practical part of holiness, keep up the power of godliness in your hearts and lives. 2 Chron. 15:2; John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Verse 23, "'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" He who frames his heart and life according to Christ's *rule*—shall be sure of Christ's *presence*.

Ezekiel was a man who kept up the power of holiness and godliness in his heart and life. [This is evident throughout the whole book of the prophet Ezekiel. See 2:4, 7-12.] And oh! the glorious visions, and deep mysteries, and rare discoveries of God, and of his presence, and of the great things which would be brought about in the latter days, which were revealed to him!

Daniel kept up the power of holiness and godliness in his heart and life; and oh, what secrets and mysteries did God reveal to him! Many of those great and glorious things, which concern the destruction of the four last monarchies, and the growth, increase, exaltation, flourishing, durable, invincible and unconquerable estate of his own kingdom, was discovered to him.

Paul was a person who kept up the power of holiness and godliness in his heart and life; and oh, what a mighty presence of God had he with him—in all his *doing, suffering, and witnessing* work! And oh, what glorious revelations and discoveries of God had he, when he was caught up into the third heaven, into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, or wordless words, such as words were too weak to utter, such "as was not possible for man to utter," and that either because they transcended man's capacity in this life, or else because the apostle was forbid to utter them, they being revealed to him not for the public use of the church—but only for his particular encouragement, that he might be the better able to encounter with all hardships, difficulties, dangers, and deaths which did or might attend him in his ministerial work, 2 Cor. 1:7-10. Some of the ancients are of opinion that he saw God's essence, for, say they, other things in heaven might have been uttered—but the essence of God is so great and so glorious a thing that no man or angel can utter it. But here I must crave leave to enter my dissent from these learned men, for the scripture is express in this, "that no man has thus ever seen the Lord at any time, and that no man can thus see the Lord, and live," John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12; Exod. 33:20-23.

And as great a favorite of Heaven as Moses was—yet he could only see the back parts of God, he could only behold some lower representations of God. Some say that he heard the heavenly singing of angels and blessed spirits, which was so sweet, so excellent and glorious, that no mortal man was able to utter it; and this of the two interpretations, is most probable. But no man is bound to make this opinion an article of his faith. This, I think, we may safely conclude, that in this rapture, besides the contemplation of celestial mysteries, he felt such unspeakable delight and pleasure, that was either like to that, or exceeded that, which Adam took in the terrestrial paradise. Doubtless the apostle did see and hear such excellent things as was impossible for the tongue of any mortal man to express or utter.

John was a man who kept up in his heart and life the power of holiness and godliness; and Christ reveals to him the general estate of his church and all that would befall his people, and that from John's time unto his second coming. Christ gives John a true representation of all the troubles, trials, changes, mercies, and glories—which in all times and in all ages and places, would attend his church—until Christ came in all his glory. About sixty years after Christ's ascension, [It is the general opinion of the learned that this Book of the Revelation was penned about the latter end of the reign of Domitian the emperor, which was about sixty years after Christ's ascension.] Christ comes to John, and opens his

heart, and unbosoms his soul, and makes known to him all that care, that love, that tenderness, that kindness, and that sweetness, that he would exercise towards his church from that very time to the end of the world. Christ tells John, that though he had been absent, and seemingly silent for about sixty years, that yet he was not so taken up with the delights, contentments, and glory of heaven—that he did not care what became of his church on earth. Oh no! and therefore he opens his choicest secrets, and makes known the most hidden and glorious mysteries to John that ever were made known to any man.

As there was none who had so much of the *heart* of Christ as John—so there was none had so much of the *ear* of Christ as John. Christ singles out his servant John from all the men in the world, and makes known to him all the happy providences and all the sad occurrences which were to come upon the followers of the Lamb, so that they might know what to *prepare* for, and what to *pray* for, and what to *wait* for. Also he declares to John all that wrath and vengeance, all that desolation and destruction, which should come upon the false prophet and the beast, and upon all who wandered after them, and who were worshipers of them, and who had received their marks either in their foreheads or in their hands.

Thus you see that they which keep up the power of holiness in their hearts and lives—they shall be sure to enjoy the choicest presence of God, and the clearest, fullest, and sweetest discoveries of God, and of these great things that concern the spiritual and eternal good of their souls. Nothing *wins* upon God like holiness, nothing *delights* God like holiness, nothing *engages* the presence of God like holiness, Psalm 50:23. He shows his salvation to him who orders his life aright. He who puts every piece of his life in the right order, he shall see and know that he shall be saved. He who walks accurately and exactly, who walks as in a careful frame, treading gingerly, stepping warily—he shall have a prospect of heaven here—and a full fruition of heaven hereafter, "You meet him who rejoices, and works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways," Isaiah 64:5. He who works righteousness and walks in righteousness, shall be sure to meet with God, and to enjoy the precious presence of God in his greatest troubles and deepest distresses. But,

[3.] Thirdly, If you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers—then keep close to instituted worship, keep close to gospel ordinances, keep close to your gospel church. Exod. 20:24, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto you and bless you." Isaiah 64:5; Rev. 2:1; Cant. 7:5; Ezek. 48:35. Where God fixes his solemn worship for the memorial and honor of his name, there he will vouchsafe his gracious presence: Mat. 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The promise of God's gracious assistance, presence, and acceptance is annexed to his church, whether it be great or small, numerous or few: Mat. 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always," according to my godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit. Lo, I am

with you, to own you! Lo, I am with you, to counsel and direct you! Lo, I am with you, to cheer and comfort you! Lo, I am with you, to assist and strengthen you! Lo, I am with you, to shelter you and protect you! Lo, I am with you, to do all your works in you and for you! Lo, I am with you, to strengthen your graces and to weaken your sins! Lo, I am with you, to scatter your fears and answer your doubts! Lo, I am with you, to better your hearts and to mend your lives! Lo, I am with you, to bless you and crown you with immortality and glory! And what can the soul desire more?

Such as have low thoughts of gospel ordinances, such as slight gospel ordinances, such as neglect gospel ordinances, such as vilify gospel ordinances, such as decry gospel ordinances, such as oppose gospel ordinances—such may talk of the presence of Christ, and such may boast of the presence of Christ—but all such are outside of the way of enjoying the presence of Christ. Christ is only to be met with in his own worship, and in his own ways. Ah, how many in these days are there, who are like to old Barzillai, who had lost his taste and hearing, and so cared not for David's feasts and music! 2 Sam. 19:35. How many are there that formerly were very zealous for ordinances—but now are as zealous against them! How many formerly have made many great, hard, and dangerous ventures to enjoy gospel ordinances, who now won't venture a broken shin for an ordinance, no, nor stir out of doors to enjoy an ordinance, etc.! How many in our days, upon neglecting and despising gospel ordinances, have grown from evil to be very evil, and from very evil to be stark evil. He shall be an Apollo to me, who can show me one man in the world that ever grew better or holier by neglecting or slighting gospel ordinances.

Many come to the ordinances, too, like the Egyptian dog, which laps a little as he runs by the side of Nylus—but stays not to drink. How many in this great city run every Sabbath to hear this man and that; and here they lap a little and there a little—but never stay to drink—never fix in this congregation or that, this way or that. These people are neither wise, serious, lovely, nor lively in the ways of God. I think they are judicially blinded and hardened, who are indifferent whether they enjoy ordinances or not, or who can part with ordinances with dry eyes. Surely the infant is very sick, who cries not for the breast, Zeph. 3:18. As ever you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in all your troubles and distresses, make conscience of sticking close to gospel ordinances. But,

[4.] Fourthly, If you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, then, when you are not in troubles, distresses, dangers, etc., be sure you make much conscience of five things:

(1.) Of prizing his presence above all other things. So Moses did, Exod. 33:13-17; so Augustine would willingly go through hell to Christ; and Luther had rather be in hell with Christ than in heaven without him; and Bernard had rather have Christ in a chimney corner than be in heaven without him.

(2.) Of improving this gracious presence against sin, the world, the flesh, oppositions and temptations, etc.

(3.) Of walking suitable to this gracious presence.

(4.) Of lamenting and mourning over those who lack this gracious presence.

(5.) Of holding any secret correspondence with the professed and known enemies of Christ. Princes will never vouchsafe their favorable presence to such subjects as hold any secret correspondence with their professed and known enemies, either at home or abroad; so here. But,

[5.] Fifthly, If you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, then, in all your troubles and distresses, etc., maintain uprightness and integrity of spirit with God. Psalm 5:12: 2 Chron. 16:9, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards him."

Psalm 84:11, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will be withhold from those who walk uprightly." This is the largest promise we find in the whole book of God, The creature stands in need of two things, provision and protection; for the first, the Lord is a sun, as full of goodness as the sun is of light. He is a **sun**, in that he does enlighten and enliven his church, whereas all the world besides lie under darkness and the shadow of death; and in that he does cheer, and warm, and comfort the hearts of his people by his presence and lightsome countenance, and is the fountain from whence all external, internal, and eternal blessings are derived to them. For the second, a **shield**, Psalm 18:2. Among all inanimate creatures the sun is the most excellent, and among all artificial creatures a shield is chief, and was of greatest use in those days. The sun notes all manner of excellency and prosperity, and the shield notes all manner of protection whatever, Isaiah 62:20; Psalm 3:4. Under the name of "grace," all spiritual good things are to be understood; and under the name of "glory," all eternal good things are to be understood; and under that phrase of "No good thing will he withhold," all temporal good things are to be understood, so far as they make for his glory, and his people's real good. Now this choice, this sweet, this full, this large promise, is made over only to the upright, and therefore, as you would have any share in it, maintain your uprightness!

Psalm 11:7, "His *countenance* does behold the upright;" Heb., His *faces*. Every gracious discovery of God to the upright is his face. God will, in all manner of ways, make gracious discoveries of his love and delight to upright ones. No father can so much delight to behold the countenance of his child, as God delights to behold the countenance of the upright.

Psalm 112:4, "Unto the upright there arises *light* in darkness." Light commonly signifies joy, comfort, peace, help, deliverance,

Job 30:26; Esther 8:16; 2 Cor. 6:10. The upright man shall have joy in tribulation, plenty in poverty, liberty in bonds, life in death—as the martyrs have frequently and gloriously experienced. Sometimes God turns the upright man's adversity into prosperity, his sickness into health, his weakness into strength, his night into day, his storms into calms, his long winter nights into pleasant summer days. Sometimes God hides his upright ones in the hollow of his hand, in his pavilion, in his presence-chamber, Isaiah 26:9, 20; Mal. 3:17. When his judgments are abroad in the earth he takes special care of his jewels, and many times, when the upright are in darkness and in great distress, God cheers their hearts with the consolations of his Spirit and the light of his countenance, Psalm 94:19, and 71:20-21. By all which it is most evident that "Unto the upright there arises light in darkness."

O sirs, do but maintain your uprightness in all your troubles and distresses, and then you will be sure of the gracious presence of God with you in all your troubles and distresses. God values an upright Job upon a ash-heap before a deceitful Jehu upon his royal throne, Job 1:8, and 2:3, 7-9; he sets a higher price upon an upright Lazarus in rags than upon a rich Dives in his purple robes, Luke 16. And therefore when an upright man is in troubles and distresses, God will be sure to keep him company. The upright man is like the philosopher's dice, cast him which way you will, and into what condition you will, he is still upright; and therefore, of all people, God loves to grace the upright man with his gracious presence. But,

[6.] Sixthly, If you would enjoy the gracious presence of God with you in all your troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, then you must be very earnest and importunate with God not to leave you—but to stay with you, to abide with you, and to dwell in the midst of you, Psalm 148:18, "The Lord is near unto all who call upon him;" but, to prevent mistakes, I mean, "to all who call upon him in truth." There are many who call upon God—but not in truth; from these God stands at a distance, Proverbs 1:28; Isaiah 11-17; Deut. 4:4; 2 John 4. There are others that call upon God in truth, in plainness and singleness of heart; and to these God is near, not only in regard of his essence, which is everywhere—but also in regard of the effects of his power, and the readiness of his will in granting their requests. Abijah prays, and finds an admirable presence of God with him, giving him a mighty victory over his most powerful enemy, 2 Chron. 3,10-11,17-18. Asa prays, and finds such a singular presence of God with him as made him victorious over an enormous army, 2 Chron. 14:9 to the end. Jehoshaphat prays, and had such a special presence of God with him that those numerous forces that were combined against him fall by their own swords, 2 Chron. 20:1-11, with verse 22-25. The wrath of God wrought their ruin, unexpectedly and irresistibly. [They were carried by such a spirit of rage and fury that no man spared his neighbor—but each one destroyed him who was near him.] Others say that the Lord did suddenly and unexpectedly cut them off, as when men are cut off by enemies that lie in ambush against them, and that by sending some unexpected strife among those nations,

whereupon they fell out among themselves, and slew one another, and so accomplished that which the Levite had foretold, verse 17, "You shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand you still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."

It was the presence of God with his people that was their preservation, and their enemies' destruction. There is no power, no force, no strength, no combinations that can stand before the powerful presence of God with his people, and a spirit of prayer upon his people.

Hezekiah prays, and finds such a powerful presence of God with him as bears up his heart, and as strengthens his faith, and as cuts off his enemies, Isaiah 37:14-21, with verse 36. Oh, beg hard of the Lord that he will stay with you, do as they did when Christ made as though he would have gone from them: Luke 24:29, "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent; and he went in to tarry with them." By prayer and importunity lay hold on Christ; say, Lord, night is near, the night of trouble, the night of distress, the night of danger, the night of death is near; stay with us, depart not from us. They over-entreated him by their importunity, they compelled him by entreaty. "Night is near, and the day is far spent." Oh, lay a hand of holy violence upon God, as Jacob did, and say, as he, "I will not let you go." Jacob, though lamed, will not let Christ go. Jacob holds fast with both hands when his joints were out of joint, being fully resolved that whatever he did let go, he would not let his Lord go, until he had blessed him, Gen. 32:25,26; Hosea 4:12. Oh, be often a-crying out with Jeremiah, "Leave us not, Lord," Jer. 14:9. Though in our great troubles and deep distresses friends should leave us, and relations leave us, and all the world leave us—yet don't *you* leave us! Oh, don't you leave us, Lord! Though all creatures should desert us—yet, if you will but stand by us, we shall do well enough; but woe, woe unto us if God departs from us! Oh, leave us not! But,

[7.] Seventhly, Keep humble, and walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8; Psalm 25:9. The highest heavens and the lowest hearts, are the habitation of God's glorious presence. Isaiah 57:15, "For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy—I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." He who would in good earnest enjoy the gracious presence of God with him in his great troubles, deep distresses, and most deadly dangers, he must keep humble, and walk humbly with his God. God will keep house with none but humble souls. There are none who feel so great a need of the divine presence as humble souls, there are none who so prize the divine presence as humble souls, there are none who so love the divine presence, and who are so enamored with the divine presence as humble souls, there are none who so thirst and long for much of the divine presence as humble souls, there are none who so lament and bewail the loss of the divine

presence as humble souls, there are none who make such a singular and thorough improvement of the divine presence as humble souls; and therefore no wonder that of all the men in the world, God singles out the humble Christian, to make his heart the habitation where his honor delights to dwell.

Abraham is but dust and ashes in his own eyes, Gen. 18:27; and what man on earth had ever more of the divine presence of God with him than he? Gen 15:12-19, 17:1-10, and 18:17-19, etc.

Jacob knew that he was unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness God had shown him, Gen. 32:10; and he had a mighty presence of God with him, Gen. 32:24-31, etc.

David in his own eyes was but a worm and no man, Psalm 22:6. The word in the original, signifies a very little worm, which breeds in scarlet. It is so little, that no man can hardly see it or perceive it; and yet what a mighty presence of God had David with him in the many battles he fought, and in the many dangers he was in, and in the many miraculous deliverances he had. See them all summed up in that 18th Psalm. It is his triumphant song after many victories won, deliverances given, and mercies obtained; and therefore worthy of frequent perusal.

Paul was the least of all saints in his own eyes; yes, he was less than the least of all saints, Eph. 3:8. This is a double diminutive, and signifies "lesser than the least," if lesser might be. Here you have the greatest apostle descending down to the lowest step of humility, 1 Cor. 15:8, 4:9; 1 Tim. 1:15. *Great Paul* is least of saints, least of the apostles, and greatest of sinners in his own eyes, and never had any mortal more of the gracious presence of God with him in all his services and in all his sufferings, in all his afflictions and in all his temptations, in all his trials and in all his troubles, which were many and great. See Acts 16:23-25, 23:10-11, 27:23-25; 2 Cor. 1:8-10, 4:8-11, 7:4-7, 11:21, seq., 12:7-10.

Is your condition low, then let your hearts be low. He who is little in his own account, is great in God's esteem, and shall be sure to enjoy most of his presence. God can dwell, God will dwell with none but those who are lowly in heart; and therefore as ever you would enjoy the special presence of God with you in your greatest troubles and deepest distresses, be sure you walk humbly with your God. Many may talk much of God, and many may profess much of God, and many may boast much of God; but he only enjoys much of God who makes conscience of walking humbly with God. But,

[8.] Eighthly, and lastly, If you would enjoy the special presence of God with you in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, then labor every day more and more after greater measures of holiness. The more holiness you reach to, the more you shall have of the presence of a holy God with you in all your straits and trials. [Ponder upon these scriptures, Isaiah 58:8-11; 2 Cor. 6:16-18, and 7:1; Deut. 23:13-14.] If the Scriptures be narrowly searched, you will find that men of the greatest measures and degrees of

holiness have always enjoyed the greatest measures of the divine presence: witness Enoch, Gen. 5:24; Noah, Gen. 6:8-9, 17-18. Just so, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Daniel, John, Paul, etc. They were all famous for holiness; and accordingly they had a famous presence of God with them, as has been showed in part, and might more fully have been discovered.

[1.] Consider, that the more holy any person is, the more excellent that person is. All corruptions are diminutions of excellency. The more mixed anything is, the more abased it is. The more you mix your wine with water, the more you abase your wine; and the more you mix your gold with tin, the more you abase your gold. But the purer your wine is, the richer and better your wine is; and the purer your gold is, the more glorious and excellent it is. Just so, the purer and holier any person is, the more excellent and glorious that person is. Now the more divinely excellent and glorious any person is, the more he is beloved of God, Dan. 9:23; and the more he is the delight of God, and the more he shall have of the presence of God.

[2.] Consider, that the more holy any person is, the more that person pleases the Lord. Fruitfulness in holiness fills heaven with joy. The *farmer* is not so much pleased with the fruitfulness of his fields, nor the *wife* with the fruitfulness of her womb—as *God* is pleased with the fruitfulness of his people in grace and holiness. Now certainly, the more God is pleased with any person, the more he will be present with that person. They commonly have most of our presence—who most please us.

Enoch had this testimony, before his translation, that he *pleased* God, or *gave God contentment*, as the original word imports. Enoch eyed God at all times, in all places, and in all companies; and this pleased God. Wherever Enoch was, his eye was still upon God. Enoch walked constantly with God; his whole life was but one continued day of walking with God; and this pleased God. Enoch kept himself from the corruptions and pollutions of the times, which were very great; he was not carried away with the stream of the times; he kept a constant counter-motion to the corrupt courses of the times; and this pleased God. Enoch maintained and kept up a clear, choice, and incessant communion with God; and this pleased God. Enoch made it his business, his work, his heaven, to approve his heart to God, and his ways to God; and this pleased God. Enoch was very serious and studious to avoid everything that might be a dishonor to God, or displeasing to God; and this pleased God. Enoch had great, and high, and honorable thoughts of God; and this pleased God. God was so pleased with Enoch, that he translates him from earth to heaven, from a *gracious* to a *glorious* presence. [God took him up in a whirlwind, say the Hebrew doctors, as Elijah was. He changed his place—but not his company, for he still walked with God; as on earth, so in heaven.] It was a singular mercy for God to be with Enoch on earth—but it was a far more glorious mercy for Enoch to be with God in heaven. The *gracious* presence of God is very desirable—but the *glorious* presence of God is most comfortable. Enoch pleases God, and God translates Enoch. We can never have those

friends near enough to us—who take a pleasure and delight to please us; so here Enoch was a bright morning star, a rising sun, for virtue and holiness; and therefore God could not satisfy himself, (to speak after the manner of men,) that he should live at so great a distance from him—and therefore translates him from earth to heaven. Well, my friends, the greater measures of holiness you reach to, the more you will please God; and the more you please God, the more you shall be sure to enjoy of the presence of God.

[3.] Consider, that the more holy any person is, the more like to God he is; and the more like to God he is, doubtless the more he is beloved of God.

It is likeness both in nature and grace, which always draws the strongest love, 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Lev. 11:44, and 19:2, and 20:7. Though every child is the father multiplied, the father of a second edition; yet the father loves him best, and delights in him most—who is most like him, and who in feature, spirit, and action does most resemble him to the life. And so does the Father of spirits also; he always loves them best who in holiness resemble him most, Heb. 12:9. There are four remarkable things in the beloved disciple above all the rest, John 13:23, and 18:16, and 19:26-27, and Mark 14:50:

(1.) That he lay nearest to Christ's bosom at the table;

(2.) That he followed Christ closest to the high-priest's palace;

(3.) That he stood close to Christ when he was on the cross, though others had basely deserted him and turned their backs upon him;

(4.) That Christ commended the care of his mother to him. Now why did Christ's desire, love, and delight run out with a stronger and a fuller tide towards John than to the rest of the disciples? doubtless it was because John did more resemble Christ than the rest, it was because John was a more exact picture and lively representation than the others were of Christ.

Now the more any man in holiness is like to Christ, the more any man in holiness resembles Christ, the more that man shall enjoy of the presence of Christ, the more that man shall lie in the bosom of Christ. The father loves to be most with that child which is most like him. Just so here, as ever you would enjoy the presence of God in your greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, be sure that you keep up holiness in your hearts and lives, be sure that you *grow* in holiness, and *flourish* in holiness—and then you shall be sure of the presence of God with you in all your troubles and deep distresses. A holy God will never leave the holy Christian. And thus much for this use of exhortation.

COMFORT AND CONSOLATION

The last use of all, is a use of **comfort** and **consolation** to all the people of God, in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Now here consider,

(1.) First of all, That God himself hands out this as a rare comfort to his people in all their troubles, distresses, and dangers—namely, That he will be graciously present with them in the midst of all their sorrows and sufferings. Gen.

26:3, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you;" 28:15, "And behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you," etc., Isaiah 43:2; Psalm 91:15; Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5; Exod. 3:12. Don't talk of your loss of friends, for I will be with you. Don't talk of your country, for I will give you this land, which is the paradise of the world. Don't talk of your poverty, for you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south, verse 14. Don't talk of your solitariness and aloneness, "for I will not leave you."

Isaiah 41:10, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Suppose a man was injuriously dealt with by this man or that, would it not be a comfort to him that a just and righteous judge stood by and was an eyewitness of all the violences which were done to him? Suppose a man were in exile with David, or in prison with Joseph, or in a dungeon with Jeremiah, or in the stocks with Paul and Silas, or in banishment for the testimony of Jesus, with John—yet would it not be a singular comfort to him to have the presence of a kind father, a bosom friend, a wise Counselor, an able physician with him? O Christian, be in whatever *place* you will, and with whatever *company* you will, and in whatever *condition* you will—yet your loving God, your kind father, your bosom friend, etc., will be still with you, he will never leave you, nor forsake you; and oh what a spring of comfort should this be to you! But,

(2.) Secondly, Know for your comfort, that there are always some special favors and blessings annexed to this special presence of God, as "I will be with you, and *bless* you." Gen.

26:3, "I am with you, and will *keep* you in all places where you go;" 28:15, "I will be with him in trouble, and *honor* him." Psalm 91:15, "I will be with him, and *strengthen* him." Isaiah 41:10, "I will be with you, and the *flames shall not kindle* upon you." 43:2, "I will be with you, and there shall not a man be able to stand

before you." Josh. 1:5, "I will be with you, to *deliver* you." Jer. 1:19, "I am with you, to *save* you, and to deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and out of the hand of the terrible," 15:20-21.

Hushai's presence with David was a burden: Job's wife's presence was but a vexation unto him, and Christ's presence among the Gergesenes was a terror to them, and the presence of talkative friends is many times a trouble to us, 2 Sam. 15:33; Job 2:9-10; Mat. 8:28, 34. Oh—but this special, this favorable presence of the Lord with his people, in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses, is a sweet presence, a comfortable presence, a delightful presence, a blessed presence, yes, such a presence as has many singular blessings annexed to it. But,

(3.) Thirdly, Know for your comfort, that you shall have mercy and kindness, and whatever good you need in due season, at that very instant, at that very nick of time wherein you most need mercy. God will time your mercies, and your blessings for you; he is near, and will not fail you when in dire straits, Psalm 145:18; Deut. 4:7; Gen. 22:10-13. When Abraham had bound his son, and bent his sword, and the knife was upheld—then comes a voice from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham, hold your hand." At that very nick of time, when the four hundred and thirty years were expired, Israel was delivered out of their captivity and slavery, Exod. 12:41, 51; Deut. 11:14, "I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain, and the latter rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil." God gives rain to all, by a *providence*—but he gives rain to his Israel by virtue of a *promise*, Acts 14:18; Job 38:26. God engages himself not only to give rain—but to give it in due season; he will give the first rain after the sowing of the seed, that it might take rooting in the earth; and he will give the latter rain a little before harvest, that the ears might be full. O my friends! it is wonderful mercy—that God will time our mercies for us.

When Jehoshaphat was put to a hard pinch, at that very nick of time God owns him, stands by him, and gives him a great victory, 2 Chron. 20:12, 22-26. When David was in great danger, Saul being at his very heels, at that very nick of time, tidings were brought to Saul, that the Philistines had invaded the land—and so David escapes, 1 Sam. 23:26-28. When all human help failed, God came in and helped! ["Let God," says Augustine, "choose his own opportunity, who so freely grants the mercy."] So Julian was cut off by the Persian war, at that very nick of time when he had vowed at his return, to make a sacrifice of the Christians' lives. And so Charles the Fifth was diverted from persecuting of the Protestants, by the Turks breaking into Hungary, at that very nick of time when his heart was set upon a hot persecution. And so Justice Gilford, a violent papist in Queen Mary's days, going up the stairs to Mrs. Roberts chamber, to compel her to go to mass, at that very nick of time he was suddenly taken with his old disease the gout, and so grievously tormented, that he swore he would never trouble her more. When Faux was giving fire to the match,

that would have given fire to the powder that would have blown up king, lords, and commons—at that very nick of time, he who never slumbers nor sleeps prevented him; and so turned our intended funeral into a festival, Psalm 121:3-5.

O Christian! are your troubles many in number, strange in nature, heavy in measure, much in burden, and long in continuance—yet remember that your God is near, whose mercies are numerous, whose wisdom is wondrous, and whose power is miraculous. The nearness or remoteness of a friend is very considerable in our troubles, distresses, needs, dangers, etc. "I have such a friend, and he would help me—but he lives so far off; and I have another friend who has a great love for me, who is able to counsel me, and to speak a word in season to me, and in my distress would stand close to me—but he is so remote. I have a special friend, that did he know how badly things go with me, would make my burdens his, and my needs his, and my sorrows his; but he is in a far country, he is at the Indies, and I may be undone before I can hear from him!"

But it is not thus with you, O Christians! who have a God so near unto you, who have the special presence of God in the midst of you, yes who have a God always standing by you, "The Lord stood by me," etc. O my friends, how can you lack comfort, who have the God of all consolation present with you? How can you lack counsel, who have the wonderful Counselor so near unto you? How can you lack grace, who have the God of all grace standing by you? How can you lack peace, who have always the presence of the Prince of peace with you? 2 Cor. 1:3; Isaiah 9:6; 1 Pet. 5:10; Isaiah 9:6. But,

(4.) Fourthly, Know for your comfort, that if God is with you, there *is* nothing, there *can* be nothing—but weakness against you. [God holds the church's enemies in chains, having his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their lips, Isaiah 37:29; he can easily rule and over-rule his proudest enemies.] Isaiah 27:4, "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle, I would go through them, I would burn them together." What are briars and thorns, compared to a devouring fire, to the consuming flames? no more are all the enemies of the church, compared to the presence of God with his people. God will be a burning and destroying fire to all the enemies of Zion. Wicked men are chaff. Psalm 1:4. Wicked men are stubble. Job 21:18, "They are as driven stubble to his bow." Isaiah 41:2, "They are as stubble fully dry." Nah. 1:10. "They are as stubble before the flame." Joel 2:5, "They are like dust." 2 Kings 13:7, "Yes, like small dust." Isaiah 29:5, "They are like a morning cloud, an early dew, a little smoke." Hosea 13:3. "They will disappear like the morning mist, like dew in the morning sun, like chaff blown by the wind, like smoke from a chimney."

Oh, the weakness of man! Oh, the power of God! No people on earth have such a power on their sides as the saints have. Consult these scriptures, 2 Kings 6:16; 2 Chron. 32:6-7; Isaiah

8:9-10; Num. 13:28, 30-33, and 14:9. No Christian can look upon the strong and mighty enemies of Zion in a scripture glass—but must behold them as weak and impotent people. Who could but smile to see weak children to attempt to besiege a wall of brass, or a wall of fire? Zech. 2:5; as great a folly and weakness it is for wicked men to make attempts upon the saints, who have been to this day, and will be to the end, a trembling and a burdensome stone to all who gather together against them, Zech. 12:2-3.

Sense looks upon the powers of the world as strong, mighty, and invincible; but faith looks upon them as poor, weak, contemptible, gasping, dying men. Thus heroic Luther looked upon them, "I care neither for Rome's favor nor fury; I am neither fond of the one, nor afraid of the other." It is dangerous to look upon the powers of the world in the *devil's multiplying glass*; it is best and safest to look upon them in a *scripture glass*, and then we shall never fear them, nor sinfully submit to them! But,

(5.) Fifthly, If God be specially present with his people, in their greatest troubles, deepest distresses, and most deadly dangers, then know for your comfort, that none can be against you but they must be against God himself! Acts

9:4-6. God is with you in all your troubles, as a father is with his child, a husband with his wife, a general with his army, and as a confederate with his allies, who is with them offensively and defensively. Hence they are said to rage against God, Isaiah 37:28-29; and to blaspheme God, 2 Kings 19:3, 6; and to fight against God, Acts 5:38-39, and 23:9; Proverbs 21:30. To fight against God is labor in vain. Who ever fought against God and prospered? Some think that this phrase of fighting against God is drawn from the fable of the giants, which were said to make war with the gods.

The church of Christ always flourishes most, and increases most—when the tyrants of the earth oppose it most, and persecute it most. Diocletian laid down the empire in great discontent, because he could not by any persecution suppress the true Christian religion. The more violent he was against the people of God, the more they increased and multiplied, and the more they were emboldened and encouraged; and therefore in a rage he throws up all. But,

[1.] First, You have the presence of an ALMIGHTY God. Gen. 17:1, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be perfect," Gen. 49:25, and Num. 24:4. The word *El-Shaddai* signifies sufficiency. God is an all-sufficient good, and a self-sufficient good; he is an independent good, an absolute good, an original good, a universal good. Some derive the word *Shaddai* from *Shad*, which signifies a *breast*, because God feeds his children with sufficiency of all good things, as the loving mother does the child with the milk of her breasts. God is the only satisfactory good, and proportionable good, and suitable good to our souls—as the breast is the most suitable good to the child's stomach. And others derive the word *Shaddai* from *Shaddad*, which signifies to spoil, conquer,

or overcome, and so they say that God did here invert or overcome the order of nature, in causing the barren to bear. But most authors do translate it *omnipotent*. God, then, is called Shaddai, that is omnipotent and all-sufficient, for his omnipotence includes also all-sufficiency.

[2.] Secondly, You have the presence of a LOVING God with you. Isaiah 43:4, "Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honorable, and I have loved you." But that this may the better stick and work, you must remember,

First, That God loves you with a **first** love, see Deut. 7:7-8: 1 John 4:19, "We love him because he first loved us." Our love is but reciprocal to his. God first cast an eye of love upon us—before we cast an eye of love on him, and therefore God is no way indebted to us for our love. Mary answers not *Rabboni*—until Christ first said unto her *Mary!* John 20:16. The pure nature of love is more seen in God's first love to us—than in our reciprocal love to him. By nature we were *without* God, and *afar off* from God; we were *strangers* to God, and *enemies* to God, yes, *haters* of God; and therefore if God had not loved us firstly, we had been everlastingly undone! Eph. 2:12, 19; Romans 5:10, and 1:30.

Secondly, As God loves you with a first love, so he loves you with a **free** love: Hosea 14:4, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." I know they are backslidden—but I will heal their backslidings. I know they have broken their bones by their fall—but I will make those broken bones to rejoice. I know there is nothing at all in them, which is excellent or eminent, which is honorable or acceptable, which is laudable or lovely—yet "I will love them freely," of my own, free, rich, absolute, sovereign, and independent grace!

Thirdly, As he loves you with a free love, so he loves you with an **everlasting** love: Jer. 31:3, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Heb., "I love you with the love of perpetuity, or with the love of eternity. My love and my affections continue still the same to you, and shall continue forever!" Or, as others carry the words, "I love you with an ancient love, or with the love of antiquity; I love you still with the same affection that in former ages I bore towards you."

Fourthly, As he loves you with an everlasting love, so he loves you with an **unchangeable** love: Mal. 3:6, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." *Men* change, and *counsels* change, and *occurrences* change, and *friends* change, and *relations* change, and *kingdoms* change, and *commonwealths* change—but God never changes, as Balaam confesses, who was the devil's lackey, and who had a mind to dance with the devil all day, and then sup with Christ at night, Num. 23:10. God is neither false nor fickle; he cannot, like men, say and unsay; he cannot alter his mind nor eat his words. "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind," 1 Sam. 15:29 Psalm 89:34;. Men are so mutable and changeable, that there is no hold

to be taken of what they say; but God is immutable in his nature, in his essence, in his counsels, in his attributes, in his decrees, in his promises, etc. He is, as the learned say, *Omnina immutabilis*, "Altogether immutable".

Fifthly, As he loves you with an unchangeable love, so he loves you with a **special** love, with a **peculiar** love, with a **distinguishing** love, with a **superlative** love. "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the Lord, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!" Psalms 146:5-10

Sixthly and lastly, As he loves his people with a special love, with a peculiar love, so he loves them with the **greatest** love, with a **matchless** love. "O Daniel greatly beloved." John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son," etc. This signifies the *greatness* of God's love, the *vehemency* of his love, and the *admirableness* of his love.

Now, what an unspeakable comfort must this be to his saints, to have the presence of a loving God, to have the presence of such a loving God with them in all their troubles and deep distresses! If the presence of a loving friend, a loving relation in our troubles and distresses, is such a mercy, oh, what then is the presence of a loving God!

[3.] Thirdly, It is the presence of an ACTIVE God, who will be a defense to you, a shield to you, a sword to you, a sun to you, a strong tower to you, a salvation to you! None can withstand him, none can equal him, none can out-act him, Psalm 18:2; 2 Chron. 16:9; Proverbs 18:10; Jer. 32:40-41; Isaiah 30:18-19, and 27:3; Jer. 31:28.

[4.] Fourthly, You have the presence of a wakeful God, of a WATCHFUL God—of a God who never, no never, slumbers or sleeps! God will be so far from *sleeping*, that he will not so much as *slumber*, Psalm 121:3-5. The phrase is taken from watchmen, who stand on the walls in time of war to discover the approaches of enemies, and accordingly give warning. Now, watchmen have been treacherous and sleepy. The capitol of Rome would have been taken by the Gauls, if the geese had not been more wakeful than the watchmen of the walls. *Iphicrates*, the Athenian captain, visiting the guards on the walls of Corinth, found one of the watch asleep, and presently thrust him through with his sword, saying, "Dead I found him, and dead I left him!" Though watchmen slumber and sleep—yet that God who is present with his people does neither; *his seven eyes* are always open.

[5.] Fifthly, You have the presence of a WISE God, of an omniscient God. God *fills* all things, he *encompasses* all things, and he *sustains* all things—and therefore he must needs *know* all things, Ezek. 3:9; Psalm 33:10-11; Isaiah 46:10, and 40:28; Romans 11:33; 2 Pet. 2:9; Jonah 1:5; 2 Kings 14:6; Mat. 26:24-25. God can find *Jonah* in the bottom of the ship; and *Jeroboam's wife* in her disguises; and *Judas* in his treason; and *Demas* in his apostasy; and the *scribes* and *Pharisees* in their hypocrisy, 2 Tim. 4:10; Mat. 23; Rev. 4:6. The whole world is to him as a sea of glass—clear and transparent. There is nothing hidden from his eyes!

"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do," Heb. 4:13. "Naked," as when the skin is pulled off, and "opened as the entrails of a sacrifice," cut down the back. The apostle, say some, uses a metaphor taken from a sheep, whose skin is taken off, and he hanged up by the neck, with his back towards the wall, and all his entrails laid bare and exposed to open view. He alludes, say others, to the anatomizing of a creature, wherein men are very cautious to find out every little vein or muscle, though they be ever so hidden. They are *naked*, therefore God sees their outside; and *opened*, dissected, quartered, and cleft asunder through the backbone, so that he sees their inside also. Opened is more than naked: naked is that which is not clothed or covered; opened is that whose inwards are discovered and made conspicuous.

Is it such a comfort to have the presence of a wise and knowing friend with us in our greatest troubles and deepest distresses? what a transcendent comfort must it be then to enjoy the presence of an all-seeing and an all-knowing God in all our troubles and distresses! The *eye of heaven* sees all, and knows all, and writes down all your troubles and trials, your sorrows and sufferings, your losses and crosses, Mat. 6:32; and accordingly will an all-knowing God act for his own glory and his people's good.

[6.] Sixthly and lastly, You have the presence of a God of MERCY, a God of tenderness, a God of compassion. Exod. 33:7-8; Jer. 31:18-20; Hosea 11:8-9; Lam. 3:22. "His compassions never fail!" Mercy is as essential to God—as light is to the sun, Micah 7:18-19, or as heat is to the fire. He delights in mercy, as the senses and faculties of the soul do in their several actions. Patience, and mildness, and mercy, and compassion, and peace are the fruits of his heart—the offspring which the divine nature produces. God's compassions are *fatherly* compassions, Psalm 103:13; they are *motherly* compassions, Isaiah 49:15; they are *brotherly* compassions, Heb. 2:12; they are *friendly* compassions, Cant. 5:1-2. Oh, how sweet must the presence of a God of mercy, a God of compassion, be to the saints in a day of trouble! The presence of a compassionate friend in a day of distress is very desirable and comfortable; what then is the presence of a compassionate God!

Thus you see that there is no presence, compared to the divine presence! There is no presence, compared to the special presence of God with his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. But,

(7.) Seventhly and lastly, If God is specially present with his people in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses—then let them all know for their comfort, that this presence will make up the lack or loss of all outward comforts—this presence will make up the loss of a husband, a child, a friend, an estate, etc., 1 Sam. 1:8. Look! as all light meets in the sun, and as all water meets in the sea, so all our outward comforts meet in the God of all comfort, 2 Cor. 1:3. "When Alexander asked king Porus, being then his prisoner, how he would be treated. Porus answered in one word, "like a king!" Just so—all things, all comforts are to be found in this special presence of God with his people, in their greatest troubles and deepest distresses. Certainly the gracious presence of the Lord is infinitely better than the presence of all outward comforts, as you know one sun is more glorious and comfortable than ten thousand stars.

QUESTION. But how may a person who has lost this gracious presence of God, recover it again?

First, Observe HOW you lost this presence of God, and labor to recover it by a contrary course. Did you lose it by sinful omissions? then be more active in a way of duty. Did you lose the presence of God by neglecting your watch, or by not walking with God, or by an eager pursuit of the world, or by giving in to this or that temptation, or by letting fall your communion with God? take a contrary course. Now keep up your watch, walk close with God, keep up a daily converse with lively Christians, let your heart and affections be set upon things above, keep your ground in the face of all temptations, maintain a standing communion with God, Psalm 119:63; Col. 3:1-2.

After Christ had stood knocking and calling to his spouse—"Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled one; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night," Cant. 5:2-3, 6—but found no entrance, he *retired* and withdrew himself, because she would not arise and put on her coat. But when she bestirs herself, "she *finds* him whom her soul loved," chapter 3:1-4. Then Christ comes into his garden again, and returns to his spouse again, and forgets all former unkindness, chapter 6:1-2. But.

Secondly, Inquire WHERE, WHEN, and WHY God has withdrawn himself; as we do when dear friends absent themselves from us. "O Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress, **why** are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who stays only a night? **Why** are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? You are among us, O

Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!" Jeremiah 14:8-9

Thirdly, Do not part with Christ for anything—not for a right eye, or a right hand, nor for an Isaac or a Benjamin. Don't say this work is too high, and feat too hard, and the other too hot, and the other too dangerous—in order to the recovery of God's countenance and presence. You must not think anything in the world too much to *do* for Christ, or to *suffer* for Christ. You will be a happy man if you can recover Christ's lost presence; though it be upon the hardest terms imaginable! But,

Fourthly, Let your hearts lie humble and low under the loss of God's gracious presence. Psalm 51:8-12; 1 Pet. 1:5, 6. "All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him." Song of Songs 3:1. "Have you seen the one my heart loves?" Song of Songs 3:3. "I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer." Song of Songs 5:6. For,

(1.) The loss of God's gracious presence is the greatest loss.

(2.) The loss of God's gracious presence is a loss-embittering loss; it is a loss that will greatly embitter all your worldly losses. I have lost my health, I have lost a precious child, I have lost a gracious spouse, who was the delight of my eyes and the joy of my heart; I have lost a costly estate, I have lost an intimate friend, I have lost a thriving trade. Oh—but that which embitters all my losses, and puts a sting into them, is this—that I have lost the gracious presence of God that once I enjoyed!

(3.) The loss of God's gracious presence is a loss that all outward comforts can never make up. When the sun is set, nothing can make it day with us.

(4.) The loss of God's gracious presence is an soul loss; and no losses can be compared to soul losses. As there are no mercies, compared to soul mercies, so there are no losses to soul losses.

(5.) The loss of God's gracious presence is a loss that will cost a man dearly, before it will be made up again. Oh the sighs, the groans, the strong cries, the earnest prayers, the bottles of tears that the recovery of the divine presence will cost a Christian!

Upon all these accounts, how well does it befit a Christian, to lie humble at the foot of God!

Fifthly, Lift up a mighty cry to heaven. Thus the saints of old have done. Consult these scriptures, Psalm 51:6-13; Lam. 3:56-57; Psalm 4:6-7, 27:9, 38:21-22, 138:3, and 119:8, "O forsake me not utterly." Christ was forsaken for a few hours; David for a few months; and Job for a few years—for the trial and exercise of his faith and patience; but then they all sent up a mighty cry to heaven. Leave them God did, to their thinking; forsake them he did in regard of *vision*—but not in regard of *union*. The promise is,

that "God will draw near to us if we draw near to him," James 4:8. Draw near to God in duty, and he will draw near to you in mercy: sanctify him, and he will satisfy you.

Prayer is the only means to supply all defects, it gets all, and makes up the loss of all; as a gracious poor woman said in her distress, "I have no friend—but I have prayer; that will get favor with my God; so long as I can find a praying heart, God will, I am sure of that, find a pitying heart and a helping hand." It is not the length—but the strength of prayer; it is not the labor of the lip—but the travail of the heart—which prevails with God, Jer. 29:12-14. It is not the *arithmetic* of our prayers, how many they are; nor the *rhetoric* of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the *geometry* of our prayers, how long they be; nor the *music* of our prayers, how sweet they be; nor the *logic* of our prayers, how methodical they are—which will prevail with God. It is only fervency, importunity in prayer, which will make a man prevalent with God. Fervent prayer hits the mark, carries the day, and pierces the walls of heaven, though like those of Gaza, made of brass and iron, James 5:16-17; Luke 18; Isaiah 45:2. The child has got many a kiss and many a hug by **crying**. If God has withdrawn his presence, the best, the surest, and the readiest way to recover it is to send up a mighty cry to heaven. "In my distress I called to the Lord; I **cried** to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears." Psalm 18:6. "I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me." Psalm 77:1. "In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free." Psalm 118:5. But,

Sixthly, Be sure you don't take up your greatest delight in any creature, in any comfort, in any contentment, in any worldly enjoyment. Jer. 50:6. When the presence of God is withdrawn from you, say as Absalom, "What is all this to me, so long as I am banished my father's presence, so long as I can't see the king's face?" 2 Sam. 14:24, 28, 32-33. When the mother sees that the child is enthralled with the doll or the rattle—she comes not in sight. If you take up your rest in any of the *dolls* and *rattles*—in any of the poor things of this world, God will certainly keep out of sight. He will never honor them with his countenance and presence—who take up in anything below himself, below his favor, below his presence.

I have read of a devout pilgrim, who along the way to Jerusalem was very kindly and nobly entertained in several places—but still he cried out, "Oh—but this is not Jerusalem! this is not Jerusalem!" So when you cast your eye upon this creature or that, oh then cry out, "This is not the presence of God, this is not the presence of God!" And when you begin to be tickled and enthralled with this and that enjoyment, with this or that contentment, oh then remember "this is not the presence of God, this is not the presence of God!"

"Here is a gracious spouse, here are precious children, here is a pleasant home, here is a wonderful climate, here is a gainful trade, etc.—but what are all these to me, so long as my sun has

set in a cloud, and God has withdrawn his presence from me? Remember this once for all—that the whole world is but a barren wilderness without the countenance and presence of God! "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." Psalm 63:1-3. But,

Seventhly and lastly, Patiently and quietly wait upon him in the way of his ordinances for the recovery of his presence.

Consult these scriptures. [Exod. 20:24; Mat. 18:20; Isaiah 64:5; Psalm 27:4, and 65:4; Rev. 2:1; Psalm 40:1-3; Isaiah 8:17; Mic. 7:7-9; Isaiah 26:8-9.] Here God dwells, here he walks, here he makes known his glory, here he gives forth his love, here he vouchsafes his presence. When God is withdrawn, your great business is to prize ordinances, and to keep close to ordinances, until God shall be pleased to lift up the light of his countenance and vouchsafe his presence to you. You will never recover the divine presence by neglecting ordinances, nor by slighting ordinances, nor by turning your back upon ordinances, nor by entertaining low thoughts of ordinances. He who thinks ordinances to be needless things, concludes—

(1.) That the taking away of the kingdom of heaven from the Jews was no great judgment, Mat. 21:43.

(2.) That the bestowing of it upon other people is no great mercy. If God is gone, it is good to lie at the pool until he returns, John 5:2-10. There are many dear Christians who have lost their God for a time—but after a time they have found him again in the way of his ordinances; and therefore let no temptation draw you off from ordinances; say, "Here I will live, here I will lie, here I will wait at the pool of ordinances, until the Lord shall return in mercy to my soul!"

I shall follow this *discourse of the divine presence* with my earnest prayers that it may from on high be so specially blessed, as that it may issue in the furtherance of the spiritual and eternal good, both of Writer and Reader.