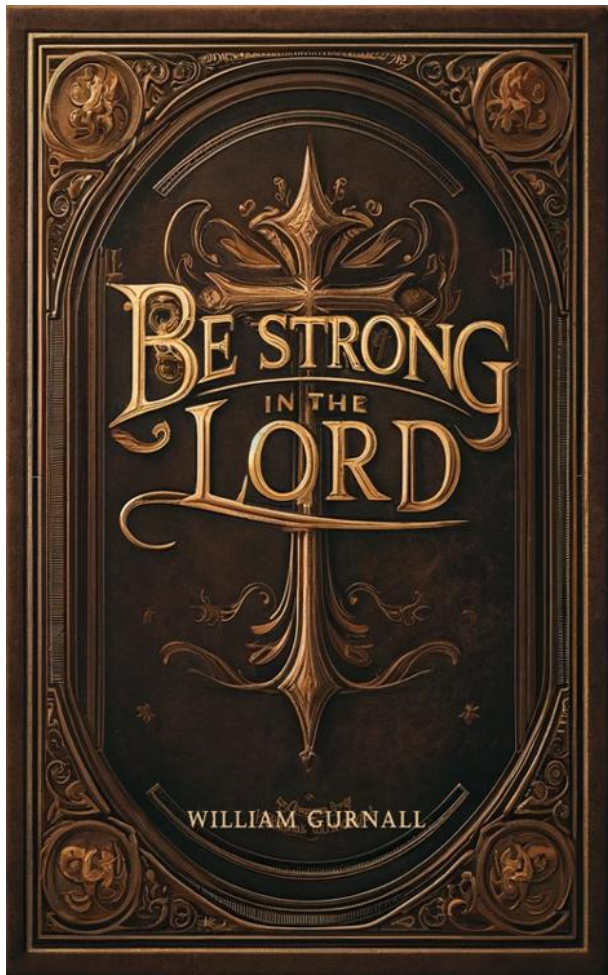




BE STRONG
IN THE
LORD

WILLIAM GURNALL



Be Strong in the Lord

by William Gurnall

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A Sweet and Powerful Encouragement to the War

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." — Eph. 6:10

The apostle begins his speech with a word of encouragement to battle: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord," the best way indeed to prepare them for the following directions. A soul deeply possessed with fear and dispirited with strong apprehensions of danger is in no posture for counsel. As we see in any army, when put to flight by some sudden alarm or apprehension of danger, it is hard rallying them into order until the fright occasioned thereby is over. Therefore, the apostle first raises up their spirits: "be strong in the Lord." As if he should say, perhaps some drooping souls find their hearts fail them while they see their enemies so strong, and they so weak; so numerous, and they so few; so well appointed, and they so naked and unarmed; so skilful and expert at arms, but they green and raw soldiers. Let not these or any other thoughts dismay you, but with undaunted courage march on and be strong in the Lord, on whose performance lies the stress of battle, and not on your skill or strength. It is not the least of a minister's care and skill in dividing the word, so to press the Christian's duty as not to oppress his spirit with the weight of it, by laying it on the creature's own shoulders and not on the Lord's strength, as here our apostle teaches us. In this verse (under four heads or branches), we have:

First, a familiar appellation, "my brethren."

Second, an exhortation, "be strong."

Third, a cautionary direction annexed to the exhortation, "in the Lord."

Fourth, an encouraging amplification of the direction, "and in the power of his might," or in his mighty power.

Branches First and Second

The appellation, "my brethren."

The exhortation, "be strong."

We have, **Branch First**, a familiar appellation, "my brethren." This we shall waive and begin with,

Branch Second, the exhortation — "be strong," that is, be of good courage, so commonly used in scripture phrase: "Be strong and courageous," 2 Chr. 32:7; "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong,'" Isa. 35:4. Or, unite all the powers of your souls and muster up your whole force, for you will have use for all you can make or get. From whence the point is this:

[Christian courage and resolution — wherefore necessary.]

Doctrine: The Christian of all men needs courage and resolution. Indeed there is nothing that he does as a Christian, or can do, but is an act of valour. A cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian: "be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest" — What? Stand in battle against those warlike nations? No, but that thou mayest "observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee," Joshua 1:7. It requires more prowess and

greatness of spirit to obey God faithfully than to command an army of men; to be a Christian than a captain. What seems less than for a Christian to pray? Yet this cannot be performed aright without a princely spirit: as Jacob is said to behave himself like a prince when he did but pray; for which he came out of the field God's banneret. Indeed, if you call that prayer which a carnal person performs, nothing is more poor and dastard-like. Such a one is as great a stranger to this enterprise as the craven soldier to the exploits of a valiant chieftain. The Christian in prayer comes up close to God with a humble boldness of faith, takes hold of him, wrestles with him; yea, will not let him go without a blessing, and all this in the face of his own sins and divine justice, which let fly upon him from the fiery mouth of the law; while the other's boldness in prayer is but the child, either of ignorance in his mind or hardness in his heart. Not feeling his sins and not knowing his danger, he rushes upon duty with a blind confidence, which soon quails when conscience awakes and gives him the alarm that his sins are upon him, as the Philistines on Samson. Alas, then in a fright the poor-spirited wretch throws down his weapon, flies the presence of God with guilty Adam, and dares not look him in the face. Indeed, there is no duty in the Christian's whole course of walking with God or acting for God but is lined with many difficulties, which shoot like enemies through the hedges at him while he is marching towards heaven. He is put to dispute every inch of ground as he goes. They are only a few noble-spirited souls who dare take heaven by force, that are fit for this calling. For the further proof of this point, see some few pieces of service that every Christian engages in.

First: The Christian is to proclaim and prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins; those sins which have lain nearest his heart must now be trampled under his feet. So David, "I have kept myself from my iniquity." Now what courage and resolution does this

require? You think Abraham was tried to purpose when called to take his "son, his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved," Gen. 22:2, and offer him up with his own hands, and no other; yet what was that to this? Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit; as ever thou lookest to see my face with comfort, lay hands on it and offer it up. Pour out the blood of it before me; run the sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down — and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it. Truly, this is a hard chapter, flesh and blood cannot bear this saying; our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar as Isaac, or as a "Lamb that is brought to the slaughter which was dumb," but will roar and shriek; yea, even shake and rend the heart with its hideous outcries.

Who is able to express the conflicts, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels before he can bring his heart to this work? Or who can fully set forth the art, the rhetorical insinuations, with which such a lust will plead for itself? One while Satan will extenuate and mince the matter: It is but a little one, O spare it, and thy soul shall live for all that. Another while he flatters the soul with the secrecy of it: Thou mayest keep me and thy credit also; I will not be seen abroad in thy company to shame thee among thy neighbours; shut me up in the most retired room thou hast in thy heart, from the hearing of others, if thou wilt only let me now and then have the wanton embraces of thy thoughts and affections in secret.

If that cannot be granted, then Satan will seem only to desire execution may be stayed awhile, as Jephthah's daughter of her father: "let me alone a month or two, and then do to me according to

that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth," Judges 11:36, 37, well knowing few such reprieved lusts but at last obtain their full pardon; yea, recover their favour with the soul. Now what resolution does it require to break through such violence and importunity, and notwithstanding all this to do present execution? Here the valiant swordsmen of the world have shown themselves mere cowards, who have come out of the field with victorious banners, and then lived, yea, died slaves to a base lust at home. As one could say of a great Roman captain who, as he rode in his triumphant chariot through Rome, had his eye never off a courtesan that walked along the street: Behold, how this goodly captain, that had conquered such potent armies, is himself conquered by one silly woman.

Second

The Christian is to walk singularly, not after the world's guise, Rom. 12:2. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world, that is, not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not be of such a complying nature as to cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times, or the humour of the company he falls into; like that courtier, who being asked how he could keep his preferment in such changing times, which one while had a prince for Popery, another while against Popery, answered, he was *e salice, non ex quercu ortus*—he was not a stubborn oak, but bending osier, that could yield to the wind. No, the Christian must stand fixed to his principles, and not change his habit; but freely show what countryman he is by his holy constancy in the truth. Now what an odium, what snares, what dangers does this singularity expose the Christian to? Some will hoot and mock him, as one in a Spanish fashion would be laughed at in your streets. Thus Michal flouted David. Indeed, the world counts the Christian for his singularity of life the only fool; which I have thought gave the

first occasion to that nickname, whereby men commonly express a silly man or a fool. Such a one, say they, is a mere Abraham; that is, in the world's account, a fool. But why an Abraham? Because Abraham did that which carnal reason, the world's idol, laughs at as mere folly; he left a present estate in his father's house to go he knew not whither, to receive an inheritance he knew not when. And truly such fools all the saints are branded for by the wise world. "You know the man and his communication," said Jehu to his companions, asking what that mad fellow came for, who was no other than a prophet, 2 Kings 9:11. Now it requires courage to despise the shame which the Christian must expect to meet withal for his singularity. Shame is that which proud nature most disdains, to avoid which many durst not "confess Christ openly," John 7:13. Many lose heaven because they are ashamed to go in a fool's coat thither. Again, as some will mock, so others will persecute to death, merely for this nonconformity in the Christian's principles and practices to them. This was the trap laid for the three children; they must dance before Nebuchadnezzar's pipe, or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel, who walked so unblameably, that his very enemies gave him this testimony, that he had no fault but his singularity in his religion, Dan. 6:5. It is a great honour to a Christian, yea, to religion itself, when all their enemies can say is, They are precise, and will not do as we do. Now in such a case as this, when the Christian must turn or burn, leave praying, or become a prey to the cruel teeth of bloody men; how many politic retreats and self-preserving distinctions would a cowardly unresolved heart invent? The Christian that hath so great opposition had need be well locked into the saddle of his profession, or else he will soon be dismounted.

Third

The Christian must keep on his way to heaven in the midst of all the scandals that are cast upon the ways of God by the apostasy and foul falls of false professors. There were ever such in the church, who by their sad miscarriages in judgement and practice have laid a stone of offence in the way of profession, at which weak Christians are ready to make a stand, as they at the bloody body of Asahel, 2 Sam. 2:22, not knowing whether they may venture any further in their profession, seeing such, whose gifts they so much admired, lie before them, wallowing in the blood of their slain profession: [from being] zealous professors, to prove perhaps fiery persecutors; [from being] strict performers of religious duties, [to prove] irreligious atheists: no more like the men they were some years past, than the vale of Sodom (now a bog and a quagmire) is, to what it was, when for fruitfulness compared to the garden of the Lord. We had need of a holy resolution to bear up against such discouragements, and not to faint; as Joshua, who lived to see the whole camp of Israel, a very few excepted, revolting, and in their hearts turning back to Egypt, and yet with an undaunted spirit maintained his integrity, yea, resolved though not a man beside would bear him company, yet he would serve the Lord.

Fourth

The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God, Isa. 50:10. Let him that walks in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. This requires a holy boldness of faith indeed, to venture into God's presence, as Esther into Ahasuerus', when no smile is to be seen on his face, no golden sceptre of the promise perceived by the soul, as held forth to embolden it to come near, then to press in with this noble resolution, "If I perish, I perish," Est. 4:16. Nay, more, to trust not only in a withdrawing but a "killing God," Job 13:15; not when his love is hid, but when his wrath

breaks forth. Now for a soul to make its approaches to God by a recumbency of faith, while God seems to fire upon it, and shoot his frowns like envenomed arrows into it, is hard work, and will try the Christian's mettle to purpose. Yet such a masculine spirit we find in the poor woman of Canaan, who takes up the bullets of Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness of faith sends them back again in her prayer.

Fifth.—The believer is to persevere in his Christian course to the end of his life: his work and his life must go off the stage together.

This adds weight to every other difficulty of the Christian's calling. We have known many who have gone into the field and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon have had enough and come running home again. Few can bear it as a constant trade. Many are soon engaged in holy duties, easily persuaded to take up a profession of religion, and as easily persuaded to lay it down, like the new moon, which shines a little in the first part of the night but is down before half the night is gone. Lightsome professors in their youth, whose old age is wrapped up in thick darkness of sin and wickedness.

O, this persevering is a hard word! This taking up the cross daily, this praying always, this watching night and day, and never laying aside our clothes and armour, I mean indulging ourselves, to remit and unbend in our holy waiting on God, and walking with God. This sends many sorrowful away from Christ. Yet this is a saint's duty, to make religion his every-day work, without any vacation from one end of the year to the other. These few instances are enough to show what need the Christian hath of resolution. The application follows.

Use or Application

Use First.—This gives us reason why there are so many professors and so few Christians indeed; so many that run and so few obtain; so many go into the field against Satan, and so few come out conquerors. Because all have a desire to be happy, but few have courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties that meet them in the way to their happiness. All Israel came joyfully out of Egypt under Moses' conduct, yea, and a mixed multitude with them. But when their bellies were pinched with a little hunger, and the greedy desires of a present Canaan deferred, yea, instead of peace and plenty, war and penury, they, like white-livered soldiers, are ready to fly from their colours, and make a dishonourable retreat into Egypt. Thus the greatest part of those who profess the gospel, when they come to push of pike, to be tried what they will do, deny to endure for Christ, grow sick of their enterprise. Alas! their hearts fail them, they are like the waters of Bethlehem. But if they must dispute their passage with so many enemies, they will even content themselves with their own cistern, and leave heaven to others who will venture more for it.

O how many part with Christ at this cross-way! Like Orpah, they go a furlong or two with Christ, while he goes to take them off from their worldly hopes, and bids them prepare for hardship. Then they fairly kiss and leave him, loath indeed to lose heaven, but more loath to buy it at so dear a rate. Like some green heads, that childishly make choice at some sweet trade, such as is the confectioner's, from a liquorish tooth they have to the junkets it affords. But meeting with sour sauce of labour and toil that goes with them, they give in, and are weary of their service. So the sweet bait of religion hath drawn many to nibble at it, who are offended with the hard service it calls

to. It requires another spirit than the world can give or receive to follow Christ fully.

Use Second.—Let this then exhort you, Christians, to labour for this holy resolution and prowess, which is so needful for your Christian profession, that without it you cannot be what you profess. The fearful are in the forlorn of those that march for hell, Rev. 21; the violent and valiant are they which take heaven by force: cowards never won heaven. Say not that thou hast royal blood running in thy veins, and art begotten of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by this heroic spirit, to dare to be holy despite men and devils. The eagle tries her young ones by the sun; Christ tries his children by their courage, that dare to look on the face of death and danger for his sake, Mark 8:34, 35. O how uncomely a sight is it to see a bold sinner and a fearful saint, one resolved to be wicked, and a Christian wavering in his holy course. To see guilt put innocence to flight, and hell keep the field, impudently braving it with displayed banners of open profaneness; to see saints hide their colours for shame, or run from them for fear, who should rather wrap themselves in them, and die upon the place, than thus betray the glorious name of God, which is called upon by them to the scorn of the uncircumcised.

Take heart therefore, O ye saints, and be strong; your cause is good, God himself espouses your quarrel, who hath appointed you his own Son, General of the field, called 'the Captain of our salvation,' Heb. 2:10. He shall lead you on with courage, and bring you off with honour. He lived and died for you; he will live and die with you; for mercy and tenderness to his soldiers, none like him. Trajan, it is said, rent his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds: Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal his saints' wounds; tears off his flesh to bind them up.

For prowess, none to compare with him: he never turned his head from danger: no, not when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared in field against him. Knowing all that should come upon him, [he] went forth and said, 'Whom seek ye?' John 18:4. For success insuperable: he never lost battle even when he lost his life. He won the field, carrying the spoils thereof in the triumphant chariot of his ascension to heaven with him, where he makes an open show of them to the unspeakable joy of saints and angels. You march in the midst of gallant spirits, your fellow-soldiers every one the son of a Prince. Behold, some, enduring with you here below a great flight of afflictions and temptation, take heaven by storm and force. Others you may see after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith and patience, got upon the walls of heaven, conquerors. From whence they do, as it were, look down, and call you, their fellow-brethren on earth, to march up the hill after them, crying aloud: 'Fall on, and the city is your own, as now it is ours. We, who for a few days' conflict, are now crowned with heaven's glory, one moment's enjoyment of which hath dried up all our tears, healed all our wounds, and made us forget the sharpness of the fight, with the joy of our present victory.'

In a word, Christians, God and angels are spectators, observing how you quit yourselves like children of the Most High. Every exploit your faith doth against sin and Satan causeth a shout in heaven. While you valiantly prostrate this temptation, scale that difficulty, regain the other ground, you even now lost out of your enemies' hands. Your dear Saviour, who stands by with a reserve for your relief at a pinch, his very heart leaps within him for joy to see the proof of your love to him and zeal for him in all your combats. He will not forget all the faithful service you have done in his wars on earth. When thou comest out of the field, he will receive thee with the like joy as he was entertained himself at his return to heaven of his Father.

Christian Courage and Resolution — How Obtained

Now, Christian, if you mean to courageously bear up against all opposition in the march to heaven, as you should do well to raise your spirit with such generous and soul-ennobling thoughts, so in an especial manner, ensure your principles are well fixed. Otherwise, your heart will be unstable, and an unstable heart is weak as water; it cannot excel in courage. Two things are required to fix our principles:

First, an established judgement in this truth of God. He who knows not well what or whom he fights for may soon be persuaded to change his side or at least stand neutral. Some who go for professors can hardly give an account of what they hope for, or in whom they hope; yet Christians they must be thought, though they run before they know their errand. Or if they have some principles they go upon, they are so unsettled that every wind blows them down, like loose tiles from a housetop. Blind zeal is soon put to a shameful retreat, while holy resolution, built on fast principles, lifts up its head like a rock in the midst of waves. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits," Dan. 11:32. The angel told Daniel who were the men that would stand to their tackling and bear up for God in that hour, both of temptation and persecution, which should be brought upon them by Antiochus; that not all the Jews, but some of them, should be corrupted basely by flatteries, others scared by threats out of their profession. Only a few with fixed principles, who knew their God whom they served and were grounded in their religion, these should be strong and do exploits. That is, to flatteries they should be incorruptible, and to power and force unconquerable.

Second, a sincere aim at the right end of our profession. Let a man be never so knowledgeable in the things of Christ, if his aim is not right in his profession, that man's principles will hang loose; he will not venture much or far for Christ, no more, no further than he can save his own stake. A hypocrite may show some mettle at hand, some courage for a spurt in conquering some difficulties; but he will show himself a jade at length. He who has a false end in his profession will soon come to an end of his profession when he is pinched on that toe where his corn is—I mean, called to deny that which his naughty heart aimed at all this while. Now his heart fails him, he can go no further. O take heed of this squint eye to our profit, pleasure, honour, or anything beneath Christ and heaven; for they will take away your heart, as the prophet says of wine and women, that is, our love, and if our love is taken away, there will be little courage left for Christ. How courageous was Jehu at first, and he tells the world it is zeal for God! But why does his heart fail him then, before half his work is done? His heart was never right set; that very thing that stirred up his zeal at first, at last quenched and cowed it, and that was ambition. His desire for a kingdom made him zealous against Ahab's house, to cut off those who might in time jostle him aside from the throne. Which done, and he quietly settled, he dares not go through with God's work, lest he should lose what he got by provoking the people with a thorough reformation. Like some soldiers, when once they meet with a rich booty at the sacking of some town, are spoiled for fighting ever after.

Branch Third

A cautionary direction, "be strong in the Lord."

In this we have a cautionary direction. Having exhorted the saints at Ephesus, and in them all believers, to a holy resolution and courage in their warfare, lest this should be mistaken, and beget in them an opinion of their own strength for the battle, the apostle leads them out of themselves for this strength, even to the Lord: "be strong in the Lord." From whence we observe.

The Saint's Strength Lies in the Lord

Doctrine: That the Christian's strength lies in the Lord, not in himself. The strength of the general in other hosts lies in his troops. He flies, as a great commander once said to his soldiers, upon their wings; if their feathers be clipped, their power broken, he is lost. But in the army of saints, the strength of every saint, yea, of the whole host of saints, lies in the Lord of hosts. God can overcome his enemies without their hands, but they cannot so much as defend themselves without his arm. It is one of God's names, "the Strength of Israel," 1 Sam. 15:29. He was the strength of David's heart; without him, this valiant worthy (who could, when held up in his arms, defy him who defied a whole army) behaves himself strangely for fear at a word or two that dropped from the Philistine's mouth. He was the strength of his hands, "He taught his fingers to fight," and so is the strength of all his saints in their war against sin and Satan. Some propound a question, whether there be a sin committed in the world in which Satan hath not a part? But if the question were, whether there be any holy action performed without the special assistance of God concurring, that is resolved: "Without me ye can do nothing," John 15:5. Thinking strength of God, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God," 2 Cor. 3:5. We apostles, we saints that have habitual grace, yet this lies like water at the bottom of a well, which will not ascend with

all our pumping till God pours in his exciting grace, and then it comes. To will is more than to think, to exert our will into action more than both. These are of God: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Phil. 2:13. He makes the heart new, and having made it fit for heavenly motion, setting every wheel, as it were, in its right place, then he winds it up by his actuating grace, and sets it going. The thoughts to stir, the will to move and make towards the holy object presented; yet here the chariot is set, and cannot ascend the hill of action till God puts his shoulder to the wheel: "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not," Rom. 7:18. God is at the bottom of the ladder, and at the top also, the Author and Finisher, yea, helping and lifting the soul at every round, in its ascent to any holy action. Well, now the Christian is set on work, how long will he keep close to it? Alas, poor soul, no longer than he is held up by the same hand that empowered him at first. He has soon wrought out the strength received, and therefore to maintain the tenure of a holy course, there must be renewing strength from heaven every moment. David knew this, and therefore, when his heart was in as holy a frame as ever he felt it, and his people by their free-will offering declared the same, yet even then he prays, that God would "keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of his people, and prepare their heart unto him," 1 Chron. 29:18. He adored the mercy that made them willing, and then he implores his further grace to strengthen them, and tie a knot, that these precious pearls newly strung on hearts might not slip off. The Christian, when fullest of divine communications, is but a glass without a foot; he cannot stand or hold what he has received any longer than God holds him in his strong hand. Therefore, Christ, when bound for heaven, and ready to take his leave of his children, bespeaks his Father's care of them in his absence. "Father, keep them," John 17:11; as if he had said, they must not be left alone, they are poor shiftless children, that

can neither stand nor go without help; they will lose the grace I have given them, and fall into those temptations which I kept them from while I was with them, if they are out of your eye or arms but one moment; and therefore, "Father, keep them."

Again, consider the Christian as addressing himself to any duty of God's worship; still, his strength is in the Lord.

1. Prayer. Would he pray? Where will he find materials for his prayer? Alas, he "knows not what he should pray for as he ought," Rom. 8:26. Left to himself, he will soon pray himself into some temptation or other, and cry for that which it would be cruelty in God to give; therefore God puts words in our mouths: "Take with you words and say," Hosea 14:2. Well, now he has words put into his mouth. Alas, they will freeze on his very lips if he has not some heart-heating affections to thaw the tap. And where shall this fire be found? Not a spark to be found on his own hearth, except it be some strange fire of natural desires, which will not serve. Whence then must the fire come to thaw the iciness of the heart but from heaven? The Spirit must stretch himself upon the soul, as the prophet on the child, and then the soul will come to some kindly warmth and heavenly heat in its affections. The Spirit must groan, and then the soul will groan. He helps us to these sighs and groans which turn the sails of prayer. He dissolves the heart, and then prayer bursts out of the heart by groans of the lips, by heavenly rhetoric, out of the eyes as from a floodgate with tears. Yet further, now the creature is enabled to wrestle with God in prayer, what will he get by all this? Suppose he is weak in grace, is he able to pray himself strong or corruption weak? No, this is not to be found in prayer as an act of the creature; this drops from heaven also: "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Ps. 138:3. David received it in duty, but had it not from his duty, but

from his God. He did not pray himself strong, but God strengthened him in his prayer.

2. Hearing the Word. Well, cast your eyes once more upon the Christian as engaging in another ordinance of hearing the Word preached. The soul's strength to hear the Word is from God. He opens the heart to attend, Acts 16:14; yea, he opens the understanding of the saint to receive the Word, so as to conceive what it means. It is like Samson's riddle, which we cannot unfold without his heifer. He opens the womb of the soul to conceive by it, as the understanding to conceive of it, that the barren soul becomes a "joyful mother of children." David sat for half a year under the public lectures of the law, and the womb of his heart was shut up until Nathan came, and God with him, and now is the time of life. He conceives presently, yea, and brings forth the same day, falling immediately into the bitter pangs of sorrow for his sins, which did not cease until he had cast them forth in that sweet 51st Psalm. Why should this one word work more than all the former, but that now God struck in with his Word, which he did not before? He is therefore said to "teach his people to profit," Isa. 48:17. He sits in heaven that teaches hearts. When God's Spirit, who is the headmaster, shall call a soul from his usher to himself, and say, "Soul, you have not gone the way to receive by hearing the Word. Thus and thus conceive of such a truth, improve such a promise"—presently the eyes of his understanding open, and his heart burns within him while he speaks to him. Thus you see the truth of this point, "That the Christian's strength is in the Lord." Now we shall give some demonstrations (or reasons).

Why the Saint's Strength is Laid Up in God

Reason First. The first reason may be taken from the nature of the saints and their grace. Both are creatures, they and their grace also. Now, "it is in the very nature of the creature to depend on God its Maker," both for being and operation. Can you conceive an accident to be out of its subject, whiteness out of the wall, or some other subject? It is impossible that the creature should be or act without strength from God. This to be, act in and of himself, is so incommunicable a property of the Deity, that he cannot impart it to his creature. God is, and there is none besides him. When God made the world, it is said indeed he ended his work, that is, of creation: he made no new species and kinds of creatures more; but to this day he has not ended his work of providence: "My Father worketh hitherto," says Christ, John 5:17, that is, in preserving and empowering what he has made with strength to be and act, that therefore he is said to hold our souls in life. Works of art, which man makes, when finished, may stand some time without the workman's help, as the house, when the carpenter that made it is dead; but God's works, both of nature and grace, are never off his hand, and therefore as the Father is said to work hitherto for the preservation of the works of nature, so the Son, to whom is committed the work of redemption, he tells us, works also. Neither did he end his work when he rose again, any otherwise than his Father did in the work of creation. God made an end of making, so Christ made an end of purchasing mercy, grace, and glory for believers, by once dying; and as God rested at the end of creation, so he, when he had wrought eternal redemption, and "by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," Heb. 1:3. But he ceases not to work by his intercession with God for us, and by his Spirit in us for God, whereby he upholds his saints, their graces, and comforts his life, without which they would run to ruin. Thus we see as grace is a creature, the Christian depends on God for his strength. But further...

Reason Second

The Christian's grace is not only a creature but a weak creature, conflicting with enemies stronger than itself, and therefore cannot keep the field without auxiliary strength from heaven. The weakest goes to the wall if no succour comes in. Grace in this life is but weak, like a king in the cradle, which gives advantage to Satan to carry on his plots more strongly to the disturbance of this young king's reign in the soul. Yes, he would soon end the war in the ruin of the believer's grace if Heaven did not take the Christian into protection. It is true indeed, grace, wherever it is, has a principle in itself that makes it desire and endeavour to preserve itself according to its strength, but being overpowered must perish unless assisted by God, as fire in green wood, which deads and damps the part kindled, will in time go out unless blown up or more fire put to that little; so will grace in the heart. God brings his grace into the heart by conquest. Now, as in a conquered city, though some yield and become true subjects to the conqueror, yet others plot how they may shake off this yoke; and therefore it requires the same power to keep as was to win it at first. The Christian has an unregenerate part that is discontented at this new change in the heart and disdains as much to come under the sweet government of Christ's sceptre as the Sodomites did that Lot should judge them. What, this fellow, a stranger, control us! And Satan heads this mutinous rout against the Christian, so that if God should not continually reinforce this new planted colony in the heart, the very natives (I mean corruptions) that are left would come out of their dens and holes where they lie lurking, and eat up the little grace the holiest on earth has; it would be as bread to these devourers.

Reason Third

A third demonstration may be taken from the grand design which God propounds to himself in the saint's salvation; yea, in the transaction of it from first to last. And that is twofold:

1. God would bring his saints to heaven in such a way as might be most expressive of his dear love and mercy to them.
2. He would so express his mercy and love to them, as might rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory possible.

Now how becoming this is to both, that saints should have all their ability for every step they take in the way to heaven, will soon appear.

Design 1

God would bring his saints to heaven in such a way as might be most expressive of his dear love and mercy to them. This way of communicating strength to saints gives a double accent to God's love and mercy.

1. It distills a sweetness into all the believer has or does when he finds any comfort in his bosom, any enlargement of heart in duty, any support under temptations, to consider whence all these came, what friend sends them in. They came not from my own cistern or any creature's. O, it is my God who has been here, and left his sweet perfume of comfort behind him in my bosom! My God who has unaware to me filled my sails with the gales of his Spirit, and brought me off the flats of my own deadness, where I lay aground. O, it is his sweet Spirit that held my head, stayed my heart in such an affliction and temptation, or else I had gone away in a fainting fit of unbelief. How can this choose but to endear God to a gracious soul? His succours coming so

immediately from heaven would be lost if the Christian had any strength to help himself (though this stock of strength came at first from God). Which, think you, speaks more love and condescension: for a prince to give a pension to a favourite, on which he may live by his own care, or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself, and come from day to day to this man's house, and look into his cupboard, and see what provision he has, what expense he is at, and so constantly to provide for the man from time to time? Possibly some proud spirit that likes to be his own man, or loves his means better than his prince, would prefer the former, but one that is ambitious to have the heart and love of his prince would be ravished with the latter. Thus God does with his saints. The great God comes and looks into their cupboard, and sees how they are laid in, and sends in accordingly as he finds them. 'Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things,' and you shall have them. He knows you need strength to pray, hear, and suffer for him, and, *in ipsâ horâ dabitur*, 'in the very hour it will be given.'

2. This way of God's dealing with his saints adds to the fullness and stability of their strength. Were the stock in our own hands, we should soon prove broken merchants. God knows we are but leaking vessels; when fullest we could not hold it long. Therefore, to make all sure, he sets us under the streaming forth of his strength, and a leaking vessel under a cock gets what it loses. Thus we have our leakage supplied continually. This is the provision God made for Israel in the wilderness: He split the rock, and the rock followed them. They had not only a draught at present, but it ran in a stream after them, so that you hear no more of their complaints for water. This rock was Christ. Every believer has Christ at his back, following him with strength as he goes, for every condition and trial. One flower with the root is

worth many in a posy, which, though sweet, does not grow, but withers as we wear them in our bosoms. God's strength, as the root, keeps our grace lively, without which, though as radiant as Adam's was, it would die.

Design 2

The second design that God has in his saints' happiness is that he may express his mercy and love to them in such a way as may rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory therein, Eph. 1:4, 12, which is fully attained in this way of empowering saints by a strength not of their own, but of their God, his sending, as they are put to expense. Had God given his saints a stock of grace to have set up with and left them to the improvement of it, he would indeed have been magnified, because it was more than God owed the creature; but he would not have been glorified as now, when not only the Christian's first strength to close with Christ is from God, but he is still beholden to God for the exercise of that strength in every action of his Christian course.

As a child that travels in his father's company, all is paid for, but his father carries the purse, not himself, so the Christian's needs are met in every condition. But he cannot say this I did, or that I suffered, but God wrought all in me and for me. The very comb of pride is cut here; no room is left for any self-exalting thoughts. The Christian cannot say, that I am a saint is mercy; but being a saint, that my faith is strong, this is the child of my own care and watchfulness. Alas, poor Christian! Who kept your eye waking, and stirred up your care? Was not this the offspring of God as well as your faith at first? No saint shall say of heaven when he comes there, 'This is heaven, which I have built by the power of my might.' No, 'Jerusalem above is a city whose builder and maker is God.' Every grace, yea, degree of grace, is

a stone in that building, the topstone whereof is laid in glory, where saints shall more plainly see how God was not only Founder to begin, but Benefactor also to finish the same. The glory of the work shall not be crumbled and piecemealed out, some to God and some to the creature, but all entirely paid in to God, and he acknowledged all in all.

Use or Application

Use First. Is the Christian's strength in the Lord, not in himself? Surely then the Christless person must needs be a poor impotent creature, void of all strength and ability of doing anything towards its own salvation. If the ship launched, rigged, and with her sails spread cannot stir till the wind comes fair and fills them, much less the timber that lies in the carpenter's yard can hew and frame itself into a ship. If the living tree cannot grow except the root communicate its sap, much less can a dead rotten stake in the hedge, which has no root, live of its own accord. In a word, if a Christian, who has his spiritual life of grace, cannot exercise this life without strength from above, then surely one void of this new life, dead in sins and trespasses, can never be able to beget this in himself, or concur to the production of it. The state of unregeneracy is a state of impotency. "When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly," Rom. 5:6. And as Christ found the lump of mankind covered with the ruins of their lapsed estate (no more able to raise themselves from under the weight of God's wrath which lay upon them, than one buried under the rubbish of a fallen house is to free himself of that weight without help), so the Spirit finds sinners in as helpless a condition, as unable to repent or believe on Christ for salvation, as they were of themselves to purchase it. Confounded therefore forever be the language of those sons of pride, who cry up

the power of nature, as if man with his own brick and slime of natural abilities were able to rear up such a building, whose top may reach heaven itself. "It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but God that shows mercy," Rom. 9:16. God himself has scattered such Babel-builders in the imagination of their hearts, who raises this spiritual temple in the souls of men, "not by might, nor by a power," of their own, "but by his Spirit," that so "grace, grace," might be proclaimed before it forever. And therefore, if any yet in their natural estate would become wise to salvation, let them first become fools in their own eyes, and renounce their carnal wisdom, which perceives not the things of God, and beg wisdom of God, who gives and upbraids not. If any man would have strength to believe, let him become weak, and die to his own, for, "by strength shall no man prevail," 1 Sam. 2:9.

Use Second. Does the Christian's strength lie in God, not in himself? This may forever keep the Christian humble, when most engaged in duty, most assisted in his Christian course. Remember, Christian, when you have your best suit on, who made it, who paid for it. Your grace, your comfort is neither the work of your own hands, nor the price of your own merit; be not, for shame, proud of another's cost. That assistance will not long stay which becomes a nurse to your pride; you are not lord of that assistance you have. Your Father is wise, who when he allows you most for your spiritual maintenance, even then keeps the law in his own hands, and can soon curb you if you grow wanton with his grace. Walk humbly therefore before your God, and manage well that strength you have, remembering that it is borrowed strength. Who will waste what he begs? Or who will give that beggar who spends idly his alms? When you have most, you cannot be long from your God's door. And how can you look him in the face for more, who has embezzled what you have received?

Branch Fourth

An Amplification of the Direction 'And in the power of his might.'

In this branch, we have an encouraging amplification annexed to the exhortation in these words: "and in the power of his might," where a twofold inquiry is requisite for the explication of the phrase. First, what do these words import, "the power of his might"? Second, what does it mean to "be strong in the power of his might"?

First. What do these words import, "the power of his might"? It is a Hebraism and imports nothing but his mighty power, like that phrase, "to the praise of the glory of his grace," Eph. 1:6, that is, to the praise of his glorious grace. And his mighty power imports no less than his almighty power; sometimes the Lord is styled "strong and mighty," Ps. 24:8, sometimes "most mighty," sometimes "almighty." No less is meant in all than God's infinite almighty power.

Second. What does it mean to "be strong in the power of his might"? To be strong in the power of the Lord's might implies two acts of faith. First, a settled firm persuasion that the Lord is almighty in power. "Be strong in the power of his might," that is, be strongly rooted in your faith concerning this one foundational truth, that God is almighty. Second, it implies a further act of faith, not only to believe that God is almighty but also that this almighty power of God is engaged for its defence; so as to bear up in the midst of all trials and temptations undauntedly, leaning on the arm of God Almighty, as if it were his own strength. For that is the apostle's drift: as to beat us off from leaning on our own strength, so to encourage the Christian to make use of God's almighty power as freely as if it were his own whenever assaulted by Satan in any kind. As a man set upon

by a thief stirs up all the force and strength he has in his whole body to defend himself and offend his adversary, so the apostle bids the Christian "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," that is, Soul, away to your God, whose mighty power is all intended and devoted by God himself for your succour and defence. Go, strengthen and entrench yourself in it by a steadfast faith, as that which shall be laid out to the utmost for your good.

From whence these two notes [or doctrines], I conceive, will draw out the fatness of the words.

Doctrine First. It should be the Christian's great care and endeavour in all temptations and trials to strengthen his faith in the almighty power of God.

Doctrine Second. The Christian's duty and care is not only to believe that God is almighty but strongly by faith to rest on this almighty power of God, as engaged for his help and succour in all his trials and temptations.

Of Acting Our Faith on the Almighty Power of God

Doctrine First. It should be the Christian's great care in all temptations and trials to strengthen his faith in the almighty power of God. When God holds forth himself as an object of the soul's trust and confidence in any great strait or undertaking, commonly this attribute of his almighty power is presented in the promise as the surest holdfast for faith to lay hold on. As a father in a rugged way gives his child his arm to lay hold of, so does God usually reach forth his almighty power for his saints to exercise their faith on, as He did for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose faith God tried above most of

his saints before or since. For not one of those great things which were promised to them did they live to see performed in their days. And how does God make himself known to them for their support, but by displaying this attribute? "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty," Ex. 6:3. This was all they had to keep house with all their days: with which they lived comfortably and died triumphantly, bequeathing the promise to their children, not doubting, because God Almighty had promised, of the performance.

Thus, in Isaiah 26, where great mercies are promised to Judah, and a song penned beforehand to be sung on that gaudy day of their salvation; yet because there was a sharp winter of captivity to come between the promise and the springtime of the promise, therefore, to keep their faith alive in this space, the prophet calls them up to act their faith on God Almighty. "Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," Isa. 26:4. So when his saints are going to the furnace of persecution, what now does he direct their faith to carry to prison, to stake, with them but this almighty power? "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator," 1 Pet. 4:19. Creator is a name of almighty power; we shall now give some reasons for the point.

Reason First

Because it is no easy work to make use of this truth, however plain and clear it now appears, in great plunges of temptation, that God is almighty. To vindicate this name of God from those evil reports which Satan and carnal reason raise against it requires a strong faith indeed. I confess this principle is a piece of natural divinity. That light which finds out a Deity will evince, if followed closely, this God

to be almighty; yet in a carnal heart, it is like a rusty sword, hardly drawn out of the scabbard, and so of little or no use. Such truths are so imprisoned in natural conscience that they seldom get a fair hearing in the sinner's bosom until God gives them a jail-delivery and brings them out of their house of bondage, where they are shut up in unrighteousness with a high hand of his convincing Spirit. Then, and not until then, the soul will believe that God is holy, merciful, almighty. Some of God's peculiar people, and not the least for grace among them, have had their faith for a time set in this slough, with much ado to get over these difficulties and improbabilities which sense and reason have objected, so as to rely on the almighty power of God, with a notwithstanding. Moses himself, a star of the first magnitude for grace, yet see how his faith blinks and twinkles till he wades out of the temptation: "The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them?" Num. 11:21-22. This holy man had lost sight for a time of the almighty power of God, and now he is projecting how this should be done; as if he had said in plain terms, How can this be accomplished? For so God interprets his reasoning: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" ver. 23. So Mary, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," John 11:32. And her sister Martha, "Lord, by this time he stinketh," ver. 39. Both gracious women, yet both betrayed the weakness of their faith in the almighty power of Christ; one limiting him to place—"if thou hadst been here," he had not died; as if Christ could not have saved his life absent as well as present—sent his health to him as well as brought it with him; the other to time—"now he stinketh;" as if Christ had brought his physic too late, and the grave would not deliver up its prisoner at Christ's command. And you have such a high opinion of yourself, Christian, that your faith needs not your utmost care and

endeavour for further establishment on the almighty power of God, when you see such as these dash their foot against this kind of temptation?

Reason Second

The second reason may be taken from the absolute necessity of this act of faith above others to support the Christian in the hour of temptation. All the Christian's strength and comfort is fetched without doors, and he has none to send on his errand but faith; this goes to heaven and knocks God up, as he in the parable his neighbour at midnight for bread: therefore, when faith fails, and the soul has none to go to market for supplies, there must needs be a poor house kept in the meantime. Now faith is never quite laid up until the soul denies, or at least questions, the power of God. Indeed, when the Christian disputes the will of God, whispering within its own bosom, will he pardon? will he save? this may make faith go haltingly to the throne of grace, but not knock the soul off from seeking the face of God. Even then faith in the power of God will bear it company thither: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" if thou wilt, thou canst pardon, thou canst purge. But when the soul concludes he cannot pardon, cannot save, this shoots faith to the heart, so that the soul falls at the foot of Satan, not able more to resist; now it grows more listless to duty, indifferent whether it prays or not, as one who sees the well dry breaks or throws away his pitcher.

Reason Third

Because God is very tender of this flower of his crown, this part of his name: indeed, we cannot spell it right and leave out this letter, for that is God's name, whereby he is known by all his creatures. Now

man may be called wise, merciful, mighty: God only, all-wise, all-merciful, almighty; so that when we leave out this syllable "all," we nickname God, and call him by his creature's name, which he will not answer to. Now the tenderness that God shows to this prerogative of his appears in three particulars:

1. In the strict command he lays on his people to give him the glory of his power. "Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid," but "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself," Isa. 8:12-13; that is, in this sad posture of your affairs, when your enemies associate, and you seem a lost people to the eye of reason, not able to contest with those united powers which beset you on every side, I charge you, sanctify me by giving me the glory of my almighty power. Believe that your God is able of himself, without any other, to defend you and destroy them.
2. In his severity to his dearest children when they stagger in their faith, and come not off roundly, without reasoning and disputing the case, to rely on his almighty power. Zacharias did but ask the angel, "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years?" yet for betraying therein his unbelief, he had a sign indeed given him, but such a one as did not only strengthen his faith but severely punish his unbelief, for he was struck dumb upon the place. God loves his children to believe his word, not dispute his power; so true is that of Luther: "God loves the obedient, not the cavilling." That which gave accent to Abraham's faith was that he was "fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform," Rom. 4:21.
3. In the way God takes of giving his choicest mercies and greatest salvations to his people, wherein he lays the scene of his

providence, so that when he has done, it may be said, Almighty power was here. And therefore, God commonly puts down those means and second causes, which if they stood about his work would blind and hinder the full prospect thereof in effecting the same. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead," 2 Cor. 1:9. Christ stayed until Lazarus was dead, that he might draw the eyes of their faith more singly to look on his power, by raising his dead friend, rather than curing him being sick, which would not have carried so full a conviction of almightiness with it. Yes, he suffers a contrary power many times to arise, in that very juncture of time when he intends the mercy to his people, that he may rear up a more magnificent pillar of remembrance to his own power, in the ruin of that which contests with him. Had God brought Israel out of Egypt in the time of those kings which knew Joseph, most likely they might have had a friendly departure and an easy deliverance, but God reserves this for the reign of that proud Pharaoh, who shall cruelly oppress them and venture his kingdom, but will satisfy his lust upon them. And why must this be the time, but that God would bring them forth with a stretched-out arm? The magnifying of his power was God's great design. "In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth," Ex. 9:16.

4. In the prevalency which an argument pressed from his almighty power has with God. It was the last string Moses had to his bow when he begged the life of Israel: "The nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able," etc., Num. 14:15-16. And "Let the power of my Lord be great," ver. 17; and with this, he had their pardon thrown to him.

The Application of This Point

The application of this point will fall in under the next, which is:

Of Acting Our Faith on the Almighty Power of God, As Engaged for Our Help

Doctrine Second. That it is the saint's duty, and should be their care, not only to believe in God Almighty, but also strongly to believe that this almighty power of God is theirs, that is, engaged for their defence and help, so as to make use of it in all straits and temptations.

First, I shall prove that the almighty power of God is engaged for the Christian's defence, with the grounds of it.

Second, [I shall prove] why the Christian should strongly act his faith on this.

First

I shall prove that the almighty power of God is engaged for the Christian's defence, with the grounds of it. God brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand, but did he set them down on the other side of the Red Sea, to find and force their way to Canaan, by their own policy or power? When he had opened the gate of their iron house of bondage, and brought them into the open fields, did he vanish as the angel did from Peter when he was out of prison? No, "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went," Deut. 1:31. This does vividly set forth the saint's march to heaven; God brings a soul out of spiritual Egypt by his converting grace, that is, the "day of his power," wherein he makes the soul willing to come out of Satan's clutches. Now when the saint is upon

his march, all the country rises upon him. How shall this creature pass the pikes and get safely by all his enemies' borders? God himself enfolds him in the arm of his everlasting strength. "We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Peter 1:5. The power of God is that shoulder on which Christ carries his sheep home, rejoicing all the way he goes, Luke 15:5. These everlasting arms of his strength are those eagles' wings upon which the saints are both tenderly and securely conveyed to glory, Ex. 19:4. There is a five-fold tie or engagement that lies upon God's power to be the saints' life-guard.

First Tie

The near relation he has to his saints. They are his own dear children; everyone takes care of his own—the silly hen, how she bustles and bestirs herself to gather her brood under her wing when the kite appears! No care like that which nature teaches. How much more will God, who is the Father of such dispositions in his creature, stir up his whole strength to defend his children? "He said, They are my people, so he became their Saviour," Isa. 63:8. As if God had said, Shall I sit still with my hand in my bosom, while my own people are thus misused before my face? I cannot bear it. The mother, as she sits in her house, hears one shriek, and knowing the voice, cries out, "O, it is my child." Away she throws all and runs to him. Thus God takes the alarm of his children's cry: "I heard Ephraim bemoaning himself," saith the Lord; his cry pierced his ear, and his ear affected his bowels, and his bowels called up his power to the rescue of him.

Second Tie

The dear love he bears to his saints engages his power. He who has God's heart cannot lack his arm. Love in the creature commands all

the other affections, sets all the powers of the whole man to work; thus in God, love sets all his other attributes to work. When once God pitched his thoughts on doing good to lost man, then wisdom fell on projecting the way, and almighty power undertook to raise the fabric according to wisdom's model. All are ready to effect what God says he likes. Now the believing soul is an object of God's choicest love, even the same with which he loves his Son, John 17:26.

1. God loves the believer as the birth of his everlasting counsel. When a soul believes, then God's eternal purpose and counsel concerning him, whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, and with whom his thoughts went so long, brings forth. And how must God needs love that creature whom he carried so long in the womb of his eternal purpose? This goodly fabric of heaven and earth had not been built, but as a stage whereon he would in time act what he decreed in heaven of old, concerning the saving of thee, and a few more his elect. And therefore, according to the same rate of delight, with which God pleased and entertained himself in the thoughts of this before the world was, must he needs rejoice over the soul now believing, with love and complacency inconceivable; and God having brought his counsel thus far towards its issue, surely will raise all the power he has, rather than be disappointed of his glory within a few steps of home; I mean, his whole design in the believer's salvation. The Lord who has chosen his saints, as Christ prays for Joshua their representative, will rebuke Satan and all their enemies.
2. God loves the saints as the purchase of his Son's blood. They cost him dear, and that which is so hardly got shall not be easily lost. He who was willing to expend his Son's blood to gain them will not deny his power to keep them.

3. God loves the saints for their likeness to himself, so that if he loves himself, he cannot but love himself appearing in them; and as he loves himself in them, so he defends himself in defending them. What is it in a saint that enrages hell but the image of God, without which the war would soon be at an end? It is the hatred that the panther has to man that makes him fly at his picture. "For thy sake we are slain all the day long": and if the quarrel be God's, surely the saint will not go forth to war at his own cost.

Third Tie

The covenant engages God's almighty power, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me," Gen. 17:1. There is a league offensive and defensive between God and his saints; he gives it under his hand that he will put forth the whole power of his godhead for them, "The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel," 1 Chron. 17:24. God does not parcel himself out by retail but gives his saints leave to challenge whatever a God has, as theirs; and let him, whoever he is, sit in God's throne and take away his crown, that can fasten any untruth on the Holy One. As his name is, so is his nature, a God keeping covenant forever. The promises stand as the mountains about Jerusalem, never to be removed; the weak as well as the strong Christian is within this line of communication. Were saints to fight it out in the open field by the strength of their own grace, then the strong were more likely to stand, and the weak to fall in battle; but both castled in the covenant, are alike safe.

Fourth Tie

The saints' dependence on God, and expectation from God in all their straits, oblige his power for their succour. Whither does a gracious

soul fly in any want or danger from sin, Satan, or his instruments, but to his God? As naturally as the coney to her burrow. "What time I am afraid," saith David, "I will trust in thee," Ps. 56:3. He tells God he will make bold of his house to step into when taken in any storm and does not question his welcome. Thus when Saul hunted him, he left a city of gates and bars to trust God in the open field. Indeed all the saints are taught the same lesson, to renounce their own strength and rely on the power of God; their own policy, and cast themselves on the wisdom of God; their own righteousness, and expect all from the pure mercy of God in Christ, which act of faith is so pleasing to God, that such a soul shall never be ashamed, "The expectation of the poor shall not perish," Ps. 9:18. A heathen could say, when a bird scared by a hawk flew into his bosom, I will not betray thee unto thy enemy, seeing thou comest for sanctuary unto me. How much less will God yield up a soul unto its enemy when it takes sanctuary in his name, saying, "Lord, I am hunted with such a temptation, dogged with such a lust, either thou must pardon it, or I am damned; mortify it, or I shall be a slave to it; take me into the bosom of thy love, for Christ's sake; castle me in the arms of thy everlasting strength, it is in thy power to save me from, or give me up into, the hands of my enemy. I have no confidence in myself or any other: into thy hands I commit my cause, my life, and rely on thee." This dependence of a soul undoubtedly will awaken the almighty power of God for such a one's defence. He has sworn the greatest oath that can come out of his blessed lips, even by himself, that such as thus fly for refuge to hope in him, shall have strong consolation, Heb. 6:17. This indeed may give the saints the greater boldness of faith to expect kindly entertainment when they repair to God for refuge, because he cannot come before he is looked for. God, having set up his name and promises as a strong tower, both calls his people into these chambers, and expects they should betake themselves thither.

Fifth Tie

Christ's presence and employment in heaven lay a strong engagement on God to bring his whole force and power into the field upon all occasions for his saints' defence. One special end of his journey to heaven, and abode there, is that he might, as the saints' solicitor, be ever interceding for such supplies and succours from his Father as their exigencies call for. The more to assure us of the same, before he went, he did, as it were, tell us what heads he meant to go upon his intercession when he should come there; one of which was this, that his Father should keep his children while they were to stay in the world from the evil thereof, John 17:15. Neither does Christ take upon him this work on his own, but has the same appointment from his Father for what he now prays in heaven, as he did for what he suffered on earth. He who ordained him a Priest to die for sinners did not then strip him of his priestly garments, as Aaron was stripped, but appoints him to ascend in them to heaven, where he sits a Priest forever by God's oath. This office of intercession was erected purely in mercy to believers, that they might have full content given them for the performance of all that God had promised. So that Jesus Christ lies in court as our ambassador, to see all carried fairly between God and us according to the agreement; and if Christ follows his business closely, and is faithful in his place to believers, all is well. Does it not behoove him to be so, who intercedes for such dear relations?

Suppose a king's son should get out of a besieged city, where he has left his wife and children, whom he loves as his own soul, and these all ready to die by sword or famine; if supply does not come sooner, could this prince, when arrived at his father's house, please himself with the delights of the court, and forget the distress of his family? Or rather, would he not come post to his father, having their cries

and groans always in his ears, and before he eats or drinks, do his errand to his father, and entreat him, if ever he loved him, that he would send all the force of his kingdom to raise the siege, rather than any of his dear relations should perish? Surely, though Christ is in the top of his preferment and out of the storm in regard of his own person, yet his children left behind in the midst of sins, Satan, and the world's batteries, are in his heart, and shall not be forgotten a moment by him. The care he takes in our business appeared in the speedy despatch he made of his Spirit to his apostles' supply, when he ascended, which as soon almost as he was warm in his seat, at his Father's right hand, he sent, to the incomparable comfort of his apostles and us, that to this day, yea, to the end of the world, do or shall believe on him.

Second

I shall prove why the Christian should strongly act his faith on this almighty power as engaged for his help. The second branch of the point follows, namely, that saints should eye this power of God as engaged for them, and press it home upon their souls until they silence all doubts and fears about the matter; which is the import of this exhortation, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Fortify and entrench your souls within the breastwork of this attribute of God's mighty power made over to you by God himself.

First, as it is the end of all promises to be security to our faith, so it is of those in particular where his almighty power is expressly engaged, that we may count this attribute our portion, and reap the comfort it yields as freely as one may the crop of his own field. "Walk before me," saith God to Abraham, "I am God Almighty;" set on this as thy portion, and live upon it. The apostle teaches us what use to make of promises: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. 13:5; there

is the promise, and the inference which he teaches us from this follows, "So we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper," ver. 6. We, that is, every believer, may boldly say, that is, we may conclude, God will help, not sneakingly, timorously, perhaps he will; but we may boldly assert it in the face of men and devils, because He that is almighty has said it. Now for a Christian not to strengthen his faith on this incomparably sweet attribute, but to sit down with a few weak unsettled hopes, when he may, yea, ought to be strong in the faith of such promises, what is it but to undervalue the blessing of such promises? As if one should promise another house and land, and bid him make them as sure to himself as the law can bind, and he should take no care to effect this: would it not be interpreted as slighting his friend's kindness? Is it a small matter that God passes over his almighty power by promise to us, and bids us make it as sure to ourselves as we can by faith, and we neglect this, leaving the writings of the promises unsealed on our hearts?

Second. Our Obedience and Comfort Are Strong or Weak, as Our Faith Is on This Principle

- 1. Our obedience, being a child of faith, partakes of its parent's strength or weakness.** Abraham, being strong in faith, performed an heroic act of obedience in offering up his son. His faith, being well set on the power of God, carried him through without staggering, whereas a weak faith would have faltered. No act of faith more strengthens for duty than that which focuses on God's almighty power engaged for its assistance. "Go in this thy might," said God to Gideon, "have not I called thee?" As if he had said, Can I not, will I not carry thee through thy work? Away goes Gideon in the faith of this and does wonders. This brought the righteous man from the East to God's foot. Though he knew not where he was going, he knew

with whom he went, God Almighty. But take a soul not persuaded of this, how uneven and unstable is he in his obedient course! Every threat from man, if mighty, dismays him because his faith is not fixed on the Almighty. Sometimes he will shift off a duty to comply with man and betray his trust into the hands of a sorry creature because he has fleshly eyes to behold the power of a man, but lacks a spiritual eye to see God at his back, to protect him with his almighty power. If his eyes were open to see this, he would not be so routed in his thoughts at the approach of a weak creature. "Should such a man as I flee?" said good Nehemiah, Neh. 6:11. He had just come from the throne of grace, where he had called in the help of the Almighty, "O God, strengthen my hands," ver. 9. And truly, now, he would rather die on the spot than disparage his God with a dishonourable retreat.

- 2. The Christian's comfort increases or wanes, as the aspect of his faith is to the power of God.** Let the soul question that, or his interest in it, and his joy gushes out, even as blood out of a broken vein. It is true, a soul may scramble to heaven with much ado, by a faith of recumbency, relying on God as able to save, without this persuasion of its interest in God; but such a soul goes with a scant side-wind, or like a ship whose masts are laid by the board, exposed to wind and weather. If others better appointed did not tow it along with them, many fears like waves would often cover such a soul, and it would be more under water than above. Whereas one that sees itself folded in the arms of almighty power, O how such a soul goes mounting before the wind, with her sails filled with joy and peace! Let affliction come, storms arise, this blessed soul knows where it shall land and be welcome. The name of God is his harbour, where he puts in as boldly as a man steps into his own

house when caught in a shower. He hears God calling him into this, and other attributes, as chambers taken up for him. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers," Isa. 26:20. God calls them his, and it would be foolish modesty not to own what God gives. "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength," Isa. 45:24; that is, I have righteousness in God's righteousness, strength in his strength, so that in this respect Christ can no more say that his strength is his own, and not the believer's, than the husband can say, My body is my own and not my wife's. A soul persuaded of this may sing merrily with the sharpest thorn at his breast; so David, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise," Ps. 57:7. What makes him so merry in so sad a place as the cave where now he was? He will tell you in ver. 1, where you find him nestling under the shadow of God's wings, and now well may he sing care and fear away. A soul thus provided may lie at ease on a hard bed. Do you not think they sleep as soundly who dwell on London Bridge as they who live at Whitehall or Cheapside, knowing that the waves that roar under them cannot hurt them? Even so may the saints rest quietly over the floods of death itself, and fear no ill.

Use or Application

Use First. Is the almighty power of God engaged for the saints' defence? Surely then their enemies will have a hard pull who meddle with those who are so far above their match. The devil was so cunning, he would have Job out of his trench, his hedge down, before he could fall on him. But men are so desperate that they will try the field with the saints, though encircled with the almighty power of God. What folly would it be to attempt or lay siege to such a city that

cannot be blocked up so no relief can get in? The way to heaven cannot be blocked. In the church's straitest siege, "there is a river which shall make glad this city of God," with seasonable succours from heaven. The saints' fresh springs are all from God, and it is as feasible for sorry man to stop the watercourses of the clouds as to dam up those streams, which invisibly glide like veins of water in the earth, from the fountainhead of his mercy into the bosom of his people. The Egyptians thought they had Israel in a trap when they saw them march into such a nook by the seaside. "They are entangled, they are entangled;" and truly so they had been irrecoverably, had not that almighty power which led them on, engaged to bring them off with honour and safety. Well, when they are out of this danger, behold they are in a wilderness where nothing is to be had for back and belly, and yet here they shall live for forty years, without trade or tillage, without begging or robbing any of the neighbouring nations; they shall not be beholden to them for a penny in their way. What cannot almighty power do to provide for his people? What can it not do to protect them against the power and wrath of their enemies? Almighty power stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that the poor creatures could not so much as see their enemies. God sets up a dark cloud as a blind before their eyes, and all the while his eye, through the cloud, is looking them into disorder and confusion. And is the Almighty grown weaker nowadays, or his enemies stronger, that they promise themselves better success? No, neither; but men are blinder than the saints' enemies of old, who sometimes fled at the appearances of God among his people, crying out, "Let us flee, for the Lord fighteth for them." Whereas there are many nowadays who will rather give the honour of their discomfitures to Satan himself than acknowledge God in the business; more ready to say that the devil fought against them than God. O you who have not yet worn off the impressions which the almighty power of God has at any time made upon your

spirits, beware of having anything to do with that generation of men, whoever they are. Come not near their tabernacle, cast not your lot in among them, who are enemies to the saints of the Most High; for they are men devoted to destruction. He ripped open the very womb of Egypt, to save the life of Israel his child, Isa. 43:3.

Use Second

This shows the dismal, deplorable condition of all you who are yet in a Christless state. You have seen a rich mine opened, but not a penny of this treasure comes to your share; a truth laden with incomparable comfort, but it is bound for another coast, it belongs to the saints, into whose bosom this truth unloads all her comfort. See God shutting the door upon you when he sets his children to feast themselves with such dainties. "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty," Isa. 65:13. God has set his number which he provides for. He knows how many he has in his family: these and no more shall sit down. One chief dish at the saints' board is the almighty power of God. This was set before Abraham and stands before all his saints, that they may eat to fullness of comfort from it; but you shall be hungry. He is almighty to pardon, but he will not use it for you, an impenitent sinner. You have not a friend on the bench, not an attribute in all God's name will speak for you: mercy itself will sit and vote with the rest of its fellow attributes for your damnation. God is able to save and help in a time of need; but upon what acquaintance is it that you are so bold with God, as to expect his saving arm to be stretched forth for you? Though a man will rise at midnight to let in a child that cries and knocks at his door, yet he will not take so much pain for a dog that lies howling there.

This presents your condition, sinner, sad enough, yet this is to tell your story in the fairest light; for that almighty power of God which is engaged for the believer's salvation is as deeply obliged to bring you to your execution and damnation. What greater tie than an oath? God himself is under an oath to be the destruction of every impenitent soul. That oath which God swore in his wrath against the unbelieving Israelites, that they should not enter his rest, concerns every unbeliever to the end of the world. In the name of God consider, were it but the oath of a man, or a company of men, who like those in the Acts, should swear to be the death of such a one, and you were the man, would it not fill you with fear and trembling night and day, and take away the quiet of your life until they were made friends? What then are their pillows stuffed with, who can sleep so soundly without any horror or amazement, though they be told that the Almighty God is under an oath of damning them, body and soul, without timely repentance? O, think about it, sinners: is it wisdom or valor to refuse terms of mercy from God's hands, whose almighty power, if rejected, will soon bring you into the hands of justice? And how fearful a thing that is, to fall into the hands of Almighty God, no tongue can express, no, not even they who feel the weight of it.

Use Third

This speaks to you who are saints indeed. Be strong in the faith of this truth, make it an article of your creed; with the same faith you believe that there is a God, believe also that this God's almighty power is your sure friend, and then improve it to your best advantage.

- 1. In agonies of conscience that arise from the greatness of your sins, fly for refuge into the almighty power of God.** Truly, sirs, when a man's sins are displayed in all their

bloody colors, and spread forth in all their killing aggravations, and the eye of conscience is awakened to behold them through the multiplying or magnifying glass of a temptation, they must needs surprise the creature with horror and amazement, till the soul can say with the prophet, For all this huge host, there is yet more with me than against me. One Almighty is more than many mighties. All these mighty sins and devils do not make one almighty sin, or an almighty devil. Oppose to all the hideous charges brought against you by them this only attribute. As the French ambassador once silenced the Spaniard's pride by repeating his master's many titles, with one that drowned them all, God himself, when he had aggravated his people's sins to the height, then to show what a God can do, breaks out into a sweet promise: "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger;" and why not? "I am God, and not man," Hosea 11:9. I will show the almightiness of my mercy. Something like our usual phrase when a child or a woman strikes us, I am a man, and not a child or a woman, therefore I will not strike again. The very consideration of God being God supposes him almighty to pardon as well as to avenge. And this is some relief. But then to consider it is almighty power in bond and covenant to pardon, this is more. As none can bind God but himself, so none can break the bond he makes: and are they not his own words, that "he will abundantly pardon?" Isa. 55:7. He will multiply to pardon, as if he had said, "I will drop mercy with your sin, and spend all I have, rather than let it be said my good is overcome by your evil." It fares with the gracious soul in this case as with a captain, who yields his castle upon gracious terms of having his life spared, and being safely conveyed to his house, there to be settled peaceably in his estate and possessions, for all which he has the general's hand and seal, on which he marches forth. But the rude soldiers, assaulting him and putting him in fear of his

life, he appeals to the general, whose honor is now engaged for him, and he is presently relieved, and his enemies punished. You may, poor soul, when accused by Satan, molested by his terrors, say, It is God that justifies; I have his hand to it, that I should have my life given me as soon as I laid down my arms and submitted to him, which I desire to do. Behold, the gates of my heart are open to let the Prince of peace in, and is not the Almighty able to perform his promise? I commit myself to him as unto a faithful Creator.

2. Improve This Almighty Power of God in Temptations to Sin

When you are overpowered and fleeing before the face of your strong corruption, or fear you shall one day fall by it, make bold to take hold of this attribute and reinforce yourself from it again to resist, and in resisting, to believe a timely victory over it. The Almighty God stands in sight of you while you are in the valley fighting and waits but for a call from you when distressed in battle, and then he will come to your rescue. Jehoshaphat cried when in the throng of his enemies, and the Lord helped him; much more may you promise yourself his succour in your soul's combats.

Betake yourself to the throne of grace with that promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you;" and before you urge it, the more to help your faith, comfort yourself with this: that though the word "almighty" is not expressed, yet it is implied in this and every promise, and you may, without adding a tittle to the Word of God, read it in your soul: "Sin shall not have dominion over you," says the Almighty God, for this and all his attributes are the constant seal to all his promises. Now, soul, put the bond in suit, fear not the recovery, it is debt, and so due. He is able whom you sue, and so

there is no fear of losing the charge of the suit; and he who was so gracious to bind himself when he was free, will be so faithful, being able, to perform now he is bound.

Only, while you expect the performance of the promise and the assistance of the almighty power against your corruptions, take heed that you keep under the shadow of this attribute and condition of this promise, Ps. 91:1. The shadow will not cool except in it. What good is it to have the shadow, though of a mighty rock, when we sit in the open sun? To have almighty power engaged for us, and we throw ourselves out of the protection thereof by bold sallies into the mouth of temptation? The saints' falls have been when they run out of their trench and hold; for, like the conies, they are a weak people in themselves, and their strength lies in the rock of God's almightiness, which is their habitation.

3. Christian, Improve This When Oppressed with the Weight of Any Duty and Service

Perhaps you find the duty of your calling too heavy for your weak shoulders; make bold by faith to lay the heaviest end of your burden on God's shoulder, which is yours (if a believer) as sure as God can make it by promise. When at any time you are sick of your work and ready to think with Jonah to run from it, encourage yourself with that of God to Gideon, whom he called from the flail to thrash the mountains, "Go in this thy might," has not God called you? Fall to the work God sets you about, and you engage his strength for you. The way of the Lord is strength. Run from your work, and you engage God's strength against you; he will send some storm or other after you to bring home his runaway servant. How often has the coward been killed in a ditch, or under some hedge, when the valiant soldier

stood his ground and kept his place and got off with safety and honour?

Are you called to suffer? Flinch not because you are afraid, you shall never be able to bear the cross; God can lay it so even, you shall not feel it. Though you should find no succour till you come to the prison door, yea, till you have one foot on the ladder, or your neck on the block, despair not. "In the mount will the Lord be seen." And in that hour he can give you such a look of his sweet face, as shall make the blood come in the ghastly face of a cruel death, and appear lovely in your eye for his sake. He can give you so much comfort in hand, as you shall acknowledge God is beforehand with you, for all your shame and pain you can endure for him. And if it should not amount to this, yet so much as will bear all the charges you can be put to in the way, lies ready told in the promise, 1 Cor. 10:13. You shall have it at sight, and this may satisfy a Christian, especially if he considers, though he does not carry so much of heaven's joy about him to heaven as others, yet he shall meet it as soon as he comes to his Father's house, where it is reserved for him.

In a word, Christian, rely upon your God, and make your daily applications to the throne of grace for continual supplies of strength; you little think how kindly he takes it, that you will make use of him, the oftener the better, and the more you come for, the more welcome. Else why would Christ have told his disciples, "Hitherto you have asked nothing," but to express his large heart in giving? Loath to put his hand to his purse for a little, and therefore by a familiar kind of rhetoric puts them to rise higher in asking, as Naaman, when Gehazi asks one talent, entreats him to take two. Such a bountiful heart your God has, while you are asking a little peace and joy, he bids you open your mouth wide and he will fill it.

Go and ransack your heart, Christian, from one end to the other, find out your wants, acquaint yourself with all your weaknesses, and set them before the Almighty, as the widow her empty vessels before the prophet; had you more than you can bring, you may have them all filled. God has strength enough to give, but he has no strength to deny. Here the Almighty himself (with reverence be it spoken) is weak; even a child, the weakest in grace of his family that can but say "Father," is able to overcome him. Therefore, let not the weakness of your faith discourage you. No greater motive to the bowels of mercy to stir almighty power to relieve you than your weakness, when pleaded in the sense of it. The pale face and thin cheeks, I hope, move more with us, than the canting language of a stout sturdy beggar; thus with that soul that comes laden in the sense of his weak faith, love, patience, the very weakness of them carries an argument along with them for succour.

OBJECTION ANSWERED

[A Grand Objection that Some Disconsolate Souls May Raise Against the Former Discourse, Answered.]

OBJECTION:

O but, says some disconsolate Christian, I have prayed again and again for strength against such a corruption, and to this day my hands are weak, and these sons of Zeruah are so strong, that I am ready to say, all the preachers do but flatter me, that pour their oil of comfort upon my head, and tell me I shall at last get the conquest of these mine enemies, and see that joyful day wherein, like David, I shall sing to the Lord, for delivering me out of the hands of all mine enemies. I have prayed for strength for such a duty, and find it comes

off as weakly and dead-heartedly as before. If God be with me by his mighty power to help me, why then has all this befallen me?

Answer First:

Look once again, poor heart, into your own bosom, and see whether you find not some strength sent unto you, which you did overlook before; this may be, yea, is very ordinary in this case, when God answers our prayer not in the letter, or when the thing itself is sent, but it comes in at the back door, while we are expecting it at the fore; and truly thus the friend you are looking for may be in your house and you not know it.

Is not this your case, poor soul? You have been praying for strength against such a lust, and now you would have God presently put forth his power to knock it on the head and lay it for dead, that it should never stir more in your bosom. Is not this the door you have stood looking for God to come in at? And yet there is no sight or news of your God's coming that way. Your corruption yet stirs, it may be is now more troublesome than before. Now you ask where is the strength promised to your relief? Let me entreat you before you lay down this sad conclusion against your God or self, to see whether he has not conveyed in some strength by another door.

Perhaps you have not strength to conquer it so soon as you desire; but has he not given further praying strength against it? You prayed before, but now more earnestly, all the powers of your soul are up to plead with God. Before, you were more favourable and moderate in your request, now you have a zeal, you can take no denial, yea, [you will] welcome anything in the room of corruption. Would God but take your sin and send a cross, you would bless him. Now, poor soul, is this nothing? Is this no strength? Had not your God reinforced

you, your sin would have weakened your spirit of prayer, and not increased it. David began to recover himself when he began to recover his spirit of prayer. The stronger the cry, the stronger the child, I warrant you. Jacob wrestled, and this is called his strength, Hos. 12:3. It appeared, there was much of God in him when he could take such hold of the Almighty as to keep it, though God seemed to shake him off. If thus you are enabled, soul, to deal with the God of heaven, no fear but you shall be much more able to deal with sin and Satan. If God has given you so much strength to wrestle with him above and against denials, you have prevailed with the stronger of the two. Overcome God, and he will overcome the other for you.

Again, perhaps you have been praying for further strength to be communicated to you in duty, that you might be more spiritual, vigorous, united, sincere, and the like, therein, and yet you find your old distempers hanging about you, as if you had never acquainted God with your ail. Well, soul, look once again into your bosom with an unprejudiced eye. Though you do not find the assisting strength you prayed for, yet do you have no more self-abasing strength? Perhaps the annoyance you have from these remaining distempers in duty occasions you to have a meaner opinion of all your duties than ever; yea, they make you abhor yourself in the sense of these, as if you had so many loathsome vermin around you. Job's condition on the dunghill, with all his botches and running sores on his body, appears desirable to you, in comparison of yours, whose soul, you complain, is worse than his body. O this afflicts my soul deeply, that you should appear before the Lord with such a dead divided heart, and do his work worst that deserves best at your hands. And is all this nothing? Surely, Christian, your eyes are held as much as Hagar's, or else you would see the streaming forth of divine grace in this frame of your heart; surely others will think God has done a mighty work in your soul. What is harder and more against the hair

than to bring our proud hearts to take shame for that of which they naturally boast and glory? And is it nothing for you to tread on the very neck of your duties, and count them matter of your humiliation and abasing, which others make the matter of their confidence and self-rejoicing? Good store of virtue has gone from Christ to dry this issue of pride in your heart, which sometimes in gracious ones runs through and through their duties, that it is seen, or may be, by those that have less grace than themselves.

Answer Second:

Christian, candidly interpret God's dealings with you. Suppose it is as you say: you have pleaded the promise, and waited on the means, and yet find no strength from all these receipts, either in your grace or comfort. Now take heed of charging God foolishly, as if God were not what he promises; this were to give that to Satan which he is all this while gaping for. It is more becoming the dutiful disposition of a child, when he has not presently what he writes for to his father, to say, My father is wiser than I. His wisdom will prompt him what and when to send to me, and his fatherly affections to me his child will neither suffer him to deny anything that is good nor slip the time that is seasonable. Christian, your heavenly Father has gracious ends that hold his hand at present, or else you had ere this heard from him.

- 1. God may deny further degrees of strength to put you on the exercise of what you have more carefully.** As a mother does with her child who is learning to walk, she sets it down, stands some distance away, and bids it come to her. The child feels its legs weak and cries for the mother's help, but the mother steps back on purpose so that the child uses all its little strength to come to her. When a poor soul comes and prays

against a sin, God seems to step back and stand at a distance, the temptation increases, and no visible succour appears, on purpose so that the Christian, though weak, should exercise the strength he has. Indeed, we shall find the sense of a soul's weakness is a special means to excite further care and diligence. One who knows his weakness, how prone he is in company to forget himself, how apt he is in passion to fly out—if there is a principle of true grace, this will excite him to be more fearful and watchful than another who has obtained greater strength against such great temptations. As a child that writes for money to his father, none comes presently. This makes him husband that little he has the better, not a penny now shall be laid out idly. Thus, when a Christian has prayed against such a sin again and again and yet finds himself weak, prone to be worsted, O how careful will this make such a one of every company, of every occasion! Such a one has no need to give his enemy any advantage.

- 2. God may deny the Christian such assisting strength in duty, or mortifying the strength of corruption, as he desires, purely on a gracious design that he may thereby have an advantage of expressing his love in such a way, as shall most kindly work upon the ingenuity of the soul to love God again.** Perhaps, Christian, you pray for a mercy you want, or for deliverance out of some great affliction, and in the duty you find no more assistance than ordinary, yes, many distractions of spirit in it, and misgiving thoughts with unbelieving fears after it. Well, notwithstanding those defects in your duty, yet God hears your prayer and sends in the mercy on purpose that he may greaten his love in your eyes and make it more luscious and sweet to your taste from his accepting your weak services and passing by

the distempers of your spirit. Here is less strength for the duty so that you may have more love in the mercy; nothing will affect a gracious heart more than such a consideration. See it in David: 'I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?' Ps. 116:11, 12. As if David had said, Notwithstanding all the comfortable messages I had from God by his prophets concerning this matter, my own prayers, and those remarkable providences, which carried in them a partial answer to them and performance of what was promised, yet I betrayed much unbelief, questioning the truth of the one, and the return of the other; and has God, notwithstanding all my infirmities, fulfilled my desire and performed his promise? O what shall I render unto the Lord? Thus, David reads God's mercy through the spectacles of his own weakness and infirmity, and it appears great; whereas if a mercy should come in as an answer to a duty managed with such strength of faith, and height of other graces, as might free him and his duty from usual infirmities, this might prove a snare, and occasion some self-applauding rather than mercy-admiring thoughts in the creature.

- 3. God may communicate less of his assisting strength, that he may show more of his supporting strength, in upholding weak grace.** We do not wonder to see a man of strong constitution who eats his bread heartily and sleeps soundly, live. But for a frail body, full of ailments and infirmities, to be so patched and shored up by the physician's art that he stands to old age, this begets some wonder in the beholders. It may be you are a poor trembling soul, your faith is weak, and your assaults from Satan strong, your corruptions stirring and active, and your mortifying strength little, so that in your opinion they rather gain ground on your grace than give

ground to it. Ever and anon you are ready to think you shall be cast as a wreck upon the devil's shore; and yet to this day your grace lives, though full of leaks. Now, is it not worth stepping aside to see this strange sight? A broken ship with masts and hull rent and torn, thus towed along by almighty power through an angry sea, and armadas of sins and devils, safely into its harbour. To see a poor dilling or rush-candle in the face of the boisterous wind, and not blown out! In a word, to see a weak stripling in grace held up in God's arms till he beats the devil craven! This God is doing in upholding you. You are one of those babes, out of whose mouth God is perfecting his praise, by ordaining such strength for you, that you, a babe in grace, shall yet foil a giant in wrath and power.

Answer Third. If after long waiting for strength from God, it is as you complain, inquire whether the hindrance is not found in yourself. The head is the seat of animal spirits, yet there may be such obstructions in the body that the other members may for a time be deprived of them; until the passage is free between Christ your head and you, your strength will not come, and therefore be willing to inquire:

- 1. Have you indeed come to God for strength to perform duty, to mortify corruption, and the like?** Perhaps you will say, Yes, I have waited on those ordinances which are the way in which he has promised to give out strength. But is this all? You may come to them and not wait on God in them. Have you not carnally expected strength from them, and so put the ordinances in God's stead? Has not the frame of your spirit some affinity with theirs, 'We will go into such a city, and buy and sell, and get gain?' James 4:13. Has not your heart said, I will go and hear such a man, and get comfort, and strength? And do you

wonder you are weak, barren, and unfruitful? Are ordinances God, that they should make you strong or comfortable? You may hear them answer you, poor soul, as the king to the woman in the siege of Samaria. Help, O prayer, you say, or, O minister; how can they help except the Lord help? These are but Christ's servants. Christ keeps the key of his wine cellar; they cannot so much as make you drink when you come to their master's house; and therefore, poor soul, stay not short of Christ, but press through all the crowd of ordinances, and ask to speak with Jesus, to see Jesus, and touch him, and virtue will come forth.

- 2. Ask your soul whether you have been thankful for the little strength you have.** Though you are not of that strength in grace to run with the foremost and keep pace with the tallest of your brethren, yet are you thankful that you have any strength at all? Even if it is only to cry after those whom you see outstrip you in grace, this is worth your thanks. Not everyone in David's army attained to be equal with his few worthies in prowess and honour, and yet they did not dismiss themselves. You have reason to be thankful for the meanest place in the army of saints. The least communications of gospel-mercy and grace must not be overlooked. As soon as Moses and his army were through the sea, they praised God before they left the bankside, acknowledging the wonderful appearance of God's power and mercy for them. Though this was just one step in their way, a howling wilderness presented itself to them, and they were not able to subsist a few days with all their provisions. Despite their great victory, Moses praised God for this first instalment of mercy. This holy man knew the only way to keep credit with God, so as to have more, was to keep in touch, and pay his praise for what was received. If you would have fuller communications of divine strength, recognise God in what he has done. Are you

weak? Bless God that you have life. Do you, through feebleness, often fail in duty and fall into temptation? Mourn in the sense of these; yet bless God that you do not live in total neglect of duty, out of profane contempt, and instead of falling through weakness, you do not lie in the mire of sin through the wickedness of your heart. The unthankful soul may blame itself for not thriving better.

3. Are you humble under the assistance and strength God has given you? Pride stops the conduit. If the heart begins to swell, it is time for God to hold his hand and turn the tap, for all that is poured on such a soul runs over into self-applauding, and so it is as water spilt, in regard to any good it does the creature, or any glory it brings to God. A proud heart and a lofty mountain are never fruitful. Besides the common ways that pride reveals itself, such as undervaluing others and overvaluing itself, you will observe two other symptoms of it.

(1.) It appears in bold ventures, when a person runs into the mouth of temptation, bearing themselves up on the confidence of their grace received. This was Peter's sin, which led him to engage further than befitted humble faith, running into the devil's quarters, and so becoming his prisoner for a while. The good man, when in his right mind, had low thoughts of himself, as when he asked his Master, "Is it I?" But he who at one time feared he might be the traitor, at another could not think so ill of himself as to suspect he should be the denier of his Master. What, him? No, though all the rest should forsake him, yet he would stand to his colours. Is this your case, Christian? Perhaps God has given you much of his mind; are you skilful in the Word of life, and therefore you dare venture to breathe in corrupt air, as if only the weak spirits of less

knowledgeable Christians exposed them to be infected with the contagion of error and heresy? You have a large portion of grace, or at least you think so, and venture to go where a humble-minded Christian would fear his heels might slip under him. Truly, now you tempt God to suffer your lock to be cut, when you are so bold to lay your head in the lap of a temptation.

(2.) Pride appears in the neglect of those means whereby the saints' graces and comforts are to be fed when strongest. Maybe, Christian, when you are under fears and doubts, then God has your company, you are often with your pitcher at his door; but when you have any measure of peace, there grows presently some distance between God and you. Your pitcher does not walk as it was wont to these wells of salvation. No wonder if you, though rich in grace and comfort, go behind-hand, seeing you spend on the old stock and drive no trade at present to bring in more. Or if you do not thus neglect duty, yet maybe you do not perform with the humility that formerly beautified the same: then you prayed in the sense of your weakness to get strength, now you pray to show your strength, that others may admire you. And if once, like Hezekiah, we call in spectators to see our treasure, and applaud us for our gifts and comfort, then it is high time for God, if he indeed loves us, to send some messengers to carry these away from us, which carry our hearts from him.

Answer Fourth. If your heart does not smite you from what has been said, but you have sincerely waited on God and yet have not received the strength you desire, let it be your resolution to live and die waiting on him. God does not tell us his time of coming, and it would be boldness to set our own heads. Go, says Christ to his disciples, 'Tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with

power from on high,' Luke 24:49. Thus he says to you, Stay at Jerusalem, wait on him in the means he has appointed, till you are endowed with further power to mortify your corruptions, etc. And for your comfort know,

- 1. Your persevering to wait on God will be evidence of strong grace in you.** The less encouragement you have to duty, the more your faith and obedience will bear you up in duty. He who can trade when times are so dead, that all his wares lie upon his hand, and yet does not draw back his hand, but rather trades more and more, surely his stock is great. What! no comfort in hearing, no ease to your spirit in praying, and yet more eager to hear, and more frequent in prayer. O soul, great is your faith and patience!
- 2. Assure yourself when you are at the greatest pinch that strength shall come.** They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength: when the last handful of meal was being prepared, then the prophet was sent to keep the widow's house. When temptation is strong, your little strength is even spent, and you are ready to yield into the hands of your enemies, then expect succours from heaven, to enable you to hold out under the temptation. Thus with Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you,' i.e., there is power from heaven to raise the siege and drive away the tempter. Thus with Job, when Satan had him at an advantage, then God takes him off, like a wise moderator, when the respondent is hard put to it by a subtle opponent, takes him off, when he would otherwise run him down. 'You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.' James 5:11.

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