

THE SEVEN UTTERANCES OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS



BY JOHN FLAVEL



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**The Instructiveness of the Death of Christ, in
His
Seven Last Words; the First of Which is here
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"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Luke 23:34

The manner in which Christ died has already been opened in the solitude and patience in which he died. The third, to wit, the instructiveness of his death, now follows, in these seven excellent and weighty sayings, which dropped from his blessed lips upon the tree, while his sacred blood dropped on the earth from his wounded hands and feet; so that on the cross he exercised both his priestly and Prophetic office together, redeeming us by his blood, and instructing us by his words.

These seven words of Christ upon the cross are his last words, with which he breathed out his soul. The last words of a dying man are remarkable; the scripture puts a remark upon them, 2 Sam. 23:1. "Now these be the last words of David." How remarkable are the last words of Christ.

These words are seven in number; three directed to his Father, and four more to those about him. Of the former sort this is one, Father, forgive them, etc. In which we have, First, The mercy desired by Christ, and that is forgiveness. Secondly, The persons for whom it is desired, [Them,] that is, those cruel and wicked persons that were now imbruing their hands in his blood. And, Thirdly, The motive or argument urged to procure that mercy from his Father, for they know not what they do.

First, The mercy prayed for, that is, forgiveness; Father, forgive. Forgiveness is not only a mercy, a spiritual mercy, but one of the greatest mercies a soul can obtain from God, without which, whatever else we have from God, is no mercy to us. So great a mercy is forgiveness, that David calls him blessed, or rather admires the blessedness of him, "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." This mercy, this best of mercies, he requests for them, Father, forgive them.

Secondly, The persons for whom he requests forgiveness, are the same that with wicked hands crucified him. Their fact was the most horrid that ever was committed by men: they not only shed innocent blood, but the blood of God; the best of mercies is by him desired for the worst of sinners.

Thirdly The motive or argument urged to procure this mercy for them, is

this for they know not what they do. As if he should say, Lord, what these poor creatures do, is not so much out of malice to me as the Son of God; but it is from their ignorance. Did they know who, and what I am, they would rather be nailed to the cross themselves, than do it. To the same purpose the apostle says, 1 Cor. 2:8. "Whom none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Yet this is not to be extended to all that had an hand in the death of Christ, but to the ignorant multitude, among whom, some of God's elect were, who afterwards believed in him, whose blood they spilt, Acts 3:17. "And now, brethren, I wet that through ignorance you did it." For them this prayer of Christ was heard. Hence the notes are,

DOCTRINE. 1. That ignorance is the usual cause of enmity to Christ.

DOCTRINE. 2. That there is forgiveness with God for such as oppose Christ through ignorance.

DOCTRINE. 3. That to forgive enemies, and beg forgiveness for them is the true character and property of the Christian spirit.

These observations contain so much practical truth, that it would be worth our time to open and apply them distinctly,

DOCTRINE. 1. That ignorance is the usual cause of enmity to Christ.

"These things (says the Lord) will they do, because they have "not known the Father, nor me," John 16:3. What thing does he mean? Why, kill and destroy the people of God, and therein suppose they do God good service, (that is) think to oblige and gratify the Father, by their butchering his children. So Jer 9:3. "They proceed from evil to evil; and have not known me, " says the Lord," q.d. Had they the knowledge of God, this would check and stop them in their ways of wickedness? and so Psalm. 74:20. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Three things must be inquired into, namely, what their ignorance of Christ was. Whence it was. And how it disposed them to such enmity against him.

First. What was their ignorance who crucified Christ? Ignorance is two-fold, simple, or respective. Simple ignorance is not supposable in these persons, for in many things they were a knowing people. But it was respective, particular ignorance, Rom. 9:25. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel." They knew many other truths, but did not know Jesus Christ; in that their eyes were held. Natural light they had; yes, and scripture light they had; but in this particular, that this was the Son of God, the Savior of the world, therein they were blind and ignorant.

But how could that be! Had they not heard at least of his miraculous works? Did they not see how his birth, life and death, squared with the prophecies, both in time, place, and manner? Whence should this their ignorance be when they saw, or at least might have seen, the scriptures fulfilled in him; and that he came among them in a time when they were big with expectations of the Messiah?

It is true, indeed, they knew the scriptures; and it cannot but be supposed the fame of his mighty works had reached their ears: But yet,

First, Though they had the scriptures among them, they misunderstood them; and did not rightly measure Christ by that right rule. You find, John 7:52. how they reason with Nicodemus against Christ; "Are you also of Galilee? Search, and see: for out of Galilee arises no prophet." Here is a double mistake: First, They supposed Christ to arise out of Galilee, whereas he was of Bethlehem, though much conversant in the parts of Galilee: And, Secondly, They thought, because they could find no prophet had arisen out of Galilee, therefore none should.

Another mistake that blinded them about Christ, was from their conceit that Christ should not die, but live forever, John 12:34. "We have heard out of the law, that Christ abides forever: and how say you, the Son of man must be lifted up? who is the Son of man?" That scripture which probably they urge against the mortality of Christ, is Isa. 9:7. "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David," etc. In like manner, John 7:27. we find them in another mistake; "We know this man whence he is; but when Christ comes, no man knows whence he is." This, likely, proceeded from their misunderstanding of Micah 5:2. "His going forth have been from of old,

from everlasting." Thus were they blinded about the person of Christ, by misinterpretations of scripture-prophecies

Secondly, Another thing occasioning their mistake of Christ, was the outward meanness and despicableness of his condition. They expected a pompous Messiah, one that should come with state and glory, becoming the king of Israel. But when they saw him in the form of a servant, coming in poverty, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, they utterly rejected him: "We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not," Isa. 53:3. Nor is it any great wonder these should be scandalised at his poverty when the disciples themselves had such carnal apprehensions of his kingdom, Mark 10:37, 38.

Thirdly, Add to this, their implicit faith in the learned rabbis and doctors, who utterly misled them in this matter, and greatly prejudiced them against Christ. "Lo, (said they) he speaks boldly, and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?" They pinned their faith upon the rulers sleeves, and suffered them to carry it whether they would. This was their ignorance, and these its causes.

Thirdly, Let us see, in the next place, how this disposed them to such enmity against Christ. And this it does three ways.

First, Ignorance disposes men to enmity and opposition to Christ, by removing those hindrances that would otherwise keep them from it, as checks and rebukes of conscience, by which they are restrained from evil; but conscience binding and reproofing in the authority and virtue of the law of God, where that law is not known, there can be no reproofs; and therefore we truly say, That ignorance is virtually every sin.

Secondly, Ignorance enslaves and subjects the soul to the lusts of Satan; he is "the ruler of the darkness of this world," Eph. 6:12. There is no work so base and vile, but an ignorant man will undertake it.

Thirdly, Nay, which is more, if a man be ignorant of Christ, his truths, or people, he will not only oppose, and persecute, but he will also do it conscientiously, That is, he will look upon it as his duty so to do, John 16:3. Before the Lord opened Paul's eyes, "he verily thought that he ought

to do many things contrary to the name of Christ." Thus you have a brief account what, and whence their ignorance was, and how it disposed and prepared them for this dreadful work. Hence we learn,

INFERENCE 1. How falsely is the gospel charged as the cause of discord and trouble in the world. It is not light, but darkness, that makes men fierce and cruel: as light increases, so does peace, Isa. 11:6, 9. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." What a sad condition would the world be in without gospel light! all places would be dens of rapine, and mountains of prey. Certainly we owe much of our civil liberty, and outward tranquility to gospel-light. If a sword, or variance, at any time, follow the gospel, it is but an accidental, not a direct and proper effect of it.

INFERENCE. 2. How dreadful is it to oppose Christ and his truth knowingly, and with open eyes? Christ pleads their ignorance as an argument to procure their pardon. Paul himself was once filled with rage and madness against Christ and his truths: it was well for him that he did it ignorantly: had he gone against his light and knowledge, there had been little hope of him, 1 Tim. 1:13. "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief." I do not say, it is simply impossible for one that knowingly and maliciously opposes and persecutes Christ and his people, to be forgiven, but it is not usual, Heb. 6:4, 5. There are few instances of it.

INFERENCE. 3. What an awful majesty sits upon the brow of holiness, that few dare to oppose it that see it! There are few or none so daringly wicked, to fight against it with open eyes; 1 Pet. 3:13. "Who will harm you while you are followers of that which is good:" q. d. who dare be so hardy to set upon known godliness, or afflict and wrong the known friends of it? The true reason why many Christians speed so bad, is not because they are godly, but because they do not manifest the power of godliness more than they do: their lives are so like the lives of others, that they are often mistaken for others. Cyprian brings in the wicked of his time, thus scoffing at professors, "behold, they that boast themselves to be

redeemed from the tyranny of Satan, and to be dead to the world, how are they overcome by the lusts of it, as well as other men:" Look as the poverty and meanness of Christ's outward condition was a ground of their mistake of him then, so the poverty and meanness of our love to God, heavenly mindedness, and mortification to this world, is a disguise to professors, and cause why they are not more owned and honored in the consciences of men at this day. For holiness, manifested in its power, is so awfully glorious, that the consciences of the vilest cannot but honor it, and do obeisance to it, Mark 6:20. "Herod feared John, for he was a just man."

INFERENCE. 4. The enemies of Christ are objects of pity. Alas, they're blind, and know not what they do. It is pity that any other affection than pity, should stir in our hearts towards them. Were their eyes but open, they would never do as they do: we should look upon them as the physician does upon his sick distempered patient. Did they but see with the same light you do, they would be as far from hating Christ, or his ways, as you are, *Simul ac desinunt ignorere, desinunt odisse*; as soon as they cease to be ignorant, they cease to hate, says Tertullian.

INFERENCE. 5. How needful is it before we engage ourselves against any person or way, to be well satisfied and resolved that it is a wicked person or practice that we oppose? You see the world generally runs upon a mistake in this matter. O beware of doing you know not what! for though you do you know not what, Satan knows what he is doing by you: he blinds your eyes, and then sets you to work, knowing that if you should but see what you are doing, you would rather die than do it: you may now do you know not what but you may afterwards have time enough to reflect on, and lament what you have done: you may now do you know not what, and hereafter you may not know what to do. O beware what you now do!

DOCTRINE. 2. That there is forgiveness with God, for such as oppose Christ out of ignorance.

If all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, then this, as well as others, Mat. 12:31. We are not, with Theophilact, to understand that place of the certainty of pardon; much less, with Origin, of the desert

of it; nor yet, with Jansenius, of the facility at it, but rather of the possibility of forgiveness: it shall be so to some; it may be so to you; even those whose wicked hands had crucified Christ, may receive remission by that blood they shed, Acts 2:23, 38. compared.

I have two things here to do: First, To open the nature of the forgiveness, and show you what it is. Secondly, To evince the possibility of it, for such as, mistakingly, oppose Christ.

For the First, Forgiveness is God's gracious discharge of a believing penitent sinner, from the guilt of all his sin, for Christ's sake.

It is Gods discharge: there is indeed fraternal forgiveness, by which one man forgives another; so far as he is interested in the wrong, Luke 6:87. There is also a ministerial forgiveness, whereby the minister of Christ, as his mouth, and in his name, declares the pardon, or ministerially applies the promises of pardon to penitent offenders, John 20:23. But none can absolutely and properly forgive sin, but God only, Mark 2:7. The primary, and principal wrong is done to him; Psalm. 51:4. " Against you, and you only" (that is) you mainly or especially, " have I sinned." Hence sins are metonymically called debts, debts to God, Mat. 6:12. Not that we owe them to God, or ought to sin against him; but as financial debts obliges him that owes it to the penalty, if he satisfy not for it; so do our sins. And who can discharge the debtor, but the creditor?

It is gracious act to discharge. "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgression for mine own name sake," Isa. 43:25. And yet sin is not so forgiven, as that God expects no satisfaction at all; but as expecting none from us, because God has provided a surety for us, from whom he is satisfied, Eph. 1:7. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

it is a gracious discharge from the guilt of sin. Guilt is that which pardon properly deals with. Guilt is an obligation to punishment. Pardon is the dissolving that obligation. Guilt is a chain with which sinners are bound and fettered by the law. Pardon is that Aquafortis that eats it asunder, and makes the prisoner a free man. The pardoned soul is a discharged soul, Rom. 8:53. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is

"God that justifies, who shall condemn? It is Christ that died."

It is God's discharge of a believing penitent sinner. Infidelity and impenitence, are not only sins in themselves, but such sins as bind fast all other sins upon the soul. "By him, all that believe are justified from all things," Acts 10:43. So Acts 3:19. "Repent therefore, that your sins may be blotted out." This is the method in which God dispenseth pardon to sinners.

Lastly, It is for Christ's sake we are discharged; he is the meritorious cause of our remission, "As God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you," Eph. 4:32. It is his blood alone that meritoriously procures our discharge.

This is a brief and true account of the nature of forgiveness.

Secondly, Now to evince the possibility of forgiveness, for such as ignorantly oppose Christ, let these things be weighed:

First, Why should any poor soul, that is now humbled for its enmity to Christ in the days of ignorance, question the possibility of forgiveness, when this effect does not exceed the power of the cause; nay, when there is more efficacy in the blood of Christ, the meritorious cause, than is in this effect of it? There is power enough in that blood, not only to pardon your sins, but the sins of the whole world, were it actually applied, 1 John 2:2. There is not only a sufficiency, but also a redundancy of merit, in that precious blood. Surely then your enmity to Christ, especially, before you know him, may not look like an unpardonable iniquity in your eyes.

Secondly, And as this sin exceeds not the power of the meritorious cause of forgiveness; so neither is it any where excluded from pardon, by any word of God. Nay, such is the extensiveness of the promise to believing penitents, that this case is manifestly included, and forgiveness tendered to you in the promises, Isa. 55:7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Many such extensive promises there are in the scriptures: and there is not one parenthesis in all these blessed pages, in which this case is excepted.

Thirdly, And it is yet more satisfactory; that God has already actually forgiven such sinners; and that which he has done, he may again do: yes, therefore he has done it to some, and those eminent for their enmity to Christ, that others may be encouraged to hope for the same mercy, when they also shall be, in the same manner, humbled for it. Take one famous instance of many; it is that of Paul in Tim. 1:13, 16. "Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. - Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life." It is no small encouragement to a sick man, to hear of some that have been recovered out of the same disease, and that prevailing in an higher degree than in himself.

Fourthly, Moreover, it is encouraging to consider, That when God had cut off others in the way of their sin, he has hitherto spared you. What speaks this but a purpose of mercy to your soul? You should account the long-suffering of God your salvation, 2 Pet. 3:15. Had he smitten you in the way of your sin and enmity to Christ, what hope had remained! But in that he has not only spared you, but also given you a heart ingenuously ashamed, and humbled for your evils: does not this speak mercy for you; surely it looks like a gracious design of love to your soul.

INFERENCE 1. And is there forgiveness with God for such as have been enemies to Christ, his truths, and gospel? Then certainly there is pardon and mercy for the friends of God, who involuntarily fall into sin, by the surprisals of temptation, and are broken for it, as ingenuous children for offending a good Father. Can any doubt, if God have pardon for such enemies, he has none for children? If he have forgiveness for such as shed the blood of Christ with wicked hands, has he not much more mercy and forgiveness for such as love Christ, and are more afflicted for their sin against him, than all other troubles they have in the world? Doubt it not, but he who receives enemies into his bosom, will much more receive and embrace children, though offending ones.

How pensive do the dear children of God sometimes sit, after their lapse into sin? Will God ever pardon this? will he be reconciled again? May I hope his face shall be to me, as in former times? Pensive soul! if you did

but know the largeness, tenderness, freeness of that grace, which yearns over enemies, and has given forth thousands, and ten thousands of pardons to the worst of sinners, you Would not sink at that rate.

INFERENCE. 2. Is there pardon with God for enemies? How inexcusable then are all they that persist and perish in their enmity to Christ! sure their destruction is of themselves. Mercy is offered to them, if they will receive it, Isa. 55:7. Proclamation is made in the gospel, that if there be any among the enemies of Christ, who repent of that they have been, and done against him, and are now unfeignedly willing to be reconciled, upon the word of a King, they shall find mercy: But "God shall wound the head of the enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as goes on still in his trespasses," Psalm. 68:21. "If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he has bent his bow, and made it ready; he has also prepared for him the instruments of death: He ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors," Psalm. 7:12.

This lays the blood of every man that perishes in his enmity to Christ, at his own door; and vindicates the righteousness of God, in the severest strokes of wrath upon them: This also will be a cutting thought to their hearts eternally: I might once have had pardon, and I refused it: the gospel trumpet sounded a parley: fair and gracious terms were offered, but I rejected them.

Is there mercy with God and forgiveness, even for his worst enemies, upon their submission; How unlike to God then are all implacable spirits! Some there are that cannot bring their hearts to forgive an enemy; "to whom revenge is sweeter than life." 1 Sam. 24:16. "If a man find his enemy, will he let him go?" This is hell fire, a fire that never goes out. How little do such poor creatures consider, if God should deal by them, as they do by others, what words could express the misery of their condition! It is a sad sin, and a sad sign, a character of a wretched state, wherever it appears. Those that have found mercy, should be ready to show mercy: and they that expect mercy themselves, should not deny it to others. This brings us upon the third and last observation, namely,

DOCTRINE. 3 That to forgive enemies, and beg forgiveness for them, is the true character and property of the Christian spirit.

Thus did Christ: "Father forgive them." And thus did Stephen, in imitation of Christ, Acts 7:59, 60. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." This suits with the rule of Christ, Mat. 5:44, 45. "But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of God your Father which is in heaven."

Here I shall first open the nature of this duty, and show you what a forgiving spirit is; and then the excellency of it, how well it becomes all that call themselves Christians.

First, Let us enquire what this Christian forgiveness is. And that the nature of it may the better appear, I shall show you both what it is not, and what it is.

First, It consists not in a Stoical insensibility of wrongs and injuries. God has not made men as insensible, stupid blocks, that have no sense or feeling of what is done to them. Nor has he made a law inconsistent with their very natures that are to be governed by it: but allows us a tender sense of natural evils, though he will not allow us to revenge them by moral evils: nay, the more deep and tender our resentments of wrongs and injuries are, the more excellent is our forgiveness of them; so that a forgiving spirit does not exclude sense of injuries, but the sense of injuries graces the forgiveness of them.

Secondly, Christian forgiveness is not a politic concealment of our wrath and revenge, because it will be a reproach to discover it; or, because we want opportunity to vent it. This is carnal policy, not Christian meekness. So far from being the mark of a gracious spirit, that it is apparently the sign of a vile nature. It is not Christianity to repose, but depose injuries.

Thirdly, Nor is it that moral virtue for which we are beholden to an easier and better nature, and the help of moral rules and documents. There are certain virtues attainable without the change of nature, which they call homilitical virtues, because they greatly adorn and beautify nature; such as temperance, patience, justice, etc. These are of singular use to conserve

peace and order in the world: and without them, (as one aptly speaks) the world would soon break up, and its civil societies disband. But yet, though these are the ornaments of nature, they do not argue the change of nature. All graces, in the exercises of them, involve a respect to God: And for the being of them, they are not by natural acquisition, but supernatural infusion.

Fourthly, and lastly, Christian forgiveness is not an injurious giving up of our rights and properties to the lust of everyone that has a mind to invade them. No; these we may lawfully defend and preserve, and are bound so to do; though, if we cannot defend them legally, we must not avenge our wrongs unchristianly: This is not Christian forgiveness. But, then positively,

It is a Christian lenity, or gentleness of mind, not retaining, but freely passing by the injuries done to us, in obedience to the command of God.

It is a levity, or gentleness of mind. The grace of God demulces the angry stomach; calms the tumultuous passions; new- moulds our sour spirits, and makes them benign, gentle and easy to be entreated; Gal. 5:22. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness," etc.

This gracious levity inclines the Christian to pass by injuries; so to pass them by, as neither to retain them revengefully in the mind, or requite them when we have opportunity with the hand: Yes, and that freely, not by constraint, because we cannot avenge ourselves, but willingly. We abhor to do it when we can. So that as a carnal heart thinks revenge its glory, the gracious heart is content that forgiveness should be his glory. I will be even with him, says nature: I will be above him, says grace: it is his glory to pass over transgression, Prov. 19:11.

And this it does in obedience to the command of God: Their own nature inclines them another way. "The spirit that is in us lusts to envy; but he gives more grace," James 4:5. It lusts to revenge, but the fear of God represseth those motions. Such considerations as these God has forbidden me; yes, and God has forgiven me, as well as forbidden me: they prevail upon him when nature urges to revenge the wrong. "Be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for

Christ's sake has forgiven you," Eph. 4:32. This is forgiveness in a Christian sense.

Secondly, And that this is excellent, and singularly becoming the profession of Christ, is evident; inasmuch as,

This speaks your religion excellent, that can mold your hearts into that heavenly frame, to which they are so averse, yes, contrarily disposed by nature. It is the glory of Pagan morality, that it can abscondere vitia, hide and cover men's lusts and passions. But the glory of Christianity lies in this, that it can abscondere vitia, not hide, but destroy, and really mortify the lusts of nature. Would Christians but live up to the excellent principles of their religion, Christianity shall be no more out-vied by heathenish morality. The greatest Christian shall be no more challenged to imitate Socrates, if he can. We shall utterly spoil that proud boast, "that the faith of Christians is out-done by the infidelity of Heathens." O Christians yield not to-day to Heathens! Let all the world see the true greatness, heavenliness, and excellency of our represented pattern; and by true mortification of your corrupt natures, enforce an acknowledgment from the world, that a greater than Socrates is here. He that is really a meek, humble, patient, heavenly Christian, wins this glory to his religion, that it can do more than all other principles and rules in the world. In nothing were the most accomplished Heathens more defective than this forgiving of injuries: It was a thing they could not understand, or, if they did, could never bring their hearts to it; witness that rule of their great Tally: "It is the first office of justice, (says he), to hurt no man, except first provoked by an injury." The addition of that exception spoiled his excellent rule.

But now Christianity teaches, and some Christians have attained it, to receive evil, and return good, 1 Cor. 4: 12,13. "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat." This certainly is that meekness wrought in us by the wisdom that is from above, James 3:17.

This makes a man sit sure in the consciences of others, who, with Saul, must acknowledge, when they see themselves so outdone, "You are more righteous than I," 1 Sam. 24:16, 17. Had we been so much injured, and

had such opportunities to revenge them, we should never have passed them by, as these men did.

This impresses and stamps the very image of God upon the creature, and makes us like our heavenly Father, who does good to his enemies, and sends down showers of outward blessings upon them, that pour out floods of wickedness daily to provoke him, Mat. 5:44, 45. In a word, this Christian temper of spirit gives a man the true possession and enjoyment of himself. So that our breasts shall be as the Pacific sea, smooth and pleasant, when others are as the raging sea, foaming and casting up mire and dirt.

INFERENCE 1. Hence we clearly infer, That the Christian religion, exalted in its power, is the neatest friend to the peace and tranquility of states and kingdoms. Nothing is more opposite to the true Christian spirit, than implacable fierceness, strife, revenge, tumults and uproars. It teaches men to do good and receive evil: to receive evil, and return good. "The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace," James 3:17,18.

The church is a dove for meekness, Cant. 6:9. When the world grows full of strife, Christians then grow weary of the world, and sigh out the Psalmist's request, "O that I had the wings of a dove! that I might fly away and be at rest." Strigellius desired to die, that he might be freed ab implacabilibus odiis theologorum, "from the implacable strife of contending divines."

The rule by which they are to walk, is, "If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay it, says the Lord," Rom. 12:18, 19. It is not religion, but lusts that make the world so unquiet, James 4:1, 2. Not godliness, but wickedness, that makes men bite and devour one another. One of the first effects of the gospel, is to Civilize those places where it comes, and settle order and peace among men. How great a mistake and evil then is it to cry out, when atheism and irreligion have broken the civil peace; this is

the fruit of religion! this is the effect of the gospel! Happy would it be if religion did more obtain in all nations. It is the greatest friend in the world to their tranquility and prosperity.

INFERENCE. 2. How dangerous a thing is it to abuse and wrong meek and forgiving Christians? Their patience and easiness to forgive often invites injury, and encourages vile spirits to insult and trample upon them: but if men would seriously consider it, there is nothing in the world should more scare and affright them from such practices than this. You may abuse and wrong them, they must not avenge themselves, nor repay evil for evil: true, but because they do not, the Lord will; even the Lord to whom they commit the matter; and he will do it to purpose, except you repent.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord," James 5:7. Will you stand to that issue? had you rather indeed have to do with God than with men? When the Jews put Christ to death, "he committed himself to him that judges righteously, 1 Pet. 2:22, 23. And did that people get anything by that: did not the Lord severely avenge the blood of Christ on them and their children? yes, do not they and their children groan under the doleful effects of it to this day? If God undertakes, (as he always does) the cause of his abused, meek, and peaceable people, he will be sure to avenge it seven fold more than they could. His little finger will be heavier then their loins. You will get nothing by that.

INFERENCE. 3. Lastly, Let us all imitate our pattern Christ, and labor for meek forgiving spirits. I shall only propose two inducements to it: the honor of Christ, and your own peace: two dear things indeed to a Christian. His glory is more than your life, and all that you enjoy in this world. O do not expose it to the scorn and derision of his enemies. Let them not say, How is Christ a lamb, when his followers are lions? How is the church a dove, that smites and scratches like a bird of prey? Consult also the quiet of your own spirits. What is life worth, without the comfort of life? what comfort can you have in all that you do possess in the world, as long as you have not the possession of your own souls? If your spirits be full of tumult and revenge, the spirit of Christ will grow a stranger to you: that dove delights in clean and quiet breasts. O then imitate Christ in this excellency also!

The Second Excellent Word of Christ Upon the Cross

"Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother!" John 19:27

We now pass to the consideration of the second memorable and instructive word of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, contained in this scripture. Wherein he has left us an excellent pattern for the discharge of our relative duties. It may be well said, the gospel makes the best husbands and wives, the best parents and children, the best masters and servants in the world; seeing it furnishes them with the most excellent precepts, and proposes the best patterns. Here we have the pattern of Jesus Christ presented to all gracious children for their imitation, teaching them how to acquit themselves towards their parents, according to the laws of nature and grace. Christ was not only subject and obedient to his parents while he lived, but manifested his tender care even while he hanged in the torments of death upon the cross. "Then says he to the disciple, Behold your mother."

The words contain an affectionate recommendation of his distressed mother to the care of a dear disciple, a bosom friend; wherein let us consider the design, manner, and season of this recommendation.

First, The design and end of it, which, doubtless, was to manifest his tender respect and care for his mother, who was now in a most distressed comfortless state. For now was Simeon's prophecy Luke 2:35. fulfilled, in the trouble and anguish that filled her soul, yes, a sword also shall pierce through your own soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Her soul was pierced for him, both as she was his mother, and as she was a mystical member of him, her head, her Lord: and therefore he commends her to the beloved disciple that lay in his bosom, saying, "Behold your mother," That is, let her be to you as your own mother. Let

your love to me be now manifested in your tender care for her.

Secondly, The manner of his recommending her, is both affectionate and mutual. It was very affectionate and moving, Behold, your mother—John, I am now dying, leaving all human society and relations, and entering into a new state, where neither the duties of natural relations are exercised, nor the pleasures and comforts of them enjoyed. It is a state of dominion over angels and men, not of subjection and obedience; this I now leave to you. Upon you do I devolve both the honor and duty of being in my stead and room to her, as to all dear and tender care over her.

John, "Behold your mother;" and as it is affectionate, so it is mutual, ver. 26. And to his mother he said, "Woman, behold your son;" not mother, but woman, intimating not only the change of state and conditions with him, but also the request he was making for her to the disciple with whom she was to live, as a mother with a son.

And all this he designs as a pattern to others.

Thirdly, The season or time when his care for his mother so eminently manifested itself, was when his departure was at hand, and he could no longer be a comfort to her, by his bodily presence; yes, his love and care then manifested themselves, when he was full of anguish to the very brim, both in his soul and body; Yet all this makes him not in the least unmindful of so dear a relation. Hence the doctrinal note is,

DOCTRINE. That Christ's tender care of his mother, even in the time of his greatest distress; is an excellent pattern for all gracious children to the end of the world.

"There are three great foundations, or bonds of relations, on which all family government depends." Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants. The Lord has planted in the souls of men, affections suitable to these relations, and to his people he has given grace to regulate those affections, appointed duties to exercise those graces, and seasons to discharge those duties. So that, as in the motion of a wheel every spoke takes its turn, and bears its stress; in like manner, in the whole round of a Christian's conversation, every affection, grace, and

duty, at one season or other, comes to be exercised.

But yet grace has not so far prevailed in the sanctification of any man's affections, but that there will be excesses or defects in the exercise of them towards our relations; yes, and in this the most eminent saints have been eminently defective. But the pattern I set before you this day, is a perfect pattern. As the church finds him the best of husbands, so to his parents he was the best of sons; "and being the best, and most perfect, is therefore the rule and measure of all others." Christ knew how those corruptions we draw from our parents are returned in their bitter fruits upon them again, to the wounding of their very hearts; and therefore it pleased him to commend obedience and love to parents, in his own example to us.

It was anciently a proverb among the heathen, in sole Sparta, expedite senescere. It is good to be an old man, or women, only in Sparta. The ground of it was the strict laws that were among the Spartans, to punish the rebellions and disobedience of children to their aged parents. And shall it not be good to be an old father and mother in England, where the gospel of Christ is preached, and such an argument as this now set before you urge; an argument which the Heathen world was never acquainted with? Shall parents here be forced to complain with the eagle in the fable, that they are smitten to the heart, by an arrow winged with their own feathers? Or, as a tree cleft in pieces by the wedges that were made of its own body? God forbid.

To prevent such sad occasions of complaints as these, I desire all that sustain the relation of children, into whose hands providence shall cast this discourse, seriously to ponder this example of Christ, proposed for their imitation in this point. Wherein we shall first consider what duties belong to the relation of children: secondly, how Christ's example enforces those duties, and then suitably apply it.

First, Let us examine what duties pertain to the relation of children, and they are as truly, as commonly branched out into the following particulars.

First, Fear and reverence are due from children to their parents, by the

express command of God, Lev. 19:3. You shall fear every man his mother and his father. The Holy Spirit purposely inverts the order, and puts the mother first, because she, by reason of her blandishments, and fond indulgence, is most subject to the irreverence and contempt of children. God has clothed parents with his authority. They are entrusted by God with them, and are accountable to him for the souls and bodies of their children; and he expects that you reverence them, although, in respect of outward estate, or honor, you be never so much above them. Joseph, though Lord of Egypt, bowed down before his aged father, with his face to the earth, Gen. 48:12. Solomon, the most magnificent and glorious king that ever swayed a scepter, when his mother came to speak with him for Adonijah, he rose up to meet her, and bowed himself to her, and caused a seat to be set up for the king's mother, and set her upon his right hand, 2 Kings 2:19.

Secondly, Dear and tender love is due from children to their parents: and to show how strong and dear that love ought to be, it is joined with the love you have for your own lives; as it appears in that injunction, to deny both for Christ's sake, Mat. 10:37. The bonds of nature are strong and direct between parents and children. What is the child but a piece of the parent wrapped up in another skin? O the care, the cost, the pity, the tenderness, the pains, the fears they have expressed for you. It is worse than Heathenish ingratitude, not to return love for love. This filial love is not only in itself a duty, but should be the root or spring of all your duties to them.

Thirdly, Obedience to their commands is due to them, by the Lord's strict and special command, Eph. 6:1. "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right; honor your father and your mother, which is the first commandment with promise." Filial obedience is not only founded upon the positive law of God, but also upon the law of nature; for though the subjection of children to parents is due to them by natural right; therefore, says the apostle, this is right, (that is) right both according to natural and positive law. However, this subjection and obedience is not absolute and universal. God has not divested himself of his own authority, to clothe a parent with it. Your obedience to them must be in the Lord," that is in such things as they require you to do in the Lord's

authority. In things consonant to that divine and holy will, to which they, as well as you must be subject; and therein you must obey them. Yes, even the wickedness of a parent exempts not from obedience, where his command is not so. Nor, on the other side, must the holiness of a parent sway you, where his commands and God's are opposite. In the former case, the Canonists have determined, "that the command must be distinguished from the person." In the latter, it is a good rule, "My parents must be loved, but my God must be preferred."

Yield yourselves, therefore, cheerfully to obey all that which they lawfully enjoin, and take heed of that black character fixed on the Heathens who know not God, be not found upon you, "disobedience to parents," Rom. 1:30. Remember, your disobedience to their just commands rises higher, much higher, than an affront to their personal authority; it is disobedience to God himself, whose commands second, and strengthen theirs upon you.

Fourthly, Submission to their discipline and rebukes, is also your duty, Heb. 12:9. "We had fathers of our own flesh that corrected us, and we gave them reverence." Parents ought not to abuse their authority. "Cruelty in them is a great sin, wrath and rebellion in a child against his parents, is monstrous." It is storied of Elian, that having been abroad, at his return, his father asked him what he had learned since he went from him; he answered, you will know shortly; I have learned to bear your anger quietly, and submit to what you please to inflict. Two considerations should especially mold others into the like frame, especially to their godly parents. The end for which, and the manner in which they manifest their anger to their children. Their end is to save your souls from hell. They judge it better for you to hear the voice of their anger, than the terrible voice of the wrath of God: to feel their hand than his. They know, if you fall into the hands of the living God, you will be handled in another manner.

And for the manner in which they rebuke and chasten, it is with grief in their hearts, and tears in their eyes. Alas! it is no delight to them to cross, vex, or afflict you. Were it not mere conscience of their duty to God, and tender love to your souls, they would neither chide nor smite: and when they do, how do they afflict themselves in afflicting you! When their faces

are full of anger, their affections are full of compassion for you; and you have no more reason to blame them for what they do, than if they cry out and violently snatch at you, when they see you ready to fall from the top of a rock.

Fifthly, faithfulness to all their interests is due so them, by the natural and positive law of God. What in you lies, you are bound to promote, not to waste and scatter their substance: to assist, not to defraud them. Whoever robbeth his father or mother, and says, it is no transgression, the same is a companion of a destroyer, Prov. 28:24. This, says one, as far excels your wronging another, as parricide is a greater crime than manslaughter, or as Reuben's incest was beyond common fornication. God never meant you should grow up about your parents, as suckers about a tree, to impoverish the root. But for a child, out of covetousness after what his parents have, secretly to wish their death, is a sin so monstrous, as should not be once named, much less found among persons professing Christianity. To desire their death, from whom you had your life, is unnatural wickedness: to dispose of their goods, much more of yourselves, without their consent, is (ordinarily) the greatest injustice to them. Children are obliged to defend the estate and persons of their parents, with the hazard of their own. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them. They shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemy in the gates. Psalm. 127:5.

Sixthly, And more especially, requital of all that love, care, and pains they have been at for you, is your duty so far as God enables you, and those things are requitable, 1 Tim. 5:4. "Let them learn to show piety at home, and requite their parents." The word is "antipelargein", and signifies to play the stork, to imitate that creature of whom it is said, that the young do tenderly feed the old ones, when they are no longer able to fly abroad and provide for themselves. Hence those that want affections of natural affection to their relations, are said to be "asogmoi", Rom. 1:30. worse than storks. Oh, it is a shame that birds and beasts should show more tenderness to their dams than children to their parents.

It is a saying frequent among the Jews, "A child should rather labor at the mill than suffer his parents to want." And to the same sense is that other

saying, "Your parents must be supplied by you if you have it; if not, you ought to beg for them, rather than see them perish." It was both the comfort and honor of Joseph, that God made him an instrument of so much support and comfort to his aged father and distressed family, Gen. 47:13. And you are also to know, that what you do for them, is not in the way of an alms, or common charity. For the apostle says, it is but your requiting them, and that is justice, not charity. And it can never be a full requital. Indeed the apostle tells us, 2 Cor. 12:14. That parents lay up for their children, and not children for their parents, and so they ought; but, sure, if providence blast them, and bless you, an honorable maintenance is their due. Even Christ himself took care for his mother.

Secondly, You have had a brief account of the duties of this relation; next, let us consider how Christ's example, who was so subject to them in his life, Luke 2:51. and so careful to provide at his death, enforces all those duties upon children, especially upon gracious children. And this it does two ways, both as it has the obliging power of a law; and as he himself will one day sit in judgement to take an account how we have imitated him in these things.

First, Christ's example in this has the force and power of a law, yes, a law of love, or a law lovingly constraining you to an imitation of him. If Christ himself will be your pattern, if God will be pleased to take relations like yours, and go before you in the discharge of relative duties; Oh, how much are you obliged to imitate him, and tread in all his footsteps! This was by him intended as a precedent, or pattern, to facilitate and direct your duties.

Secondly, He will come to take an account how you have answered the pattern of obedience, and tender care he set before you in the days of his flesh. What will the disobedient plead in that day? He that heard the groans of an afflicted father or mother, will now come to reckon with the disobedient child for them; and, the glorious example of Christ's own obedience to, anti tenderness of his relations, will, in that day, condemn and aggravate, silence and shame such wretched children as shall stand guilty before his bar.

INFERENCE 1. Has Jesus Christ given such a famous pattern of

obedience and tenderness to parents? Then there can be nothing of Christ in stubborn, rebellious, and careless children, that regard not the good or comfort of their parents. The children of disobedience cannot be the children of God. If providence directs this to the hands of any that are so, my heart's desire and prayer for them is, that the Lord would search their souls by it, and discover their evils to them, while they shall read the following queries.

First Query, Have you not been guilty of slighting your parents by irreverent words or carriages; the old man or woman? To such I commend the consideration of that scripture, Prov. 30:17, which, methinks, should be to them as the hand-writing that appeared upon the plaister of the wall to Belshazzar. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despises to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." That is, they shall be brought to an untimely end, and the birds of the air shall eat that eye, that had never seen but for that parent that was despised by it.

It may be you are vigorous and young, they decayed and wrinkled with ages: but, says the Holy Spirit, "Despise not your mother when she is old," Prov. 23:22. Or when she is wrinkled, as the Hebrew signifies. It may be you are rich, they poor; own, and honor them in their poverty, and despise them not. God will requite it with his hand if you do.

Second Query, Have you not been disobedient to the commands of parents? a son of Belial is a son of wrath, if God give not repentance to life. Is not this the black brand set upon the Heathens, Rom. 1:30. Have not many repented this upon a ladder, with a halter about their necks? Woe to him that makes a father or mother complain, as the tree in the fable, that they are cleft asunder with the wedges that are cut out of their own bodies.

Third Query, Have you not risen up rebelliously against, and hated your parents for chastening your bodies, to save your souls from hell? Some children (says one) will not take that from a parent, which beasts, yes, and savage beasts too, bears and lions, will take from their keepers. What is this but to resist an ordinance of God for your good? and, in rebelling against them, to rebel against the Lord? Well, if they do not, God will take

the rod into his own hand, and him you shall not resist.

Fourth Query, Have you not been unjust to your parents, and defrauded them? first, help to make them poor, and then despise them because they are poor. O horrid wickedness! What a complicated evil is this! You are, in the language of the scripture, a companion with destroyers, Prov. 28:24. This is the worst of theft, in God's account. You may think you make bold with them, but how bold do you make with conscience, and the command of God?

Fifth Query, Are you not, or have you not been ungrateful to parents? Leaving them to shift for themselves, in those straits you have helped to bring them into. O consider it, children, this is an evil which God will surely avenge, except you repent. that! to be hardened against your own flesh; to be cruel to your own parents, that with so much tenderness fed you, when else you had perished! I remember Luther gives us a story of one, (and oh that it might be a warning to all that hear it), who had made over all that he had to his son, reserving only a maintenance for himself; at last his son despised him, and grudged him the very meat he eat; and one day the father coming in, when the son and his wife were at dinner upon a goose, they shuffled the meat under the table; but see the remarkable vengeance of God upon this ungracious, unnatural son: the goose was turned into a monstrous toad, which seized upon this vile wretch, and killed him. If any one of you be guilty of these evils, to humble you for them, and reclaim you from them, I desire these six considerations may be laid to heart.

First, That the effects of your obedience, or disobedience will stick upon you and yours to many generations. If you be obedient children in the Lord, both you and yours may reap the fruits of that your obedience, in multitudes of sweet mercies, for many generations. So runs the promise, Eph. 6:22. "Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth." You know what an eye of favor God cast upon the Recabites for this, Jer. 35:8. from the 14th to the 20th verse: and as his blessings are, by promise, entailed on the obedient, so his curse upon the disobedient, Prov. 20:20. "Whoever curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness;" that is the lamp of his life

quenched by death, yes, say others, and his soul also by the blackness of darkness in hell.

Secondly, Though other sins do, this sin seldom escapes exemplary punishment, even in this world. Our English history tells us of a yeoman in Leicestershire, who had made over all he had to his son, to prefer him in marriage, reserving only a bare maintenance at his son's table: afterward, upon some discontent, the son bid his father get out of his house. The next day Mr. Goodman, the minister of the parish, meeting the young man walking about his ground, asked him, How he did? He answered, very well; but before the minister was gone far from him, his affections fell out, which he carried in his hands, got to his house, sent for Mr. Goodman, bitterly bewailed his sin against his father, and so died. And Dr. Taylor, in his great exemplar, tells us of another, that, upon discontent with his father, wished the house might be on fire, if ever he came any more into his father's house: afterwards, coming, in, it was fired indeed, and this wicked son only consumed. I could multiply instances of this nature, (for indeed that righteous judgement of God has multiplied them,) but this only for a taste.

Thirdly, Heathens will rise up in judgement against you, and condemn you. They never had such precepts nor precedents as you, and yet some of the better natured Heathens would rather chosen death, than to do as you do. You remember the story of Croesus' dumb son, whose dear affections could make him speak when he saw Croesus in danger; though he never spoke before, yet then he could cry out, "O do not kill my father!" But what speak I of Heathens! the stork in the heavens, yes, the beasts of the earth, will condemn the disobedience of children.

Fourthly, These are sins inconsistent with the true fear of God, in whoever they are found. That a man is indeed, which he is in his family, and among his relations. He that is a bad child can never be a good Christian. Either bring testimonies of your godliness from your relations, or it may be well suspected to be no better than counterfeit. Never talk of your obedience to God, while your disobedience to the just commands of your parents gives you the lie.

Fifthly, A parting time is coming when death will break up the family, and

when that time comes, oh! how bitter will the remembrance of these things be! when you shall see a father or a mother lying by the wall, what a cut will it be to remember your miscarriages and evils! They are gone out of your reach, you cannot now, if you would, give them any satisfaction for what you have done against them; but, oh, how bitter will the remembrance of these things be at such a time! Surely, this will be more unsupportable to you than their death, if the Lord open your eyes, and give you repentance; and if not, then,

Sixthly, What a terrible thing will it be, to have a father or mother come in as witnesses against you at Christ's bar? As well as they loved you, and as dear as you were to them in this world, they must give evidence against you then. Now, what a fearful thing is it for you but to imagine your parents to come before the Lord, and say, Lord, I have given this child many hundred reproofs for sin; I have counseled, persuaded, and used all means to reclaim him, but in vain; he was a child of disobedience, nothing could work upon him: what think you of this?

INFERENCE. 2. Have you such a pattern of obedience, and tender love to parents? Then, children, imitate your pattern, as it becomes Christians, and take Christ for your example. Whatever your parents be, see that you carry it towards them becoming such as profess Christ

First, If your parents be godly, O beware of grieving them by any unbecoming carriage. Are you a Christian indeed? you will then reckon yourself obliged in a double bond, both of grace and nature, to them: O what a mercy would some children esteem it, if they had parents fearing the Lord, as you have!

Secondly, If they be carnal, walk circumspectly, in the most precise and punctual discharge of your duties, for how know you, O child, but hereby you may win your parents? Would you but humbly, and seriously entreat, and persuade them to mind the ways of holiness, speaking to them at fit seasons, with all imaginable humility and reverence, insinuating your advice to duties, or trouble for their evils, rather by relating some pertinent history, or proposing some excellent example, leaving their own conscience to draw the conclusion, and make application, than to do it yourselves; it is possible they may ponder your words in their hearts, as

Mary did Christ's, Luke 2:49, 51. And would you but back all this with your earnest cries to heaven for them, and your own daily example, that they may have nothing from yourselves to retort upon you; and thus wait with patience for the desired effect: O what blessed instruments might you be of their everlasting good!

INFERENCE. 3. To conclude, Let those that have such children as fear the Lord, and endeavor to imitate Christ in those duties, account them a singular treasure and heritage from the Lord, and give them all due encouragement to their duties.

How many have no children at all, but are as a dry tree! and how many have such as are worse than none? The very reproach and heart breaking of their parents, that bring down their hoary heads with sorrow to the grave.

If God have given you the blessing of godly children, you can never be sufficiently sensible of, or thankful for such a favor. O that ever God should honor you to bring forth children for heaven! what a comfort must this be to you, whatever other troubles you meet with abroad, when you come home among godly relations, that are careful to sweeten your own family to you by their obedience! especially, what a comfort is it, when you come to die, that you leave them within the covenant, entitled to Christ, and so need not be anxious how it shall be with them when you are gone? Take heed of discouraging or damping such children from whom so much glory is like to rise to God, and so much comfort to yourselves. Thus let Christ's pattern be improved, who went before you in such eminent holiness, in all his relations, and left you an example that you should follow his steps!

The Third of Christ's Last Words Upon the Cross

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto you, Today shall you be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43

In this scripture you have the third excellent saying of Christ upon the cross, expressing the riches of free grace to the penitent thief; a man that had spent his life in wickedness, and for his wickedness was now to lose his life. His practice had been vile and profane, but now his heart was broken for it; he proves a convert, yes, the first fruits of the blood of the cross. In the former verse he manifests his faith, "Lord, remember me, when you comest into your kingdom. In this Christ manifests his pardon and gracious acceptance of him; "Verily I say unto you, to-day shall you be with me in paradise." In which promise are considerable, the matter of it, the person to whom it is made, the time set for its performance, and the confirmation of it for his full satisfaction.

First, The matter or substance of the promise made by Christ, namely, That he shall be with him in paradise. By paradise he means heaven itself, which is here shadowed to us by a place of delight and pleasure. This is the receptacle of gracious souls, when separated from their bodies. And that paradise signifies heaven itself, and not a third place, as some of the fathers fondly imagine, is evident from 2 Cor. 12:2, 4. where the apostle calls the same place by the names of the third heaven, and the paradise. This is the place of blessedness designed for the people of God. So you find, Rev. 2:7. "To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God;" that is to have the fullest and most intimate communion with Jesus Christ in heaven. And this is the substance of Christ's promise to the thief: You, that is you in spirit, or you in the noblest part, your soul which here bears the image of the whole person; "You shall be with me in paradise."

Secondly, The person to whom Christ makes this excellent and glorious promise: it was to one that had lived lewdly and profanely; a very vile and wretched man, in all the former part of his time, and, for his wickedness, now justly under condemnation; yes, to one that had reviled Christ, after that sentence was executed on him. However, now at last the Lord gave him a penitent believing heart. Now, almost at the last gasp, he is soundly, in an extraordinary way converted; and, being converted, he owns and professes Christ amidst all the shame and reproach of his death; vindicates his innocence, and humbly supplicates for mercy; "Lord, remember me when you comest into your kingdom."

Thirdly, The set time for the performance of this gracious promise: Today, this very day, shall you be with me in glory: Not after the resurrection, but immediately from the time of your dissolution, you shall enjoy blessedness. And here I cannot but detect the cheat of those that deny an immediate state of glory to believers after death; who, (to the end this scripture might not stand in full opposition to their, as uncomfortable, as unsound opinion), loose the whole frame of it, by drawing one pin, yes, by transposing but a comma, putting it at the word day, which should be at the word you; and so reading it thus, "Verily I say unto you to-day," referring the word "day" to the time that Christ made the promise, and not to the time of its performance. But if such a liberty as this be yielded, what may not men make the scriptures speak? There can be no doubt, but Christ, in this expression, fixes the time for his happiness; "To-day you shall be with me.

Fourthly, and lastly, You have here the confirmation and seal of this most comfortable promise to him, with Christ's solemn asseveration; "Verily I say unto you." Higher security cannot be given. I that am able to perform what I promise, and have not out promised myself; for heaven and the glory thereof, are mine: I that am faithful and true to my promises, and have never forfeited my credit with any; I say it, I solemnly confirm it; "Verily I say unto you, to-day you shall be with me in paradise." Hence we have three plain obvious truths, for our instruction and consolation.

DOCTRINE. 1. That there is a future eternal state, into which souls pass at death.

DOCTRINE. 2. That all believers are, at their death, immediately received into a state of glory and eternal happiness.

DOCTRINE. 3. That God may, though he seldom does, prepare men for this glory, immediately before their dissolution by death.

These are the useful truths resulting from this remarkable word of Christ to the penitent thief. We will consider and improve them in the order proposed.

DOCTRINE. 1. That there is a future eternal state, into which

souls pass at death.

This is a principal foundation-stone to the hopes and happiness of souls. And seeing our hopes must needs be as their foundation and ground work is, I shall briefly establish this truth by these five arguments. The being of a God evinces it. The scriptures of truth plainly reveal it. The consciences of all men have presentiments of it. The incarnation and death of Christ is but a vanity without it; and the immortality of human souls plainly discovers it.

Arg. 1. The being of a God undeniably evinces a future state for human souls after this life. For, if there be a God who rules the world which he has made, he must rule it by rewards and punishments, equally and righteously distributed to good and bad; putting a difference between the obedient and disobedient. the righteous and the wicked. To make a species of creatures capable of a moral government, and not to rule them at all, is to make them in vain, and is inconsistent with his glory, which is the last end of all things. To rule them, but not suitably to their natures, consists not with that infinite wisdom from which their beings proceeded, and by which their workings are ruled and ordered. To rule them, in a way suitably to their natures, namely, by rewards and punishments, and not to perform, or execute them at all, is utterly incongruous with the veracity and truth of him that cannot lie: this were to impose the greatest cheat in the world upon men, and can never proceed from the holy and true God. So then, as he has made a rational sort of creatures, capable of moral government by rewards and punishments; so he rules them in that way which is suitable to their natures, promising "it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked." These promises and threatening can be no cheat, merely intended to scare and fright, where there is no danger, or encourage where there is no real benefit; but what he promises, or threatens, must be accomplished, and every word of God take place and be fulfilled. But it is evident that no such distinction is made by the providence of God (at least ordinarily and generally) in this life; but all things come alike to all; and as with the righteous, so with the wicked. Yes, here it goes ill with them that fear God; they are oppressed; they receive their evil things, and wicked men their good; therefore we conclude, the righteous Judge of the whole earth, will, in another world,

recompense to everyone according as his work shall be.

Arg. 2. Secondly, And as the very being of God evinces it, so the scriptures of truth plainly reveal it. These scriptures are the pandect, or system of the laws, for the government of man; which the wise and holy Ruler of the world has enacted and ordained for that purpose. And in them we find promises made to the righteous, of a full reward for all their obedience, patience, and sufferings in the next life or world to come; and threatening, made against the wicked, of eternal wrath and anguish, as the just recompense of their sin in hell forever, Rom. 2:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. "You treasures up to yourself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil, etc." So 2 Thess. 1:4, 5, 6, 7. "So that we ourselves glory in you, in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure: which is (a manifest token) of the righteous judgement of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer; seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you: and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, etc." To these plain testimonies, multitudes might be added, if it were needful. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but these words shall never pass away.

Arg. 3. Thirdly, As the scriptures reveal it, so the consciences of all men have borne presentiments of it. Where is the man whose conscience never felt any impressions of hope, or fear, from a future world? If it is said, these may be but the effects and force of discourse, or education; we have read such things in the scriptures, or have heard it by preachers; and so raise up to ourselves hopes and fears about it. I demand, how the consciences of the Heathens, who have neither scriptures nor preachers, came to be impressed with these things? Does not the apostle tell us, Rom. 2:15. "That their consciences in the mean while work upon these things?" their thoughts, with reference to a future state, accuse, or else

excuse, that is their hearts are cheered and encouraged by the good they do, and terrified with fears about the evils they commit. Whereas, if there were no such things, conscience would neither accuse nor excuse for good or evil done in this world.

Arg. 4. Fourthly, The incarnation and death of Christ, are but vanity without it. What did he propose to himself, or what benefit have we by his coming, if there be no such future state? Did he take our nature, and suffer such terrible things in it for nothing! If you say, Christians have much comfort from it in this life: I answer, the comforts they have are raised by faith and expectation of the happiness to be enjoyed, as the purchase of his blood, in heaven. And if there be no such heaven to which they are appointed, no hell from which they are redeemed, they do but comfort themselves with a fable, and bless themselves with a thing of nothing: their comfort is no greater than the comfort of a beggar, that dreams he is a king, and when he awakes, finds himself a beggar still. Surely the ends of Christ's death were to deliver us from the wrath to come, 1 Thess. 1:10. not from an imaginary, but a real hell, to bring us to God, 1 Pet. 3:18. to be the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him, Heb. 5:9.

Arg. 5. Fifthly and lastly, The immortality of human souls, puts it beyond all doubt. The soul of man, vastly differs from that of a beast, which is but a material form, and so wholly depending on, that it must need perish with matter. But it is not so with ours: Ours are reasonable spirits, that can live and act in a separated state from the body, Eccles. 3:21. "Who knows the spirit of man, that goes upward; and the spirit of a beast, that goes downward to the earth?" For if a man dispute whether man be rational, this his very disputing it proves him to be so: so our disputes, hopes, fears, and apprehensions of eternity, prove our souls immortal, and capable of that state.

INFERENCE 1. Is there an eternal state, into which souls pass after this life? How precious then is present time, upon the improvement whereof that state depends. O what a huge weight has God hanged upon a small wire! God has set us here in a state of trial: "According as we improve these few hours, so will it fare with us to all eternity." Every day, every hour, nay, every moment of your present time has an influence into your

eternity. Do you believe this? What! and yet squander away precious time so carelessly, so vainly! How do these things consist? When Seneca heard one promise to spend a week with a friend that invited him, to recreate himself with him; he told him, he admired he should make such a rash promise! What (said he) cast away so considerable a part of your life? How can you do it? Surely, our prodigality in the expense of time, argues we have but little sense of great eternity.

INFERENCE 2. How rational are all the difficulties, and severities of religion, which serve to promote and secure a future eternal happiness? So vast is the disproportion between time and eternity, things seen, and not seen as yet, the present vanishing, and future permanent state, that he can never be justly reputed a wise man, that will not let go the best enjoyment he has on earth, if it stand in the way of his eternal happiness. Nor can that man ever escape the just censure of notorious folly, who, for the gratifying of his appetite and present accommodation of his flesh, lets go an eternal glory in heaven. Darius repented heartily that he lost a kingdom for a draught of water; O, said he, "for how short a pleasure have I sold a kingdom!" It was Moses' choice, and his choice argued his wisdom, he chose rather "to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season," Heb. 11:25. Men do not account him a fool, that will adventure a penny, upon a probability to gain ten thousand pounds. But sure the disproportion between time and eternity is much greater.

INFERENCE. 3. If there certainly be such an eternal state into which souls pass immediately after death; How great a change then does death make upon every man and upon every man and woman? O what a serious thing is it to die! It is your passage out of the swift river of time, into the boundless and bottomless ocean of eternity. You that now converse with sensible objects, with men and women like yourselves, enter then into the world of spirits. You that now see the continual revolutions of days and nights, passing away one after another, will then be fixed in a perpetual NOW. O what a serious thing is death! You throw a cast for eternity when you die. If you were to cast a die for your natural life, O! how would your hand shake with fear, how it would fall! But what is that to this?

The souls of men are, as it were, asleep now in their bodies; at death they

awake, and find themselves in the world of realities. Let this teach you, both how to carry yourselves towards dying persons when you visit them; and to make every day some provision for that hour yourselves. Be serious, be plain, be faithful with others that are stepping into eternity; be so with your own souls every day. O remember what a long word, what an amazing thing eternity is! especially considering,

DOCTRINE. 2. That all believers are, at their death, immediately received into a state of glory and eternal happiness.

"This day shall you be with me." This the Atheist denies: He thinks he shall die, and therefore resolves to live as the beasts that perish. Beryllus, and some others after him, taught, that there was indeed a future state of happiness and misery for souls, but that they pass not into it immediately upon death and separation from the body, but shall sleep until the resurrection, and then awake and enter into it. But is not that soul asleep, or worse, that dreams of a sleeping soul until the resurrection? Are souls so wounded and prejudiced by their separation from the body, that they cannot subsist or act separate from it? Or have they found any such conceit in the scriptures? Not at all. The scriptures take notice of no such interval; but plainly enough denies it, 2 Cor. 5:8. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." Mark it, no sooner parted from the body, but present with the Lord. So Phil. 1:23. "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, which is far better." If his soul was to sleep until the resurrection, how was it far better to be dissolved, than to live? Sure Paul's state in the body had been far better than his state after deaths if this were so; for here he enjoyed much sweet communion with God by faith, but then he should enjoy nothing.

To confirm this dream, they urge, John 14:3. "If I go away, I will come attain, and receive you to myself". As if the time of Christ's receiving his people to himself, should not come, until his second coming at the end of the world. But though he will then collect all believers into one body, and present them solemnly to his Father; yet that hinders not, but he may, as indeed he does, receive every particular believing soul to himself at death, by the ministry of angels. And if not, how is it that when Christ comes to

judgement, he is attended with ten thousand of his saints, that shall follow him when he comes from heaven? Jude 14. You see then the scripture puts no interval between the dissolution of a saint, and his glorification: It speaks of the saints that are dead, as already with the Lord: And the wicked that are dead, as already in hell, calling them spirits in prison, 1 Pet. 3:19, 20. assuring us, that Judas went presently to his own place, Acts 1:25. And to that sense, is the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Luke 16:22.

But let us weigh these four things more particularly, for our full satisfaction in this point.

Arg. 1. First, Why should the happiness of believers be deferred, since they are immediately capable of enjoying it, as soon as separated from the body? Alas, the soul is so far from being assisted by the body (as it is now) for the enjoyment of God; that it is either clogged or hindered by it: So speaks the apostle, 2 Cor. 5:6, 8. "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" that is our bodies prejudice our souls, obstruct and hinder the fullness and freedom of their communion: When we part from the body, we go home to the Lord! then the soul is escaped as a bird out of a cage or snare. Here I am prevented by an excellent pen, which has judiciously opened this point: To whose excellent observations I only add this; That if the entanglements, snares, and prejudices of the soul are so great and many in its embodied estate, that it cannot so freely dilate itself and take in the comforts of God by communion with him, then surely the laying aside of that clog, or the freeing of the soul from that burden, can be no bar to its greater happiness, which it enjoys in its separated state.

Arg. 2. Secondly, Why should the happiness and glory of the soul be deferred, unless God had some farther preparative work to do upon it, before it be fit to be admitted into glory? But surely, here is no such work wrought upon it after its separation by death: all that is done of that kind, is done here. When the compositum is dissolved, all means, duties, and ordinances are ceased. The working day is then ended, and night comes, when no man can work, John 9:3. To that purpose are those words of Solomon, Eccles. 9:10. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the

grave where you go." So that our glorification is not deferred, in order to our fuller preparation for glory. If we are not fit when we die, we can never be fit: all is done upon us that ever was intended to be done; for they are called, Heb. 12:23. the spirits of the just made perfect.

Arg. 3. Thirdly, Again, Why should our salvation slumber, when the damnation of the wicked does not slumber? God defers not their misery; and surely he will not defer our glory. If he be quick with his enemies, he will not be slow and dilatory with his friends. It cannot be imagined, but he is as much inclined to acts of favor to his children, as to acts of justice to his enemies; these are presently damned, Jude, ver. 7. Acts 1:25. 1 Pet. 3:19, 20. And what reason why believers, yes, every believer, as well as this in the text, should not be, that very day in which they die, with Christ in glory?

Arg. 4. Fourthly, and lastly, How do such delays consist with Christ's ardent desires to have his people with him where he is, and with the vehement longings of their souls to be with Christ? You may see those reflected flames of love and desire of mutual enjoyment between the bridegroom and his spouse in Rev. 22:17, 20. Delays make their hearts sick: the expectation and faith in which the saints die, is to be satisfied then; and surely God will not deceive them. I deny not but their glory will be more complete when the body, their absent friend, is reunited, and made to share with them in their happiness; yet that hinders not, but meanwhile the soul may enjoy its glory, while the body takes its rest, and sleeps in the dust.

INFERENCE 1. Are believers immediately with God after their dissolution? Then how surprisingly glorious will heaven be to believers! Not that they are in it before they think of it, or are fitted for it; no, they have spent many thoughts upon it before, and been long preparing for it; but the suddenness and greatness of the change is amazing to our thoughts. For a soul to be now here in the body, conversing with men, living among sensible objects, and within a few moments to be with the Lord; this hour on earth, the next in the third heaven; now viewing this world, and anon standing among an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect: O what a change is this! What! but wink, and see God! Commend your soul to Christ, and be transferred in

the arms of angels into the invisible world, the world of spirits! To live as angels of God? To live without eating, drinking, sleeping! To be lifted up from a bed of sickness to a throne of glory! To leave a sinful, troublesome world, a sick and pained body, and be in a moment perfectly cured, and feel yourself perfectly well, and free from all troubles and distempers! You cannot think what this will be! Who can tell what sights, what apprehensions, what thoughts, what frames believing souls have, before the bodies they left are removed from the eyes of their dear surviving friends!

INFERENCE. 2. Are believers immediately with God after their dissolution? Where then shall the unbelievers be, and in what state will they find themselves immediately after death has closed their eyes? Ah! what will the case of them be that go the other way?

To be plucked out of house and body, from among friends and comforts, and thrust into endless miseries, into the dark vault of hell, never to see the light of this world any more; never to see a comfortable sight; never to hear a joyful sound; never to know the meaning of rest, peace, or delight any more. O what a change is here! To exchange the smiles and honors of men, for the frowns and fury of God; to be clothed with flames, and drink the pure unmixed wrath of God, who were but a few days since clothed in silks, and filled with the sweet of the creature! How is the state of things altered with them! It was the lamentable cry of poor Adrian, when he felt death approaching: "O my poor wandering soul! alas! where are you going! Where must you lodge this night! You shall never jest more, never be merry more!"

Your term in your houses and bodies is out, and there is another habitation provided for you; but it is a dismal one! When a saint dies, heaven above is as it were moved to receive and entertain him; at his coming, he is received into everlasting habitations, into the inheritance of the saints in light. When an unbeliever dies, we may say of him alluding to Isa. 14:9. "Hell from beneath is moved for him, to meet him at his coming; it stirs up the dead for him." No more sports, nor plays, nor cups of wine, nor beds of pleasure: the more of these you enjoyed here, the more intolerable will this change be to you. If saints are immediately with God, others must be immediately with Satan.

INFERENCE. 3. How little cause have they to fear death, who shall be with God so soon after their death? Some there are that tremble at the thoughts of death; that cannot endure to hear its name mentioned; they would rather stoop to any misery here, yes, to any sin, than die, because they are afraid of the exchange. But you that are interested in Christ, need not do so; you can lose nothing by the exchange: the words Death, Grave, and Eternity, should have another kind of sound in your ears, and make contrary impressions upon your hearts. If your earthly tabernacles cast you out, you shall not be found naked; you have "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" and it is but a step out of this into that. O what fair, sweet, and lovely thoughts should you have of that great and last change! But what speak I of your fearlessness of death? Your duty lies much higher than that far.

INFERENCE. 3. If believers are immediately with God, after their dissolution, then it is their duty to long for that dissolution, and cast many a longing look towards their graves. So did Paul, I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ, which is far better. The advantages of this exchange are unspeakable: You have gold for brass; wine for water; substance for shadow: solid glory for very vanity. Oh! if the dust of this earth were but once blown out of your eyes, that you might see the divine glory, how weary would you be to live? How willing to die; But then be sure your title be sound and good: leave not so great a concernment to the last; for, though it is confessed, God may do that in an hour, that never was done all your days, yet it is not common; which brings to our third and last observation.

DOCTRINE. 3. That God may, though he seldom does, prepare men for glory immediately before their dissolution by death.

There is one parable, and no more, that speaks of some that were called at the last hour, Matt. 20:9, 10. And there is this one instance in the text, and no more, that gives us an account of a person so called. We acknowledge God may do it, his grace is his own, he may dispense it how and where he pleases: we must always salve divine prerogative. Who shall fix bounds, or put limits to free grace, but God himself, whose it is? If he do not ordinarily show such mercies to dying sinners (as indeed he does

not); yet it is not because he cannot, but because he will not; not because their hearts are so hardened by long custom in sin, that his grace cannot break them, but because he most justly withholds that grace from them. When blessed Mr. Bilney, the martyr, heard a minister preaching thus: O you old sinner, you have lain these fifty years rotting in your sin, do you think now to be saved? That the blood of Christ shall save you? O, said Mr. Bilney, what preaching of Christ is this? If I had heard no other preaching than this, what had become of me? No, no, old sinners, or young sinners, great or small sinners, are not to be beaten off from Christ, but encouraged to repentance and faith; for who knows but the affections of mercy may yearn at last upon one that has all along rejected it? This thief was as unlikely ever to receive mercy, but a few hours before he died, as any person in the world could be.

But surely this is no encouragement to neglect the present seasons of mercy, because God may show mercy hereafter; or to neglect the ordinary, because God sometimes manifests his grace in ways extraordinary. Many, I know, have hardened themselves in ways of sin, by this example of mercy. But what God did at this time, for this man, cannot be expected to be done ordinarily for us, and the reasons thereof are:

Reason 1. First, Because God has vouchsafed us the ordinary and standing means of grace, which this sinner had not; and therefore we cannot expect such extraordinary and unusual conversion as he had. This poor creature never heard in all likelihood, one sermon preached by Christ, or any of his apostles: He lived the life of a highwayman, and concerned not himself about religion. But we have Christ preached freely, and constantly in our assemblies: We have line upon line, precept upon precept: and when God affords the ordinary preaching of the gospel, he does not use to work wonders. When Israel was in the wilderness, then God gave them bread from heaven, and clave the rocks to give them drink; but when they came to Canaan, where they had the ordinary means of subsistence, the manna ceased.

Reason 2. Secondly, Such a conversion as this, may not be ordinarily expected by any man, because such a time as that will never come again: it is possible, if Christ were to die again, and you to be crucified with

him, you mightest receive your conversion in such a miraculous and extraordinary way; but Christ dies no more; such a day as that will never come again.

Mr. Fenner, in his excellent discourse upon this point, tells us, That as this was an extraordinary time, Christ being now to be installed in his kingdom, and crowned with glory and honor; so extraordinary things were now done; as when kings are crowned, the streets are richly hanged, the conduits run with wine, great malefactors are then pardoned, for then they show their munificence and bounty; it is the day of the gladness of their hearts. But let a man come at another time to the conduits, he shall find no wine, but ordinary water there. Let a man be in the jail at another time, and he may be hanged; veer, and have no reason but to expect and prepare for it. What Christ did now for this man, was at an extraordinary time.

Reason 3. Thirdly, Such a conversion as this may not ordinarily be expected; for as such a time will never come again, so there will never be the like reason for such a conversion any more: Christ converted him upon the cross, to give an instance of his divine power at that time, when it was almost wholly clouded: Look, as in that day the divinity of Christ brake forth in several miracles, as the preternatural eclipse of the sun, the great earthquake, the rending of the rocks and veil of the temple; so in the conversion of this man in such an extraordinary way, and all, to give evidence of the divinity of Christ, and prove him to be the Son of God whom they crucified; but that is now sufficiently confirmed, and there will be no more occasion for miracles to evidence it.

Reason 4. Fourthly. None has reason to expect the like conversion, that enjoys the ordinary means; because, though in this convert we have a pattern of what free grace can do, yet, as divines pertinently observe, it is a pattern without a promise; God has not added any promise to it, that ever he will do it for any other; and where we have not a promise to encourage our hope, our hope can signify but little to us.

INFERENCE 1. Let those that have found mercy in the evening of their life, admire the extraordinary race that therein has appeared to them. O that ever God should accept the bran, when Satan has had the flour of

your days! The fore-mentioned reverend author tells us of one Marcus Caius Victorius, a very aged man in the primitive times, who was converted from Heathenism to Christianity in his old age. This man came to Simplicianus, a minister, and told him, he heartily owned and embraced the Christian faith. But neither he nor the church would trust him for a long time; and the reason was, the unusualness of a conversion at such an age. But after he had given them good evidence of the reality thereof, there were acclamations and singing of Psalms, the people everywhere crying, Marcus Caius Victorius is become a Christian. This was written for a wonder! Oh! if God have wrought such wondrous salvation for any of you, what cause have you to do more for him than others! What! to pluck you out of hell when one foot was in! To appear to you at last, when so hardened by long custom in sin, that one might say, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Oh! what riches of mercy have appeared to you!

INFERENCE. 2. Let this convince and startle such, as even to their gray hairs, remain in an unconverted state, who are where they were when they first came into the world, yes, rather further off by much.

Bethink yourselves, you that are full of days, and full of sin, whose time is almost done, and your great work not begun: who have but a few sands more in the upper part of the glass to run down, and then your conversion will be impossible; your sun is setting; your night is coming; the shadows of the evening, are stretched out upon you; you have one foot in the grave, and the other in hell. O think, if all sense and tenderness be not withered up as well as natural verdure; think with yourselves how sad a case you are in: God may do wonders, but they are not seen every day, then they would cease to be wondered at. O strive, strive, while you have a little time, and a few helps and means more; strive to get that work accomplished now that was never done yet; defer it no longer, you have done so too much already.

It may be (to use Seneca's expression) you have been these sixty, seventy, or eighty years, beginning to live, about to change your tactics; but hitherto you still continue the same. Do not you see how Satan has gulled, and cheated you with vain purposes, until he has brought you to the very brink of the grave and hell? O it is time now to make a stand, and pause a

little where you are, and to what he has brought you. The Lord at last give you an eye to see, and an heart to consider.

INFERENCE. 3. Lastly, Let this be a call and caution to al young ones to begin with God betime, and take heed of delays until the last, so as many thousands have done before them to their eternal ruin. Now is your time, if you desire to be in Christ; if you have any sense of the weight and worth of eternal things upon your hearts: I know your age is voluptuous, and delights not the serious thoughts of death and eternity: you are more inclined to mind your pleasures, and leave these grave and serious matters to old age: but let me persuade you against that, by these considerations.

First, O set to the business of religion now, because this is the molding age. Now your hearts are tender, and your affections flowing: now is the time when you are most likely to be wrought upon.

Secondly, Now, because this is the freest part of your time. It is in the morning of your life, as in the morning of the day: if a man have any business to be done, let him take the morning for it; for in the after part of the day a hurry of business comes on, so that you either forget it, or want opportunity for it.

Thirdly, Now, because your life is immediately uncertain; you are not certain that ever you shall attain the years of your fathers: there are graves in the church-yard just of your length; and souls of all sorts and sizes in Golgotha, as the Jews proverb is.

Fourthly, Now, because God wil1 not spare you because you are but young sinners, little sinners, if you die Christless. If you are not; as you think, old enough to mind Christ, surely, if you die Christless, you are old enough to be damned: there is the small spray, as well as great logs in the fire of hell.

Fifthly, Now, because your life will be the more eminently useful, and serviceable to God, when you know him betimes, and begin with him early. Austin repented, and so have many thousands since, that he began so late, and knew God no sooner.

Sixthly, Now, because your life will be the sweeter to you, when the morning of it is dedicated to the Lord. The first fruits sanctify the whole harvest: this will have a sweet influence into all your days, whatever changes, straits, or troubles you may afterwards meet with!

The Fourth Excellent Saying of Christ Upon the Cross

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46

This verse contains the fourth memorable saying of Christ upon the cross; words able to rend the hardest heart in the world: it is the voice of the Son of God in an agony: his sufferings were great, very great before, but never in that extremity as now; when this heaven rending and heart melting out-cry brake from him upon the cross, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? In which are considerable, the time, matter, and manner of this his sad complaint.

First, The time when it was uttered, "about the ninth hour," that is about three of the clock afternoon. For as the Jews divided the night into four quarters, or watches; so they divided the day, in like manner, into four quarters, or greater flours; which had their names from that hour of the day that closed the quarter. so that beginning their account of their lesser hours from six in the morning, which with them was the first, their ninth hour answered to our third afternoon. And this is heedfully marked by the evangelists, on purpose to show us how long Christ hanged in distress upon the cross both in soul and body, which at least was full three hours: towards the end whereof his soul was so filled, distressed, and overwhelmed, that this doleful cry brake from his soul, in bitter anguish, "My God, my God," etc.

Secondly. The matter of the complaint. It is not of the cruel tortures he felt in his body, nor of the scoffs and reproaches of his name; he mentions

not a word of these, they were all swallowed up in the sufferings within, as the river is swallowed up in the sea, or the lesser flame in the greater. He seems to neglect all these, and only complains of what was more burdensome than ten thousand crosses; even his Father's deserting him, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is a more inward trouble that burdens him, darkness upon his spirit, the hidings of God's face from him, an affliction he was totally a stranger to until now; here he lays his hand in this complaint. This was the pained place, to which he points in this dolorous outcry.

Thirdly. The manner in which he utters his sad complaint, and that was with a remarkable vehemency, "he cried with a loud voice," not like a dying man, in whom nature was spent, but as one full of vigor, life, and sense. He gathered all his spirits together, stirred up the whole power of nature, when he made this grievous outcry. There is in it also an emphatical reduplication which shows with what vehemency it was uttered; not singly, my God, but he doubles it, "My God, my God," as distressed persons use to do. So Elisha, when Elijah was separated from him by the chariots and horses of fire, cries out, "My father, my father."

Nay, moreover, to increase the force and vehemency of this complaint, here is an affectionate interrogation, "Why have you forsaken me?" Questions, especially such as this, are full of spirits. It is as if he were surprised by the strangeness of this affliction: and rousing up himself with an unusual vehemency, turns himself to the Father, and cries, Why so, my Father? O what do you mean by this! What! hide that face from me that was never hid before! What! and hide it from me now, in the depth of my other torments and troubles! O what new, what strange things are these! Lastly, here is an observable variation of the language in which this astonishing complaint was uttered; for he speaks both Hebrew and Syrian in one breath, Eli, Eli lama, are all Hebrew, sabachthani is a Syrian word, used here for emphasis sake. Hence we observe,

DOCTRINE. That God in design to heighten the sufferings of Christ to the uttermost, forsook him in the time of his greatest distress; to the unspeakable affliction and anguish of his soul.

This proposition shall be considered in three parts: The desertion itself;

the design or end of it; the effect and influence it had on Christ.

First, The desertion itself. Divine desertion generally considered, is God's withdrawing himself from any, not as to his essence, that fills heaven and earth, and constantly remains the same; but it is the withdrawment of his favor, grace, and love: when these are gone, God is said to be gone. And this is done two ways, either absolutely, and wholly, or respectively, and only as to manifestation. In the first sense, devils are forsaken of God. They once were in his favor and love, but they have utterly and finally lost it. God is so withdrawn from them, as that he will never take them into favor any more. In the other sense he sometimes forsakes his dearest children, that is he removes all sweet manifestations of his favor and love for a time, and carries it to them as a stranger, though his love be still the same.

And this kind of desertion, which is respective, temporary, and only in regard of manifestation, is justly distinguished from the various ends and designs of it, into probational, cautional, castigatory, and penal. Probational desertions are only for the proof and trial of grace. Cautional desertions are designed to prevent sin. Castigatory desertions are God's rods to chastise his people for sin. Penal desertions are such as are inflicted as the just reward of sin, for the reparation of that wrong sinners have done by their sins. Of this sort was Christ's desertion. A part of the curse, and a special part. And his bearing it was no small part of the reparation, or satisfaction he made for our sins.

More particularly, to open the nature of this desertion of Christ by his Father, there being much of intricacy and difficulty in it; I shall proceed in the explication of it negatively, and positively.

First, Negatively. When Christ cries out of God's forsaking him, he does not mean, that he had dissolved the personal union of the two natures. Not as if the marriage-knot which united our nature to the person of Christ was loosed, or a divorce made between them: No, for when he was forsaken of God, he was still true and real God-man, in one person.

Secondly, When Christ bewails the father's forsaking him, he does not mean, that he pulled away the prop of divine support from him, by which

he had until then endured the tortures and sufferings that oppressed him: no, though the Father deserted, yet he still supported him. And so much is intimated in these words of Christ, Eli, Eli, which signifies, my strong One, my strong One. God was with him by way of support, when withdrawn as to manifestations of love and favor. In respect of God's supporting essence which was with Christ at this time, it is said, Isa. 42:1. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold:" and John 16:32. "I am not alone, but my father is with me." So that this cannot be the meaning of it.

Thirdly, Much less is it his meaning? that God had left him, as to inherent grace and sanctification; recalling that spirit of holiness which had anointed him above his fellows: no, when he was forsaken, he remained as holy as ever: he had indeed less comfort, but not less holiness than before. Such a desertion had irritated and made void the very end of his death. And his sacrifice could never have yielded such a fragrant odor to God as it did, Eph. 5:2.

Fourthly, The love of God was not so withdrawn from Christ, as that the Father had now no love for him, nor delight in him. That is impossible, he can no more cease to love Christ, than to love himself. his love was not turned into wrath; though his wrath only was now manifested to him as our surety; and hid his love from him as his beloved Son.

Fifthly, Nor was Christ forsaken by his Father finally, upon what account soever it was that he was forsaken: no, it was but for a few hours that the dark cloud dwelt upon his soul; it soon passed away, and the bright and glorious face of God shone forth again as bright as ever, Psalm. 22:1, 24. compared.

Sixthly, and lastly, It was not a mutual desertion, or a desertion on both parts; the Father forsook him, but he forsook not his Father. When God withdrew, he followed him, crying, "My God, my God."

Yet to speak positively of it; though he did not dissolve the personal union, nor cut off divine supports, nor remove his inherent grace, nor turn his Father's love into hatred, nor continue forever, nor yet was it on both parts, Christ's forsaking God, as well as God's forsaking Christ: yet I say it was,

First, A very sad desertion, the like unto which in all respects never was experienced by any, nor can be to the end of the world. All his other sufferings were but small to this; they bore upon his body, this upon his soul; they came from the hands of vile men, this from the hands of a dear Father. He suffered both in body and soul; but the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings. Under all his other sufferings he opened not his mouth; but this touched the quick, that he could not but cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Secondly, As it was sad, so it was a penal desertion, inflicted on him for satisfaction for those sins of ours, which deserved that God should forsake us forever, as the damned are forsaken by him. So that this cry (as one observes) was like the perpetual shriek of them that are cast away forever: this was that hell, and the torments of it which Christ, our surety, suffered for us. For look, as there lies a twofold misery upon the damned in hell, namely, pain of sense, and pain of sense; so upon Christ answerable, there was not only an impression of wrath, but also a subtraction or withdrawment of all sensible favor and love. Hence it is said by himself, John 12:27. And now my soul, "tetaraktai" is troubled. The word signifies, troubled as they that are in hell are troubled. Though God did not leave his soul in hell, as others are, he having enough to pay the debt which they have not, yet in the torments thereof, at this time, he was; yes, his sufferings at this time in his soul were equivalent to all that which our souls should have suffered there to all eternity.

Thirdly, It was a desertion that was real, and not fictitious. He does not personate a deserted soul, and speak as if God had withdrawn the comfortable sense and influence of his love from him; but the thing was so indeed. The Godhead restrained and kept back, for this time, all its joys, comforts and sense of love from the manhood, yielding it nothing but support. This bitter doleful outcry of Christ gives evidence enough of the reality of it: he did not feign, but feel the burdensomeness of it.

Fourthly, This desertion fell out in the time of Christ's greatest need of comfort that ever he had in all the time of his life on earth. His Father forsook him at that time, when all earthly comforts had forsaken him, and all outward evils had broken in together upon him; when men, yes, the best of men stood afar off, and none but barbarous enemies were

about him. When pains and shame, and all miseries even weighed him down; then, even then, to complete and fill up his suffering, God stands afar off too.

Fifthly, and lastly, It was such a desertion as left him only to the supports of his faith. He had nothing else now but his Father's covenant and promise to hang upon. And indeed, as a judicious author pertinently observes, the faith of Christ did several ways act and manifest itself, in these very words of complaint in the text.

For though all comfortable sights of God and sense of love were obstructed, yet you see his soul cleaves fiducially to God for all that: My God, etc. Though sense and feeling speak as well as faith, yet faith speaks first, My God, before sense speaks a word of his forsaking. His faith presented the complaint of sense; and though sense comes in afterwards with a word of complaint, yet here are two words of faith to one of sense: it is, "My God, my God," and but one word of forsaking. As his faith spoke first, so it spoke twice, when sense and feeling spoke but once: yes, and as faith spoke first, and twice as much as sense, so it spoke more confidently than sense did. He lays a confident claim to God as his God; "My God, my God," and only queries about his forsaking of him, "Why have you forsaken me?" This is spoken more dubiously, the former more confidently.

To be short, his faith laid hold on God, under a most suitable title, or attribute, Eli, Eli, "my strong One, my strong One," q. d. O you, with whom is infinite and everlasting strength; you that have hitherto supported my manhood, and according to your promise upheld your servant; what! will you now forsake me? My strong One, I lean upon you. To these supports and refuges of faith this desertion shut up Christ: by these things he stood, when all other visible and sensible comforts shrunk away, both from his soul and body. This is the true, though brief account of the nature and quality of Christ's desertion.

Secondly, In the next place, let us consider the designs and ends of it; which were principally satisfaction and sanctification: Satisfaction for those sins of ours which deserved that we should be totally and everlastingly forsaken of God. This is the desert of every sin, and the

damned do feel it, and shall to all eternity: God is gone from them forever, not essentially; the just God is with them still, the God of power is still with them, the avenging God is ever with them; but the merciful God is gone, and gone forever. And thus would he have withdrawn himself from every soul that sinned, had not Christ borne that punishment for us in his own soul: If he had not cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" we must have howled out this hideous complaint in the lowest hell forever, O righteous God! O dreadful! O terrible God! you have forever forsaken me!

And as satisfaction was designed in this desertion of Christ, so also was the sanctification of all the desertion of the saints designed in it. For he having been forsaken before us, and for us, whenever God forsakes us, that very forsaking of his is sanctified, and thereby turned into a mercy to believers. Hence are all the precious fruits and effects of our desertions: such are the earnest excitations of the soul to prayer, Psalm. 78:2. Psalm. 88:1, 9. The antidoting the tempted soul against sin. The reviving of ancient experiences, Psalm. 77:5. Enchanting the value of the divine presence with the soul, and teaching it to hold Christ faster than ever before, Cant. 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5. These, and many more, are the precious effects of sanctified desertion; but how many, or how good soever these effects are, they all owe themselves to Jesus Christ, as the author of them; who, for our sakes would pass through this sad and dark state, that we might find those blessings in it. So then, the Godhead's suspending of all the effects of joy and comfort from the humanity of Christ at this time, which had not ceased to flow into it, in an ineffable measure and manner, until now, must needs be both a special part of Christ's satisfaction for us, and consequently, that which makes all our temporary desertions rather mercies and blessings, than curses to us.

Thirdly, Let us, in the next place, consider the effects and influence this desertion had upon the spirit of Christ.

And though it did not drive him to despair, as the Papists falsely charge Mr. Calvin to have affirmed; yet it even amazed him, and almost swallowed up his soul in the deeps of trouble and consternation. This cry is a cry from the deeps, from a soul oppressed even to death. Never was the Lord Jesus so put to it before; it is a most astonishing outcry.

Let but five particulars be weighed, and you will say, never was there any darkness like this: no sorrow like Christ's sorrow in his deserted state: For,

First, Apprehend, reader, this was a new thing to Christ, and that which he never was acquainted with before. From all eternity until now there had been constant and wonderful outlets of love, delight, and joy, from the bosom of the Father, into his bosom. He never missed his Father before: never saw a frown, or a veil, upon that blessed face before. This made it an heavy burden indeed, the words are words of admiration and astonishment; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" you that never midst so before, have forsaken me now.

Secondly, As it was a new thing to Christ, and therefore the more amazing, so it was a great thing to Christ; so great, that he scarce knew how to support it. Had it not been a great trial indeed, so great a spirit as Christ's was would never have so drooped under it, and made so sad a complaint of it. It was so sharp, so heavy an affliction to his soul, that it caused him, who was meek under all other sufferings as a lamb, to roar under this like a lion; for so much those words of Christ signify, Psalm. 22:1. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from the voice of my roaring?" It comes from a root, that signifies "to howl, or roar as a lion; and rather signifies the noise made by a wild beast, than the voice of a man."

And it is as much as if Christ had said, O my God, no words can express my anguish: I will not speak, but roar, howl out my complaint; pour it out in volleys of groans: I roar as a lion. It is no small matter will make that majestic creature to roar: and sure, so great a spirit as Christ's would not have roared under a slight burden.

Thirdly, As it was a great burden to Christ, so it was a burden laid on in the time of his greatest distress. When his body was in tortures, and all about him was black, dismal, and full of horror and darkness. He fell into this desertion at a time when he never had the like need of divine supports and comforts, and that aggravated it.

Fourthly, It was a burden that lay upon him long, even from the time his soul began to be sorrowful and sore amazed in the garden, until his very death. If you were but to hold your finger in the fire for two minutes, you would not be able to bear it. But what is the finger of a man to the soul of Christ? Or what is a material fire to the wrath of the great God!

Fifthly, So heavy was this pressure upon Christ's soul, that in probability it hastened his death; for it was not usual for crucified persons to expire so soon; and those that were crucified with him were both alive after Christ was gone. Some have hanged more than a day and a night, some two full days and nights, in those torments alive; but never did any feel inwardly what Christ felt. He bare it until the ninth hour, and then makes a fearful outcry and dies. The uses follow.

INFERENCE 1. Did God forsake Christ upon the cross as a punishment to him for our sins? Then it follows, That as often as we have sinned, so oft have we deserved to be forsaken of God. This is the just recompense and demerit of sin. And, indeed, here lies the principal evil of sin, that it separates between God and the soul. This separation is both the moral evil that is in it, and the penal evil inflicted by the righteous God for it. By sin we depart from God, and, as a due punishment of it, God departs from us. This will be the dismal sentence in the last day, Matt. 25: "Depart from me, you cursed." Thenceforth there will be a gulf fixed between God and them, Luke 19:20. No more friendly intercourses with the blessed God forever. The eternal shriek of the damned is, Woe and alas, God has forsaken us for evermore. Ten thousand worlds can nowise recompense the loss of one God. Beware, sinners, how you say to God now, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of your ways, lest he say, Depart from me, you shall never see my face.

INFERENCE. 2. Did Christ never make such a sad complaint and outcry, until God hid his face from him? Then the hiding of God's face is certainly the greatest misery that can possibly befall a gracious soul in this world. When they scourged, buffeted, and smote Christ, yes, when they nailed him to the tree, he opened not his mouth; but when his father hid his face from him, then he cried out; yes, his voice was the voice of roaring: this was more to him than a thousand crucifyings. And, surely, as it was to Christ, so is it to all gracious souls, the saddest stroke, the heaviest

burden that ever they felt. When David forbade Absalom to come to Jerusalem, to see his father, he complains in 2 Sam. 14:32. "Therefore, (says he) am I come from Geshur, if I may not see the king's face?" So does the gracious soul bemoan itself; Therefore am I redeemed, called, and reconciled, if I may not see the face of my God?

It is said of Tully, when he was banished from Italy, and of Demosthenes, when he was banished from Athens, that they wept every time they looked towards their own country: and, is it strange that a poor deserted believer should mourn every time he looks heaven ward? Say, Christian, did the tears never trickle down your cheeks when you look towards heaven, and could not see the face of your God, as at other times? If two dear friends cannot part, though it be but for a season, but that parting must be in a shower; blame not the saints if they sigh and mourn bitterly when the Lord, who is the life of their life, depart, though but for a season, from them; for if God depart, their sweetest enjoyment on earth, the very crown of all their comforts is gone, and what will a king take in exchange for his crown? What can recompense a saint for the loss of his God! Indeed, if they had never seen the Lord, or tasted the incomparable sweetness of his presence, it were another matter; but the darkness which follows the sweetest light of his countenance, is double darkness.

And that which does not a little increase the horror of this darkness is, that when their souls were thus benighted, and the sun of their comfort is set; then does Satan, like the wild beasts of the desert, creep out of his den, and roar upon them with hideous temptations. Surely this is a sad state, and deserves tender pity! Pity is a debt due to the distressed, and the world shows not a greater distress than this. If ever you have been in troubles of this kind yourselves, you will never slight others in the same case: nay, one end of God's exercising you with troubles of this nature, is to teach you compassion towards others in the same case. Do they not cry to you, as Job 19:21. "Have pity have pity upon me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me." Draw forth affections of mercy and tender compassion to them; for, either you have been, or are, or may be in the same case yourselves: however, if men do not, to be sure, Christ, that has felt it before them, and for them, will pity them.

INFERENCE. 3. Did God really forsake Jesus Christ upon the cross?

Then from the desertion of Christ, singular consolation springs up to the people of God; yes, manifold consolation. Principally it is a support in these two respects, as it is preventive of your final desertion and a comfortable pattern to you in your present sad desertions.

First, Christ's desertion is preventive of your final desertion: because he was forsaken for a time, you shall not be forsaken forever: for he was forsaken for you: and God's forsaking him, though but for a few hours, is equivalent to his forsaking you forever. It is every way as much for the dear Son of God, the darling delight of his soul, to be forsaken of God for a time; as if such a poor inconsiderable thing as you are, should be cast off to eternity. Now this being equivalent, and borne in your room, must needs give you the highest security in the world, that God will never finally withdraw from you: had he intended to have done so, Christ had never made such a sad outcry as you hear this day, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Secondly, Moreover, this sad desertion of Christ becomes a comfortable patterns to poor deserted souls in divers respects: and the proper business of such souls, at such times, is to eye it believably, in these six respects.

First, Though God deserted Christ, yet at the same time he powerfully supported him: his omnipotent arms were under him, though his pleased face was hid from him: he had not indeed his smiles, but he had his supports. So, Christian, just so shall it be with you: your God may turn away his face, but he will not pluck away his arm. When one asked holy Mr. Baines, how the case stood with his soul, he answered, supports I have, though suavities I want. Our father, in this, deals with us, as we ourselves sometimes do with a child that is stubborn and rebellious. We turn him out of doors, and bid him begone out of our sight: and there he sighs and weeps; but however, for the humbling of him, we will not presently take him into house and favor: yet we order, or at least, permit the servants to carry him meat and drink. Here is fatherly care and support: though no former smiles, or manifested delights.

Secondly, Though God deserted Christ, yet he deserted not God: his Father forsook him, but he could not forsake his Father, but followed him

with this cry, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And is it not even so with you? God goes off from your souls, but you cannot go off from him. No, your hearts are mourning after the Lord, seeking him carefully with tears: complaining of his absence, as the greatest evil in this world. This is Christ-like: so it was with the spouse, Cant. 3:1, 2. Her beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; but was she content to part with him so? No such thing. "By night, on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I found him not; I will arise now, and go about the city," etc.

Thirdly, Though God forsook Christ, yet he returned to him again. It was but for a time, not forever. In this also does his desertion parallel yours. God may, for several wise and holy reasons, hide his face from you, but not so as it is hid from the damned, who shall never see it again. This cloud shall pass away; this night shall have a bright morning: "For (says your God) I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wrath; for the spirit shall fail before me, and the souls which I have made." As if he should say, I may contend with him for a time, to humble him, but not forever, lest, instead of a sad child, I should have a dead child. Oh the tenderness even of a displeased father!

Fourthly, Though God forsook Christ, yet at that time he could justify God. So you read, Psalm. 22:2, 3. "O my God (says he) I cry in the day time, but you hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent: but you are holy." Is not your spirit, according to the measure, framed like Christ's in this; could you not say, even when he writes bitter things against you, he is a holy, faithful, and good God for all this? I am deserted but not wronged. There is not one drop of injustice in all the sea of my sorrows. Though he condemn me, I must, and will justify him; this also is Christ-like.

Fifthly, Though God took from Christ all visible and sensible comforts, inward as well as outward; yet Christ subsisted, by faith, in the absence of them all: his desertion put him upon the acting of his faith. "My God, my God", are words of faith, the words of one that wholly depends upon his God: and is it not so with you too? Sense of love is gone, sweet sights of God shut up in a dark cloud? well, what then? Must your hands presently

hang down, and your soul give up all its hopes? What! Is there no faith to relieve in this case? Yes, yes, and blessed be God for faith. "Who is among you that fears the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servants, that walks in darkness, and has no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God," Isa. 50:10. To conclude,

Sixthly, Christ was deserted, a little before the glorious morning of light and joy dawned upon him. It was a little, a very little while, after this sad cry, before he triumphed gloriously; and so it may be with you: heaviness may endure for a night, but joy and gladness will come in the morning. You know how Mr. Glover was transported with joy, and cried out, as a man in a rapture, O Austin! he is come, he is come, he is come, meaning the Comforter, who for some time had been absent from his soul.

But, I fear I am absolutely and finally forsaken.

Why so? Do you find the characters of such a desertion upon your soul? Be righteous judges, and tell me, whether you find an heart willing to forsake God? Is it indifferent to you whether God ever return again or no? Are there no mournings, meltings, or thirsting after the Lord? Indeed, if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever; but can you do so? Oh, no, let him do what he will, I am resolved to wait for him, cleave to him, mourn after him, though I have no present comfort from him, no assurance of my interest in him; yet will I not exchange my poor weak hopes for all the good in this world.

Again, you say God has forsaken you, but has he let loose the bridle before you? To allude to Job 30:11. Has he taken away from your souls all conscientious tenderness of sin, so that now you can sin freely, and without any regret? If so, it is a sad token indeed: tell me, soul, if you, indeed, judge God will never return in loving kindness to you any more; why have you not then give yourself over to the pleasures of sin, and fetch your comforts that way, from the creature, since you can't have no comfort from your God? Oh, no, I cannot do so; if I die in darkness and sorrow, I will never do so: my soul is as full of fear and hatred of sin as ever, though empty of joy and comfort. Surely, these are no tokens of a soul finally abandoned by its God.

INFERENCE. 4. Did God forsake his own Son upon the cross; Then the dearest of God's people may, for a time, be forsaken of their God. Think it not strange, when you, that are the children of light, meet with darkness, yes, and walk in it; neither charge God foolishly; nor say he deals hardly with you. You see what befall Jesus Christ, whom his soul delighted in: It is doubtless your concernment to expect and prepare for days of darkness. You have heard the doleful cry of Christ, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" You know how it was with Job, David, Heman, Asaph, and many others, the dear servants of God, what heart melting lamentations they had made upon this account; and are you better than they? Oh, prepare for spiritual troubles; I am sure you do enough every day to involve you in darkness. Now, if at any time this trial befall you, mind these two seasonable admonitions, and lay them up for such a time.

Admonition 1. First, Exercise the faith of adherence, when you have lost the faith of evidence. When God takes away that, he leaves this: that is necessary to the comfort, this to the life of his people. It is sweet to live in views of your interest, but if they be gone, believe and rely on God, for an interest. Stay yourselves on your God when you have no light, Isa 50:10. Drop this anchor in the dark, and do not reckon all gone when evidence is gone: never reckon yourselves undone while you can adhere to your God. Direct acts are noble acts of faith, as well as reflexive ones; yes, and in some respects to be preferred to them. For,

First, As your comfort depends on the evidencing acts of faith, so your salvation upon the adhering act of faith. Evidence comforts, affiance saves you; and, sure, salvation is more than comfort.

Secondly, Your faith of evidence has more sensible sweetness, but your faith of adherence is of more constancy and continuance: the former is as a flower in its month, the latter sticks by you all the year.

Thirdly, Faith of evidence brings more joy to you, but faith of adherence brings more glory to God: for thereby you trust him when you cannot see him; yes, you believe not only without, but against sense and feeling; and, doubtless, that which brings glory to God, is better than that which brings comfort to you. O then exercise this, when you have lost that.

Admonition 2. Secondly, Take the right method to recover the sweet light which you have sinned away from your souls. Do not go about from one to another complaining; nor yet sit down desponding under your burden. But,

First, Search diligently after the cause of God's withdrawment: urge him hard, by prayer, to tell you therefore he contends with you, Job 10:2. Say, Lord, what have I done that so offends your Spirit? What evil is it which you so rebuke? I beseech you show me the cause of your anger: have I grieved your Spirit in this thing, or in that? Was it my neglect of duty, or my formality in duties? Was I not thankful for the sense of your love, when it was shed abroad in my heart? O Lord, why is it thus with me?

Secondly, Humble your souls before the Lord for every evil you shall be convinced of: tell him, it pierces your heart, that you have so displeased him, and that it shall be a caution to you, while you live, never to return again to folly: invite him again to your souls, and mourn after the Lord until you have found him: If you seek him, he will be found of you, 2 Chron. 15:2. It may be you shall have a thousand comforters come about your sad souls, in such a time to comfort them: this will be to you instead of God, and that will repair your loss of Christ: despise them all, and say, I am resolved to sit as a widow until Christ return; he, or none, shall have my love.

Thirdly, Wait on in the use of means, until Christ returns. O be not discouraged; though he tarry, wait you for him; for, blessed are all they that wait for him!

The Fifth Excellent Saying of Christ Upon the Cross

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said--**I thirst!**" John 19:28

It is as truly, as commonly said, death is dry: Christ found it so, when he

died. When his spirit labored in the agonies of death, then he said, I thirst.

This is the fifth word of Christ upon the cross, spoken a little before he bowed the head and yielded up the Spirit. It is only recorded by this evangelist; and, there are four things remarkable in this complaint of Christ, namely, The person complaining: the complaint he made: the time when, and the reason why he so complained.

First, The person complaining. Jesus said, I thirst. This is a clear evidence, that it was no common suffering: great and resolute spirits will not complain for small matters. The spirit of a common man will endure much, before it utters any complaint. Let us therefore see,

Secondly, The affliction, or suffering, he complains of; and that is thirst. There are two sorts of thirst, one natural and proper, another spiritual and figurative: Christ felt both at this time. His soul thirsted, in vehement desires and longings, to accomplish and finish that great and difficult work he was now about; and his body thirsted, by reason of those unparalleled agonies it labored under, for the accomplishing thereof: but it was the proper natural thirst he here intends, when he said, I thirst. Now, "this natural thirst," of which he complains, "is the raging of the appetite for moist nourishment, arising from scorching up of the parts of the body for want of moisture." And, among all the pains and afflictions of the body, there can scarcely be named a greater, and more intolerable one, than extreme thirst. The most mighty and valiant have stooped under it. Mighty Samson, after all his conquests and victories, complains thus, Judges 15:18. "And he was sore athirst, and called on the Lord, and said, You have given this great deliverance into the hand of your servant, and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" Great Darius drank filthy water, defiled with the bodies of the slain, to relieve his thirst, "and protested, never any drink was more pleasant to him." Hence, Isa. 41:17, thirst is put to express the most afflicted state, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them;" that is when my people are in extreme necessities, under any extraordinary pressures and distresses, I will be with them, to supply and relieve them. Thirst causes a most painful compression of the heart, when the body, like a

sponge, sucks and draws for moisture, and there is none. And this may be occasioned, either by long abstinence from drink, or by the laboring and expense of the spirits under grievous agonies and extreme tortures; which, like a fire within, soon scorch up the very radical moisture.

Now, though we find not that Christ tasted a drop since he sat with his disciples at the table; after that no more refreshments for him in this world: yet that was not the cause of this raging thirst; but it is to be ascribed to the extreme sufferings which he so long had conflicted with, both in his soul and body. These preyed upon him, and drank up his very Spirits. Hence came this sad complaint, I thirst.

Thirdly, Let us consider the time when he thus complained. "When all things were now accomplished," says the text, that is when all things were even ready to be accomplished in his death. A little, a very little while before his expiration, when the pangs of death began to be strong upon him: and so it was both a sign of death at hand, and of his love to us, which was stronger than death, that would not complain sooner, because he would admit of no relief, nor take the least refreshment, until he had done his work.

Fourthly, and lastly, Take notice of the design and end of his complaint: "that the scripture might be fulfilled, he says, I thirst;" that is that it might appear, for the satisfaction of our faith, that whatever had been predicted by the prophets, was exactly accomplished, even to a circumstance in him. Now it was foretold of him, Peal 69:21. "They gave me gall for my meat, and, in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink;" and herein it was verified. Hence the note is,

DOCTRINE. That such were the agonies and extreme sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, as drank up his very spirits, and made him cry, I thirst.

"If I, (said one) should live a thousand years, and every day die a thousand times the same death for Christ that he once died for me, yet all this would be nothing to the sorrows Christ endured in his death." At this time the bridegroom Christ might have borrowed the words of his spouse, the church, Lam. 1:12. "It is nothing to you, all you that pass by? See and

behold, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Here we are to enquire into, and consider the extremities and agonies Christ labored under upon the cross, which occasioned this sad complaint of thirst; and then make application, in the several inferences of truth deducible from it.

Now the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross were two fold, namely, His corporeal, and spiritual sufferings: we shall open them distinctly, and then show how both these meeting together upon him in their fullness and extremity, must needs consume his very radical moisture, and make him cry, I thirst. To begin with the first.

First, His corporeal and more external sufferings were exceeding great, acute, and extreme sufferings; for they were sharp, universal, continual, and unrelieved by any inward comfort.

First, They were sharp sufferings; for his body was racked or digged in those parts where sense more eminently dwells: in the hands and feet the veins and sinews meet, and their pain and anguish meet with them; Psalm. 22:16. "They digged my hands and my feet." Now Christ by reason of his exact and excellent temper of body, had doubtless more quick, tender and delicate senses than other men: his body was so formed, that it might be a capacious vessel, to take in more sufferings than any other body could. Sense is, in some, more delicate and tender, and in others dull and blunt, according to the temperament and vivacity of the body and spirits; but in none as it was in Christ, whose body was miraculously formed on purpose to suffer unparalleled miseries. and sorrows in: "A body have you fitted me," Heb. 10:5. Neither sin nor sickness had any way enfeebled or dulled it.

Secondly, As his pains were sharp, so they were universal, not affecting one, but every part; they seized every member; from head to foot, no member was free from torture: for, as his head was wounded with thorns, his back with bloody lashes, his hands and feet with nails, so every other part was stretched and distended beyond its natural length, by hanging upon that cruel engine of torment, the cross. And as every member, so

every particular sense, was afflicted; his sight with vile wretches, cruel murderers that stood about him; his hearing with horrid blasphemies, belched out against him; his taste with vinegar and gall, which they gave to aggravate his misery; his smell with that filthy Golgotha where he was crucified, and his feeling with exquisite pains in every part; so that he was not only sharply, but universally tormented.

Thirdly, These universal pains were continual, not by fits, but without any intermission. He had not a moment's ease by the cessation of pains; wave came upon wave, one grief driving on another, until all God's waves and billows had gone over him. To be in extremity of pain, and that without a moment's intermission, will quickly pull down the stoutest nature in the world.

Fourthly, and lastly, As his pains were sharp, universal and continual, so they were altogether unrelieved by his understanding part. If a man have sweet comforts flowing into his soul from God, they will sweetly demulce and allay the pains of the body: this made the martyrs shout amidst the flames. Yes, even inferior comforts and delights of the mind, will greatly relieve the oppressed body.

It is said of Possidonius, that, in a great fit of the stone, he solaced himself with discourses of moral virtue, and when the pain twinged him, he would say, "O pain you does nothing, though you are a little troublesome, I will never confess you to be evil." And Epicures, in the fits of the colic, refreshed himself, ob memoriam inventorum, that is by his inventions in philosophy.

But now Christ had no relief this way in the least; not a drop of comfort came from heaven into his soul to relieve it, and the body by it: but, on the contrary, his soul was filled up with grief, and had an heavier burden of its own to bear than that of the body; so that instead of relieving, it increased unspeakably the burden of its outward man. For,

Secondly, Let us consider these inward sufferings of his soul how great they were, and how quickly they spent his natural strength, and turned his moisture into the drought of summer. And,

First, His soul felt the wrath of an angry God, which was terribly impressed upon it. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion; but what is that to the wrath of a Deity? See what a description is given of it in Nahum 1:6. "Who can stand before his indignation: and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him." Had not the strength that supported Christ been greater than that of rocks, this wrath had certainly overwhelmed and ground him to powder.

Secondly, As it was the wrath of God that lay upon his soul, so it was the pure wrath of God, without any alloy or mixture: not one drop of comfort came from heaven or earth; all the ingredients in his cup were bitter ones: There was wrath without mercy; yes, wrath without the least degree of sparing mercy; "for God spared not his own Son," Rom. 8:32. Had Christ been abated or spared, we had not. If our mercies must be pure mercies, and our glory in heaven pure and unmixed glory, then the wrath which he suffered must be pure and unmixed wrath. Yes,

Thirdly, As the wrath, the pure unmixed wrath of God, lay upon his soul, so all the wrath of God was poured out upon him, even to the last drop; so that there is not one drop reserved for the elect to feel. Christ's cup was deep and large, it contained all the fury and wrath of an infinite God in it! and yet he drank it up: he bore it all, so that to believing souls, who come to make peace with God through Christ, he says, Isa. 27:4. "Fury is not in me." In all the chastisements God inflicts upon his people, there is no vindictive wrath; Christ bore it all in his own soul and body on the tree.

Fourthly, As it was all the wrath of God that lay upon Christ, so it was wrath aggravated, in divers respects beyond that which the damned themselves do suffer. That is strange you will say; can there be any sufferings worse than those the damned suffer, upon whom the wrath of an infinite God is immediately transacted, who holds them up with the arm of his power, while the arm of his justice lies on eternally? Can any sorrows be greater than these? Yes; Christ's sufferings were beyond theirs in divers particulars.

First, None of the damned were ever so near and dear to God as Christ was: they were estranged from the womb, but Christ lay in his bosom.

When he smote Christ, he smote "the man that was his fellow," Zech. 13:7. But in smiting them, he smites his enemies. When he had to do, in a way of satisfaction, with Christ, he is said not to spare his own son, Rom. 8:32. Never was the fury of God poured out upon such a person before.

Secondly, None of the damned had ever so large a capacity to take in a full sense of the wrath of God as Christ had. The larger any one's capacity is to understand and weigh his troubles fully, the more grievous and heavy is his burden. If a man cast vessels of greater and lesser quantity into the sea, though all will be full, yet the greater the vessel is, the more water it contains. Now Christ had a capacity beyond all mere creatures to take in the wrath of his Father; and what deep and large apprehensions he had of it may be judged by his bloody sweat in the garden, which was the effect of his mere apprehensions of the wrath of God. Christ was a large vessel indeed; as he is capable of more glory, so of more sense and misery than any other person in the world.

Thirdly, The damned suffer not so innocently as Christ suffered; they suffer the just demerit and recompense of their sin: They have deserved all that wrath of God which they feel, and must feel forever: It is but that recompense which was meet; but Christ was altogether innocent: He had done no iniquity, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. When Christ suffered, he suffered not for what he had done; but his sufferings were the sufferings of a surety, paying the debts of others. "The Messiah was cut off, but not for himself," Dan. 9:26. Thus you see what his external sufferings in his body, and his internal sufferings in his soul were.

Thirdly, In the last place, it is evident that such extreme sufferings as these, meeting together upon him, must needs exhaust his very spirits, and make him cry, I thirst. For let us consider,

First, What mere external pains, and outward afflictions can do. These prey upon, and consume our spirits. So David complains, Psalm. 39:11. "When you with rebukes correctest man for iniquity; you makes his beauty to consume away as a moth," that is look, as a moth frets and consumes the most strong and well wrought garment, and makes it scary and rotten without any noise; so afflictions waste and wear out the

strongest bodies. They make bodies of the firmest constitution like an old rotten garment: They shrivel and dry up the most vigorous and flourishing body, and make it like a bottle in the smoke, Psalm. 119:83.

Secondly, Consider what mere internal troubles of the soul can do upon the strongest body: They spend its strength, and devour the spirits. So Solomon speaks, Prov. 17:22. "A broken spirit drieth the bones," that is it consumes the very marrow with which they are moistened. So Psalm. 32:3, 4. "My bones waxed old, and through my roaring all the day long: for day and night your hand was heavy on me: my moisture (or chief sap) is turned into the drought of summer." What a spectacle of pity was Francis Spira become, merely through the anguish of his spirit? a spirit sharpened with such troubles, like a keen knife, cuts through the sheath. Certainly, whoever has had any acquaintance with troubles of soul, knows, by sad experience, how, like an internal flame, it feeds and preys upon the very spirits, so that the strongest stoop and sink under it. But,

Thirdly, When outward bodily pains shall meet with inward spiritual troubles, and both in extremity shall come in one day; how soon must the firmest body fail and waste away like a candle lighted at both ends? Now strength fails a-pace, and nature must fall flat under this load. When the ship in which Paul sailed, fell into a place where two seas met, it was quickly wrecked; and so will the best constituted body in the world, if it fall under both these troubles together the soul and body sympathize with each other under trouble, and mutually relieve each other.

If the body be sick and full of pain, the spirit supports, cheers, and relieves it by reason and resolution all that it can; and if the spirit be afflicted the body sympathizes and helps to bear up the spirit; but now, if the one be over laden with strong pains, more than it can bear, and calls for aid from the other, and the other be oppressed with intolerable anguish, and cries out under a burden greater than it can bear, so that it can contribute no help, but instead thereof adds to its burden, which before was above its strength to bear, then nature must needs fail, and the friendly union between soul and body suffer a dissolution by such an extraordinary pressure as this. So it was with Christ, when outward and inward sorrows met in one day in their extremity upon him. Hence the bitter cry, I thirst.

INFERENCE 1. How horrid a thing is sin! How great is to that evil of evils, which deserves that all this should be inflicted and suffered for the expiation of it!

The sufferings of Christ for sin give us the true account, and fullest representation of its evil. "The law (says one) is a bright glass, wherein we may see the evil of sin; but there is the red glass of the sufferings of Christ, and in that we may see more of the evil of sin, than if God should let us down to hell, and there we should see all the tortures and torments of the damned. If we should see them how they lie sweltering under God's wrath there, it were not so much as the beholding of sin through the red glass of the sufferings of Christ."

Suppose the bars of the bottomless pit were broken up; and damned spirits should ascend from thence, and come up among us, with the chains of darkness rattling at their heels, and we should hear the groans, and see the ghastly paleness and trembling of those poor creatures upon whom the righteous God has impressed his fury and indignation, if we could hear how their consciences are lashed by the fearful scourge of guilt, and how they shriek at every lash the arm of justice gives them.

If we should see and hear all this, it is not so much as what we may see in this text, where the Son of God, under his sufferings for it, cries out, I thirst. For, as I showed you before, Christ's sufferings, in divers respects, were beyond theirs. O then, let not your vain heart slight sin, as if it were but a small thing! If ever God show you the face of sin in this glass, you will say, there is not such another horrid representation to be made to a man in all the world. Fools make a mock at sin, but wise men tremble at it.

INFERENCE. 2. How afflictive and intolerable are inward troubles. Did Christ complain so sadly under them, and cry, I thirst? Surely then they are not such light matters as many are apt to make of them. If they so scorched the very heart of Christ, dried up the green tree, preyed upon his very spirits, and turned his moisture into the drought of summer, they deserve not to be slighted, as they are by some. The Lord Jesus was fitted to bear and suffer as strong troubles as ever befell the nature of man, and

he did bear all other troubles with admirable patience; but when it came to this, when the flames of God's wrath scorched his soul, then he cries, I thirst.

David's heart was, for courage, as the heart of a lion; but when God exercised him with inward troubles for sin, then he roars out under the anguish of it, "I am feeble, and sore broken; I have roared, by reason of the disquietness of my heart. My heart panteth, my strength fails me: As for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me," Psalm. 38:8, 10. "A wounded spirit who can bear!" Many have professed that all the torments in the world are but toys to it; the racking fits of the gout, the grinding tortures of the stone, are nothing to the wrath of God upon the conscience. What is the worm that never dies but the efficacy of a guilty conscience? This worm feeds upon, and gnaws the very inwards, the tender and most sensible part of man and is the principal part of hell's horror. In bodily pains, a man may be relieved by proper medicines; here nothing but the blood of sprinkling relieves. In outward pains, the body may be supported by the resolution and courage of the mind; here the mind itself is wounded. O let none despise these troubles, they are dreadful things!

INFERENCE. 3. How dreadful a place is hell, where this cry is heard forever, I thirst! There the wrath of the great and terrible God flames upon the damned forever, in which they thirst, and none relieves them. If Christ complained, I thirst, when he had conflicted but a few hours with the wrath of God; what is their state then, that are to grapple with it forever? When millions of years are past and gone, ten thousand millions more are coming on. There is an everlasting thirst in hell, and it admits of no relief. There are no full cups in hell, but all eternal, unrelieved thirst. Think on this you that now add drunkenness to thirst, who wallow in all sensual pleasures, and drown nature in an excess of luxury. Remember what Dives said in Luke 16:24. "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." No cups of water, no bowls of wine in hell. There, that throat will be parched with thirst, which is now drowned with excess. The songs of the drunkard turned into cowlings. If thirst in the extremity of it be now so

insufferable, what is that thirst which is infinitely beyond this in measure, and never shall be relieved? Say not it is hard that God should deal thus with his poor creatures. You will not think it so, if you consider what he exposed his own dear Son to, when sin was but imputed to him. And what that man deserves to feel, that has not only merited hell, but, by refusing Christ the remedy, the hottest place in hell.

In this thirst of Christ we have the liveliest emblem of the state of the damned, that ever was presented to men in this world. Here you see a person laboring in extremity, under the infinite wraths of the great and terrible God lying upon his soul and body at once, and causing him to utter this doleful cry, I thirst. Only Christ endured this but a little while, the damned must endure it forever: in that they differ, as also in the innocence and ability of the persons suffering, and in the end for which they suffer. But, surely, such as this will the cry of those souls be that are cast away forever. O terrible thirst!

INFERENCE. 4. How much do nice and wanton appetites deserve to be reprov'd? The Son of God wanted a draught of cold water to relieve him, and could not have it. God has given us variety of refreshing creatures to relieve us, and we despise them. We have better things than a cup of water to refresh and delight us when we are thirsty, and yet are not pleas'd. O that this complaint of Christ on the cross, I thirst, were but believ'ingly considered, it would make you bless God for what you now despise, and beget contentment in you for the meanest mercies, and most common favors in this world. Did the Lord of all things cry, I thirst, and had nothing in his extremity to comfort him; and do you, who have a thousand times over forfeited all temporal as well as spiritual mercies, condemn and slight the good creatures of God! What, despise a cup of water, who deserves nothing but a cup of wrath from the hand of the Lord! O lay it to heart, and hence learn contentment with anything.

INFERENCE. 5. Did Jesus Christ upon the cross cry, I thirst? Then believers shall never thirst eternally. Their thirst shall be certain satisfied.

There is a threefold thirst, gracious, natural, and penal. The gracious thirst is the vehement desire of a spiritual heart after God. Of this David speaks, Psalm. 42:1, 2. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so

panteth my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God?" And this is indeed a vehement thirst; it makes the soul break with the longings it has after God, Psalm. 119. It is a thirst proper to believers, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Natural thirst is (as before was noted) a desire of refreshment by humid nourishment, and it is common both to believers and unbelievers in this world. God's dear saints have been driven to such extremities in this life, that their tongues have even failed for thirst. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst," Isa. 41:17. And of the people of God in their captivity, it is said, Lam. 4:4. "The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst. The young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them. They that feed delicately are desolate in the streets; they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dung hills." To this many that fear the Lord have been reduced.

A penal thirst, is God's just denying of all refreshments or relief to sinners in their extremities, and that as a due punishment for their sin. This believers shall never feel, because when Christ thirsted upon the cross, he made full satisfaction to God in their room. These sufferings of Christ, as they were ordained for them, so the benefits of them are truly imputed to them. And for the natural thirst, that shall be satisfied: for in heaven we shall live without these necessities and dependencies upon the creature; we shall be equal with the angels in the way and manner of living and subsisting, "isangeloi eisin", Luke 20:6. And for the gracious thirsting of their souls for God, it shall be fully satisfied. So it is promised, Mat. 5:6. "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled:" They shall then depend no more upon the stream, but drink from the overflowing fountain itself, Psalm. 36:8 "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house, and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures: for with you is the fountain of life, and in Your light shall we see light:" There they shall drink and praise, and praise and drink for evermore; all their thirsty desires shall be filled with complete satisfaction. O how desirable a state is heaven upon this account! and how should we be restless until we come there; as the

thirsty traveler is until he meet that cool, refreshing spring he wants and seeks for. This present state is a state of thirsting, that to come of refreshment and satisfaction. Some drops indeed come from the fountain by faith, hut they quench not the believer's thirst; rather like water sprinkled on the fire, they make it burn the more: but there the thirsty soul has enough.

O bless God, that Jesus Christ thirsted under the heat of his wrath once, that you might not be scorched with it forever. If he had not cried, I thirst, you must have cried out of thirst eternally, and never be satisfied.

INFERENCE. 6. Lastly; Did Christ in the extremity of his sufferings cry, I thirst? Then how great, beyond all compare, is the love of God to sinners, who for their sakes exposed the Son of his love to such extreme sufferings?

Three considerations marvelously heighten that love of the Father.

First, His putting the Lord Jesus into such a condition. There is none of us would endure to see a child of our own lie panting, and thirsting in the extremity of torments, for the fairest inheritance on earth; much less to have the soul of a child conflicting with the wrath of God, and making such heart-rending complaints as Christ made upon the cross, if we might have the largest empire in the world for it: yet, such was the strength of the love of God to us, that he willingly gave Jesus Christ to all this misery and torture for us. What shall we call this love? O the height, length, depth, and breadth of that love which passes knowledge! The love of God to Jesus Christ was infinitely beyond all the love we have for our children, as the sea is more then a spoonful of water: and yet, as dearly as he loved him, he was content to expose him to all this, rather than we should perish eternally.

Secondly, As God the Father was content to expose Christ to this extremity, so in that extremity to hear his bitter cries, and dolorous complaints, and yet not relieve him with the least refreshment until he fainted and died under it. He heard the cries of his Son; that voice, I thirst, pierced heaven, and reached the Father's ear; but yet he will not refresh him in his agonies, nor abate him anything of the debt he was now

paying, and all this for the love he had to poor sinners. Had Christ been relieved in his sufferings, and spared, then God could not have pitied or spared us. The extremity of Christ's suffering was an act of justice to him; and the greatest mercy to us that ever could be manifested. Nor indeed (though Christ so bitterly complains of his thirst) was he willing to be relieved, until he had finished his work. O love unspeakable! He does not complain, that he might be relieved, but to manifest how great that sorrow was which his soul now felt upon our account.

Thirdly, And it should never be forgotten, that Jesus Christ was exposed to these extremities of sorrow for sinners, the greatest of sinners, who deserved not one drop of mercy from God. This commends the love of God singularly to us, in that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Rom. 5:1. Thus the love of God in Jesus Christ still rises higher and higher in every discovery of it. Admire, adore, and be ravished with the thoughts of this love!

The Sixth Excellent Saying of Christ Upon the Cross

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished. And he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit." John 19:30

It is finished. This is the sixth remarkable word of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, uttered as a triumphant shout when he saw the glorious issue of all his sufferings now at hand.

It is but one word in the original; but in that one word is contained the sum of all joy; the very spirit of all divine consolation. The ancient Greeks reckoned it their excellency to speak much in a little: "to give a sea of matter in a drop of language." What they only sought, is here found. I find some variety, (and indeed variety rather than contrariety), among expositors about the relation of these words. Some are of opinion, that the antecedent is the legal types and ceremonies; and so make this to be the meaning; It is finished: that is, all the types and prefigurations that

shadowed forth the redemption of souls, by the blood of Christ, are now fulfilled and accomplished. And, doubtless, as this is itself a truth, so it is such a truth as may not be excluded, as foreign to the true scope and sense of this place. And though it be objected, that many types and prefigurations remained at this time unsatisfied, even all that looked to the actual death at Christ, his continuance in the state of the dead, and his resurrection; yet it is easily removed, "by considering that they are said to be finished, because they were just finishing, or ready to be finished: and it is as if Christ had said, I am now putting the last hand to it", a few moments of time more will complete and finish it. I have the sum now in my hand, which will fully satisfy and pay God the whole debt.

It is now but bow the head, and the work is done, and all the types therein fulfilled. So that this cannot exclude the fulfilling of the types in the death of Christ, from their just claim to the sense of this place. But yet, though we cannot here exclude this sense, we cannot allow it to be the whole or principal sense: for lo! a far greater truth is contained herein, even the finishing or completing of the whole design and project of our redemption, and therein of all the types that prefigured it. Both these judicious Calvin conjoins, making the completing of redemption the principal; and the fulfilling of all the types the collateral and less principal sense of it.

Yet it must be observed, when we say, Christ finished redemption-work by his death, the meaning is not that his death alone did finish it; for his abode in the grave, resurrection, and ascension, had all of them their joint influence therein; but these being shortly to follow, all are included in the scope of this place. According then to the principal scope of the place, we observe,

DOCTRINE. That Jesus Christ has perfected and completely finished the great work of redemption, committed to him by God the Father.

To this great truth the apostle gives a full testimony, Heb. 10:14 "By one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified." And to the same purpose speaks Christ, John 17:4. "I have glorified you on earth! I have finished the work you gave me to do." Concerning this work, and the

finishing thereof by Jesus Christ upon the cross, we shall enquire what this work was; how Christ finished it; and what evidence can be produced for the finishing of it.

First, What was the work which Christ finished by his death?

It was the fulfilling the whole law of God in our room, and for our redemption, as a sponsor or surety for us. The law is a glorious thing; the holiness of God, that fiery attribute, is engraved or stamped upon every part of it; Deut. 33:2. "From his right hand went a fiery law." The jealousy of the Lord watched over every point and tittle of it, for his dreadful and glorious name was upon it; it cursed everyone that continued not in all things contained therein, Gal. 3:10. Two things, therefore, were necessarily required in him that should perfectly fulfill it, and both found in our Surety, and in him only, namely, a subjective and effective perfection.

First, A subjective perfection. He that wanted this, could never say, It is finished. Perfect working always follows a perfect Being. That he might therefore finish this great work of obedience, and therein the glorious design of our redemption; lo! in what shining and perfect holiness was he produced! Luke 1:35. "That holy thing that shall be born of you, shall be called the Son of God." And indeed, "such an High-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," Heb. 7:26. So that the law could have no exception against his person; nay, it was never so honored since its first promulgation, as it was by having such a perfect and excellent person as Christ to stand at its bar, and give it due reparation.

Secondly, There must be also an effective perfection, or a perfection of working and obeying, before it could be said, It is finished. This Christ had; for he continued in all things written in the law, to do them: He fulfilled all righteousness, as it behoved him to do, Mat. 3:15. He did all that was required to be done, and suffered all that was requisite to be suffered; he did and suffered all that was commanded or threatened, in such perfection of obedience, both active and passive, that the pure eye of divine justice could not find a flaw in it; and so finished the work his Father gave him to do; and this work finished by our Lord Jesus Christ

was both a necessary, difficult, and precious work.

First, It was a necessary work which Christ finished upon the cross; necessary, upon a threefold account.

Opus necessarium ex parte Patris; It was necessary on the Father's account: I do not mean that God was under any necessity, from his nature, of redeeming us this or any other way; for our redemption is opus liberi concilii, an act of the free counsel of God; but when God had once decreed and determined to redeem and save poor sinners by Jesus Christ, then it became necessary that the counsel of God should be fulfilled; Acts 4:28. "To do whatever your hand and counsel had before determined to be done."

Secondly, Ex parte Filii. It was necessary with respect to Christ, upon the account of that precious compact that was between the Father and him about it. Therefore it is said by Christ himself, Luke 22:22. "Truly the Son of man goes as it was determined," that is as it was fore agreed and covenanted; under the necessity of fulfilling his engagement to the Father, he came into the world; and being come, he still minds his engagement, John 9:3. "I must work the works of him that sent me."

Thirdly, Ex parte nostri. Yes, and it was no less necessary upon our account that this work should be finished; for, had not Christ finished this work, sin had quickly finished all our lives, comforts, and hopes. Without the finishing this work, not a son or daughter of Adam could ever have seen the face of God. Therefore it is said, John 3:14, 15. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so [must] the Son of man be lifted up; that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." On all these accounts the finishing of this work was necessary.

Secondly, As it was necessary this work should be finished, so the finishing of it was exceeding difficult: It cost many a cry, many a groan, and many a tear, before Christ could say, It is finished. All the angels in heaven were not able, by their united strength, to lift that burden one inch from the ground, which Christ bare upon his shoulders, yes, and bare it away. But how heavy a burden this was, may in part appear by his

agony in the garden, and the bitter outcries he made upon the cross, which in their proper places have been opened.

Thirdly, and lastly, It was a most precious work which Christ finished by his death; that work was dispatched and finished in few hours, which will be the matter of everlasting songs and triumphs to the angels and saints to all eternity. O it was a precious work! The mercies that now flow out of this fountain, namely, justification, sanctification, adoption, etc. are not to be valued; besides the endless happiness and glory of the world to come, which cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive. If the angels sang when the foundation-stone was laid, what shouts, what triumphs shall there be among the saints, when this voice is heard, It is finished!

Secondly, Let us next inform ourselves how, and in what manner Jesus Christ finished this glorious work; and if you search the scriptures upon that account, you will find that he finished it obediently, freely, diligently, and fully.

First, This blessed work was finished by Jesus Christ most obediently, Phil. 2:8. "He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." "His obedience was the obedience of a servant, though not servile obedience." So it was foretold of him, before he touched this work, Isa. 1. 5. "The Lord God has opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back;" that is My Father told me the very worst of it; he told me what hard and heavy things I must undergo, if ever I finished this design of redemption; and I was not rebellious, that is I heartily submitted to, and accepted all those difficulties; for there is a Meiosis in the words; I was content to stoop to the hardest and most ignominious part of it, rather than not finish it.

Secondly, As Christ finished it obediently, so he finished it freely. Freedom and obedience in acting are not at all opposite to, or exclusive of each other. Moses' mother nursed him in obedience to the command of Pharaoh's daughter, yet most freely with respect to her own delight and contentment in that work. So it is said of Christ, and that by his own mouth, John 10:17, 18. "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to

take it up again. This commandment have I received of my Father." He liked the work for the end's sake. When he had a prospect of it from eternity, then were his delights with the sons of men: then he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, Prov. 8:30, 31. And when he came into the world about it, with what a full and free consent did his heart echo to the voice of his Father calling him to it; just as you shall sometimes hear an echo answering your voice two or three times over, Psalm. 40. "Lo, I come: I delight to do your will: your law is within my heart." He finished the work freely.

Thirdly, As he finished it freely, so he finished it diligently; he wrought hard from the morning of his life to the end of it: he was never idle wherever he was, but "went about doing good," Acts 10:38. Sometimes he was so intent upon his work, that "he forget to eat bread," John 4:30, 31. As the life of some men is but a diversion from one trifle to another, from one pleasure to another; so the whole life of Christ was spent and taken up between one work and another: never was a life so filled up with labor: the very moments of his time were all employed for God to finish this work.

Fourthly, and lastly, He finished it completely and fully. All that was to be done by way of impetration and meritorious redemption is fully done; no hand can come after his; angels can add nothing to it. "That is perfected to which nothing is wanting, and to which nothing can be added." Such is the work Christ finished. Whatever the law demanded is perfectly paid; whatever a sinner needs, is perfectly obtained and purchased; nothing can be added to what Christ has done; he put the last hand to it, when he said, It is finished. Thus you see what the work was, and how Christ finished it.

Thirdly, In the last place, let us consider what assurance or evidence we have that Christ has so finished redemption-work: and if you pursue that enquiry, you will find these, among other plain evidences of it.

First, When Christ died, redemption-work must needs be finished, inasmuch as the blood, as well as the obedience of Christ, was of infinite value and efficacy, sufficiently able to accomplish all the ends for which it was shed; "and that not by divine acceptance, but upon the account of its

proper value." This effect, namely, the finishing redemption-work meritoriously by Christ, does not exceed the power of the cause to which we assign it, namely, the death of Christ. And if there be a sole sufficient cause in act, what hinders but the effect should follow? There was certainly enough in Christ's blood to satisfy the utmost demand of justice: when that therefore is actually shed, justice is fully paid, and, consequently, the souls for whom, and in whose names it is paid, are fully redeemed from the curse by the merit thereof.

Secondly, It is apparent that Christ finished the work, by the discharge or acquittance God the Father gave him, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand. If Christ, the sinner's surety, be, as such, discharged by God the creditor, then the debt is fully paid. Now Christ was justified, and cleared at his resurrection, from all charges and demands of justice; therefore it is said, 1 Tim. 3:16 that he was justified in the spirit, that is openly discharged by that very act of the Godhead, his raising him from the dead. For when the grave was opened, and Christ arose, it was to him as the opening of the prison-doors, and setting a surety at liberty, who was confirmed for another man's debt. To the same sense Christ speaks of his ascension, John 16:10. "The Spirit (says he) shall convince the world of righteousness," that is of a complete and perfect righteousness in me, imputable to sinners for their perfect justification. And whereby shall he convince and satisfy them that is so? Why, by this, "Because I go to the Father, and you see me no more." There is a great deal of force and weight in those words, "because you see me no more:" for it amounts to this much; by this you shall be satisfied I have fully and completely performed all righteousness, and that, by my active and passive obedience; I have so fully satisfied God for you, as that you shall never be charged or condemned; because, when I go to heaven, I shall abide there in glory with my Father, and not be sent back again, as I should, if any thing had been omitted by me. And this the apostle gives you also in so many plain words, Heb. 10:12, 13, 14. "After he had offered one sacrifice for sins, forever sat down on the right hand of God." And what does he infer from that, but the very truth before us, verse 14 that "by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified?"

Thirdly, It is evident Christ has finished the work, by the blessed effects of

it upon all that believe in him: for by virtue of the completeness of Christ's work, finished by his death, their consciences are now rationally pacified, and their souls at death, actually received into glory; neither of which could be, if Christ had not in this world finished the work. If Christ had done his work imperfectly, he could not have given rest and tranquility to the laboring and burdened souls that come to him, as now he does, Mat. 11:28. Conscience would still be hesitating, trembling, and unsatisfied, and had he not finished his work, he could not have had entrance through the veil of his flesh into heaven, as all that believe in him have, Heb. 10:19, 20. If he had but almost done that work, we had been but almost saved, that is, certainly damned. And thus you see briefly the evidences, that the work is finished.

INFERENCE. 1. Has Christ perfected and completely finished all his work for us? How sweet a relief is this to us that believe in him against all the defects and imperfections of all the works of God, that are wrought by us. There is nothing, finished that we do: all our duties are imperfect duties; they come off lamely, and defectively from our hands. It is Christ's charge against the church of Sardis, Rev. 3:2. I have not found your works "pepleromena" perfect, or filled up before God. O there is much impudence and vanity in the best of our duties: but here is the grand relief, and that which answers to all the grounds of our doubts and fears upon that account; Jesus Christ has finished all his work, though we can finish none of ours: and so, though we be defective, poor, imperfect creatures, in ourselves, yet, notwithstanding, we are complete in him, Col. 2:9, 10. Though we cannot perfectly obey, or fulfill one command of the law, yet is "the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us that believe," Rom. 8:4. Christ's complete obedience being imputed to us, makes us complete, and without fault before God.

It is true, we ought to be humbled for our defects, and troubled for every failing in obedience; but we should not be discouraged, though multitudes of weaknesses be upon us, and many infirmities compass us about, in every duty we put our hand to: though we have no righteousness of our own; yet of God, Christ is made unto us righteousness; and that righteousness of his is infinitely better than our own: instead of our own, we have his. O blessed be God for Christ's perfect righteousness!

INFERENCE. 2. Did Christ finish his work with his own hand? How dangerous and dishonorable a thing is it to join anything of our own to the righteousness of Christ, in point of justification before God. Jesus Christ will never endure this; it reflects upon his work dishonorably; he does not (in this case) affect social glory: not I, and my God; I, and my Christ, did this; he will be all, or none, in your justification. If he have finished the work, what need of our additions? And if not, to what purpose are they? Can we finish that which Christ himself could not? But we would fain be sharing with him in this honor, which he will never endure. Did he finish the work by himself, and will he ever divide the glory and praise of it with us? No, no, Christ is no half Savior. O it is an hard thing, to bring these shroud hearts to live upon Christ for righteousness: we would fain add our penny to make up Christ's sum. But if you would have it so, or have nothing to do with Christ, you and your penny must perish together, Isa. 50 ult. God gives us the righteousness of Christ, as he gave manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. It is said, Deut. 8:16. "That he fed them with manna in the wilderness, that he might humble them." The quality of the food was not humbling, for it was angels food, but the manner of giving it was so: they must live by faith upon God for it, from day to day. This was not like other food, produced by their own labor. Certainly God takes the right way to humble proud nature, in calling sinners wholly from their own righteousness to Christ's for their justification.

INFERENCE. 3 .Did Christ finish his work for us: Then there can be no doubt, but he will also finish his work "in" us. As he began the work of our redemptions, and finished it: so he that has begun the good work in you, will also finish it upon your souls. And at this the apostle says, "He is confident," Phil. 1:6. Jesus Christ is not only called the author, but also the finisher of our faith, Heb. 12:2. If he begin it, no doubt but he will finish it. And indeed the finishing of his own work of redemption without us, gives full evidence that he will finish his work of sanctification within us; and that because these two works of Christ have a respect and relation to each other; and such a relation, that the work he finished by his own death, resurrection, and ascension, would be in vain to us, if the work of sanctification in us should not in like manner be finished. Therefore, as he presented a perfect sacrifice to God, and finished redemption-work; so

will he present every man perfect and complete, for whom he offered up himself, for he will not lose the end of all his sufferings at last. To what purpose would his meritorious impetration be, without complete and full application? Be not therefore discouraged at the defects and imperfections of your inherent grace: be humbled for them, but be not dejected by them: this is Christ's work, as well as that: that work is finished, and so will this.

INFERENCE. 4. Is Christ's work of redemption a complete and finished work? How excellent and comfortable beyond all compare, is the method and way of faith! Surely the way of believing is the most excellent way in which a poor sinner can approach God, for it brings before him a complete, entire, perfect righteousness; and this must needs be most honorable to God, most comfortable to the soul that draws near to God. O what a complete, finished perfect thing is the righteousness of Christ! the searching eye of the holy and jealous God cannot find the least flaw or defect in it. Let God or conscience look upon it; turn it every way; view it on every side; thoroughly weigh and examine it, it will appear a pure, a perfect piece, containing in it whatever is necessary for the reconciling of an angry God, or pacifying of a distressed and perplexed soul. How pleasing, therefore, and acceptable to God must be that faith, which presents so complete and excellent an atonement to him! Hence the acting of our faith upon Christ for righteousness, the approaches of faith to God with such an acceptable present, is called the work of God; that is, the most grateful, acceptable, and well pleasing work to God that a creature can perform; John 6:29. "This is the work of God, that you believe." One act of faith pleases him more, than if you should toil all your lives at a task of obedience to the law. As it is more for God's honor and your comfort, to pay all you owe him at one payment, in one full sum, than to be paying by very small degrees, and never be able to make full payment, or see the bond cancelled; so this perfect work only produces perfect peace.

INFERENCE. 5. Did Christ work, and work out all that God gave him to do, until he had finished his work? How necessary then is a laborious working life to all that call themselves Christians? The life of Christ, you sees, was a laborious life. Shall he work and we play? Shall a zealous,

active, working Christ be reproached with idle, negligent and lazy followers? O work, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12.

Objection. But if Christ wrought so hard, we may sit still. If he finished the work, nothing remains for us to do.

Solut. Nothing of that work which Christ did, remains for you to do. It is your commendation and duty to leave all that to Christ: but there is other work for you to do; yes, store of work lying upon your hands. You must work as well as Christ, though not for the same ends Christ did. He wrought hard to satisfy the law, by fulfilling all righteousness. He wrought all his life long, to work out a righteousness to justify you before God. This work falls to no hand but Christ's: but you must work, to obey the commands of Christ into whose right you are come by redemption: you must work to testify your thankfulness to Christ, for the work finished for you: you must work, to glorify God by your obedience: let your light so shine before men. For these, and divers other such ends and reasons, your life must be a working life. God preserve all his people from the gross and vile opinions of Antinomian libertines, who cry up grace and decry obedience: who under specious pretenses of exalting a naked Christ upon the throne, do indeed strip him naked of a great part of his glory, and vilely dethrone him. My pen shall not English what mine eyes have read. Tell it not in Gath.

But for you, reader, be you a follower of Christ, imitate your pattern; yes, let me persuade you, as ever you hopest to clear up your interest in him, imitate him in such particulars as these that follow.

First, Christ began early to work for God; he took the morning of his life, even the very beginning of it, to work for God: "How is it (said he to his parents, when he was but a child of about twelve years old) that you sought me? Knew you not that I must be about my Father's business?" Reader, if the morning of your life be not gone, O devote it to the work of God as Christ did: if it be, ply your work the closer in the afternoon of your life. If a man have any great and necessary business to do, it is good doing it in the morning; afterwards a hurry of business and diversion comes on.

Secondly, As Christ began betime, so he followed his work close: he was early up, and he wrought hard, so hard, that "he forget to eat bread." John 4:31, 32. So zealous was he in his Father's work, that his friends thought "that he had been beside himself," Mark 3:21. So zealous that "the zeal of God's house eat him up." He flew like a seraphim, in a flame of zeal, about the work of God. O be not you like snails. What Augustus said of the young Roman, well becomes the true Christian, "whatever he does, he does it to purpose."

Thirdly, Christ often thought upon the shortness of his time, and wrought hard because he knew his working-time would be but little. So you find it, John 9:4. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night comes, when no man can work." O in this be like Christ: rouse your hearts to diligence with this consideration. If a man have much to write, and be almost come to the end of his paper, he will write close, and thereby put much matter in a little room.

Fourthly, He did much work for God in a very silent manner: he wrought hard, but did not spoil his work, when he had wrought it, by vain ostentation. When he had expressed his charity in his acts of mercy and bounty to men, he would humbly seal up the glory of it, with this charge; "see you tell no man of it", Matt. 8:4. He affected no popular air. All the angels in heaven could not do what Christ did, and yet he called himself a worm, for all that, Psalm. 22:6. O imitate your pattern; Work hard for God, and let not pride blow upon it, when you have done. It is hard for a man to do much, and not value him self for it too much.

Fifthly, Christ carried on his work for God resolvedly: no discouragements would beat him off, though never any work met with more from first to last. How did Scribes and Pharisees, Jews, Gentiles, yes, devils set upon him, by persecutions, and reproaches, violent oppositions, and subtle temptations; but yet, he goes on with his Father's work for all that: he is deaf to all discouragements. So it was foretold of him, Isa. 42:4. "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged." O that more of this spirit of Christ were in his people: O that, in the strength of love to Christ, and zeal for the glory of God, you will pour out your hearts in service, and, like a river, sweep down all discouragements before you.

Sixthly, He continued working, while he continued living: His life and labor ended together: He fainted not in his work: Nay, the greatest work he did in this world, was his last work. O be like Christ in this, be not weary of well doing: Give not over the work of God, while you can move hand and tongue to promote it, and see that your last works be more than your first. O let the motions of your soul after God be, as all natural motions are, swiftest when nearest the center. Say not it is enough, while there is any capacity of doing more for God. In these things, Christians, be like your Savior.

INFERENCE. 6. Did Christ finish his work? Look to it Christian, that you also finish your work which God has given you to do: That you may with comfort say, when death approaches, as Christ said, John 17:4. "I have glorified you on earth, I have finished the work you gave me to do; and now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self." Christ had a work committed to Him, and he finished it; you have a work also committed to you: O see that you may be able to say, it is finished when your time is so: O work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; and, that I may persuade you to it, I beseech you lay these considerations close to heart.

First, If your work be not done before you die, it can never be done when you are dead. "There is no work nor knowledge, nor device in the grave, where you go," Eccl. 9:5, 10. They that go down to the pit cannot celebrate the name of God, Isa 38:18. Death binds up the hand from working, any more; strikes dumb the tongue that it can speak no more; for then the composition is dissolved. The body, which is the soul's instrument to work by, is broken and thrown aside: the soul itself presented immediately before the Lord, to give an account of all its works. O therefore, seeing the night comes, when no man can work, as Christ speaks, John 9:4. make haste and finish your work.

Secondly, If you finish not your work, as the season of working, so the season of mercy will be over at death. Do not think, you that have neglected Christ all your lives, you that could never be persuaded to a laborious holy life, that ever your cries and entreaties shall prevail with God for mercy, when your season is past: No, it is too late, "Will God hear his cry, when troubles come upon him?" Job 27:9. The season of mercy is then over; as the tree falls, so it lies: Then he that is holy shall be holy

still, and he that is filthy shall be filthy still. Alas, poor souls, you come too late: "The master of the house is risen up, and the doors are shut," Luke 19:42. The season is over: happy had it been if you had known the day of your visitation.

Lastly, If your work be not finished when you come to die, you can never finish your lives with comfort. He that has not fished his stork with care, can never finish his course with joy. O what a dismal case is that soul in, that finds itself surprised by death in an unready posture! To lie shivering upon the brink of the grave, saying, Lord, what will become of me! O I cannot, I dare not die! For the poor soul to shrink back into the body, and cry, Oh, it were better for me to do any thing than die. Why, what is the matter? Oh, I am in a Christless state and dare not go before that awful judgment-seat. If I had in season made Christ sure, I could then die with peace. Lord, what shall I do? How do you like this, reader? Will this be a comfortable close! When one asked a Christian that constantly spent six hours every day in prayer, why he did so? He answered, Oh, I must die, I must die. Well then, look to it that you finish your work as Christ also did his!

The Seventh and Last Word with Which Christ Breathed out His Soul

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father, into your hands I commend my spirit**; and having said thus, he gave up his spirit." Luke 23:46

These are the last of the last words of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, with which he breathed out his soul. They were David's words before him, Psalm. 31:5. and for substance, Stephen's after him, Acts 7:27. They are words full, both of faith and comfort; fit to be the last breathing of every gracious soul in this world. They are resolved into these five particulars:

First, The person depositing, or committing: The Lord Jesus Christ, who in this, as well as in other things, acted as a common person, as the head of the church. This must be remarked carefully, for therein lies no small part of a believer's consolation: When Christ commends his soul to God, he does as it were bind up all the souls of the elect in one bundle with it, and solemnly presents them all with his, to his Father's acceptance: To this purpose one aptly renders it.

"This commendation made by Christ, turns to the singular profit and advantage of our souls; inasmuch as Christ, by this very prayer, has delivered them into his Father's hand, as a precious treasure, whenever the time comes that they are to be loosed from the bodies which they now inhabit." Jesus Christ neither lived nor died for himself, but for believers; what he did in this very act, refers to them as well as to his own soul: You must look therefore upon Christ, in it is last and solemn act of his life, as gathering all the souls of the elect together, and making a solemn tender of them all, with his own soul to God.

Secondly, The depository, or person to whom he commits this precious treasure, and that was to his own Father: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Father is a sweet encouraging, assuring title: Well may a son commit any concernment, how dear soever, into the hands of a father, especially such a son into the hands of such a father. "By the hands of the Father into which he commits his soul, we are not to understand the naked or mere power, but the fatherly acceptance and protection of God."

Thirdly, The depositum, or thing committed into this hand, [my spirit] that is my soul, now instantly departing, upon the very point of separation from my body. The soul is the most precious of all treasures, it is called the darling, Psalm. 35:17. or, "the only ones," that is that which is most excellent, and therefore most dear and precious: A whole world is but a trifle, if weighed, for the price of one soul, Mat. 16:26. This inestimable treasure he now commits into his Father's hands.

Fourthly, The Act by which he puts it into that faithful hand of the Father, "parathesomai", I commend. We rightly render it in the present tense, though the word be future: For, with these words he breathed out his

soul. This word is of the same import with "sunhiemi" I present, or tender it into your hands; It was in Christ an act of Faith, a most special and excellent act intended as a precedent for all his people.

Fifthly, and Lastly, The last thing observable is, the manner in which he uttered these words, and that was with a loud voice; he spoke it that all might hear it, and that his enemies, who judged him now destitute and forsaken of God, might be convinced that he was not so, but that he was dear to his Father still, and could put his soul confidently into his hands: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Talking then these words, not only as spoken by Christ, the head of all believers, and so commending their souls to God with his own, but also as a pattern, teaching them what they ought to do themselves, when they come to die. We observe,

DOCTRINE. That dying believers are both warranted, and encouraged, by Christ's example, believably to commend their precious souls into the hands of God.

Thus the apostle directs the faith of Christians, to commit their souls to God's tuition and fatherly protection, when they are either going into prisons, or to the stake for Christ, 1 Pet. 4:9. "Let them (says he) that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

This proposition we will consider in these two main branches of it, namely, what is implied and carried in the soul's commending itself to God by faith, when the time of separation is come. And what warrant or encouragement gracious souls have for so doing.

First, What is implied in this act of a believer, his commending or committing, his soul into the hands of God at death?

And if it be thoroughly weighed, you will find these six things, at least, carried in it.

First, It implies this evidently in it, That the soul outlives the body, and fails not, as to its being, when its body fails; it feels the house in which it

dwelt, dropping into ruins, and looks out for a new habitation with God. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." The soul understands itself a more noble being than that corruptible body, to which it was united, and is now to leave in the dust: it understands its relation to the Father of spirits, and from him it expects protection and provision in its unbodied state; and therefore into his hands it puts itself. If it vanished, or breathed into air, and did not survive the body, if it were annihilated at death, it were but a mocking of God to say, when we die, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Secondly, It implies the soul's true rest to be in God. See which way its motions and tendencies are, not only in life, but in death also. It bends to its God: It reposes, it even puts itself upon its God and Father; "Father, into your hands." God is the center of all gracious spirits. While they tabernacle here, they have no rest but in the bosom of their God: when they go hence, their expectation and earnest desires are to be with him. It had been working after God by gracious desires before, it had cast many a longing look heaven-ward before; but when the gracious soul comes near its God (as it does in a dying hour) "then it even throws itself into his arms;" as a river, that after many turnings and windings, at last is arrived to the ocean; it pours itself with a central force into the bosom of the ocean, and there finishes its weary course. "Nothing but God can please it in this world, and nothing but God can give it content when it goes hence." It is not the amenity of the place, where the gracious soul is going, but the bosom of the blessed God, who dwells there, that it so vehemently pants after; not the Father's house, but the Father's arms and bosom: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit: Whom have I in heaven but you? And on earth there is none that I desire in comparison of you, Psalm. 73:24,25.

Thirdly, It also implies the great value believers have for their souls. That is the precious treasure; and their main solicitude and chief care, is to see it secured in a safe hand: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit:" They are words speaking the believer's care for his soul, that it may be safe, whatever becomes of the vile body. A believer when he comes near to death, spends but few thoughts about his body, where it shall be laid, or how it shall be disposed of: He trusts that in the hands of friends; but

as his great care all along was for his soul, so he expresses it in these his very last breathing, in which he commends it into the hands of God: It is not, Lord Jesus receive my body, take care of my dust, but receive my Spirit: Lord, secure the jewel, when the casket is broken.

Fourthly, These words imply the deep sense that dying believers have of the great change that is coming upon them by death; when all visible and sensible things are shrinking away from them, and failing. They feel the world and the best comforts of it failing: Every creature and creature comfort failing: For, at death we are said to fail, Luke 16:9. Hereupon the soul clasps the closer about its God, cleaves more close than ever to him: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Not that a mere necessity puts the soul upon God; or that it cleaves to God, because it has then nothing else to take hold on: No, it chose God for its portion, when it was in the midst of all its outward enjoyments, and had as good security as other men have for the long enjoyment of them: but my meaning is, that although gracious souls have chosen God for their portion, and do truly prefer him to the best of their comforts; yet in this compounded state, it lives not wholly upon its God, but partly by faith, and partly by sense; partly upon things seen, and partly upon things not seen. The creatures had some interest in their hearts; alas, too much: but now all these are vanishing, and it sees they are so. I shall see man no more, with the inhabitants of the world, (said sick Hezekiah;) hereupon it turns itself from them all, and casts itself upon God for all its subsistence, expecting now to live upon its God entirely, as the blessed angels do; and so, in faith, they throw themselves into his arms: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Fifthly, It implies the atonement of God, and his full reconciliation to believers, by the blood of the great Sacrifice; else they dared never commit their souls into his hands: "For it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. 12:29. that is of an absolute God, a God unatoned by the offering up of Christ. The soul dare no more cast itself into the hand of God, without such an atoning sacrifice, than it dares approach to a consuming fire; And, indeed, the reconciliation of God by Jesus Christ, as it is the ground of all our acceptance with God; for we are made accepted in the beloved: So it is plainly carried in the order or

manner of the reconciled soul, committing itself to him: For, it first casts itself into the hands of Christ, then into the hands of God by him. So Stephen, when dying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit:" And by that hand it would be put into his Father's hands.

Sixthly, and lastly, It implies both the efficacy and excellency of faith, in supporting and relieving the soul at a time when nothing else is able to do it; Faith is its conductor, when it is at the greatest loss and distress that ever it met with: it secures the soul when it is turned out of the body; when heart and flesh fail, this leads it to the rock that fails not: it sticks by that soul until it sees it safe through all the territories of Satan, and safe landed upon the shore of glory; and then is swallowed up in vision: many a favor it has shown the soul while it dwelt in its body. The great service it did for the soul was in the time of its espousals to Christ. This is the marriage knot, the blessed bond of union between the soul and Christ. Many a relieving sight, secret and sweet support it has received from its faith since that; but, surely, its first and last works are its most glorious works. By faith it first ventured itself upon Christ; threw itself upon him in the deepest sense of its vileness and utter unworthiness, when sense, reason, and multitudes of temptations stood by, contradicting and discouraging the soul: by faith it now casts itself into his arms, when it is launching out into vast eternity.

They are both noble acts of faith; but the first no doubt, is the greatest and most difficult: for, when once the soul is interested in Christ, it is no such difficulty to commit itself into his hands, as when it has no interest at all in him. It is easier for a child to cast himself in the arms of his own father, in distress, than for one that has been both a stranger and an enemy to Christ, to cast itself upon him, that he may be a father and a friend to it.

And this brings us upon the second enquiry I promised to satisfy, namely,

Secondly, What warrant or encouragement have gracious souls to commit themselves at death into the hands of God? I answer, Much every way; all things encourage and warrant its so doing: For,

First, This God, to whom the believer commits himself at death, is its

Creator: the Father of its being; he created and inspired it, and so it has the relation of a creature to a Creator: yes, of a creature now in distress, to a faithful Creator, 1 Pet. 4:19. "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing; as to a [faithful Creator]." It is very true, this single relation, in itself, gives little ground of encouragement, unless the creature had conserved that integrity in which it was originally created. And they that have no more to plead with God for acceptance, by their relation to him as creatures to a Creator, will doubtless find that word made good to their little comfort, Isa. 27:11. "It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them, will show them no favor." But now, grace brings that relation into repute: holiness ingratiates us again, and revives the remembrance of this relation; so that believers only can plead this.

Secondly, As the gracious soul is his creature, so it is his redeemed creature; one that he has bought, and that with a great price, even with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 1:18. This greatly encourages the departing soul, to commit itself into the hands of God; so you find, Psalm. 31:5. "Into your hands do I commend my spirit, you have redeemed it, O Lord God of truth." Surely this is mighty encouragement, to put itself upon God in a dying hour. Lord, I am not only your creature, but your redeemed creature; one that you have bought with a great price: O, I have cost you dear! for my sake Christ came from your bosom, and is it imaginable, that after that you have in such a costly way, even by the expense of the precious blood of Christ, redeemed me, you should at last exclude me? Shall the ends both of creation and redemption of this soul be lost together? will God form such an excellent creature as my soul is, in which are so many wonders of the wisdom and power of its Creator? will he be content, when sin has marred the frame, and defaced the glory of it, to recover it to him self again, by the death of his own dear Son, and after all this, cast it away, as if there were nothing in all this? "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit:" I know you will have a respect to the work of your hands; especially to a redeemed creature, upon which you best expended so great sums of love, which you have bought at so dear a rate.

Thirdly, Nay, that is not all; the gracious soul may confidently and securely commit itself into the hands of God, when it parts with its body at death; not only because it is his creature, his redeemed creature, but because it is his renewed creature also: and this lays a firm ground for the believer's confidence and acceptance; not that it is the proper cause, or reason of its acceptance, but as it is the soul's best evidence, that it is accepted with God, and shall not be refused by him, when it comes to him at death: for, in such a soul, there is a double workmanship of God, both glorious pieces, though the last exceeds in glory. A natural workmanship, in the excellent frame of that noble creature, the soul; and a gracious workmanship upon that again; a new creation upon the old; glory upon glory. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus," Eph. 2:10. The Holy Spirit came down from heaven on purpose to create this new workmanship; to frame this new creature; and indeed, it is the top and glory of all God's works of wonders in this world; and must needs give the believer encouragement to commit itself to God, whether at such a time, it shall reflect either upon the end of the work, or upon the end of the workman; both which meet in the salvation of the soul so wrought upon, the end of the neck is our glory. By this "we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," Col. 1:12. It is also the design and end of him that wrought it, 2 Cor. 5:5. "Now he that has wrought us for the self same thing, is God." Had he not designed your soul for glory, the Spirit should never have come upon such a sanctifying design as this: surely it shall not fail of a reception into glory, when it is cast out of this tabernacle: such a work was not wrought in vain, neither can it ever perish: when once sanctification comes upon a soul, it so roots itself in the soul, that where the soul goes, it goes; gifts indeed, they die: all natural excellency and beauty, that goes away at death, Job 4 ult. but grace ascends with the soul; it is a sanctified, when a separate sent. And can God shut the door of glory upon such a soul, that by trace is made meet for the inheritance? O, it cannot be!

Fourthly, As the gracious soul is a renewed soul, so it is also a sealed soul; God has sealed it in this world for that glory, into which it is now to enter at death. All gracious souls are sealed objectively, that is they have those works of grace wrought on their souls which do, (as but now was said,) ascertain and evidence their title to glory; and in many are sealed

formally; that is, the Spirit helps them clearly to discern their interest in Christ, and all the promises. This both secures heaven to the soul in itself, and becomes also an earnest or pledge of that glory in the unspeakable joys and comforts that it produces in the soul: So you find, 2 Cor. 1:22. "Who has sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." God's sealing, us gives his security; his objective seal makes it sure in itself, its formal seal makes it so to us. but, if over and above all this, he will please, as a fruit of that his sealing, to give us those heavenly inexpressible joys and comforts which are the fruit of his formal sealing-work, to be an earnest, a foretaste and hanel of that glory, how can the soul that has found all this, fear in the least at a rejection by its God, when at death it comes to him? Surely, if God have sealed, he will not refuse you; if he have given his earnest, he will not shut you out; God's earnest is not given in jest.

Fifthly, Moreover, every gracious soul may confidently cast itself into the arms of its God, when it goes hence, with "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Forasmuch as every gracious soul; is a soul in covenant with God; and God stands obliged by his covenant and promise to such, not to cast them out, when they come unto him. As soon as ever you became his, by regeneration, that promise became your, Heb. 13:5. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." And will he leave the soul at a time when it never had more need of a God to stand by it, than it has then? Every gracious soul is entitled to that promise, John 14:3. "I will come again, and receive you to myself." And will he fail to make it good when the time of the promise is come, as at death it is? It cannot be. multitudes of promises; the whole covenant of promises, give security to the soul against the fears of rejections, or neglect by God. And the soul's dependence upon God and his promise; its very casting itself upon him, from the encouragement the word gives it, add to the engagement upon God. When he sees a poor soul that he has made, redeemed, sanctified sealed, and by solemn promise engaged himself to receive, coming to him at death, firmly depending upon his faithfulness that has promised, saying, as David, 2 Sam. 23:5, Though Lord, there be many defects in me, yet you have made a covenant with me, well ordered in all things, and sure; and this is all my salvation, and all my hope." Lord, I am resolved to send out my soul in an act of faith; I will venture it upon the credit of your

promise. How can God refuse such a soul? How can he put it off, when it so puts itself upon him?

Sixthly, But this is not all; the gracious soul sustains many intimate and dear relations to that God into whose hands it commends itself at death. It is his spouse, and the consideration of such a day of espousals, may well encourage it to cast itself into the bosom of Christ, its head and husband: it is a member of his body, flesh and bones, Eph. 5:30. It is his child, and he its everlasting Father, Isa. 9:6. It is his friend. "Henceforth (says Christ,) I call you not servants, but friends," John 15:15. What confidence may these, and all other the dear relations Christ owns to the renewed soul, beget, in such an hour as this is! that husband can throw off the dear wife of his bosom; Who in distresses casts herself into his arms! What father can shut the door upon a dear child that comes to him for refuge, saying, Father, into your hands I commit myself!

Seventhly, and lastly, The unchangeableness of God's love to his people, gives confidence they shall in no wise be cast out. They know Christ was the same to them at last as he was at first: the same in the pangs of death, as he was in the comforts of life: having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end, John 13:1. He does not love as the world loves, only in prosperity; but they are as dear to him when their beauty and strength are gone, as when they were in the greatest flourishing. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's, Rom. 14:8. Take in all these things, and weigh them both apart, and together, and see whether they amount not to a full evidence of the truth of this point, that dying believers are both warranted and encouraged to commend their souls into the hands of God; whether they have not everyone of them cause to say as the apostle did, 2 Tim. 1:12 "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." The improvements of all this you have in the following practical deductions.

Deduction I. Are dying believers only warranted and encouraged thus to commend their souls into the hands of God? What a sad strait then must all dying unbelievers be in about their souls? Such souls will fall into the hands of God, but that is their misery, not their privilege: they are not put

by faith into the hands of mercy, but fall by sin into the hands of justice: not God, but the devil is their father, John 8:4. Where should the child go but to its own father? They have not one of those aforementioned encouragements to cast themselves into the hands of God, except the naked relation they have to God as their Creator, and that is as good as none, without the new creation. If they have nothing but this to plead for their salvation, the devil has as much to plead as they. It is the new creature that brings the first creation into repute again with God.

O dismal! O deplorable case! A poor soul is turning out of house and home, and knows not where to go; it departs, and immediately falls into the hands of justice. The devil stands by, waiting for such a soul (as a dog for a crust) whom God will throw to him. Little! ah little, do the friends of such a one think, while they are honoring his dust by a splendid and honorable funeral, what a case that poor soul is in that lately dwelt there; and what fearful straits and extremities it is now exposed to! He may cry, indeed, Lord! Lord! open to me, as in Mat. 7:22. But to how little purpose are these vain cries! Will God hear him when he cries? Job 27:9. It is a lamentable case!

Deduction 2. Will God graciously accept, and faithfully keep what the saints commit to him at death? How careful then should they be to keep what God commits to them, to be kept for him while they live? You have a great trust to commit to God when you die, and God has a great trust to commit to you while you live: you expect that he should faithfully keep what then you shall commit to his keeping, and he expects you should faithfully keep what he now commits to your keeping. O keep what God commits to you, as you expect he should keep your souls when you commit them unto him. If you keep his truths, he will keep your souls. "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you, etc." Rev. 3:10. Be faithful to your God, and you shall find him faithful to you. None can pluck you out of his hand; see that nothing wrest his truths out of your hands. "If we deny him, he also will deny us," 2 Tim. 2:12. Take heed lest those estates you have gotten as a blessing, attending the gospel, prove a temptation to you to betray the gospel. "Religion (says one) brings forth riches, but the daughter devours the mother." How can you expect acceptance with God, who have betrayed his truth, and dealt

perfidiously with him.

Deduction 3. If believers may safely commit their souls into the hands of God, how confidently may they commit all lesser interests and lower concernments into the same hand? Shall we trust him with our souls, and not with our lives, liberties or comforts. Can we commit the treasure to him and not a trifle? Whatever you enjoy in this world, is but a trifle to your souls. Sure, if you can trust him for eternal life for your souls, you may much more trust him for the daily bread for your bodies. I know it is objected, that God has made over temporal things to his people upon conditional promises, and an absolute faith can never be grounded upon conditional promises.

But what means this objection? Let your faith be but suitable to these conditional promises, that is believe they shall be made good to you so far as God sees them good for you: do you but labor to come up to those conditions required in you, and thereby God will have more glory, and you more comfort: If your prayers for these things proceed from pure ends, the glory of God, not the satisfaction and gratification of your lusts: If your desires after them be moderate as to the measure, content with that proportion the Infinite Wisdom sees fittest for you: If you take God's way to obtain them, and dare not strain conscience, or commit a sin, though you should perish for want: If you can patiently wait God's time for enlargements from your straits, and not make any sinful haste, you shall be surely supplied; and he that remembers your souls will not forget your bodies. But we live by sense, and not by faith; present things strike our affections more powerfully than the invisible things that are to come. The Lord humble his people for this.

Deduction. 4. Is this the privilege of believers, that they can commit their souls to God in a dying hour? Then how precious, how useful a grace is faith to the people of God, both living and dying?

All the graces have done excellently, but faith excels then all: faith is the Phoenix grace, the queen of graces: deservedly it is stiled precious faith, 2 Pet. 1:1. The benefits and privileges of it in this life are unspeakable: and as there is no comfortable living, so no comfortable dying without it.

First, While we live and converse here in the world, all our comfort and safety is from it; for all our union with Christ, the fountain of mercies and blessings, is by faith, Eph. 3:17. "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." No faith, no Christ: all our communion with Christ is by it: he that comes to God must believe, Heb. 11:6. The soul's life is enrapt up in this communion with God, and that communion in faith. All communications from Christ depend upon faith; for look, as all communion is founded in union, so from our union and communion are all our communications. All communications of quickening, comforts, joy, strength, and whatever serves to the well-being of the life of grace, are all through that faith which first knits us to Christ, and still maintains our communion with Christ; believing we rejoice, 1 Pet. 1:8. The inner man is renewed, while we look to the things that are not seen, 2 Cor. 4:18.

Secondly, And as our life, and all the supports and comforts of it here, are dependent on faith, so you see our death, as to the safety and comfort of our souls then, depends upon our faith: he that has no faiths cannot commit his soul to God, but rather shrinks from God. Faith can do many sweet offices for your souls upon a death-bed, when the light of this world is gone, and all joy ceases on earth: it can give us sights of things invisible in the other world, and those sights will breathe life into your souls, amidst the very pangs of death.

Reader, do but think what a comfortable foresight of God, and the joys of salvation, will be to you, when your eye-strings are breaking; faith can not only see that beyond the grave, which will comfort, but it can cleave to its God, and clasp Christ in a promise, when it feels the ground of all sensible comforts trembling, and sinking under your feet: "My heart and my flesh fails, but God is the strength (or rock) of my heart, and my portion forever." Reeds fail, but the rock is firm footing; yes, and when the soul can no longer tabernacle here, it can carry the soul to God, cast it upon him, with "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." O precious faith!

Deduction 5. Do the souls of dying believers commend themselves into the hands of God? Then let not the surviving relations of such sorrow as men that have no hope. A husband, a wife, a child, is rent by death out of your arms: well, but consider into what arms, into what bosom they are

commended. Is it not better for them to be in the bosom of God, than in yours? Could they be spared so long from heaven, as to come back again to you but an hour, how would they be displeased to see your tears, and hear your cries and sighs for them: They would say to you as Christ said to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." I am in a safe land, I am out of the reach of all storms and troubles. O did you but know what their state is, who are with God, you would be more than satisfied about them.

Deduction 6. Lastly, I will close all with a word of counsel. Is this the privilege of dying believers, to commend their souls into the hands of God.? Then as ever you hope for comfort, or peace in your last hour, see that your souls be such, as may be then fit to be commended into the hands of an holy and just God: See that they be holy souls; God will never accept them if they be not holy, "Without holiness no man shall see God," Heb. 12:24. "He that has this hope, (namely, to see God) purifieth himself even as he is pure," 1 John 3:3. Endeavors after holiness are inseparably connected with all rational expectations of blessedness. Will you put an unclean, filthy, defiled thing into the pure hand of the most holy God? O see they be holy, and already accepted in the beloved, or use to them when they take their leave of those tabernacles they now dwell in. The gracious soul may confidently say then, Lord Jesus! into your hand I commend my spirit. O let all that can say so then, now say, Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ!